4-28-2016 12:00 AM

Girls(') Speak: Criticality as Agency

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Women's Studies and Feminist Research
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Abstract

I seek to contribute knowledge about girls' embodied sense of agency, as well as to provide empirical insights into anti-violence community programming. Rather than a focus on girls as victims, I want to illuminate the conditions of possibility for girls' exercise of agency. Working with a feminist post-structuralist framework, and drawing heavily on Judith Butler (1990; 1997), I ask: How does anti-violence programming impact girls' sense of themselves as agential subjects rather than victims, and, hence, as capable of exercising agency in their subjectivization? Which conceptions of agency do girls mobilize, and how do certain identity categories come to bear on how they understand their agency? I understand that existing literature offers little opportunity for "girls to be a part of the production of knowledge regarding their own lives" (Hussain et al. 2006). As such, my methodology centers on girls' voices, using focus groups to engage 13 girls aged 16-21, who took part in an anti-violence program offered through a community centre located in a mid-sized city in South Western Ontario. While I did not set out to specifically study the experiences of teen mothers, it became an important focus of the data analysis as 5 of the girls were teen mothers.

One significant finding from this research is that the girls tended to experience agency or made sense of their agential capacities in terms that are best understood as negotiations between discourses; engaging in certain relations of power in order to frame their own narrative accounts as embodied, gendered and agential subjects. My research contributes to an understanding of how girls experience subjectivizing power within the context of a community anti-violence programming initiative, and has created space for locating ways in which girls are doing 'girl', how they are thinking about and engaging with the discourses on girl, and how this feels agential.

Keywords

Acknowledgments

Thank you Dr. Wayne Martino and Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti for your support and guidance throughout these five years, particularly during the editing phase and my struggle in incorporating theory. Thank you to Louise Pitre, for creating space for me to find my community. Thank you to Jane McGregor, for your friendship and for the continued support provided throughout this process. Thank you to my feminist sisters and colleagues. You have kept my brain sharp; you have shared in a continual learning around feminist analysis & praxis. Thank you to my partner Alex, my father Marc, and my 'tantes' for your encouragement and hugs. Thank you to mom, Pauline Trudell. You've been my sounding board and have gone through this learning journey right by my side.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

1 Chapter 1: Introduction & Theoretical Framework

1.1 Introduction

Utilizing a feminist post-structuralist lens and located at the crossroads of girlhood studies and feminist sociology of education, I aim to "engage with and challenge the binaries of savvy agentic actor vs. passive dupe or victim of sexual objectification" (Ringrose 2013:113). Looking at how girls constitute themselves as gendered subjects and make sense of their agency, I am concerned to investigate their relationship to embodiment processes in terms of how they negotiate practices of subjectification and the conditions under which they do so. Rather than a focus on girls as victims, the goal of this research is to identify instances of girls' agency. My research questions were: How do girls exert self-determination and agency? Which conceptions of agency do girls mobilize, and which girls mobilize what types of agency? How do girls tell their own stories of being actors in their own lives? How do they understand their own agency in their subjectivizing processes? The site for this examination is a specific anti-violence girls' program offered through a community organization. I seek to understand the role of this type of community program in fostering girls' sense of their own agency.

I started out wanting to produce knowledge about girls' embodied identities and their insights into their own agency, given the current context of postfeminism, with its emphasis on 'girl power' framed in terms of feminist backlash and discourses of new traditionalism (Genz & Brabon 2009; see section below for greater discussion on postfeminism). I seek to offer nuance to understandings of girls' agency, given that our current post-feminist context encourages girls to "see themselves as inherently powerful" (Harris and Dobson 2015:146). Given my feminist poststructuralist framework, I have a particular investment in illuminating the conditions of possibility that might enable: girls' exercise of power and agency in terms of

> being able to do something with what is done with me. […] It does not consist in denying th[e] condition of my constitution. If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose.

> That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility (Butler 2004:3).

As such, this research project explores how girls conceive of their own agency, and how community programming aimed at girls can be used to foster girls' sense of their own agency. It centers on girls' understandings of agency, given that

> in the tradition of feminist analysis, research should be aimed at giving girls a voice. However self-evident this might sound, research that examines girls' own everyday experiences and their definitions thereof has waned in recent decades. (Duits & van Zoonen 2006:115).

In this respect, I seek to put the emphasis back on girls and their own conceptualizations of girlhood and agency.

My research contributes to an understanding of how girls experience subjectivizing power within the context of a community anti-violence programming initiative. Complexities in the existing literature on girls' agency center on the relationship between agency and power, and the ensuing relationship between agency and choice. The literature has not resolved the questions of: What of self-reflexivity and fantasy? Does agency need to be consciously chosen? And what of momentary versus sustained agency? Can there be contradictory moments in girls' active agential engagement with their world where they do not necessarily exercise agency and under what conditions of temporality? My research helps to move the field forward by generating knowledge about girls' criticality as agency, with regards to directing attention to how they understand the choices they make and under what conditions of livability. My interest in conducting such research, is to examine the implications of this knowledge generation for improving the development and delivery of violence prevention programs for young women in the community.

I want to understand the lived experiences of girls as acting subjects - not docile bodies - within their discursive and material worlds (Brown 2012), with a particular interest in girls' gendered and sexual embodiment. I also want to ground my work in community engagement and activism. As such, I investigate a specific community based anti-violence program ('the Girls Program'), which I helped to develop and deliver. This *Girls Program* was explicitly aimed at fostering girls' agency and sense of ontological

becoming through a focus on creating a space for them to reflect critically on power relations in their everyday lives. The *Girls Program* is a 10-week discussion group for young women aged 14-25 to discuss topics that impact their everyday lives. Using the model of popular education (hooks 1994), the facilitator leads girls in discussing "issues that are relevant when it comes to creating the tools women need to experience healthy relationships and to addressing gender-based violence in their own lives and the lives of people they know" (Program Synopsis). The program works collaboratively with community centers, libraries and schools in order to gain access to girls. I engaged with 13 girls who took part in 4 focus groups; these girls were all 'graduates' of the *Girls Program*. They had the opportunity to hone their critical thinking through 10 weeks of programming that introduced the girls to critical discourses related to gender and sexuality, power and privilege, sexual expression and agency. Such discursive framings of gender, sexuality and agency were informed by my own engagement with and understanding of the critical feminist and queer inspired poststructuralist literature that underpin the conceptual and analytic framework for this study (particularly Butler 1993, 1997, 2004, Davies 1991, Pomerantz 2008, Raby 2006, and Ringrose 2007). The value of engaging with these graduates was that they were well positioned to enter into a conversation about agency and subjectivity, given their voluntary participation in a feminist inspired anti-violence program initiative. Thus, the data generated from this research enabled me to provide some assessment of the extent to which the *Girls Program* fostered critical thinking around subjectivity and a degree of critical self-reflexivity, and how this was experienced and understood by a specific group of girls.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

My research sits at the nexus of the fields of girlhood and feminist post-structural studies. An overarching question within the field of feminist inspired girlhood studies, focusing on girls' agency, is: how much individual control do girls exercise over 'who they are' and 'who they might become'? A focus on girls' agency as informed by an engagement with Butler, as well as Girlhood scholars and feminist poststructuralist theorists, helps to explore these questions.

1.2.1   A Butlerian Analytical Perspective

Firstly, it is important to speak to how I understand and make sense of agency and girls' subjectivity. I draw principally from Butler in order to understand power, subjectification, resistance and importantly, agency. Butler relies on Foucault's understanding of power, whereby subject formation is embedded in the operations of power relations. Foucault states that "it is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (Foucault 1982:212). "Power as such does not exist," but rather it is relational, "a way in which certain actions modify others" (Foucault 1982:217, 219). Butler utilizes Foucault's conception of power relations in order to examine the formation of the gendered subject. Power can be both a humanist conception of 'power over', and a post-structuralist approach to the discursive 'power through' (Foucault 1982). A humanist conception of power sees it as "a universal resource to which all humans *qua* humans have access" (Butler 1995:136). It can be possessed, deployed, given away. Power is exerted in this sense over another person, by a ruler, by an institution. Conversely, 'power through', according to Foucault, is "a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings to the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to [their] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (Foucault 1982:241). Power cannot be acquired or shared. In this sense, using Foucault, Butler understands power as not belonging to the individual, but existing in and through a network of relations. This form of power is very much linked to a post-structural understanding of language and discourse, which I will discuss in greater depth in the following section.

However, for now it is important to note that Butler's position on discourse and power is consistent with post-structural approaches which stress that:

> language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. […]. Language is not the expressions of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific. (Weedon 1997:21)

Simply put, language offers the individual subject positions, ways of being, through discourse. Discourse here is not language per se, but a historical and social structure of statements, categories, beliefs that create a network and become 'normal' and 'natural' (St. Pierre 2000). Butler relies on Althusser's notion of interpellation in order to demonstrate the relationship of discourse to the taking up of subject positions. Althusser's scenario is as follows: a police officer shouts 'Hey you there', and an individual turns to this Call. It is in that turning that the individual takes on the subject position conferred by the police officer (Butler 1997:106-7). In other words, discourse "'recruits' subjects, or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing" (Althusser 1971:162). The Call, the hailing, can be read as the social dictate, the reading of subjectivity by others. For example, a girl may be read and thus named as 'smart girl', and then she answers to that name and performs that subject position. Consequently, she achieves subjectivity through both the answering and the *performing* of the 'smart girl'.

Butler utilizes this discursive understanding of power when looking at how an individual negotiates or engages with certain power relations regarding gender subjectification. She states, "subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction in production" (Butler 1997:84). Subjectification, the continual process of enacting and gaining subjectivity, is

> a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the readibility of its own production. The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness (Butler 1997:405).

Gender discourses, in relation to masculinity and femininity, hail individuals to enact specific subjectivities. In this ongoing enactment or rather subject formation, girls must repeat bodily acts that produce the effect of a consistent subjectivity. These acts must be read by others as intelligible, and thus they are chosen from an array of existing options that are then cited by the girls. But, there is a constant requirement to re-perform the acts, to ensure a semblance of the whole, of consistency.

This enactment of subjectivity is discussed by Butler as Performativity.

> A stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. […] The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional discontinuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this 'ground.' (Butler 1990:97).

An individual performs specific norms, in this case gender, in such a way that the accumulation of these acts, gestures, is seen as natural and whole. The very performance is concealed, even from the actor, and is seen as an expression of an interior self. The citation of the norm, of the interpellative hailing, is the process by which individuals actively constitute themselves- their process of subjectivization. However, as Butler points out, there are occasional moments of 'discontinuity', and slippages in the performance, "a repetition that repeats against its origin" (Butler 1997:94). These slippages against the normative discourses offer the possibility for a slightly different subjectivization governed by a commitment to rearticulating one's relation to the norm. The individual cannot abdicate from gendering discourses, for

> the paradox of subjectivation (assoujetissement) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power (Butler 1993:15).

And here is where a Butlerian post-structuralist understanding of agency arises. Agency in Butlerian terms is resisting or challenging hegemonic norms through the "possibility of a failure to repeat" (Butler 1990:179) exactly the same kind of gender performativity from one moment to the next. Butler (1995) believes agency lies in 'subversive citation':

> To be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. "Agency" is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed. […] That this is a repeated process, an iterable procedure, is precisely the condition of agency within discourse (135).

Consequently, agency does not mean that girls step outside of power. Girls cannot simply be free of its discursive, hailing effect. Power is not exterior to the individual, and consequently oppositional resistance would require the opposing of oneself in some manner. Rather, using Butlerian understanding of agency as resistance to the norms, to discursive power, I see agency as

> being able to do something with what is done with me. […] It does not consist in denying th[e] condition of my constitution. If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility (Butler 2004:3).

Through a Butlerian lens, agency can never really be reduced to simply docile bodies that are passively acted upon. Nor does it equate agency as a personal quality of the individual, something one is particularly 'good at doing'. Agency is not to be understood as a property of the subject, as is the case in the conception of the humanist, rationalist subject possessing inherent free will. Rather, it is conceptualized as an effect of power, as constituted in discourse. Agency is situational, emerging out of the individual's interactions with their environment in specific historical- temporal and spatial contexts and under specific conditions or contingencies. Different theorists describe this as: "'will' or 'intent' must be understood as an agentic effect in discourse and not an essentialized attribute of a person" (Taylor 2011); "a subject's capacity to make meaning in her interactions with others" (Willis 2009:98); and, "girls circulate between power's threads, not as pawns, but as participants in power relations" (Pomerantz 2008:37). By framing agency as situational and contingent, as emerging out of the bounds of a discursive operation of power, and not as an inherent quality of the individual, we can allow space for all girls to exhibit agency in their own circumstances and under specific conditions of shifting temporality, while still recognizing differences in embodying and enacting agency through subject formation. I am interested in understanding the ways in which girls navigate the subjectivizing discourses around femininity. How do girls perform their subjectivities in ways that subvert, offer moments of slippages, or re-articulate a discourse? For girls are

> always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may by enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted

corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler 1997:410).

Butler's contributions around subjectification, allow us to identify discursive resistance as a form of subversion to specific norms that govern certain modalities of power particularly with regards to constituting female subjects as particular sorts of subjects. Butler (1990) frames resistance as possibility: "mobilized possibilities of 'subjects' that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (Butler 1990:40). Girls' resistance is embedded in the very power they operate within. While power as such "can't be wished away" (Martindale 1992:330), for it is embodied rather than held, thus the effects of power, understood as modifying actions, can be resisted.

1.2.2 Feminist Poststructuralist Critiques of the Liberal Humanist Subject and Engagements with Girls' Agency

In this next section I elaborate on feminist-poststructuralist critique of the individual liberal humanist subject, and the ways in which specific authors have engaged with Butler's notions of agency in order to flesh out more specifically a more nuanced understanding of 'girls' agency'. As I have already explained, the notion of agency as it is deployed in this dissertation is informed by Butlerian notions of subversion and rearticulation in terms of refusing specific norms, and in this respect is rooted in understanding how and why women and girls make particular 'choices' in specific places and at specific times and under certain conditions of possibility (Willis 2009:113). Within the literature on girlhood, however, there is an under-theorization of agency and although it is often used as an analytical concept, there is no clear understanding of what it implies as it is "frequently used as a self-evident and unqualified construct" (Ringrose 2013:60, Maxwell & Aggleton 2010). For example, through a discursive framing of girls as victims, girls are often spoken of as lacking in agency, having a child status, suffering from sexual violence and from the effects of popular media cultures (Ringrose 2013). As will be discussed further in the section below, when girls' agency is theorized beyond the discourse of lack of agency, it is limited to active resistance or re-signification (Maxwell & Aggleton 2010:331). Importantly, we cannot theorize agency without deconstructing

the liberal humanist discourse of the 'choosing' rational subject (Ringrose 2013). The liberal humanist 'rational subject' is "expected to be autonomous and flexible to negotiate, choose, and succeed" (Rich & Evans 2009:5). This subject's agency is presumed, a given, and thus success or failure is a reflection of individual efforts and not structural or discursive barriers. Such a conceptualization of agency is refuted and problematized in this study.

Ringrose (2013), for example, argues that "debates over how to understand the relative play of agency vs. regulatory structural or discursive constraints" (58) have been taken up outside of the realm of feminist theory and girlhood studies, particularly through sociological and cultural studies. For example, Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of structure and agency looks at the relationship between the rational actor and the structuration process that constrains an individual. Conversely, poststructuralists such as Weedon (1997) reject the liberal humanist notion of the unitary, rational, autonomous and self-determining subject as a basis for conceptualizing agency.

> Humanist discourses presuppose an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed and coherent and which makes her what she *is*. […]Against this irreducible humanist essence of subjectivity, post-structuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak (32).

As Weedon (1999) explains, liberal humanist ideas of the individual rely on a dualism, where "the mind is conceived as distinct from the body and superior to it" (13). Thus, the individual is conceived as rational and rising above the constraints of the body. The individual is perceived to be abstract and separate, able to act freely and make informed choices. For the liberal humanist subject, agency is simply the ability to act in such a way that forwards the desires of the abstracted internal mind/self. In other words,

> resistance to domination is practiced by self-contained, autonomous individuals in response to an oppressive force from the outside, a force that challenges both the natural and political liberty of the individual (St. Pierre 2000:489).

Poststructuralist critiques of this liberal humanist framing of the individual point to the role of discourses in shaping bodies and subjectivities. For example, the liberal humanist individual who can use her reason to make choices about her sexuality is nevertheless

"shaped by discourses of gender and sexuality that preclude objective free choice" (Weedon 1999:24). Liberal humanist discourse assumes an essence of womanhood, focusing on a 'true femininity' (Weedon 1997:78). Weedon states that feminist post-structuralism illuminates how "there is no authentic female subjectivity, to be found somewhere beyond discourse" (ibid 102) that the liberal humanist self is separate and insulated from the effects of social discourse is a myth. Starting from the premise that language does not reflect reality, but indeed gives reality meaning, thus "the individual is never a fully coherent intentional subject as in the liberal tradition" (ibid 104).

The notions of self-determination and choice are caught up with the liberal individual, whereby subjectivity is determined through "sovereign intentional consciousness" (Weedon 1999:116). The discussion above on Butler highlighted how feminist post-structuralism sees subjectivities as formed through discourses and in specific historical-temporal and contingent contexts. There is no fully autonomous subjectivity prior to the effects of discourse, "no space beyond power from which to act" (ibid 123). Weedon points to Butler's important claim that there is no notion of sex outside of culture, no natural, internal sense of one's sex that exists before and untouched by discursive meanings. This framing of the person as a knowable set entity who interfaces with their environment, assumes a relationship between agency and this environment-society-that is antagonistic, whereby society acts forcefully on you and you pit yourself against it as a unitary, self-determining individual (Davies 1991:42). Relying on binaries, liberal humanist discourses frame agency as voluntary versus forced, as empowering versus degrading, as enlightened versus victimized. Agential actions include appropriation of dominant symbols that use them in new ways, and direct challenges to the dominant group (Raby 2006:144). Butler complicates the volition of the individual, the sense of voluntarism that drives the liberal humanist self. For Butler, agency

> will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (assoujetissement) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms (Butler 1993:15).

Offering a further post-structural critique of the humanist approach to agency, Harris & Dobson complicate the relationship between agency and 'choice'.

> 'Choice' has always been a difficult thing to analyze and to use as a measure of agency, because one's own preferences and decisions can never be disentangled from the social context within which they are arrived at. (Harris & Dobson 2015:148).

Girls' agency beyond the humanist bounds of 'choice', through an understanding of discursive operations of power and Performativity, is of particular relevance in light of the two dominant discourses on girlhood: 'can-do' supergirls and the 'at-risk' victimized girls (Francis 2010, Pomerantz and Raby 2011, McRobbie 2007). Butlerian notions of performativity are necessary to understanding girls' embodiment of these discourses, as discussed in the previous section.

Much feminist post-structural theoretical engagement on girlhood has emerged in reaction to these discourses and for this reason I will offer a brief overview of the 'can-do' and 'at-risk' discourses. Firstly, in constituting the 'can-do' supergirls, neoliberalism has played a significant role. Since the 1990s, a neoliberal policy reform agenda has been at play in the social policy development in Ontario, subscribing to such values as budget cuts and expediency, standardized testing and accountability, and quantitative evidence-based policy making (Martino & Rezai-Rashti 2011). The neoliberal framework sees education as preparing students to partake in the market economy, to enter into the labour market with essential skill sets that can be mobilized to foster greater national economic competitiveness. The result is a framing of boys as underachievers and girls as overachievers. Specifically, neoliberal accountability has determined what counts as evidence in terms of boys' underachievement, relying on evidence-based policy making and placing a large importance of numbers. This has enabled the framing of a gender achievement gap in which boys are presented as the new disadvantaged (Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2011:1). Additionally, neoliberalism has ensured that achievement and individual success are defined solely through test scores. Thus, the only indicator that matters when comparing the effect of the educational system on boys versus girls is that of test scores; alternative understandings of education as fostering equity, social inclusion and community are excluded, as are any assessments of whether girls are thus indeed 'overachieving' in areas other than testing.

Another way in which neoliberalism has positioned girls as the achievers within the boy/girl binary is through its prioritizing of individual self-sufficiency and meritocracy. In their study examining young women's experience of eating disorders and their relation to the performative constitution of subjectivities in schools, Rich and Evans (2009) found that all of the girls they studied constructed narratives reflecting the neoliberal self. Each was striving for excellence in education and saw this as the effect of their individual efforts (Rich and Evans 2009:5-6). This notion of meritocracy is embedded within the prevalent neoliberal ethos in which individual effort will lead to success regardless of structural inequalities. Thus, successful girls are offered as evidence that the individual can achieve, laying aside issues of equity and focusing on individualization (Pomerantz and Raby 2011, Ringrose 2007).

As mentioned above, discourses on girlhood also conversely center on 'at-risk' girls focusing on girls' loss of voice, on their lowering self-esteem and on the effects of societal conceptions of a sexualized femininity (Gilligan & Brown 1993, Gonick 2004). It also intersects with a correlated discourse on girls as 'risk-takers'; teen pregnancy, girl gangs, drug taking, sexuality and STDs (Harris 2004, Hussain et al. 2006). Girls as 'risk-takers' are conceived as a potential subset of 'at-risk' girls in that this narrative presents their actions and behaviours as the sources of their experiences of violence, pain and hardship (Hussain et al. 2006). There is a "discursive violence [...] unleashed upon girls in the creation and circulation of images and narratives" (ibid 61). Furthermore, these images and constructions of 'at-risk' and 'can-do' girls are classed and raced (Hussain et al. 2006, Baker 2010, Lucey et al. 2002, Gonick 2006). Girls 'at risk' most often refers to girls from racial minority communities or those living in socioeconomically marginalized communities, and we must question which girls have access to the resources which will enable them to overachieve, and to become 'super girls'.

A feminist post-structural approach illuminates the ways in which these discourses, the 'can-do', and the 'at-risk', operate as a form of power that subjectivizes and restricts available identity positions. This restriction occurs not through a top-down mode of coercive power, but via a constitutive productive power. Thus, the celebratory discourses

mobilized by neoliberalism surrounding girls' academic achievement rarely allow for space to

> explore the emotional, social, psychic, and physical costs, consequences, and sacrifices for high achieving (predominantly middle class) pupils, particularly girls who have only relatively recently encroached upon the territory of [middle class boys'] academic success (Renold and Allan 2006:458).

Neoliberal, humanist and, as we will see below, postfeminist arguments draw on measures of girls' superior educational achievements as compared to boys to validate that "girls have reached unparalleled levels of success and feminist interventions into schooling have been met, and may have gone 'too far', so that girls' achievements are continuously positioned as won at the expense of boys" (Ringrose 2007:471). Girls are the 'can-do', the 'top-girls' (Reay 2001, McRobbie 2007), whose agency is presumed. In the discourses positioning girls as 'can-do' and 'top-girls', there is little understanding of the constraints these girls face on the full employment of agency in their process of subjectification. Put another way, there is no 'power that acts' or constructs the subject. Butler (1993) states that "acquisition of being [is achieved] through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power" (15). In their ongoing subject formation, girls repeat bodily acts that produce the effect of consistent subjectivity. These acts must be read by others as intelligible, and thus they are chosen from an array of existing options that are then cited by the girls. Importantly, the girls thus take part in the operation of power in that they perform these citational acts, (re)producing the very constitutive power that has led to their subjectivization.

"Young people's agency involves a simultaneous mastery and submission, which is a consequence of the process of subjecthood" (Allen 2008). A Butlerian understanding of resistant agency sees girls' agency as found in the process itself, "a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler 1993:15). Girls' agency lies in the necessity of constant reiterative acts that offers the possibility of "a repetition that repeats against its origin" (Butler 1997:94), of a use of language that is applied differently than intended (Raby 2006:151). For girls' femininities, these identities are never stable and necessitate a constant reiteration. It is through this reiteration that possibility opens up. As Pomerantz and Raby (2011) state,

> performativity also acknowledges the possibility of reiteration, where girls actively negotiate their identities by playing one discourse against another, embodying in contradictory ways being smart, and drawing on multiple understandings of their academic success from myriad sources (551).

In other words, when their identity is not read as something wholly intelligible, there is a slight difference perceived by others. This difference calls attention to the very act of performativity, offering the possibility of illuminating the fallacy of 'natural' identities.

Importantly, feminist post-structuralism allows for an understanding of the constraints and also possibilities around girls' ability to achieve, aspire and perform. It recognizes that agency as

> being able to 'speak' as a subject does not, however, enable us to escape our discursive positioning, nor does it mean we preceded discourse as a 'doer behind the deed' (Butler 1993).

Instead, "the suturing of discourse and subjectivity produces a fluid and multiple subject who is both enabled and constrained by discourse" (Pomerantz 2008:14). In other words, there is agency located in girls' negotiating of their identities and in the way they act in the world by navigating those discourses that call upon them to embody a certain type of girlhood or femininity.

Davies' (1991) engagement with Butler in fleshing out agency is helpful here. She states that feminist post-structuralism makes clear the way in which girls are subjected to discourse and in so doing, "shows how agency is fundamentally illusory" (46). However, this discursive operation of power opens up possibility, what we might consider as a bounded and embedded form of agency. Here, the "speaking/writing subject can move within and between discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other" (Davies 1991:46). Davies discusses this form of agency as 'radically conditioned agency' (Davies 2006), quoting Butler to then ask: "By what norms am I constrained as I begin to ask what I may become?" (Butler 2004:58). For Davies, agency occurs where the subject can critically examine subjectivizing discourses at play and then engage actively with these practices in their subjectivization.

But what of the question of intention; while many post-structuralist theorists take up agency as being resistant discursive 'push-back', I would like to focus on the work of a few theorists who question the need for agency to be defined by the intention of resistance (Allen 2008, Brown 2012, Maxwell & Aggleton 2010 & 2011, Pomerantz 2008, Willis 2009). In other words, the distinction here is between seeing agency as resistance to hegemonic social contexts, and looking at what Korteweg (2008) terms 'embedded agency': practices that do not aim at resisting hegemony "yet still reflect active engagement in shaping one's life" (437). A foundational post-structural thought is that "our existence as persons has no fundamental essence, we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses" (Davies 1991:42). For feminist post-structuralists such as Davies, choices are understood as 'forced choices' meaning that it is not because other lines of action are unavailable, but that a chosen line of action occurs because one has been constituted through a discourse to want that action (ibid 46). Certain ways of enacting girl have greater currency; they are ascribed with greater social status and value, than others. For example, girls are discursively subjected to narratives inciting them to avoid enacting 'slut'. 'Slut' conjures up a "woman who has sex with random, indiscriminate partners and therein gets a bad reputation" (Carr 2013:30, see Tolman 2005). Being called a 'slut' is a discursive operation of power inciting girls to perform a more virginal femininity. While a performance of the subjectivity of 'slut' is undoubtedly available to girls, it bears a significant social cost. As such, enacting a subjectivity that avoids confluence with 'slut' is in essence a 'forced choice'. Furthermore, feminist post-structural approaches to power and subjectivity illuminate how an 'appropriate' sexuality is performed as natural, as being pre-discursive; the result is that we come to believe girls' sexuality is simply effects of a 'true' interior self. This is a manifestation of a productive and coercive power.

By making clear the way in which a person is subjected by discourse, feminist poststructuralist theorists such as Davies and Pomerantz show how agency is fundamentally illusory. However, this opens up another possibility, related to the idea of the speaking/writing subject, who can use some of the understandings of poststructuralist theory itself to regain another kind of agency. The speaking/writing subject can move

within and between discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, and use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other (Davies 1991:46). This complicates the notion of agency, as it states that we can never become free of the oppressive and constitutive forces that subjectivize us. However, we can look within the discourses and the operations of power for fissures, moments of possibility and for ways to manipulate or employ these to our own advantage. By looking at agency as embedded in social forces that are typically construed as limiting agentic behavior-say religion, patriarchy, gender role prescriptions-"the capacity to act is not contingent on adopting liberal 'free will' and 'free choice' approaches to subjectivity" (Korteweg 2008:437).

In other words, girls' capacity to act is obscured "when read only from their resistance to forces of domination" (Korteweg 2008: 437). Girls may exhibit agential acts that do not fall under the banner of 'resistance' to hegemonic forces, and do not perfectly subscribe to one side of the binary mentioned above. Raby (2005) argues that "by emphasizing conscious intent we may be preventing young people's actions from being defined as resistant at all" (160). Raby sees girls' capacity for agential resistance as "fragmented and transitory" (ibid 161). Unlike liberal humanist conceptions of power, which are framed through the terms of dominance and submission "in which power is possessed by the dominant group and wielded against the subordinate" (Raby 2006:139), Raby sees power "not as something to be possessed and enacted upon subjects, but as a relation between people" (Raby 2006:139). In this way, they frame resistance through acts of *discursive* intervention under certain conditions of possibility that are understood in terms of refusing specific norms. As Butler (2004) states,

> the "I" that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them (3). […] They can be exposed as non-natural and nonnecessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation (218).

Discursive resistance is a girl's navigation of varying subjectivizing discourses in such a way that produces a "clash between contradictory subject positions and practices" (Weedon 1987:125). When she fails to perform the seemingly naturalized scripts of femininity, or performs them with a difference or rather in alternative ways,

this calls attention to the performative nature of the scripts (Raby 2006); it is a use of language that is applied differently.

Following the lines of Korteweg's 'embedded agency', Becky Francis (2001) critiques the post-structural/post-modern reduction of agency to a Foucauldian sense of discursive resistance to power. "It is our ability to choose different discourses which enables us to go beyond our personal material realities and envisage the world from other perspectives, enabling sympathy and rapport (Francis 2001:176). Francis is exploring the ways in which girls can work within the discourses available to them, strategically employing and suturing them in ways that speak to the notion of a fluid rather than fixed or fully determined subject which, as mentioned earlier, "is both enabled and constrained by discourse" (Pomerantz 2008:14). Francis highlights that agency is not in a binaric relationship to power, requiring of girls that they enact resistant/oppositional acts in order to exert agency. Butler (2004) states that "agency does not consist in denying this condition of my constitution" (3) or rather, the discourses and norms constraining my subjectivity. "The capacity to develop a critical relation to these norms presupposes a distance from them, an ability to suspend or defer the need for them, even as there is a desire for norms that might let one live (ibid)." Rather, "if I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose" (ibid). Thus, agency is located in the navigating of multiple and often conflicting discourses of femininity and sexuality.

In humanist conceptions, action is often linked to choice, in that volition drives choice and is thus perceived as 'agential' (McRobbie 2009, Baker 2010). Francis states that agency is "our ability to choose different discourses" (Francis 2001:176). However, in some ways, this implies a humanist interior self who exerts volition in the choosing, and as discussed above, Butler invalidates "any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes" (Butler 1993:15). Harkening back to the discussion above on Davies' 'forced choices', is it possible to disentangle volition from discursive power, when there is always and already a value system internalized through discourse? Rather than focusing on a liberal humanist question of what are girls' intentions/volition, perhaps instead we can ask how are girls

navigating discourses of femininity and the power relations in which they are implicated? How can we make sense of girls' agential capacities and refusal of patriarchal norms? These questions are in keeping with the feminist scholarship (see Willis 2009) that contests persons as either fully determined or voluntary subjects.

1.2.3　Postfeminist Problematics

A postfeminist shift emerged in the late 20th century, and much of the analytical, feminist post-structural girls' scholarship highlighted above is an engagement with this framework. As such, it is instructive to offer a discussion of postfeminism in order to illuminate the ways in which it has produced new questions, new engagements, for the literature on girls' agency.

The concept of postfeminism is fraught with contradiction. Genz & Brabon (2009) offer a detailed account of the framework of postfeminism, stating that there are a variety of ways in which postfeminism is used, to identify "an anti-feminist backlash, pro-feminist third wave, girl power dismissive of feminist politics, trendy me-first power feminism and academic postmodern feminism" (10). Often, it is used to imply a 'post-revolutionary' time in which the successes of feminism have been garnered, and we are now moving away from collectivist mobilization. Commonly, postfeminism is seen to support "an individualistic and liberal agenda that relies on a mantra of choice and assumes that the political demands of first and second wave feminism have now been met" (ibid 13-14). Specifically,

> Postfeminism has been defined as a depoliticization of feminist goals, inherently opposed to activist and collective feminist politics. Critics have emphasized that 'post-feminism takes the sting out of feminism', confusing 'lifestyle, attitudinal feminism with the hard political and intellectual work that feminists have done and continue to do' (Gentz 2006:336).

Genz & Brabon go on to look at how postfeminism is a generational conflict, whereby many young women point out to their feminist mothers that the world has changed, and that the tenets that drove their brand of feminism, seem to feel like rules that disallow girls from the pleasure of pre-feminist, traditionalist womanhood.

There is a backlash to feminism and a re-valuing of traditionalism relating specifically to gender roles. Specifically, the notion of 'new traditionalism' arises in postfeminism, articulating a vision of the home "as women's sanctuary from the stresses of their working lives" (Genz & Brabon 2009:51), idealizing the 'choice' made by women to abstain from paid work. The domestic sphere is "rebranded as a domain of female autonomy and independence" (ibid 52), and feminism is blamed for having portrayed traditional gender roles as imprisoning.

Importantly, some authors take up postfeminism to examine how we can contextualize girls' agency in this new era (Harris & Dobson 2015). Through this discourse critics argue that girls have been positioned as 'achievers' in a neoliberal, individualist consumerist society. In other words, feminism has achieved its goals, girls are succeeding and thriving, as depicted by the examples of 'girl power', girls' ability to consume, and girls' ability to be whatever they want to be. Genz and Brabon (2009) link this framing of girls' agency to the rise of a neo-liberal politics that positions girls as 'neo-liberal entrepreneurs'(7), and "which replaces collective, activity politics with more individualistic assertions of (consumer) choice and self-rule" (8). This critique of neoliberal's link to postfeminist agency highlights how "freedom is often directly tied to the ability to purchase, with [girls'] agency premised upon and enabled by the consumption of products and services" (8). Structural differences such as age, class, sexuality, race etc are eliminated, the focus being on the individual's capacities. In reaction to the portrayal of feminism as antithetical to femininity (Genz & Brabon 2009:23), girl power arises and seeks to reclaim femininity, appropriating feminism's claims of equality and female power, and asserting that girls can, and quite possibly do, have it all.

As argued by Joanne Baker (2010), post-feminism requires that young women claim volition and evade victimhood. In her research, Baker (2010) finds that young women intentionally claim agency, "associated with a highly individuated selfhood; voluntaristic, intentional behaviour and choice", despite unfairness or oppression they may be living (190).There is now a contradictory understanding of girls' agency, particularly through the discourse of 'can-do' supergirls. "The postfeminist moment is

politically confusing in the sense that it no longer allows us to assume a modernist vision of political agency and resistance" (Gentz 2006:338). Postfeminism is particularly interested in how girls' and women's sexuality can be a locus of agency. Shifting from a "victim-feminist construction of a passive, dominated female sexuality as 'object'" (Ringrose 2013:66), postfeminism positions women as sexually empowered subjects, making individual choices around their sexuality. The portrayal of sexuality is thus equated with power. However,

> this 'performance of confident sexual agency' is actually central to a new 'disciplinary technology of sexy' which has replaced innocence or virtue as the commodity that young women are required to offer in the heterosexual marketplace (Ringrose 2013:66 quoting Stephen Gill 2007).

Angela McRobbie's work brings to the fore the effect on girls' subjectivization of positioning girls as 'achievers' and the 'fading away' of feminism. She argues that young women continue to be regulated, however the 'girl power' narrative under postfeminism is less about what young women ought not to do, and more about what they can do (McRobbie 2007). Employing a critique of the postfeminist culture, McRobbie argues that the production of girlhood now comprises a constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly stereotypically feminine. Harris expands on this, adding that young women have symbolically been constructed as independent, successful and self-inventing (Harris 2004:16). Evidence for the 'can-do' successful girls is leveraged from "educational success; their consumption, leisure, and fashion practices; apparent rejection of institutionalized feminism; sexual assertiveness; professional ambitions; delayed motherhood, and so on" (ibid 17). Put another way, for Harris and McRobbie, postfeminism portrays agency and empowerment as already having been achieved by girls. They are critical of this assumption of agency and empowerment. For example, McRobbie (2007) introduces the concept of the post-feminist masquerade, in which women must perform specific stylized acts that while framed as a choice, are in fact meant to lessen the tension between masculinized success and feminized sexual desirability.

In contrast to many of these critical approaches to postfeminism, Genz & Brabon (2009) seek to go beyond the binaric criticism against postfeminism, and look at how this framing can offer new tools for girls' agency. They look to offer "an interpretation of postfeminist politics that allow for the multiple agency and subject positions of individuals" (34) in our current context. They state that postfeminism requires that we look beyond who traditionally qualifies as a feminist audience, and examine how "feminist concerns have entered the mainstream and are articulated in politically contradictory ways" (34). One area of focus is that of girl power, which sees

> femininity [as] powerful and empowering, providing women/girls with the agency to negotiate the possibilities of their gender role [...] using the signs and accoutrements of femininity to challenge stable notions of gender formations (Genz & Brabon 2009:78-9).

As highlighted by Harris and McRobbie above, criticism is levelled against this conception of postfeminist agency, as it is directly tied to "consumer culture and the ability to purchase, with women's agentive powers premised upon and enabled by the consumption of products and services" (Genz & Brabon 2009:79). Nevertheless, Genz & Brabon argue that it is futile to erect a line between feminist third wave activism and perceived disempowering false conceptions of girls/women's agency under postfeminism. Rather, they look at how 'micro-political' forms of gendered agency "can play to the expectations of the patriarchal gaze while hoping to rewrite [these] patriarchal codes" (Genz & Brabon 2009:81). In fact, Gentz (2006) understands the postfeminist politics as moving away from agency as necessarily oppositional, to seeing agency as arising within a "'conflicted actor' who is capable of individually integrating diverse desires and obligations through creatively reconfiguring his/her practices and relationships" (Gentz 2006:12). This being said, I wonder whether girls do in fact need to exhibit a self-reflexive critical understanding of their social positioning and the constraints of the narratives through which they come to understand their agential capacities. A focus on examining such forms of critical self-reflexivity is the subject of this dissertation.

In this chapter, my purpose has been to explicate the theoretical framing of my dissertation. In so doing, I have elaborated the feminist post-structural lens and

employment of Butlerian notions of agency that inform my thinking about girls and their self-constitution as specific sorts of gendered subjects. Why does this focus on girls' agency matter? What is at stake? Literature arising out of the *Girl Child Project* examines the presence of everyday violence in the lives of Canadian girls (Berman & Jiwani 2002). Using a continuum of violence, this research calls for a need to create "'safe spaces' where girls have opportunities to build connections and develop structures of support" (Hussain et al. 2006:56). Does the community programming for girls succeed in creating a space where girls can critically explore their experiences, where they can come to understand the effects of violence in their lives, but also where they can come to see the ways in which they are making active choices in affecting their lived realities? In employing the feminist poststructuralist analytic framework that informs my research on girls' active self-constitution as gendered subjects, I have been concerned in this chapter to ground my framing of girls' ontological sense of becoming in terms which refuse any notion of the docile body. Such a position is consistent with Davies (1999) who asserts that it is by "seeing how agency is constituted, marginal members of society can cease blaming themselves for not being agentic and can challenge the dominant discourses that constitute them as non-agentic" (44).

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I provide a focused literature review which highlights existing empirical research that deals specifically with girls' agency and anti-violence programming. Beginning with a brief overview of the field of girlhood studies, I examine the literature on girls' agency, concentrating on studies that in some way contribute to my understanding and which provide insight into the relevant research that has already been conducted. Given the partnership with a girls' anti-violence program from which this research drew its data, I also review literature pertaining to this topic, making the link between girls' agency and programming such as that found within the *Girls Program*. In undertaking this review, I establish that my research contributes to both fields, in terms of its theoretically informed empiricism, and in terms of generating novel insights into girls' criticality as an agential capacity, while also drawing attention to how this knowledge about criticality has the potential to inform the development and execution of violence prevention programming directed to young women in the community.

2.1 Girlhood Studies

The intention here is not to fully illustrate the literature within the field of girl studies or girlhood, as this field covers a variety of issues, research questions and theoretical approaches that are not relevant to the focus of this study. Nevertheless, I provide a brief overview of this field as it is helpful in situating more specifically the literature on girls' agency at the nexus of girlhood and feminist post-structural studies.

Emerging in the 1990s, Girlhood Studies is an academic field that examines the experiences of girls, looking at issues of femininities and gendered embodiment, and how socio-economic factors, sexuality, race, ethnicity & (dis)ability come to bear on the process of becoming a girl (Driscoll 2008, Lipkin 2009, Currie et al. 2009, Brown & Mazzarella 2009). Some authors in the field focus on continued low self-esteem, while others examine how girls are voicing themselves with greater force than ever before

through zines, blogs, lyrics, etc. There are two dominant discourses on girlhood: the 'can-do' supergirls and the 'at-risk' victimized girls (Currie et al. 2009)[1]. The latter focuses on girls' loss of voice, on their lowering self-esteem and on the effects of societal conceptions of a sexualized femininity (Gilligan & Brown 1993, Gonick 2004). The former highlights how girls' academic performances have solidified into a new seductive narrative about girls' educational and workplace success, where girls have become a 'metaphor' for social mobility and social change (Ringrose 2007). In this discourse, girls have reaped the benefits of the feminist movement and the 'equal' opportunity to succeed. An overarching question within the field is: how much individual control do girls exercise over 'who they are' and 'who they might become'?

For example, Currie et al. (2009) delve in to the current state of girlhood studies, looking to various discourses of girlhood such as meanness, hypersexuality, pursuit of perfection, girl power, popular girls, skater girls, and online girls. While their research is further described below in the section on Girls' Agency, what is important, as it relates to the field of Girlhood Studies more largely, is that they establish a defining debate within the literature on girlhood, that of the girl as at-risk or as overachiever. "Feminist research on girls associated adolescence with girls' 'loss of voice', a lowering of their self-esteem, and a culture that 'poisons' girls toward their female bodies" (8). This framing has led to projects aimed at 'girl power' to save girls at risk, to uncritically pursue 'empowerment'. Harris and Dobson, in fact, claim that empowerment in girlhood studies tends to be imbued with a postfeminist orientation, wherein power and empowerment are distanced from

> staid, collectivist and victimizing feminism, and simultaneously [away] from any political theorization of gendered inequality and power structures. [Instead, postfeminist empowerment situates] girls' agency in their ability to consume, to focus on individual achievements, and to see themselves as already equals who can be whoever they want to be. (Harris & Dobson 2015:149-150).

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[1] In my use of the category 'girl', I in no way intend to empty it of its various political, racial, ethnic, and other forms of intersectional differences. Girls experience girlhood differently. This will be addressed later on in the literature review on girlhood.

Building upon this, Anita Harris' (2004) and Angela McRobbie's (2007) theoretical cultural studies work brings to the fore the effect of postfeminism in positioning girls as 'achievers' and the 'fading away' of feminism. As mentioned in the previous chapter, McRobbie argues that young women continue to be regulated; however, the 'girl power' narrative is less about what young women ought not to do, and more about what they can do. The production of girlhood now comprises a constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine. Harris examines the symbolic ways young women are constructed as 'can-do' versus 'at-risk', particularly the use of education and employment to construct the 'successful girl' and ideal citizen. She draws attention to the differential ways in which the narrative of the successful girl is applied across all girls. She states that "young women of quite specific populations have been used symbolically: particular kinds of young women have been constructed as a problem for society, namely young mothers, the sexually active, and Black and Indigenous girls" (Harris 2004:15). Conversely, the integrated and upwardly mobile migrant girl has been used to demonstrate the success of modern girls. Both Harris and McRobbie critique postfeminist/neoliberal accounts of girlhood, troubling the idea that "girl power and new socioeconomic opportunities have simply created brilliant prospects for all young women" (Harris 2004:183).

In turn, other researchers look to the 'failing boys' discourse (Martino & Rezai-Rashti 2011, Kehler & Watson 2012) in order to examine its effects on girlhood. Pomerantz and Raby (2011) state that set against the neo-liberal backdrop of 'What about the boys?' and 'girl power', it is assumed that smart girls today 'have it all' and, therefore, no longer require feminist interventions in the school. Through focus groups held in St. Catherine's Ontario, they explore how six teenage girls talk about being smart in the wake of celebratory discourses. Issuing a challenge to these post-feminist assumptions, they highlight complex narratives of girls' academic success, including post-feminist narratives of individualization and the 'supergirl', alongside feminist narratives of gender inequality in the school and the broader social world. The context of the girls' school cultures either hindered or helped girls in their performances of academic identities; they assisted in

determining both what 'smart' meant to the girls, as well as how being a smart girl was perceived by others. For example, being called 'smart' at one school meant something different than being called 'smart' at another. This definitional instability is an example of the poststructural belief that language constructs rather than reflects reality (552).

Their work also demonstrates the contradictions that arise when navigating and performing narratives of girlhood. Many of the girls they engaged with offered varying definitions of what it meant to be smart. For example, 'I think being smart is about more than that', about more than intelligence. Using Butler's performativity, Pomerantz and Raby understand the varying definitions "as a form of reiteration, where the girls took charge of resignifying the term in order to shift its perceived meaning of 'boring', 'singleminded', and 'geeky'" (Pomerantz & Raby 2011:556). The girls also presented contradictory narratives when they saw their lives as individualized projects governed by personal choice, and yet they recounted experiences of sexism and the need to outperform boys in order to be seen as equal: "These contradictions suggest that the girls are struggling within often bewildering neo-liberal circumstances to understand what [is] performing a 'smart girl' identity'" (561). Their work is particularly useful in its discussion of these contradictions and its leveraging of a post-structural analysis to begin to explicate the performative differences. This literature laid the theoretical groundwork for my in-depth analysis of how girls might use such contradictions as agential opportunities in their subjectivizing processes.

Other authors within the field of girlhood utilize a critical intersectional approach to complicate the discourses on girlhood, particularly that of the 'can-do, overachiever' girl. Which girls are positioned as overachieving? How do identity categories of race, class, and sexuality come to bear on the available narratives of girlhood particular girls have access to? Contributing towards the body of work around 'successful girls', Joanne Baker (2010) articulated a classed and raced analysis of the assumptions underscoring the discourse of female success through narratives from diverse young women with varied educational paths. Drawing on data from interviews with 55 young women aged 18-25 in regional Australia, she found that young women are now obliged to account for these unfashionable arrangements, using the ubiquitous belief in choice. She argues that this discourse around girls' achievement cuts across social positioning and has been

internalized by young women with the result that recognition of structural constraint and social hierarchy is diminished. They must account for their educational and career success, or the lack thereof, on individualized terms.

Offering a discourse analysis, Marion Brown (2011) examines the constitution of mainstream girlhood into three narratives. She locates them within their historical contexts, using the literature from the field of girlhood studies and including conceptualizations of the 'girl' from feminist poststructuralist perspectives. Specifically, she examines the *sad girl* story that dominated North America in the early 1990s, she who was victimized by male privilege and misogyny of adolescence and beyond; the *mad grrrls* who rebuked this vulnerability; and the *bad girls* who are bad because they are conniving and/or because they are violent. She discusses how girls occupy all these identities in particularly racialized and classed ways, meaning that there are unique interactions among these identity locations. This article is important for highlighting that constructions of girlhood have never been equally available to all girls.

2.1.1　Girls' Agency

Turning now to the literature that more explicitly engages with girls' agency, there is a body of post-structural feminist work located predominantly in the field of gender and education that looks at girls' subject formation and the ways in which they exert agency and choice in this process (Renold & Allan 2006; Rich & Evans 2009; Reay 2001; Pomerantz 2008; Willis 2009; Francis 2010; Brown 2012; Pomerantz & Raby 2011; Ringrose 2007; Ringrose 2013). This literature is clear in identifying ways in which girls use the subjectivities they are hailed into in ways that offer them agency and some control over this process. However, questions that remain within this field are: How is self-reflexivity and fantasy being employed to enact such forms of agency in navigating discourses of femininity and female embodiment in postfeminist times? Can an action that seems to embody resistance but is not knowingly perceived as such by the actor, then be considered a moment of that individual's agency? And what of momentary versus sustained agency? My research contributes to filling these gaps, and addresses these questions in its focus on an examination of girls' criticality as agency, understood in terms of how they constitute themselves as female subjects and deploy critical agential

capacities framed as an integral part of their ontological becoming. The focus on how this criticality contributes to violence prevention is also an important contribution.

Jessica Ringrose (2013) does an excellent job of providing an overview of the literature on girls' agency in the fifth chapter of her book entitled *Rethinking debates on girls' agency: critiquing postfeminist discourses of 'choice'*. As she states, agency is a key organizing principle in girlhood studies, as well as in gender and education. Much of the literature on girls' agency centers on the debate of the relative play of agency vs. regulatory structural or discursive constraints (61). She notes that "the concept of 'agency' is frequently used as a self-evident and unqualified construct" (60). She undertook a journal keyword search of 120 educational articles, looking for 'girls' and 'agency', and found that "most introduced the notion of agency without explicitly attaching it to a theoretical framework- its meanings were implied rather than demonstrated" (ibid). Seeking to address the need for a more clear understanding of grounded agency, the rest of her book focuses on the research she undertook in 2004/5 looking at aggression and bullying, using in-depth focus and individual interviews with a mixed ethnicity friendship group of girls in Wales, UK. Ringrose seeks to contribute to the field by thinking further about "the nature of the subjective struggle involved for the teen girls [….and] to place this struggle in the context of the dominant cultural discourses through which these 'choices' are forged" (63). Similarly, my research explores girls' agency in their subjectivizing processes, but looking explicitly to girls' understandings of agency and how these understandings have implications for developing anti-violence programming in the broader context of community agencies.

There are a few studies in particular on girls' agency that are helpful in demonstrating the ways in which subjectivization is a key site for girls' agency. Louisa Allen's study from 2008 looks to young women in high school in New Zealand and uses photovoice to capture their sexual agencies: "Rather than attempting to cast moments of young people's agency as examples where the relations of ruling are reversed, this paper endeavours to tease out the nuances inherent in young people's agency" (Allen 2008:565). Allen engaged with 22 16-19 year olds, providing them with cameras and relying on photo-voice and Butler's and Davies' work to elucidate the mechanisms of

young people's agency. She concludes that "agency is a reworking of the conditions of existence [...] not freedom from dominating forces but a double-edged process of submission and mastery" (Allen 2008:575). Her post-structuralist interpretation of girls' maneuverings of existing power operations informed the analysis of my own data in Chapter 4.

Mona-Iren Hauge's study in 2009 examines how girls negotiate discourses which make certain ways of being and becoming as an adolescent girl possible or impossible. In foregrounding how girls use their bodies when negotiating subjectivities as adolescents, Hauge relies on longitudinal qualitative interview data of children's social transitions between childhood and adolescence. She goes on to examine how these processes of subjectivization position girls according to prevailing discourses of hetero-femininity: "relationships between boys and girls are gradually subject to a re-interpretation, which for most girls means that boys as a group turn from potential friends towards becoming potential boyfriends" (Hauge 2009:298). This focus on the body and compulsory heterosexuality is important for understanding girls' subjectivizing processes.

Beavis and Charles (2007) conducted a study of female gamers in Melbourne's Emuse gaming cafe to look at interpellation of the 'girl gamer'. "We consider the agency some of the girls achieve from embracing and exaggerating their 'otherness' as a girl gamer, immediately visible and special in relation to the male gamers who make up the majority" (Beavis & Charles 2007:695). Seven gamer girls were interviewed individually. Beavis and Charles sought to "consider the significance of cyber 'LAN' cafés as sites where on and off-line practices meet in a way that complicates binary notions of the gendered gamer" (691). The girls found a sense of agency over their own identity performances through the fragmenting of the category 'girl' in the very act of articulating their place in a male dominated gaming culture. They were gamers, and they were girls, but their performance of both identities was disrupted by the contradictory ways in which they embodied both locations. This disruption was identified as a site of agency for the girl gamers.

Audrey Dentith (2004) looked at how discourses afford particular subject positions from which girls are able to name themselves and act within. Using an ethnographic approach, she engaged nine girls in Las Vegas, aged 13 to 18 years-old, through one-on-one interviews and small focus groups. While focusing on the role of mediated sex and consumer culture on emergent girl identities, she offers insights for girl's agency more broadly, through their subjectivizing processes, exploring female adolescents' subjectivities in light of the sexual politics and consumer culture of Las Vegas, Nevada. She looks at how the "young women make sense of, resist, accommodate to or embrace" (Dentith 2004:456) certain subjectivities and discourses. She demonstrates that these young women do not forcibly take up these discourses, but they partake in them in ways that allow for individual self-expression and choice. My research expands upon Dentith's focus on the sex market and consumerism as informing subjectivity, looking more broadly to what the girls voiced as impacting their subjectivizing processes.

Similarly, Shauna Pomerantz's doctoral study of girls' 'style culture' shows that girls are agentic when they take "up an existing sign system, as they must, and [make] it their own, working it to accomplish both individual identities and forms of social order" (Pomerantz 2005:xii). Conducting a year-long ethnography with 20 girls in Vancouver's East Side, she sought to illuminate the school's symbolic economy of style. She found that

> style functioned as 'social skin', […and] acted as one of the most accessible and malleable ways for girls to indicate subjectivity and belonging. It also acted as a form of agency, where girls understood how they were positioned within discourses of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, and used style as a means to re/position themselves (ibid ii).

Pomerantz's study offers important insight into girls' use of style in their subjectivizing processes. More specifically, she centers her analysis of girls' style on a specific context: Canadian schools. Writing on the same research project in her 2008 book, she states that her aim is to re-conceptualize style as a form of identity negotiation in schools (Pomerantz 2008). My approach to discourse and girl subjecthood is in keeping with that posited by Pomerantz, whereby discourse speaks us into subjecthood,

> naming and classifying us as particular kinds of people who lead particular kinds of (sanctioned, disparaged, privileged, oppressed) lives- it simultaneously offers

us attachment to the social world through the subject positions or social roles that we occupy as a result of our discursive constitution (ibid 13).

Girls' styles discursively constitute social markers. Conversely, my research is not particularly focused on style or the school setting; it broadly engages girls in community settings around the full spectrum of their lived experiences as agential, looking to other discursive avenues through which girls engage in subjectivization as a basis for examining their agential capacities.

Pomerantz delves into the 'feminist struggle' on agency, captured by Alison Jones (1997) when she states we cannot be both choosing agents and discursively constituted subjects at the same time "without erring on either side" (262). For Pomerantz, the girls she worked with "spoke of themselves as fixed subjects with "core" identities, but in the same breath conceived of themselves as having the power to change "who" they were within the school's social world" (Pomerantz 2005:147). My research similarly delves in to the contradictions girls voiced, looking at how they narrated agency and discursive constraints in the same sentence. This is a productive space to add to within the literature on girls' agency, in that while "we all experience ourselves as humanist subjects; we do 'consider our options', choose and think critically" (Jones 1997:263), post-structuralism indicates there is no 'doer behind the deed', no choosing subject. How can we reconcile agency within girls' lives without slipping towards a structuralist, humanist notion of girls as simply choosing particular discourses or ways of being is a central polemic which my research sought to address.

Building upon such a polemic, in her study of fifteen and sixteen year old girls, Deborah Youdell (2005) considered how particular sexed, gendered and sexualized selves are constituted. Through a series of close readings of data generated via employing an ethnographic methodology undertaken in a south London secondary school, Youdell looked at how female students' mundane and day-to-day practices—including bodily deportment, physical games, linguistic accounts, and uses of clothing, hairstyles and accessories—are implicated in the discursive constitution of student subjectivities. In regards to agency, she discusses the possibilities of resignification via the 'andro-dyke' and the 'hetero-femme drag queen'. Both forms of resistant agency use performative

iterations of alternative femininities. In both cases, the girls involved exerted agency by seeking to consciously perform an 'alternative' gendered subjectivity. This focus on feminine subjectivities, and how girls embody agency through their subjectivization, is an example of 'embedded agency'. The girls are navigating the constricting confines of subjectivities they are being hailed into, but using this very hailing power to exert some degree of agential choice.

What these studies demonstrate is by that using a post-structural feminist lens, we are able to identify ways in which girls use the subjectivities they are hailed into in ways that offer them agency and some intervention or refusal of norms in this process. However, there are some questions that arise when we seek to identify agency through this framework. For example, does enacting agency for girls simply mean the ability to think and speak in way that challenges hegemonic gender systems? What of the new disciplinary technologies of the self and femininity, arising out of postfeminism, which position girls as being empowered and having limitless choice (McRobbie 2007, Ringrose 2013)? How are these being negotiated by girls in their daily lives? Employing a post-feminist lens alerts us to the fact that girls can draw on contemporary discourses of girl power and choice to project or inscribe themselves as powerful. How should we account for such positions in terms of making sense of what it means to be an agential subject and what discourses of criticality can/need to be mobilized in the service of refusing the terms of such postfeminist illusions? (Ringrose 2013:62).

Calling attention to the relationship of resistance and girls' agency, Harris & Dobson (2015) offer further theoretical grounding for the field, engaging with the above questions. They focus particularly on how the concepts of choice, empowerment and voice are potentially problematic axes of analysis in identifying girls' agency: "These are the terms by which the possibility of girls' and young women's agency has traditionally been understood in feminist scholarship" (145). However, given post-feminist, neoliberal context, the usefulness of these terms in understanding feminist agency is brought into question. As such, they point to the need for girls themselves to develop and identify accessible language that help to articulate their experiences of agency that do not reduce their agency to a mere cooptation of problematic neoliberal postfeminist discourses of

girl empowerment. This call for research directly informs my methodological choice in engaging girls around their understandings of what constitutes agency, what it feels like, looks like, and how it is experienced. Furthermore, Harris & Dobson advocate for the scholarly examination of "many forms of unheroic struggle and creativity, and/or non-resistant actions, relations and practices that can also be understood as 'agentic'" (153). They offer up the concept of the 'suffering actor', influenced by the work of McDonald (1992), which highlights that while girls may struggle to link their experiences with horizons of possibility, this "experience is one of suffering, not passivity" (Harris & Dobson 2015:153). They hope that this concept can help the field in looking beyond actions that are resistant, to locating agency in "the struggles for coherence, social acceptance and survival" (ibid). This helps to inform my analysis of what constitutes girls' agency, reaching beyond discursive resistance to one that speaks to what Butler understands as refusing norms and in so doing reengaging in citational practices that are committed to rearticulating one's relation to those norms.

One way to exemplify the grounded importance of this question of agency as the ability to think and speak, is through fantasy as a site of agency. Ringrose and Renold (2012b), for example, looked to girls' fantasy, examining what they term "'projectivity' [as] encompass[ing] the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future" (971). They relied on four individual case studies with teen girls in urban and rural working class communities across England and Wales, mapping "how girls negotiate contradictory neo-liberal discourses of girlhood that dominate in popular culture; what McRobbie calls the new 'post-feminist masquerade'" (ibid 462). Similarly, Jessica Willis (2009) looked at girls' reading as a site of potential agency:

> when girls read, they participate in social meaning-making processes through their dynamic use and interpretation of discourses of 'femininity'. During early adolescence, books and literature provide an important lens through which girls can explore, challenge, and interrogate their social environments. Literary texts offer preadolescent girls opportunities for the exploration of thoughts and ideas that may not be easily broached in their immediate material worlds (Willis 2009: 108).

Through 15 individual interviews with preadolescent girls in the Northeastern United States, Willis demonstrated that girls' agency occurs through their exploration of possible subjectivities.

In these studies we see that girls' imagining of alternatives in living a 'livable life' that entails embodying a different subjectivity from the one that they currently embody. The embodiment of such norms is a site of agency and possibly a site of active resistance to the subjectivizing power of mainstream discourses on femininity. However, how does collective action relate to individual agency? As the research conducted by Ringrose and Renold and Wills illuminates, agency needs to be understood not just in terms of refusing norms as understood in terms of embodying social action but also at the level of fantasy and the social imaginary. What norms govern the possibilities for thinking beyond one's current limits in terms of embodying gendered forms of agency? What do such conceptualizations of gender norms at both the bodily and imaginative levels mean for fostering girls' critical agential capacities? My research was designed with these questions in mind and with the explicit purpose of generating knowledge for improving anti-violence program development for young women in the community.

Interestingly, in their 2006 paper, Currie et al. argue that girls' capacity to be self-reflexive itself constitutes agency, regardless of the outcome in terms of specific actions. This paper relied on data that formed part of their larger study, 'Girl Power'. 'Girl Power' relied principally on 71 semi-structured interviews with girls 11-16 years of age, recruited through community centre workers in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Various chapters and papers emerged (see Currie et al. 2009), focusing on girls "who participated in activities such as skateboarding, making webpages, role-playing on the Internet, and so on.[…] We were interested in whether their participation also signals the empowerment of girls (Currie et al. 2006:421). Their 2006 paper used 21 interviews with 18 girls, arguing that the search for *authentic* selfhood is characteristic of girls who are designated as *empowered* by their peers. The authors discussed that while self-reflexivity allows girls to reflect upon and actively negotiate the conditions of their gendered performances of girlhood, the problem remains that this rational individualism limits the transformative potential of girls' agency. Nevertheless, this study is important in

highlighting that a sense of individual agency, understood in terms of building a sense of self-efficacy, can be satisfied through 'thought' and the fostering of critical thinking capacities at the level of focusing pedagogically on inculcating specific norms as a basis for directing certain interpretive self-reflexive engagement in the delivery of anti-violence programs.

Locating her research in the good girl/slut or virgin/whore binary that is a defining part of girlhood, Elizabethe Payne (2015) looks at the ways "Southern, White, middle-class lesbian young women stake their claims to lesbian moral goodness by making repeated value-laden distinctions between those-straight and lesbian-who keep their sexual desire in check and those who do not" (225). Compliance with hegemonic femininity offers cultural rewards and social capital. However, by interviewing 9 lesbian-identifying young women 18-21 in a major metropolitan city in Texas, Payne looks beyond how these girls navigate their sexual identities, seeking to understand how they position themselves in the world as girls writ large, given the loss of social capital that comes from having a *deviant* sexuality. Available discourses for young lesbian women are limited, and do not offer a subjecthood that is encompassing of being both a 'good girl' and a 'sexual being'. Payne provides insights into attempts to expand "the 'good girl' category to include lesbians. Such analysis of the discursive constraints and the maneuverings within discourse by lesbian girls informed my own understanding and application of poststructuralist notions of negotiation, subjectification and their significance for thinking about girls' agential capacities.

The literature examined to date helps in understanding that agency is not an inherent personal quality, but rather an interaction with the social world and the discourses one navigates. Questions that remain then focus on whether agency must comprise a sustained approach or whether it can be momentary in nature. Put another way, do girls need to approach all moments of interaction with the social world from a place of agency in the sense of always refusing or rearticulating norms? Is it possible to think of girls' exercising their agential capacities in terms which speak to both their sustained engagement over time, as well as in terms that speak to their temporality?

Maxwell and Aggleton (2010 and 2011), for example, reviewed the research on young women's agency and found that it is usually evidenced in moments of (active) resistance or re-signification. As such, most conceptualizations of agentic practice are located in the moment, in one resistant action. They find that "one of the limitations of writing to date, which draws on empirical data to theorize about agency, is that agentic practices usually appear to be momentary, and it is not clear how such practice can become more sustained" (Maxwell and Aggleton 2011:310). Conceptualizing agency as a discursive practice, Maxwell and Aggleton explicitly looked for sustained agency, examining how 54 young women constructed their sexual and intimate experiences through narrative (Maxwell and Aggleton 2011:314). They found that one way to move beyond momentary practices of agency and see sustained agential engagement was to look at how these young women positioned themselves in their relationships and as actors, to look at their ongoing identity creation rather than at their individual actions (ibid 310). This is an instrumental framing of girls' agency, as it not does assess whether a practice is agentic or not, based on whether it necessarily challenges dominant norms (ibid). Rather, it looks at girls' discursive positioning of themselves as active and in control when talking about their experiences (ibid 310). This positioning is ongoing, a constant interaction between their social lived reality, and the narrative framing they give to that reality in their account of it.

The literature reviewed in this section points to the need for research that is grounded in a theoretical understanding of agency that moves beyond its liberal humanist limits. As mentioned above, Weedon (1997) rejects the liberal humanist notion of the unitary, rational, autonomous and self-determining subject as a basis for conceptualizing agency. Poststructuralist renderings of the subject and agency underscore more nuanced understandings of subjectivity and the process of subjectification as involving a more complex shifting and contextual analysis of self-constitution which entail the negotiation of various discourses under quite specific conditions.

2.3 Prevention-based Anti-violence Girls' Programming Literature

I now turn to an examination of the literature addressing the effects of anti-violence programming for young women. Violence against women is a significant and widespread problem. In Canada, more than half (54 percent) of young women under 16 have experienced some form of unwanted sexual attention, while another 24 percent have experienced rape or coercive sex (School Community Safety Advisory Panel 2008:374). These percentages increase for disabled, immigrant, refugee, Aboriginal, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered girls. While girls are at risk of victimization at any age, the rate of victimization for female victims increases through the teenage years to a peak at the age of 15 (ibid). These statistics highlight the need for violence-prevention programming aimed specifically at girls. The *Girls Program* I have partnered with is one such program, whose aim is to imbue girls with the critical thinking and tools to foster their agential capacities. It is understood that it is problematic to impose prevention of sexual violence upon girls alone, as this is a form of victim blaming (Bedera & Nordmeyer 2015). While the *Girls Program* aims to prevent girls from experiencing violence through fostering protective skills, it is done in tandem with content that is critical of girls being required to take responsibility for their own protection.

There is a great deal of evidence that generally supports the positive impact of girls' programs, linking them to the broader goal of violence prevention (see Ellis & Thiara 2014). Organized youth activities are associated with identity exploration and reflection for both boys and girls (Hansen et al 2003). Connor and Davidson (2003) for example argue that girls who have an opportunity to explore and reflect on their identity can come to recognize their own strengths, and that girls who think of themselves as a strong person are more resilient when faced with adversity (Connor & Davidson 2003). While girls' programming includes a large spectrum of curriculum and activity content, researchers have found that violence prevention programs are an important means by which to prevent or minimize the effects of violence. Below is an overview of the literature supporting specific violence-prevention programming for girls.

In their 2002 report on behalf of the Alliance of Five Research Centers on Violence, Berman and Jiwani undertook to examine the prevention of violence as it affects the Canadian girl child. Each centre undertook a different approach and a different methodology: "Some centers concentrated their efforts on the analysis of specific policies and legislation, while others focused on evaluating programs, and still others combined policy and narrative analysis based on the lived realities of girls and young women" (Berman & Jiwani 2002:6). All sought to embody a Participatory Action Research approach. Amongst many other findings, they concluded that violence prevention programs that have a gender-specific component can play an important role in increasing girls' ability to identify violence in their lives and take steps to reduce and cope with its effects (Berman & Jiwani 2002, see also Janovicek 2001).

More specifically, this finding is further supported by Cameron et al. in 2004, who undertook part of the research for the Alliance of Five Research Centers on Violence, situated in Atlantic Canada. They sought to understand the value of gender-differentiated approaches to violence prevention programming. Involving three phases, and using questionnaires with the youth participants, they looked to participants for their feedback on the experiences of violence, but also their desires for gender-segregated programming. An important finding from this research was that violence prevention initiatives have been found to be highly valued by female participants, who "reported appreciating the opportunity to exchange ideas on their experiences that might contribute to violence acceptance, and gained confidence that there were things that they could do to reduce violence in their communities" (Cameron et al. 2002:44). Girl participants highly rate violence prevention programs that recognize the need to connect and build relationships among girls (Amaro et al. 2001). This programming has been found to offer "the opportunity to share and validate hidden knowledge" so that girls then have the "ability to voice submerged consciousness about their 'doubled selves' or multiple subjectivities" (Lee and DeFinney 2004:110).

In 2002 Normandeau et al. looked at what happens to school-based violence-prevention programs once they have been implemented and assessed. Some never went any further than the few places where they were first implemented, while others were widely

adopted. Through 28 semi-structured interviews with those responsible for disseminating the programs, they examined the factors that help or hinder the dissemination of school-based violence-prevention programs for children and teens. One clear finding was that violence prevention programs are one important way to address and intervene in abusive situations so that violence either does not occur or its effects are minimized. Girls reported that the programs help them to identify violence in their lives, give them the opportunity to exchange ideas about what contributes to violence acceptance, teach them about steps to reduce and cope with its effects and build confidence that there are things they can do to reduce violence in their communities (Normandeau et al. 2002, Berman & Jiwani 2002, Janovicek 2001).

In 2012, the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health partnered with the Girls Action Foundation, and researchers from the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, York University and the University of Montreal on a study of Girls' Perspectives on Girls' Groups and Healthy Living (BC Centre for Excellence et al.). They sought to identify best practices in healthy promotion with girls through girls' groups, understanding health as including dating violence (3). Using mix-methodology, they undertook a survey of academic and web-based grey literature on girls groups and sex/gender specific health promotion programming, conducted 7 focus groups with girls aged 13-15, led individual interviews with facilitators and volunteers, and garnered responses from an online discussion on KickAction.ca (3). They emerged with 9 promising practices for girls' health promotion groups. Specifically in relation to anti-violence programming and supports for girls, the research found that girls felt that the opportunity to build friendships and share what they were experiencing was helpful in improving their self-esteem. Girls reported that group increased their self-respect and self-acceptance, giving them the confidence to resist peer pressure. The safety and confidentiality of groups, the cultural sensitivity and the ability to share what they experienced was important to girls. Facilitators saw that giving girls information and discussion space helped them explore gender stereotypes, assisting them in navigating dating violence. For the practitioners in the field, this research is important setting out the guiding principles for girls' groups. For this research in particular, it

clearly makes the link between building protective factors[2] and reducing risk factors for violence, with offering girls programming centred on critical thinking and discussion spaces to share in their experiences. My own research contributes further to generating critical insights into supporting girls' agentic capacity in this respect, but does so from a theoretically informed position which speaks to nuanced notions of Butlerian inspired understandings of agency.

In an empirical, quantitative study of sexual assault prevention programming, Senn et al. (2015) offered resistance programming in four 3-hour units to 451 university women, including information and skills relating to prevention, in order to assess risk from acquaintances, overcome emotional barriers in acknowledging danger, and engage in effective verbal and physical self-defense. Using the Sexual Experiences Survey-Short Form Victimization, they followed up one-year later with the participants to examine sexual assault rates. In comparison to the control group, they found that the "sexual assault resistance program was successful in decreasing the occurrence of rape, attempted rape, and other forms of victimization among first-year university women" (2326). Similarly, Senn & Forest (2015) offered workshops during the undergraduate curriculum content for 827 students and using online surveys at 3 time points (baseline, post intervention, 4 month follow-up), found that "integrating the preparation of peer educations and bystander-type sexual assault prevention workshops […] can produce positive changes in male and female students' confidence, readiness, and capacity to as prosocial bystanders" (1). The reliability of these findings is strongly linked to the specific curriculum content that was presented in both instances; nevertheless, the studies are important in demonstrating the causal link between sexual assault prevention and offering information and training for girls and young women about the dynamics of sexual assault, including the problematics of hyper-masculinity and passive-femininity. While the *Girls Program* that this research has partnered with does not include the exact curriculum content that Senn et al. (2015) and Senn & Forest (2015) do, it does offer a

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[2] Protective factors are conditions that enhance positive outcomes for girls and lessen the likelihood of negative consequences when they are exposed to risk (Jessor, Turbin & Costa 1998).

critical lens on gender roles, rape culture and sexual assault. This research thus looks at how this programming can inform girls' understandings of themselves as agential subjects.

In their study, Burkett and Hamilton (2012) look at young women's perceptions of sexual consent. They offer an analysis of the current context in which women's empowerment is assumed within postfeminist discourses and the standard approach of sexual violence prevention campaigns that suppose women are free and autonomous agents who can simply say 'no' (817). By promoting risk avoidance behaviours and strategies, most sexual violence prevention campaigns "place responsibility on young women to properly communicate their willingness, or unwillingness, to engage in sexual relations" (ibid). This is underscored by a postfeminist presumption of women's autonomy and choice. Through semi-structured in-depth interviews of eight women aged 18-24 in Australia, they find that the young women reflected "the contradictory character of postfeminist sensibilities, primarily in the marked discrepancy between their perceptions of women's natural rights to sexual agency and their vilification of their own (and other women's) inabilities to control their everyday sexual encounters with men"(817). Their study offers a critique of sexual violence programming that assumes girls are free and autonomous beings who can say no. They complexify girls' experiences of consent and thus of sexual agency by focusing on the inhibiting structures of gender roles and postfeminist incitements to narrate one's experience as 'choice'. This work is important in understanding the girls' agency in the context of sexual violence programming content, whereby presumptions of choice embedded in the programming will only serve to further the discursive power of the postfeminism.

As part of a larger national study entitled 'Lives of Girls', in 2014 Hussain & Berman looked at the experiences of violence for Ontario girls. 31 focus groups with 18 different groups of girls in high school and community settings were organized over 2 years, to discuss violence in the lives of girls. While their findings are numerous, one important contribution was that isolation and exclusion were widespread and common experiences of girls.

> They conveyed a sense of aloneness as they talked about feeling that aspects of their lives, experiences, and problems were not accorded the space to be communicated and acknowledged. Furthermore, the young women in this group felt they were not provided with the time, space and relational supports to process their experiences and emotions in meaningful ways (Hussain & Berman 2014:170).

This points to the potential of violence-prevention groups, in fostering community and a sense of belonging through shared experience. In fact, Hussain & Berman found that "collective and collaborative storytelling creates a meaningful space for young women to express and name their experiences and feelings in ways that let them know their knowledge is important (ibid 181).

Importantly, girls' programming addressing sexual violence does not act in isolation of other forms of oppression. The literature states that

> Programs for girls should not be based on delinquency models that focus on the manifestation of girls' marginalization rather than the root causes. Ageism, sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and colonization are relational systems of oppression that affect healthy outcomes for the girls. Policy makers therefore should incorporate theories of intersectionality into the development of social programs that address the unique vulnerabilities of girls (Henderson & Jackson 2006: 242-243, Henderson & Jackson 2004).

Sexual violence cannot be discussed as a separate sociological phenomenon, apart from the list of 'isms' that inform who experiences oppression, who exerts oppression, and why. Experiences of sexual violence must also be understood on a continuum. Liz Kelly (1988) proposed that sexual violence exists as a continuum, calling attention to the notion that sexual violence is not driven by desire, but by power: "Men's power over women in patriarchal societies results in men assuming rights of sexual access to and intimacy with women and in certain levels of force, coercion or abuse being seen as justified" (41). The continuum of sexual violence include:

> Any physical, visual, verbal, or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact (41).

Different social locations experience acts different; for example, intentionally misgendering a trans woman can be experienced as a form of sexual violence for that

specific identity. The *Girls Program* with whom this research has partnered foregrounds the notion of the continuum of sexual violence. For the data analysis of this research, it is essential to understand girls' words and narration of experiences of agency or of oppression through an intersectional lens.

An intersectional approach offers insights for the work being done to engage diverse youth around issues of gender and anti-violence programming. Morales-Williams (2014) undertook a doctoral research project, employing ethnographic methods to look at a summer camp within a community center in the Bronx, and "the everyday ways that five women of color (18-26) taught a public pedagogy of gender and sexuality" (ii). Using an intersectional lens, she examined how "manifestations of rape culture within urban communities of color are augmented by a history of sexual stereotyping and marginalization, […] constructed through a white male gaze" (3). Using data from 9 weeks spent observing in the field, and one-year follow up interviews, Morales-Williams finds that summer camps for female youth are an informal site of anti-violence programming, and female camp counsellors offer a public pedagogy of gender and sexuality to the youth. She states that

> while prior research has positioned urban girls and young women of color as agents of their own sexuality, little has been said about what they teach the public when they are granted positions of authority. Understanding the kind of knowledge that young urban women of color produce is essential in understanding their agency and resiliency. It affords communities and organizations the lens required to best understand them as intellectual and cultural resources (20).

Morales-Williams's intersectional approach to rape culture and youth programming enabled her to identify the agential knowledge production occurring by the camp counsellors in relation to gender and sexuality, thus constituting an informal site of anti-violence programming. By acknowledging the anti-violence work being done by the camp counsellors, Morales-Williams' work "carves out a space for young women to shape, inform, and challenge public pedagogy about gender and sexuality" (20-21).

This review of the significant literature on anti-violence programming for girls enabled me to establish the connection between anti-violence programming and fostering girls' sense of capacity and agency, as one form of protective skillset. Such studies illuminate

the impact of such programs and their utility with regards to fostering productive interventions in the lives of young women. However, my research hones in on fostering girls' agential capacities as one possible outcome of a particular case study of this type of programming. Further knowledge about such interventionist programs in terms of their pedagogical implications, in conjunction with a theoretically informed and grounded understanding of agency from a Butlerian perspective marks my research as particularly distinctive.

2.2   Conclusion

The review of literature undertaken in this chapter, which spans both girlhood studies and the field of anti-violence programming, has demonstrated that there is a necessary depth of analysis that is lacking from employing commonsense understandings of agency, defined simply in terms of "our ability to make decisions and to act on the world in order to change it" (Francis 2001:162) . Complexities in the literature center on the relationship between agency and power, and the ensuing relationship between agency and choice. The review also highlights that what is needed within the context of empirical research into anti-violence programing and its effects or impact on young women is a theoretically informed empiricism that is capable of offering further insight into girls' agential subjectivizing processes. As such, my research helps to move the field forward in its Butlerian framing and focus on girls' self-criticality as an agential capacity, and in its examination of the implications of such knowledge generation for the development and delivery of violence prevention programing for young women.

3 Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to address my research questions which relate to how girls' programming impacts on girls' as agential subjects, I employed a qualitative research methodology which relied on focus group interviews as a basis for generating data and empirical insights. I embrace a qualitative methodological inquiry that is consistent with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) framing of qualitative research as:

> […] a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible, […..studying] things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (3).

Wishing to explore how girls conceive of their own agency, I chose an instrumental case study research design that situates this phenomenon in the lived world of the girls (Stake 2005). Grounding my theoretical exploration on girls' agency within the context of a community agency's specific anti-violence programing initiative was appropriate as "case studies are pertinent when your research addresses either a descriptive question- "what is happening or has happened"" (Yin 2012:5). I wanted to understand how anti-violence programming offered through a particular feminist community agency impacted on girls' sense of their own agency and sense of ontological becoming. This is a broad, descriptive question best suited to a case study approach that allows me to "gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest" (Patton 2002:447).

Furthermore, this case study is instrumental in that the case being examined is to provide insight into an issue, [….] it facilitates our understanding of something else" (Stake 2005:445). This case study of the girls who took part in the anti-violence program allowed a better understanding of girls' agency or agential capacities to be developed in light of the Butlerian and feminist poststructuralist inspired theoretical framing of the phenomenon under investigation. . This type of community programming is important, particularly in what is often termed a 'postfeminist era' of illusory and celebratory 'girl power', in that it provides a productive site for investigating young women's

subjectification and self-constitution as agential subjects and moreover to identify the discourses through which they come to negotiate and express their agency:

> Terms and subject positions from which to describe experiences of victimhood, oppression, lack, limitation, and what we might call, 'suffering-marked-by-structure' are not readily available to young women […]. Identifying structural oppression appears to require a vocabulary, a subject position, and/or an emotional and embodied state, and not often one young women readily identify with in describing their own experiences and life paths (Harris & Dobson 2015:148).

As Stake states, "the case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts" (Stake 2005:444). As Program Coordinator for over 4 years, and having re-written the curriculum for the *Girls Program* (as expanded on below), I have experiential knowledge of this particular case. I am aware of the specific socio-geographic context in which this program is offered, and I have an in-depth knowledge of the experience the girls have undergone in participating in the *Girls Program*. I am also a girl, or at the very least a previous girl, who also spent years growing up in this particular geographical context. While I do not claim to know or understand the intersectional experiences of all girls involved in the focus groups, I do bring an experience as a girl who has lived, at least partially, a similar context.

3.1 The Community Program in Question

The Community agency with which I partnered in developing and delivering the *Girls Program* has as its mandate: 'a world without sexual violence'. As such, one component of their programming has always been violence prevention and public education. Over its more than 40 years of herstory, the agency has offered a psycho-educational small group program for young women, taking various iterations but generally falling under the rubric of a healthy relationships program. In 2011, I started as a volunteer facilitator for the young women's group that was being run at the time. The group was designed for a maximum of ten young women between the ages of 15-21, as an after school activity. The participants were not necessarily survivors of violence.

Over the span of one year, I took over as the principal facilitator for this program and initiated a change in curriculum direction in the *Girls Program*. Starting in 2012, my title became Program Coordinator and the *Girls Program* began to explicitly focus on fostering girls' agency in terms of providing a space for them to reflect on their experiences as young women, given the institutionalization of male privilege and power. This was in addition to continuing to cover topics relating to healthy relationships, including gender roles, power and privilege, boundaries and assertiveness. Below is an overview of the programming. There is a complete curriculum attached in Appendix 5.

Table 1 Curriculum Overview

Week 1	Introduction to the Girls Program
Week 2	What is gender vs. sex, self-esteem and how the media influences all of these Gender stereotypes: What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a man? In a relationship, what do you expect from your partner? Where does that come from? What does your partner expect of you? Where does that come from?
Week 3	Rape culture, understandings of gender and sexual identity, agency
Week 4	What are boundaries, why do we need them. What is an unhealthy/healthy relationship? What is assertiveness and how is it often portrayed for women? (gender identity)
Week 5	Intersectionality, Privilege backpack exercise (understanding intersecting identities) Myths vs. realities of sexual assault, different forms of violence, stats What is power, sources of power
Week 6	Women/girls rarely are seen as physically strong or as being physically aggressive-why? Guest presenter comes in to do team building, healthy body strength activities-bootcamp The goal is not to frame this as a self-defense course, but to look at how our bodies can be things other than tools for beauty…they are strong and capable
Week 7	Discussion of sexual intimacy, different kinds of sexualities including LGBTQ
Week 8-10	Take action activity and evaluations

I wanted to move away from viewing girls as potential victims, and to focus rather on promoting in girls a sense of their own capacity and the power of their voice to effect change in their own lives. The *Girls Program* embodies the approach of popular

education as explained by hooks 1994[3]. In her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, she states, for example, that "to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching [whereby it] is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students" (13). In this sense, the programming was conceived in this spirit and centers on the girls, who lead in naming and raising issues important to them, while facilitators offer support and resources. This approach positions girls as capable actors, imbuing in them a sense of capacity and agency. This is all part of promoting in girls the resilience and tools necessary for larger societal violence prevention.

Consequently, I explicitly created space for girls to 'take action' by allotting the last two weeks of the program for girls to plan and execute an 'action moment'. In these two weeks, the program facilitator prompts a discussion on what it means to have agency, and how the girls understand this in concrete terms within the context of their own lives. In other words, they engage in a group discussion which involves them talking about specific issues or obstacles in their own lives as young women that they would like to address, and reflecting on how they would like to take action.

Ideas in the past for action have included:
- making a public service type video
- starting a Twitter # campaign
- chalking in a park in their community
- creating posters to hang in their community centre/school
- making T-Shirts with individual messages on them for the girls to take home

The purpose of this 'taking action' activity is to have the girls recognize that they are agents in their lives, that they are not victims of their circumstances, but rather that they have a voice and an ability to speak out. While it is clear that as individuals they cannot necessarily transform systemic structural conditions of male power and privilege, there is a political commitment to creating supportive conditions for thinking through questions

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[3] In her book Teaching to Transgress, bell hooks (1994) embodies the approach of popular education, stating that "to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching [whereby it] is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students" (13).

of personal safety and to consider concrete ways in which they can act in the world. The focus is on encouraging the girls to take action in their lives that lead to promoting healthy relationships and supporting a cause/belief they identify as important.

Importantly, the *Girls Program* participants are diverse, and there is quite arguably an overrepresentation of minority groups within this population. Based on evaluation data obtained through a *Girls Action Foundation* survey, we know the following:
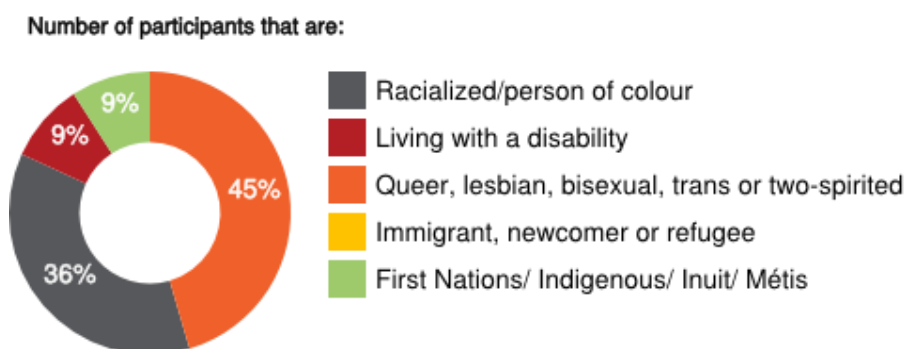
Figure 1 Girls Profile

This diversity is important to note, as it reminds us that girls' experiences of girlhood are not uniform. Intersectionality will come into play in understanding girls' embodied identities and their framing of agency. As we will see below, the diversity within the girls who participated in the focus groups was different than what is listed above for the program as a whole. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this, but it should be noted that I did not collect fullsome demographic data for my focus groups[4], so many identity brackets were unknown to me as the researcher unless the girls spoke specifically about those experiences.

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[4] Extensive demographic data was not collected, as I wanted the focus groups to feel informal and welcoming. I wanted the girls to feel like active participants, not simply subjects of a research study. So often, girls who are less advantaged have to fill out countless surveys and information forms in order to access services. I wanted to ensure that the girls had the choice to reveal the parts of their identities that they wanted to have known, throughout the focus group discussions.

3.2   The Focus Groups

I relied on the words of the girls themselves; many specific terminologies that were used by the girls came directly from curriculum content in the *Girls Program* (e.g. structural power). The narrations took place during 4 focus groups with 13 girls who participated in the programming. I focused on their perceptions of what constitutes agency, what makes them feel agential and how agency feels or is experienced in their own lives, specifically concentrating on identifying what the girls considered important to them in terms of being agential and what the indicators of such agency were.

"Feminist theory has challenged what counts as research and knowledge using approaches that place women's experiences at the centre of inquiry, thereby valuing women's "ways of knowing" (Belenky 1997). Consequently, this research project was concerned to generate narrative accounts that emerged out of the focus group discussions with girls who engaged in the program. As Krueger and Casey (2009) point out, the focus group is a "carefully planned series of discussions to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (p. 2). The value of the focus group as a method is that it allows for rich discussion *between* participants, "who build on each other's comments and hold each other accountable for the veracity of what is said" (Linville, Lambert-Shute, Fruhauf & Piercy 2003). I conducted four focus groups for girls having undertaken the program in the past year. Each group had a maximum of 5 participants, mostly compromised of girls who had taken the program together. This smaller number made transcribing more manageable, and allowed for more in-depth dialogue and participation by each girl. It ensured a lively group discussion, and a communal recall of the experiences they shared in the program.

Given the focus on girls' agency, the girls were actively encouraged to lead the discussion and to discuss their understandings of agency. Rather than me as the researcher coming in to mine the girls for knowledge that served my own ends, I framed the focus group conversations as a source of knowledge production for all involved. Put another way, our conversations enabled learning and a honing of our critical thinking (hooks 1994), for both the girls and for me as a facilitator. I was not simply passively taking in information as a researcher. The focus groups were themselves instances of

critical thinking whereby the girls were offered a space to reflect upon their own agency, what that might look like and how they may want to work within the constraints of their everyday lives, to enact agential acts and decisions going forward. They helped elucidate our own thinking for ourselves and exposed both me and the girls to other ways of thinking about our experiences as young women and as agents. This learning was fostered through focus groups, as "the interaction occurring within the group accentuates empathy and commonality of experiences and fosters self-disclosure and self-validation" (Madriz 2000:842). Going into the focus groups, my intention was

> to creatively devise research approaches that are personally and politically meaningful for the researchers and the girls, approaches that contribute to positive change in understandings of girls' lives and that enable girls and women to consider their experiences in previously unseen ways (Hussain et al. 2006:54).

An important methodological consideration for these focus groups was that of the recruitment of participants. At the end of each of the *Girls Program* groups that took place in late 2014, the facilitator of the group let the girls know that there was a study that was concerned to investigate the *Girls Program* and would focus on the perspectives and experiences of girls who had participated in the program. The facilitator explained the purpose of the study- to improve the *Girls Program* for future girls, to ensure that the girls who have participated have a voice in making improvements, and to understand how girls understand their agency. The facilitator provided a flyer (see Appendix 4) with more detail including email contact information. I also leveraged the *Girls Program* Facebook page, whose membership is closed and is comprised of girls who have added themselves to the page during or after their group. I posted the flyer on the Facebook page, and requested that interested girls connect with me via Facebook private message.

For the girls who contacted me, we set up a date/time that would work for themselves and their peers from similar groups. Most of the focus group meetings occurred at the location of their *Girls Program* group, as it was a familiar and accessible venue. I distributed a parental consent form via email prior to the focus group for girls under the age of 18 (see Appendix 3). This form explained the research project, ensured confidentiality of the girls' responses, and explained how the data would be stored and used. The girls themselves had the ability to consent to the focus groups through another

form distributed on the day of the focus group (see Appendix). All of these forms, as well as the process of recruitment, were approved by the Board of Ethics for Western University, under the Non-Medical Research Ethics Board. At the beginning of each focus group, I explained that at any point the girls could refuse to participate, discontinue participation or withdraw from the study. Their participation was anonymous, and all data would remain securely stored and confidential. I also explained that if I were to use their words in my thesis text, I would be sure to use pseudonyms.

While I sought to obtain roughly 4-5 participants per focus group, with 5 focus groups in total, I ended up with the following:

Table 2 Focus Groups

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
When	November 10th 2014 630pm	December 1st 2014 11am-12pm	December 4th 2014 530-630pm	January 28th 2015 1-3pm
Who	4 girls, aged 16-18	2 girls, aged 18 Two infants	3 girls, aged 16-17	4 girls, aged 19-21 Two toddlers
Where	Community Centre	Classroom	Rural community centre	Youth-based community centre
Length	1:07mins	45mins	47mins	52mins

Many of the girls who are involved in the *Girls Program* face structural barriers that would make attending a focus group challenging. Gaining access to the girls after the group had finished was challenging, as was maintaining interest while we sorted through a date/time for the focus group. My sample is not representative of all of the girls who have taken the *Girls Program*, and it is clustered amongst certain groups at certain community centers, given that once one girl had expressed interest in the focus group, she sought out her friends to attend as well in order to make the experience more

comfortable and fun. While acknowledging the limitations of a small sample size and the lack of representation in terms of diversity, this small sample allowed for more in-depth understanding and a rapport to be built with those girls who were eager to participate in the study. As with much qualitative research, my goal is to "look at a "process" or the "meanings" individuals attribute to their given social situation, not necessarily to make generalizations" (Hesse-Biber 2007:119).

As Table 2 demonstrates, the focus groups ranged in length from 45 minutes to just over an hour. The length was determined by the girls, their interest and attention; the presence of children was also a factor in the length, as the girls who were mothers were trying to both engage their children while also participating in the conversation. For my part, the presence of children was unplanned but welcomed. I did not intentionally seek out teen mothers, but as mentioned, many of the girls in the *Girls Program* face social and structural barriers and it is not surprising that there was an overrepresentation of this group amongst the participants. While childcare could have been arranged, in many ways I believe it was fruitful that the children were present during the focus groups. It provided a means for me to create rapport with the mothers, to engage in conversation about their children. There was an increased sense of comfort and community with the children present. Additionally, as will be discussed in my chapter on Teen Mothers, the presence of 5 teen mothers in the focus groups meant that I was able to gain insight on a specific subset of girls and their relationship to agency and their ontological sense of becoming.

Relating to other identity categories and intersectionality, I did not collect demographic data and I did not require that the girls disclose their identifiers for ability, race, socio-economic status, or sexuality. The girls who did participate all identified as girls[5]. Based solely on visual cues, there was one girl from a visible minority group, and all girls were

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[5] As the name of the program includes the word 'girl', there is a certain exclusion that occurs for those who may identify both as girls but also as having trans affiliations. Amongst the participants of the program, we have had participants who choose to be referred to as 'he'. There is no formal policy around who can or cannot participate in group, other than they must willingly choose to be part of a program with such a title.

able-bodied. Through our discussions, which will be highlighted in my Findings chapters, it was apparent that many if not all of the girls came from lower socio-economic backgrounds. There were 4 girls who identified as other than purely heterosexual (within the LGBTQ spectrum).

As mentioned, focus groups can illicit an exchange between the participants in which each prompts the other, responds to each other's narratives, creating a multi-layered discussion (Warr 2005). My intention was to frame the discussion by facilitating a brainstorming session with the girls. Indeed, this helped to warm up the conversation, and reminded them of discussions that were facilitated during the *Girls Program* regarding the key concepts of power, privilege and agency. For each group, I:

1. Prepared 2 large sheets of paper, one for each concept: (1) lack of power, (2) taking action & agency
2. Put them on the floor or taped them on the wall.
3. Had magazines, scissors and glue sticks, markers, stickers etc. available.
4. Warmed up by asking the girls to share how they understood these concepts[6].

I asked the girls to think about how it feels to be powerful, to have privilege. What does that look like, feel like, sound like? How do you know when someone is powerful or has privilege? If they had trouble thinking about themselves, I asked them to think about someone their age or someone in the group who they considered powerful.

After I went through the questions for the first concept, I gave them time to do their drawings, collage and writing: graffiti, sayings, pictures, parts of songs, stories to illustrate the concept. This led to an open discussion on the concept, and merged quite naturally into the second concept and the second sheet. These open discussions, facilitated by prompts, in effect provided the bulk of the content for the focus groups.

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[6] This activity has been modified from one developed by Girls Action Foundation as a Girls Self-Reporting Tool for program indicators other than those I am focusing on.

Some prompts for each concept are as follows:

- *Agency*: taking action, being outspoken, able to speak up about what's important to them, critical thinking, able to dream and think about other possibilities for their life, find ways to express how they're feeling, find solutions to problems
- *Power and privilege*: remind the girls of the exercise 'Privilege Pendulum' that took place in the *Girls Program*. Power over, power with, power to, power within.
- *Structural and personal power*. While we may be disempowered from structural forces such as racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, we can still find power in personal approaches to issues. These can include: recognition by others of something you did or said, being able to overcome a difficulty on their own or with very little assistance, succeeding at something or doing something really well
- *Lack of power*: being disrespected or putdown, being ignored, being stereotyped or denied an opportunity to prove oneself, not having control, experiencing loss, feeling ignorant, feeling shame, feeling or being isolated (Girls Action Foundation 'Amplify' 2009: 347).
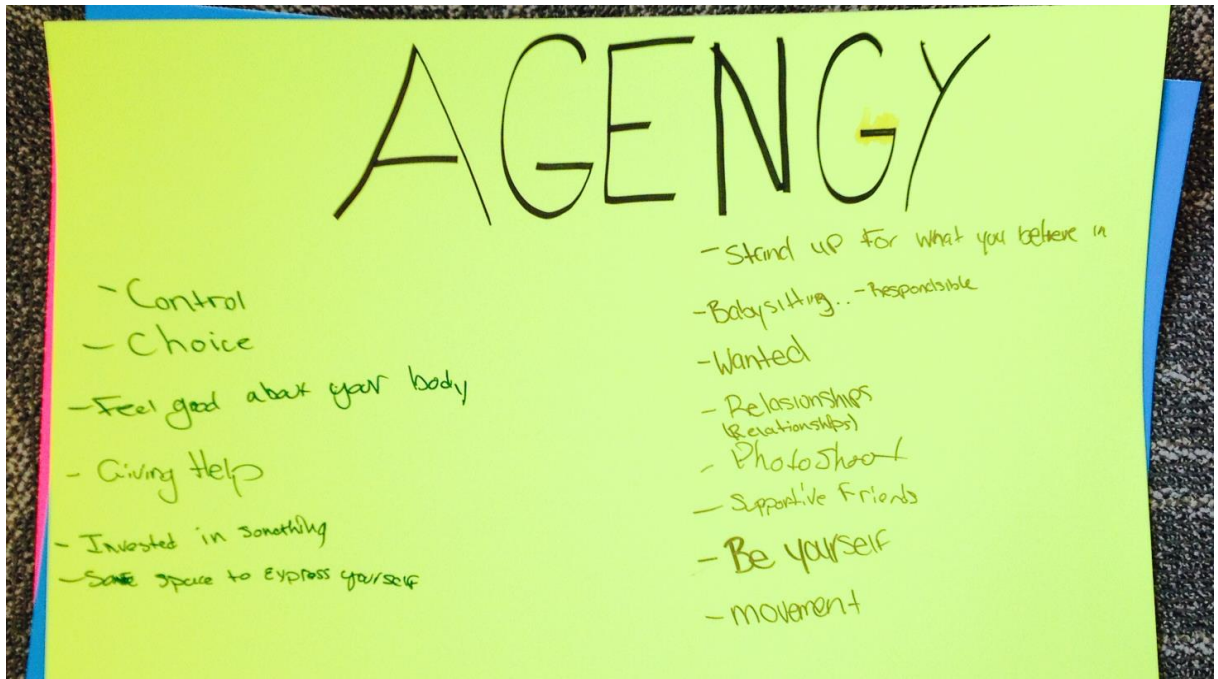
Figure 2 Girls' Brainstorming on Agency FG1
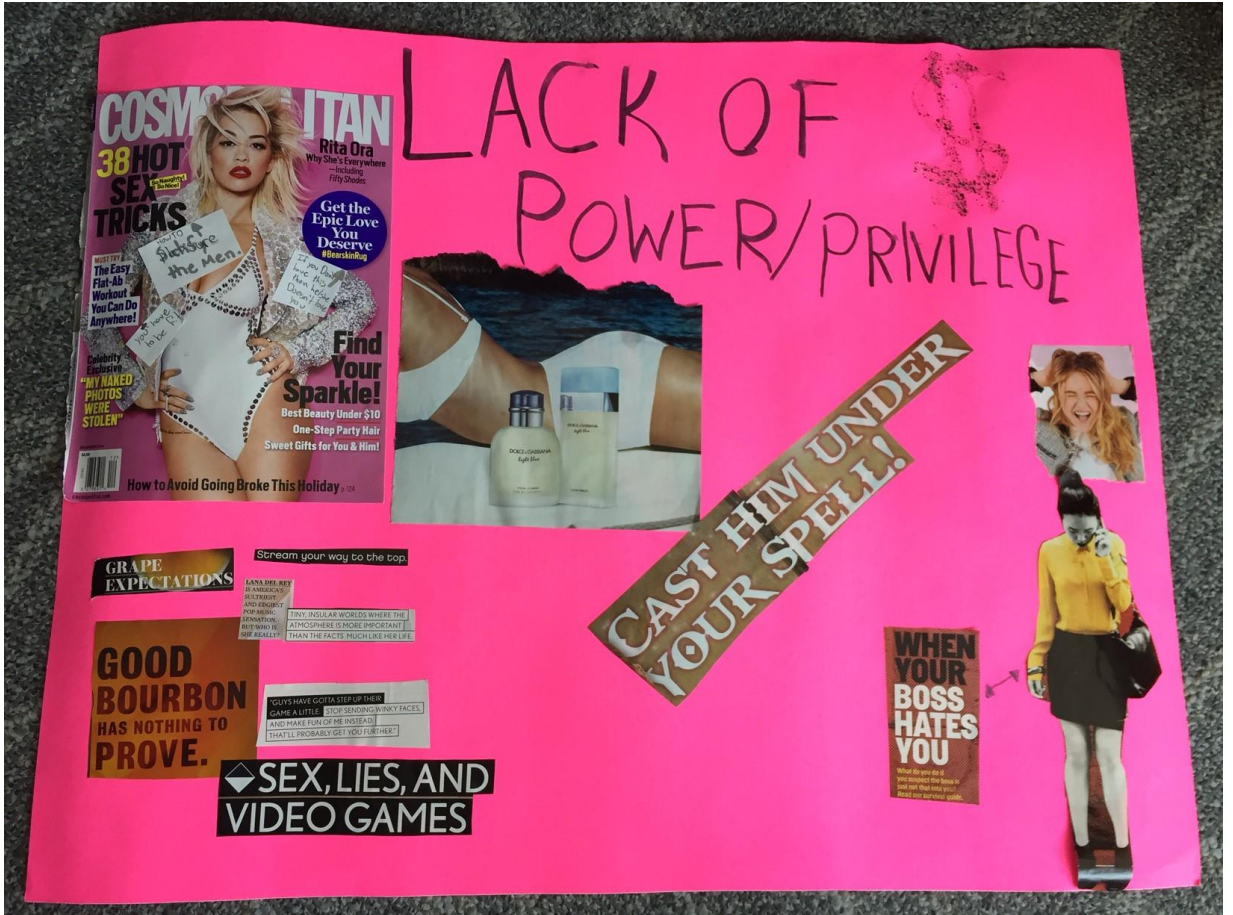
Figure 3-Girls' Brainstorming on Lack of Power FG3

Figure 4-Girls' Brainstorming on Agency FG4

Figure 5-Girls' Brainstorming on Lack of Power FG4

During this activity, I followed the stream of discussion the girls forwarded. Epistemological approaches to feminist research require a consideration of how the ways in which a question is phrased impacts the type of responses that participants offer during the interview process (Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). As such, I did not come to the focus group with a set list of questions, but rather I approached it as a semi-structured interview whereby I established the conversation themes and set some direction, and then provided prompts and follow up questions when needed to dig further into certain topics. As mentioned above, my principal research question was: how does girls' programming impact girls' sense of themselves as agential, as actors rather than victims in their own lives, and as capable of exerting agency in their subjectivization? In reference to the literature above, which conceptions of agency do girls mobilize, and how do certain identity categories come to bear on how they understand their agency?

However, these sorts of questions did inform my approach and panning for the focus group discussions:

- How do girls navigate discourses of choice and experiences of constraint?

- What characteristics do girls attribute to agency?

- What does it mean to them to be powerful?

- How do they make decisions within the constraints of available femininities, and do they link this to agency?

- How do the girls narrate themselves and their experiences as gendered subjects? Do they label themselves as agents, actors with the capacity for action?

- How do they frame their choices, are they shaped by certain constraints (what are their choice biographies)?

- How does collective action relate to individual agency (e.g. individual agency in fantasy or in re-performing femininity with difference)?

I sought to elucidate these questions through my prompts during the conversation and in the follow up questions below.

- Is agency the same as power?

- When you think about your everyday life, what are moments in which you've felt like you have agency?

- How are you an actor in your own life, or not?

- What makes you feel powerful in life? In what situations do you have power?

- In what areas do you feel able to act (e.g. familial vs. friend)?

- Can you give me examples of actions you've taken that you're proud of, that make you feel powerful and capable?

- Has the *Girls Program* made you feel like you have the ability to influence others? If so, how? In what moments?

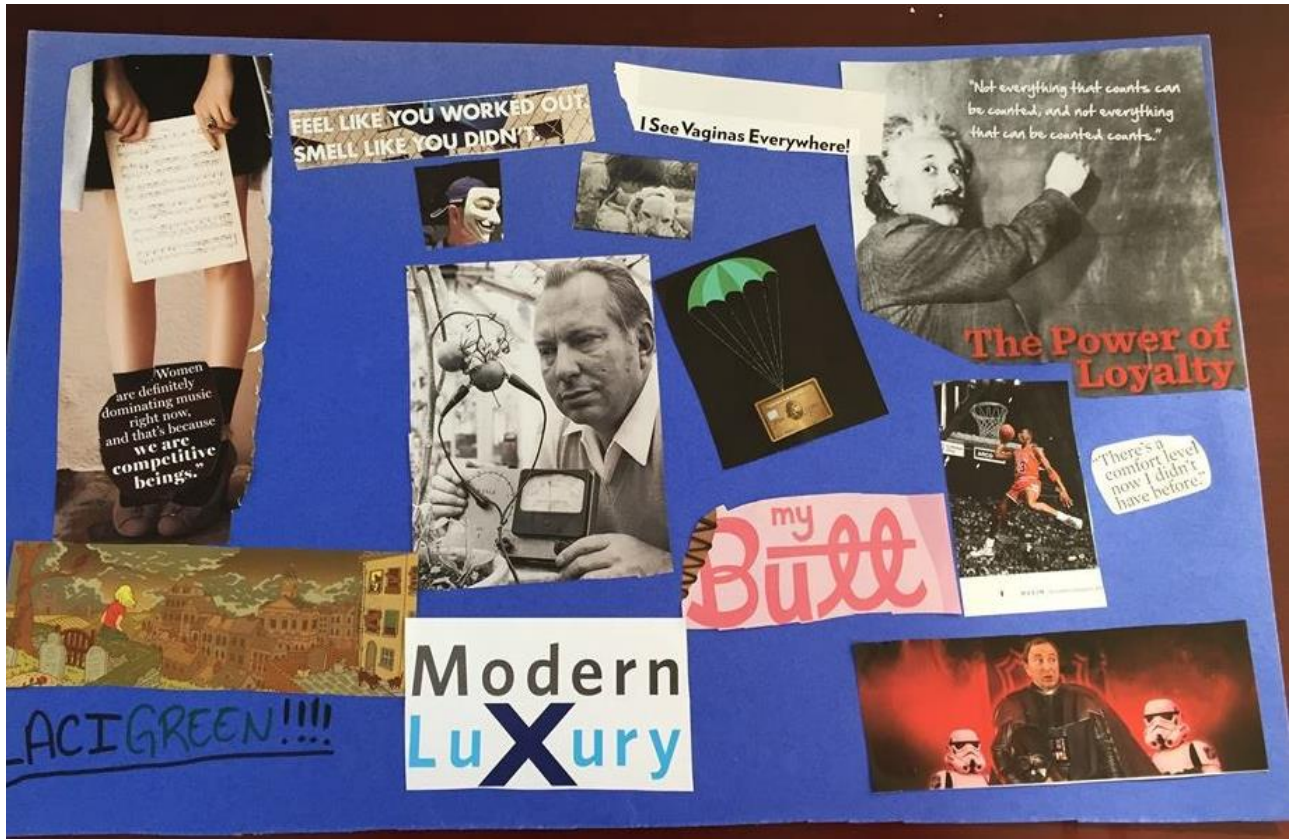- Did something get in the way of you making decisions or acting in the way you wanted to? What prevented you?

- Can you think of things that may have prevented other young women from making decisions?

- When you have dreams and hopes of things you'd like to happen, what do those look like? Can you tell me about some of them?

- Do these look different than your actual life? How does that make you feel? (prompts if needed-inspired to go after your dreams, feeling like you are disappointed in your own life)

- Does *the Girls Program* allow space for you to recognize the power and privilege present in your life? Does it allow space for you to be able to name and see how you have moments when you can be an agent but also that you have moments when you have no choices?

- What does it mean to feel successful to you? Is this different from feeling like you have agency?

- Do you feel like your moments of success are due to your own efforts, to a sense of teamwork, to luck, to supports or resources you had?

I modeled my approach to employing focus group methods on that undertaken by a variety of educational researchers, including Pomerantz and Raby 2011, and Renold 2000:

> Focus groups have an advantage over other qualitative techniques in that they can help reduce the power imbalance between adults and youth, foster comfort among participants, and generate more talk than one-on-one interviews (Pomerantz & Raby 2011:551).

In dealing with human subjects that inhabit a social position with lesser structural power, I was aware of the challenge posed by this power imbalance in garnering truthful and in-depth personal revelations of girls' perceptions. Social location can come to bear on the research participants' accounts to the researcher. The advantage of employing focus groups was that my power was in some ways checked by the fact that I was an outsider, I was in the minority position in relation to the majority being girls of a similar age, many with similar lived experiences and all having taken the *Girls Program*. In turn, the girls had the benefit of support and familiarity. Another advantage to the use of focus groups over one-on-one interviews, for example, is that focus groups allowed for the co-production of knowledge between the girls; this ensured a richer source of data: "Focus group participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say (Patton 2002:386). Importantly, focus groups can contribute towards a social justice agenda, "because they can serve to expose and validate women's everyday experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies" (Madriz 2000:835-6). In essence, in the case of this research, the focus group setting fed into a more participatory knowledge production, circumventing some of the power dynamics of the researcher/researched.

My approach to the focus group was that of "children's standpoint" (Renold 2000: 310). The children's standpoint approach enables students to exercise some form of control over the focus of the discussion, to lead the discussion into areas of interest to them, revealing their own accounts and perspectives of what is important as a focus for the research (Maguire 2008:421). In keeping with feminist participatory research and supporting the notion that this methodology is being utilized as an exploratory tool, these research participants had the opportunity to provide valuable knowledge that I was unaware of, and can thus take part in critical reflection and analysis of the *Girls Program.*

Importantly, I also sought to employ reflexivity in order to examine how my social location and my assumptions intervened in the research (Hesse-Biber 2007:129). I recognized that there would be power differentials relating to the challenge of insider/outsider status, of education, class and age. While not doing away with these differences, I sought self-awareness through reflexivity in order to minimize their effects. Unfortunately, given that this study was not longitudinal and that I only met with the girls on one occasion, I did not have the time that is required to build trust and a fulsome relationship with the girls. I sought others ways in which to build rapport and worked to help the girls feel comfortable. For example, I used appropriate (not overly theoretical) language and active listening in order to create some degree of trust in the short time available. My focus groups were also framed as a conversation within a reciprocal relationship, gaining a rapport with the girls. My approach was in keeping with feminist methodologies that "work against detachment, acknowledging the subjective stakes and limitations of research" (Driver 2007:18). In relation to girls, I am an adult researcher but I also relate as a previous girl. I passionately wanted to hear of their experiences of girlhood and their processes of subjectification, having navigated and still navigating identifiers and productive hailings into certain subjectivities. Having come to a self-identification as queer well in to my 20s, I wanted to know how girls come to their desires and how they narrate their sexual subjectivities. I am not detached from this research, nor am I connected through sameness to the girls. I meet the girls "through various degrees of affective and social recognition" (ibid). Outing my queerness was intentionally used in certain focus groups as a way to connect to the girls.

I waited for one of the girls to express some 'queerness' of her own, in her gender or sexual identity, and would offer rapport through my own outing. This was one method I used to establish connection and trust.

Youdell employs a post-structural methodology in order to highlight that her research does not passively observe such identity formations, but is itself "implicated in processes of ongoing subjectivation" (Youdell 2006:254). While the ethics of researcher's effect on girls' gender identity may be a matter of concern, the realization of the researcher's implication in subjectivation offers an interesting possibility for performative disruptions. Firstly, recognizing that all social research is subjective and feminist research in particular is driven by a desire for social change, research on girls' gender identities can result in a disruption of dominant and oppressive identities. In other words, research involving girls can lead to the very disruptions in performative gender identity constructions that the researcher is seeking to study. The girls may question the discursive power relations that have constrained their own identity; they may gain an awareness of the effect of their daily minute bodily actions such as crossing their legs, adorning their bodies and vocal deference to the masculine. The fact that the researcher takes part in the very performative subjectivation that they are studying poses interesting challenges and opportunities for the ensuing research analysis.

Another challenge I was aware of in using focus groups was that of group dynamics. Unlike a one-on-one interview, the group setting of a focus group can silence those who are shy or have more reserved personalities. Some girls can come to dominate the direction of the discussion. This is a challenge facing girls' groups more broadly, and one that I have navigated previously in my facilitation. The use of the craft activity was helpful in engaging girls who do not voice themselves as strongly as others. They were able to express themselves through creative means other than language- by collaging or writing down their thoughts on the sheets. I would then try to prompt them through conversation to explain what had been added to the sheets. I also moderated the conversation to some degree, not by silencing those who were outspoken, but rather for example, by thanking them for their contribution and asking if anyone else had thoughts on the topic at hand. Some argue that "participants should […] be unfamiliar with each

other since familiarity can inhibit disclosure, promote an established way of relating to each other, and may make it difficult to determine what influences the participants (Franz 2011: 1381). However, I saw a benefit in many of the girls knowing one another before coming in to the focus group. The girls had spent considerable time together prior to the focus group, having done the *Girls Program* as a group, and thus having established a group dynamic whereby most of the girls felt comfortable in voicing themselves in group.

3.3   Data Analysis

With regards to data analysis, firstly the recorded focus group discussions were transcribed. I then did an initial read through of the transcriptions, providing an "opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights" (Patton 2005:441). I used the method of coding to assist in "locating coded themes, grouping data together in categories" so that I could decide what forms a pattern, what constitutes a theme (ibid 442). The first round of coding consisted of descriptive analysis of the focus group data. The second round of coding focused on interpretation: "Interpretation involves explaining the findings, answering 'why' questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework" (Patton 2005:438). I did a 'cross-case' analysis meaning that rather than doing a case study of each participant or each focus group, I grouped together answers from different people to common questions. I relied on inductive analysis (discovering patterns, themes in the data), using open-coding. However, deductive analysis was used when "generating theoretical propositions or formal hypotheses after inductively identifying categories" (Patton 2005:454). For example, my inductive analysis looked at the ways in which the participants have made sense of their world-what language did they employ? What emerged in terms of practices used by the girls?

Once I undertook my data analysis, I then used a 'case record'. "The case record pulls together and organizes the voluminous case data into a comprehensive, primary resource package […] information is edited, redundancies are sorted out, parts are fitted together, and the case record is organized for ready access chronologically and/or topically"

(Patton 2005:449). This then lead to the development of my two chapters on findings, to follow.

During data analysis, I was aware of how I was interpreting the girls' talk. As stated by Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2007), "the transformation of 'what girls say' into 'what researchers make of what they said' is a theoretically mediated process" (377). As girls discussed their experiences as girls, their sense of agency, they underwent a process of subjectivization: "Positioning is a dynamic process of negotiating multiple (but limited) Subject positions" (ibid 388). It is also important to note that the discourse of girls' voices, while an appropriate insight on girls' subjectivities, is not an unproblematic methodology (see Mazzei & Jackson 2009). Mazzei and Jackson "aim to de-authorize the centrality of voice in poststructural qualitative methodologies in favour of a more complex, nuanced and qualified researcher position that acknowledges the problems embedded in writing research, and denies the rights to "self-pardoning" (Ingrey 2014:31). In the data analysis of this research, the product of the process was not a stable truth that I could capture as researcher, but comprised contradiction and inconsistency as will be discussed in my findings. I treated the transcripts not "as reflections of reality but rather as the product of a research-specific practice of constituting a shared reality, one characterized by instability and contradiction (ibid 381). In other words, I did not seek coherence in the transcripts by skimming over contradiction.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a brief overview of the *Girls Program* from which I gained access to the girls who participated in this study. The methodology employed was that of a qualitative case study, using open-ended questions in a focus group setting to explore my research questions which were concerned with how girls' programming impacts on girls as agential subjects. Through 4 focus groups with 13 girls, and over 211 minutes of discussion, the girls offered their thoughts, feelings and analysis on power and agency. Let us now delve into what they shared.

4 Chapter 4 Data Analysis: What the Girls Said

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I employ a poststructuralist focus on agency and resistance, informed specifically by an understanding of Butlerian focus on subjectification. Starting from the girls' voices and their narrations, I examine gender subjectification and power relations, moving then to look at girls' agency and strategies of resistance; the latter includes a focus on fantasy and social imaginaries, as well as on practices of 'doing and undoing gender'. Although some of the citations below include the voices of the teen mothers, I focus much more specifically on their experiences as mothers in the following chapter.

It is helpful to have an overview of who these girls were. The table below provides what details I was able to garner, either that the girls disclosed or that were visible in some way. These components of their identities or lived experiences are highlighted as they inform what the girls then voice below.

Table 3 Overview of Girl Participants

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4
4 girls	2 girls	3 girls	4 girls
aged 16-18	aged 18	aged 16-17	aged 19-21
No children present	Two infants present	No children present	Two toddlers present
2 state wards	2 teen mothers	2 identified as LGBTQ or questioning 1 teen mother 1 very savvy language use 1 quite politically active on social media	2 identified as pansexual 1 identified as gender non-conforming 2 teen mothers 1 visible minority The group had quite a bit of lived experience and analysis to draw on

4.2 Gender Subjectification and Power Relations

In order to understand what the girls voiced on agency, I first look to how they understood power. During the focus groups, we began each session with a discussion on

what is 'Lack of Power', what it feels like, where it comes from, who lives it, when have they felt it. Agency as a word was usually unfamiliar to the girls, so I wanted to contextualize the opposite of agency. The girls were familiar with the concept of power, particularly understanding structural power, because it is a core focus of one of the weeks in the *Girls Program*. What arose in conversations around power was incredibly insightful as it went much further than setting the scene for agency. As will be discussed in this section, the girls were very able to locate power operations in their lives and to analyze their provenance. I have come to see that this analysis of power itself is illustrative of their agential capacities.

As discussed in chapter one, power can be both a humanist conception of 'power over', and a post-structuralist approach to the discursive 'power through' (Foucault 1982). According to Foucault, this is "a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings to the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependency, and tied to [their] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (Foucault 1982:241). This research is interested in the way young women understand themselves as particular sorts of gender subjects, and how they negotiate or engage with certain power relations regarding gender subjectification. Butler states, "subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction in production" (Butler 1997:84). The research findings below highlight this subjectivizing power, looking at how the girls come to constitute and understand themselves as particular sorts of embodied gendered subjects. Contrary to how the post-feminist rhetoric frames and focuses on girls' choice and volition in order to demonstrate girls' empowerment and self-actualization in quite simplistic and problematic ways (McRobbie 2009, Baker 2010), these girls were able to identify norms governing operations of power and their effects in terms of the limits imposed on gendered subjectification in terms of how women are represented in the media.

In the example below relating to a print-ad of a naked woman sporting only branded footwear while hailing a cab in a busy city, we can see the girls' awareness and articulation of displeasure at the effects of gender-normative scripts in advertising:

Participant 1: This whole frickin' ad.

AnnaLise: Can I see it? Wow.

Participant 1: When and how would you see a woman hailing a taxi naked with just shoes on for a shoe ad?

Participant 2: Imagine if I was a man. It's frickin' hilarious.

AnnaLise: So what's going on in that that you don't like?

Participant 2: You're advertising shoes and she's fucking naked! She's hailing and she's fucking naked – that's not cool at all!

Participant 1: What if it was a guy, like, advertising Jordans or something?

AnnaLise: Yeah.

Participant 2: And he's just wearing Jordans. Literally, just Jordans. (FG4)

The girls identify a certain hailing, a call to a feminine subjectivity that is sexualized, or rather the sexual objectification of women's bodies in the media. Butler uses Althusser's interpellation in order to demonstrate that the gaining of subjectivity occurs through both a Call and an acceptance/turning to the Call (Butler 1997:106-7). Here the Call occurs through advertising writ large, but more specifically instanced in the ad depicting a naked woman hailing a taxi. The woman is portrayed as sexy, very good looking; her nakedness is both shocking and attention grabbing, but also normalizing in its public use through the ad. Through the Call, girls/women are hailed into sexual objectification. The hailing into a sexualized subjectivity for girls/women is a widespread and dispersed form of power, part of regimes of sexual objectification that are manifested through media technologies. Looking at magazines aimed at teenage girls and drawing on the work of McRobbie (2009), Tincknell et al. (2003) state that this form of media continues to emphasize a post-feminist necessity for consumption. The reproductive and emotional labour involved in the culture of femininity assumes girls possess individual freedom and sexual liberation (49). Sexual self-expression must be expressed as part of the desired normative girl subjectivity. While the girls in this focus group were able to identify the Call being operated through this particular print-media and offered criticism and pushback against the sexualized script it offered them, this does not mean that they fully turned away from this Call. In other moments of their lives, the girls might very well have taken up this Call and enacted it.

As was often the case, when the girls demonstrated an awareness of how power subjectivizes them, they also mobilized a pushback to that very power, in this case in the form of sarcasm:

> AnnaLise: So they're using her body?
>
> Participant 1: Well, one, they wouldn't censor his nipples.
>
> Participant 2: No, they wouldn't. Those are allowed.
>
> Participant 1: Men nipples are allowed. Woman nipples are scary nipples.
>
> Participant 2: They're scary nipples [laughs].
>
> Participant 1: And they're my mother nipples too [states one of the teen mothers in the group]. (FG4)

This dialogue not only demonstrates an awareness of certain practices or relations of gender subjection that are driven by a logic of sexual objectification, an awareness that itself is agential; it also demonstrates a pushback through sarcasm. Post-structuralism or more specifically, Butler's contributions around subjectification, allow us to identify discursive resistance as a form of subversion to power. Butler (1990) frames resistance as possibility: "mobilized possibilities of 'subjects' that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (Ingrey 2014 citing Butler 1990:40). Here, power is not held, it is embodied through the mobilization of certain norms. It modifies the actions of others- "it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult" (Foucault 1982: 249). Relating to female subjectivity, the available and recognizable narratives of femininity operate as a form of power which subjectivizes, restricting available identity positions. "Acquisition of being [is achieved] through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicit with power" (Butler 1993:15). In their ongoing subject formation, girls must repeat bodily acts that produce the effect of consistent subjectivity. These acts must be read by others as intelligible, and thus they are chosen from an array of existing options that are then cited by the girls. But, there is a constant requirement to re-perform the acts, to ensure a semblance of the whole, of consistency.

When girls identify citational gender scripts, when they point to moments of productive power, they are in effect not re-performing the required performance. When they

sarcastically point out that 'woman nipples are scary nipples', failing to perform the seemingly naturalized script of female modesty, they call attention to the performative nature of this script. Their resistance is embedded in the very power they operate within. Power as such "can't be wished away" (Martindale 1992:330), for power is embodied rather than held. But the effects of power, understood as modifying actions, can be resisted. As we will see through many other examples from the focus groups, the act of vocalizing power's subjectivization requires an awareness of the very operations of power. By employing an analytical lens, the girls do not step outside of the operations of power. Agency in Butlerian terms is resisting or challenging hegemonic norms through the "possibility of a failure to repeat" (Butler 1990:179), exactly the same kind of gender performativity from one moment to the next: "A resistant subject, is exactly the kind of subject that is produced within and through institutionalizing discourses that is also simultaneously limited by the effects of power" (Ingrey 2014:17). Consequently, agency does not mean that the girls step outside of power, but rather by identifying the operation of power, naming it, they exert agency and take on a certain discursive control over its operation. As such, I seek to locate agency in the girls' talk, using a Butlerian understanding of agency as resistance, as

> being able to do something with what is done with me. This does not mean that I [we] can remake the world so that I [we] become its maker. That fantasy of godlike power only refuses the ways we are constituted (Butler 2004:3).

The dialogue above ends with the following contribution from one participant:

> Participant: [Nipples] are meant to arouse men, and that must be hidden because men can't be aroused all the time, they have money to make, right? Second of all, it would be seen as humorous. And this is seen as normal. And that's kind of... I hate it. I hate it so much. This is the kind of shit that makes women feel powerless. (FG4)

This girl voiced anger, reacting to the "discursive violence [...] unleashed upon girls in the creation and circulation of images and narratives" (Hussain et al. 2006). The discourse framing women as sexualized objects is not without emotional and material impact, it is not simply a limitation on possible subjectivities for girls. Contradicting the postfeminist narrative that girls achieve sexual liberation in part due to the consumption

of sexualizing media (Tincknell et al. 2003), this girl feels powerless in reaction to the discourse. Her powerlessness is experienced as a harm, as a form of violence.

Sarcasm and anger were often-utilized discursive tools employed by the girls in response to certain forms of subjection involving sexual objectification of women's bodies. They were able to identify power, and its hailing effects. The expression of their anger and sarcasm were discursive means or tools by which the girls were able to side-step the re-articulation of nipples as simply sex-objects for male arousal, to refuse certain hegemonic practices of subjectification in ways that allowed them to refuse the very constitutive effects of power with regards to their subjectivization as sexualized objects.

Through a Butlerian understanding of resistant agency and its embeddedness in power relations, we know that by identifying power the girls cannot simply be free of its regulatory effects. Power is not exterior to the individual, nor does it operate according to a logic of oppositional resistance. Rather, as Butler states, resistant agency is "a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler 1993:15). Through their anger and sarcasm, the girls offered "a repetition that repeats against its origin" (Butler 1997:94).

> Participant 1: My mom – you know how you like, get the gray hair? Her hair was like, almost white.
> Participant 2: See I can't wait till I get a white little halo.
> Participant 3: My grandma has a cute white afro.
> Participant 1: I dye my hair, but I can see I'm getting grays, so I'm going to be like, fuck it. (FG4)

The girls were not fully opting-out of the script that calls upon women to refuse or oppose aging. Rather, they worked within the discourse, but re-articulated it differently. As stated by Butler, resistant agency is found in the process itself. It is not an opposition to an outside dominating force, as subjectivizing power is not exterior to the individual; in other words, oppositional resistance would require the opposing of oneself in some manner. Resistant agency is rearticulation and not an opposition to power. The performative requirement of subjectivity offers the possibility of "a repetition that

repeats against its origin" (Butler 1997:94), of a use of language that is applied differently than intended (Raby 2006:151). In the citation above, the girls employ humour and possibly hyperbole to call attention to certain practices of subjectification, but also to offer up a pushback to those forms of subjection and the power relations in which they are embedded. This agential use of humour is not to be mistaken with a conception of agency as simply the ability of an individual to choose to act. Through a Butlerian lens, agency can never really be reduced to simply docile bodies that are passively acted upon. Rather,

> agency does not consist in denying th[e] condition of my constitution. If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility (Butler 2004:3).

We can see that the girls are navigating the subjectivizing discourses around femininity and age, and beauty. In their awareness of these discourses, they identify power but also already are locating agency. The girls enact agency in that they can never be reduced to simply docile bodies who are passively acted upon. Conversely, locating agency in the paradox mentioned above means that agency cannot be conceived in terms of the individual choosing to act. The very constraints of the social order, here the discourses of femininity and beauty, are the opportunities for girls to resist and rearticulate, to exert agency. Agency is to endeavor "to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to [social norms]" (Butler 2004:3). Similarly below, we can see that when girls were able to identify the operation of power, they were already and at once agentially transforming the discourses constricting their gender performativity.

> Participant 1: They tell you to dress so many ways though. It's like, you have to dress naked, because it's what guys want, but then if you dress naked you're a slut.
>
> Participant 2: Or, yeah, or you're going to get raped.
>
> AnnaLise: Yeah?
>
> Participant 2: Or it's your fault.
>
> Participant 1: It's horrible. It's like, don't teach us that we're wrong for dressing how we dress – teach guys to control themselves. ..Like, I'm sorry,

do you think with your penis? Like, obviously, because if they have to ban, like, clothes that show your shoulders, or things that just happen to show the form of your body, like, congratulations, it's a body! If my ass is distracting to you, I – if it helps, I take a crap outta that! All the time. (FG3)

Here, the girls identified how victim-blaming operates very concretely in their lives through the subjectivizing requirement to dress a certain way. A dominant script that has widespread currency is that women should be held to account for the repercussions of the way they dress ('slutty' or modest), for where they walk (alone, at night, dark alley), for their intoxication ('she got drunk'), and for their flirtatious actions ('she led him on all night'). If a woman experiences sexual assault, victim-blaming incites us to question any of the above actions committed by the victim, and if she is found wanting in these, she is to blame for her assault.

Participant 1 calls attention to how the language of 'slut' conjures up a "woman who has sex with random, indiscriminate partners and therein gets a bad reputation" (Carr 2013:30, see Tolman 2005). Through our dress codes in high schools, requiring girls to cover their bra straps or ensure that their skirts are a certain length, the victim-blaming narrative is operationalized as a 'prevention tool' to *empower* and *protect* girls. Dress codes are a tangible form of power, a domination from above that physically requires certain actions. However, the discourse that supports dress codes--that of preventing sexual assault--is a subjectivizing form of power. The girls in the citation above identified this subjectification, this hailing that they be modest in their attire. The word 'slut' "plays a vital role in invalidating, dismissing, silencing, and degrading women who fight for their humanity and for control over their sexuality and body" (Carr 2013:30). The girls' awareness of the subjectivizing power of 'slut' is leveraging a form of agency, in that their critical analysis of norms around female sexuality means that they fail to take up the virginal or victim-blaming script and (re)perform or (re)articulate this subjectivizing power.

Importantly, when I speak of critical analysis or critical thinking, I am engaging with Butler's understanding of such:

Critique is always a critique of some instituted practice, discourse, episteme, institution, and it loses its character the moment in which it is abstracted

from its operation and made to stand alone as a purely generalizable practice. But if this is true, this does not mean that no generalizations are possible or that, indeed, we are mired in particularisms. On the contrary, we tread here in an area of constrained generality. (Butler 2001:1).

Critical thinking is not a trait that a girl possesses, it is always in relation to subjectivizing processes and involves a critical understanding of the norms governing such relations. It is the operationalizing of agency according to available discourses; it is the constituting of oneself in terms other than those defined by the patriarchal limits of sexual objectification and sexualization of the female body (see De Clercq 2013:87). In the focus groups, what was particularly interesting was that while some girls employed critical analysis to enable them to challenge certain norms, this was not universally the case. Other girls did not engage in such critical practices but rather supported certain forms of female subjection and rearticulated familiar sexist discourses and binaries. They took part in the subjectivizing power discourses, (re)articulating them. The interview data below pertains to an interaction regarding the divergent understandings of the call upon young women to be virginal. Asking about the social effects of a girl sleeping with a lot of guys, the following discussion ensued:

> Participant 1: Because she's showing that her body, that she wants her body to be used for that. And she's not saving it for that one person that she thinks she's going to be with. She gives it to other people, she's showing them like, hey I need sex, I don't have a boyfriend, I need you, or like…
>
> Annalise: so where do you get power from?
>
> Participant 1: being a virgin
>
> [Referencing a friend who is sexually active] Participant 2: She's not like, you know, like dressing like slutty, or like or a whore or anything, like that. Like you see her, she wears like jogging pants and like. Like she dresses like a little hobo. We both do, it's okay. So like, you know. It's not necessarily a bad thing to have sex with a lot of people. That's like slut shaming. (FG1)

Through her discourse, Participant 1 is re-articulating the script that hails girls/women into virginity, the virgin/whore binary that associates virginity with worth as part of compulsory heterosexuality (Tolman et al. 2003, Tolman 2005, Carr 2013). It is helpful to look to Foucault's use of Jeremy Bentham's plan for the Panopticon "as the paradigmatic example of a disciplinary technology" (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982: 216). The Panopticon illustrates how productive power is embodied rather than exerted, and

highlights how we come to internalize the disciplinary power through what is termed by Dreyfus & Rabinow as 'colonization of the self' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982 215). Participant 1 has internalized a productive power that subjectivizes her into being a virgin. There is no exterior force requiring that she be a virgin, forcing this state upon her. Her internalization and co-optation of this script is re-mobilized as a subjectivizing power through her narrating the requirement of virginity. It is not a form of power that requires her virginity, but is a subjectivizing power, it hails her into being, and she has turned and responded to the call. Power is embodied and mobilized through her mobilization of such discourses.

Participant 2, however, offers a different narrative around female sexuality. She questions the hailing of girls/women into virginity, and names this subjectivizing power as 'slut-shaming' (see Ringrose and Renold 2012)[7]. These two participants are situated at the nexus of the "schizoid double pull towards performing knowing sexy 'slut' in postfeminist media contexts" (Ringrose and Renold 2012:333) but also remaining innocent, moral and de-sexualized (Tolman et al. 2003). Participant 2 fails to re-articulate the subjectivizing script. Her identification of the presence of a certain productive form of power, and her failure to fully re-articulate 'slut-shaming' is agential in that agency

> will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (assoujetissement) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power (Butler 1993:15).

Participant 2 is working within the discourse of slut-shaming, she is not exterior to this operation of power. She states that "it's not necessarily bad to have sex with a lot of people" while also stating that "she's not like, you know, like dressing like slutty, or like or a whore or anything", as though such attire would still carry the values

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[7] Slut shaming is a deeply classed discourse, "whereby associating 'sluts' with 'prostitutes' and 'whores' her sexual value is to be diminished and kept in check" (Ringrose and Renold 2012:335).

ascribed through the slut-shaming discourse. Here, like above, we cannot identify power without also already locating agency.

Continuing on with the theme of girls partaking in subjectivizing power, we can see in the example below that the same girl can vacillate between critical engagement with power relations centered on femininity and female attractiveness, while at the very same time (re)producing them.

> Participant: [Young girls] are trying to be all skinny and like all the girls in the magazines. I saw this new store down the street and it's like a plus sized store and they had all these nice clothes, and they're trying to make everyone know about body shaming. (FG4)
>
> [later on]
>
> Participant: It sounds really shallow, but me being more physically fit would make me feel a little better. Just because, I have all this confidence in my life, and everything is so perfect and everything is right where I want it to be, except for that. And that's the one thing that's kind of making me not be motivated to do the rest of it, because I feel like so much shit about that part, that everything else is just not worth it. So, if I could change that one thing, that one thing to make me feel amazing, that would be the one thing that I would change.
>
> AnnaLise: And it's hard because you were so critical earlier about all the media stuff that affects how we think about it.
>
> Participant: Well it's not because the media portrays it as this and this. I'm not healthy.
>
> AnnaLise: So it's more about your health than you?
>
> Participant: Yeah, it's about my health. I like how I look – personally, I like how I look. But I wish I could be…..I would kill to have a bigger booty-boob-combo-ratio…But seriously, this ratio, can we change? But what I would really like to do is walk into a store, find what I want, buy it because I want it, and I don't have to go to a store that I'm like, "Well, what's this size? What's this size? Is this going to be able to fit my butt? Is this going to fit this? Is this going to fit this?" I just want to be able to go shopping! That's it! I want to be able to walk upstairs and not feel like I'm dying. (FG4)

This dialogue is complex in the discourses it is mobilizing. The contradictions illustrated in her narration are important in understanding productive power. At the beginning of the narrative, the girl is critical of the enticement for girls to be 'skinny'. She points to the

subjectivizing power that occurs through postfeminist modes of representation in magazines around femininity and female attractiveness (Renold and Ringrose 2011, Tolman et al. 2003), in this case centered on being 'skinny'. In her criticism and identification of this operation of power, one would think that she is perhaps beyond the influence of its effects. It is as though, as a result of her critical analysis, that she has somehow reached what would falsely seem to be a stable 'state' of agency and empowerment. However, her contradiction calls into question this humanist framing of agency as a state of being, a quality of a person, or even a misunderstanding around Butler's performativity as voluntaristic performance. Gender is "a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler 2004:1), meaning that one's improvisational moments--here, in the form of critical analysis--are always "constrained by its more structural aspects that […] inaugurate and authorize a process of gendering understood as the practical instantiation of an abstract structure or form" (Bollen 2007:222). The same girl from above goes on to say "I like how I look – personally, I like how I look. But I wish I could be.....I would kill to have a bigger booty-boob-combo-ratio". She is both happy with how she looks but desires to look different. Her reference to the 'ratio' is a re-articulation of the subjectivizing call on women to achieve a specific embodied form.

Here we can look to the work of Sandra Bartky, in applying Foucault to examine subjectification of the female body through disciplinary practices relating to beauty and aesthetics (Bartky 1988). This girl is self-regulating, re-producing the subjectivizing power towards a feminized aesthetic. And yet, she is again aware that she is falling into the trope of this call, and seeks to validate her desire for a different ratio through a different discourse than that centered on beauty and mobilized through the media. As a postfeminist consumer, she knows that in seeking to voice herself as empowered, she must present as "above influence and beholden to no one, able to choose to 'use beauty' to make herself feel good, feel confident" (Gill 2007:74). She turns to the narrative of 'health', a hailing for women that is not fully about healthy bodies but about a certain form and look that has come to represent health (Burgard 2009; Giovanelli &

Ostertag 2009). She places a different value on the different discourses available to her to support her desire for a specific body form.

It is important to be reminded by Foucault that productive power is "to govern the possible field of action" (Foucault 1928:250). She has available to her a set of narrative discursive frames or alternative discourses through which she is able to help make sense of her body, its form, which "define what it means to be a woman or man and the available range of gender-appropriate and transgressive behaviour" (Weedon 1999:104). These discourses are not passive, they are value-laden (Weedon 1987:126) with "hierarchical binary oppositions" (ibid) which thus incites the girl above towards certain desires for change. Relations of power centered on femininity and female attractiveness, while patriarchal, "offer women forms of subjectivity and pleasure that are experienced as pleasurable" (Weedon 1999:119). As such, it is not about stepping outside of the influence of power, an impossibility that has been made very clear earlier in this chapter. The desire for a certain body form may seem natural, the result of the 'laws of attraction' and evolution that are consequently a universal incitement upon all women/girls. However, the girl's piece-mealing together of different discourses negates a universal naturalized desire for a specific form. She is pulled by desire (Petersen 2007) in producing a legitimate femininity, the 'booty-boob combo ratio', one that is intelligible and holds value, while at the same time critical of this discourse that constitutes 'body shaming'. She seeks to narrate her desires for a certain body through the discourse of 'healthy body' and physical fitness, but fails to fully mobilize the discourse when she then vacillates to "Yeah, it's about my health. I like how I look – personally, I like how I look. But I wish I could be.....I would kill to have a bigger booty-boob-combo-ratio".

In her vacillations, this navigation of the field of available scripts in effect draws attention to the fact that these discourses are performances, that they are not inherent to the self. Her performativity is not without failures, and she offers critical thinking in her interrogation of norms around body shape. The girl is suturing together different discourses; she is actively navigating "the often discontinuous, overlapping or conflicting relations of power" (McNay 2000:16). As such, although she is constructed as a subject through her discursive practices, her very navigation of varying

instances of performativity demonstrates that she "is capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices" (Weedon 1987:125). Her critical thinking on norms does not mean she steps outside of the operations of power, but she can "reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her [...and] choose from the options available" (ibid).

As mentioned in chapter one, in his work on postfeminist politics, Stephen Gentz understands agency as not only oppositional, but as arising within a "'conflicted actor' who is capable of individually integrating diverse desires and obligations through creatively reconfiguring his/her practices and relationships" (Gentz 2006:12). The many discourses being acted upon, and through, this particular girl are creating contradictions. And these discourses are desirous, they "carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood" (Butler 2004:2). She is a conflicted actor at the center of these, demonstrating both agency in her identification of the subjectivizing presence of power, and co-optation as she seeks to re-articulate the discourses.

Below is a final example of how power operates – how it is mobilized – in terms of how girls are constituted and constitute themselves through complex and contradictory relations of subjectification. In response to a hailing into a heterosexual identity, the girl in this citation not only recognizes the subjectivizing power in this scene, but she intentionally pushes back at the Call, re-scripting what are available in terms of identifications for the sexual orientation.

> Participant: Like me, my friends [name] and [name], we all kind of like touch each other, but not like touch each other, we just like obviously because we're friends. We're like good friends. And they'll always call us lesbians, and we're like, so what if we are? ... But like the fourth time they [called us lesbians], I was like "next time they do it I'm going to say something", like I don't give a care. Cause like, what if I am a lesbian? Who the fuck cares? No one. So like, we were touching each other again... So they're like, "oh you guys are lesbians." And I'm like really? ...What if we are lesbians? Who cares? I don't care. Like I don't care. Like, you shouldn't care if I'm a lesbian, because that's my like, sexual orientation. Shut the fuck up. And [teacher] is like, "watch your language." And I'm like no, they need to stop and shut the fuck up. And she's like go in the hallway. And I'm like, are you going to forget about me? My teacher likes to forget about us. Okay, sorry. Rant over. (FG1)

Productive power here occurred through the incitement to heterosexuality, a *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich 1982) that is mobilized through the boys' pejorative use of 'lesbians' as a put-down. The unspoken, true effect of this use of 'lesbians', is that the girls are required to citationally perform heterosexuality in order to avoid being bullied. The subjectivizing power relates to compulsory heterosexuality whereby the bullying is meant to keep the girls in check, to box-in their heterosexuality. The girl not only names this form of subjection, she confronts it.

The process of gender subjectivizing is intimately tied to sexuality, as "compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearance and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions" (Butler 1997:408). The girl names the Call being exerted upon her as the requirement to enact a feminized heterosexuality. According to Butler,

> gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the readibility of its own production. The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness (Butler 1997:405).

Gender and the associated 'appropriate' sexuality are performed as natural, as being pre-discursive; the result is that we come to believe gender and sexuality are simply effects of a 'true' interior self. This is a manifestation of a productive and coercive power, in that it operates through a set of relations and practices through which individuals are often required to understand themselves whose very operations are often concealed. Consequently, if a girl can see beyond the belief that her gender and sexuality are natural and pre-ordained, that very critical thought process is agential:

> Acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires [that] create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality (Butler 1990:173).

In the citation above, while the girl does not self-identify as a lesbian, she does state that there should be no negative repercussions were she indeed a lesbian[8]. She discursively pushes back at the incitement to heterosexuality, she offers up the possibility that she could enact a lesbian identity and she calls in to question the naturalness of one's sexual identity. Agency entails pushing back against certain norms and embracing others through creative critical engagement that enables this girl to see other potentialities or ways of being beyond the "sedimentation of disciplinary effects on the body" (McNay 2000:31).

This section examined subjectivizing power in the girls' narratives, specifically looking at how they were aware of the double-standards around nipples and the nakedness of women in advertising, how they recognized the call to hide one's aging and grey hair, how they experienced the need to be skinny, how they addressed victim-blaming, and how they understood that the identifiers of lesbian, non-gendered and pansexual were disruptive to dominant femininity. We began to highlight the agential value of critical analysis in how it engages with these moments of subjectivizing power.

4.3   Girls' Agency and Strategies of Resistance

While my intention is to unearth the ways in which girls experience agency, it is important to recognize that this is not the same thing as saying that girls' lives are characterized by agency. As argued by Joanne Baker (2010), post-feminism requires that young women claim volition and evade victimhood. In her research, Baker (2010) finds that young women intentionally claim agency, "associated with a highly individuated selfhood; voluntaristic, intentional behaviour and choice", despite unfairness or oppression they may be living (190). Above, my intention in discussing power in relation

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[8] Interestingly, we cannot be sure of the reason for why her teacher sent her to the hallway, whether she is sent to there because of the swearing or because of her confrontation of heteronormative scripts. Were it the latter, this would indicate another form of power re-inscribing the girl into heterosexuality.

to agency was to highlight the constraints upon girls' lives and in particular, upon their enacted subjectivities. I want to unearth instances of agency that occur at the limits of discourse, and to better understand what qualifies those instances as agential. This is all in order to move away from a post-feminist conception of agency as effervescently present in the lives of girls (Gentz 2006). Girls themselves were very clear in stating the constraints they experienced from certain institutionalized norms and regimes of practice:

> Participant: In politics, [it] makes us all feel powerless, even though we vote, and some people don't, which is a huge percentage in Canada. We still – our votes, are only marginal compared to other regions, like, rural compared to urban. So sometimes I feel like my vote as a Canadian, doesn't get heard, because it's not one of the adults with jobs who are working 9-5 and making 120,000 a year kind of thing, you know what I mean? (FG4)
>
> [In another instance, same participant]
>
> Participant: Personally, I had to drop out of school to start working at 15, so I feel like as if my in-opportunities to complete my high school in the normal standard way kind of kept me from jobs, and opportunity. I feel like as if for a female, it's harder, because it's more dangerous to be homeless, and so you have to focus and say, "Hey! I need to go work because, as much as I'd like to be sitting, completing my school. (FG4)

Both of these citations demonstrate an awareness by this girl of the constraining structures that shape her daily existence (Jiwani, Steenbergen and Mitchell 2006). However, her awareness here disallows a framing of her as a purely innocent vulnerable victim in need of protection (Willis 2009, Gilligan & Brown 1993, Gonick 2004). She has the insight, the critical knowledge to name the effects of certain regimes of power and to contextualize them. As I began to explore above and will further delve in to now, I frame critical analysis or criticality as agential in that it points to a resistant engagement to certain norms that govern subjectivizing power (Butler 2001). The girls did not claim unlimited choice or complete volition over their lives. In fact, I argue that resistant agency arose when there was recognition that that was simply untrue. This approach to agency seeks to avoid the pitfalls of both dominant discourses on girlhood discussed in Chapter 1: the 'can-do' supergirls and the 'at-risk' victimized girls. It is in keeping with

the feminist scholarship that contests persons as either determined or voluntary subjects (Willis 2009).

I began my research on girls' agency by asking: How do girls exert self-determination and agency? Which conceptions of agency do girls mobilize, and which girls mobilize what types of agency? How do girls tell their own stories of being agential in their own lives? Out of the literature on girls' agency, I asked the following questions in order to flesh out agency, beyond the bounds of the active versus passive binary. What norms govern girls' understandings of themselves as agential subjects? How might self-reflexivity and fantasy be conceived in terms of the role they play in girls' lives and thinking as agential subjects? Must agency be sustained or can it be momentary in nature? I will now proceed by addressing each of these questions from the literature, in the hopes of arriving at insights into the larger research questions I started with. To note, a sub-group of girls emerged during the focus groups -the teen mothers. They experienced specific forms of productive power, and exerted agency in relation to this power, which is particular to their lived experience and specific circumstances. As such, they will be discussed separately in the following chapter.

4.3.1   Girls' Critical Self-Reflexivity

As discussed in Chapter 1 on my theoretical framework, there are diverging thoughts around the necessity of action and change as being qualifiers of agency. For some, particularly those writing within a humanist or development framework, agency must be socially beneficial, and agents must advance goals that people value. This framing of agency looks at agency as functional. It must lead to change (quoting Sen, Ibrahim & Alkire 2007:9 in OPHI). Conversely, many post-structuralists question what counts as 'action', as they locate power and power relations in discourses that have a historical and contextual specificity. In her study, Deborah Youdell (2005) identifies linguistic accounts—in addition to the use of clothing, hairstyles and accessories—as being implicated in the agential discursive constitution of student subjectivities.

As highlighted in my theoretical framework, Currie et al. (2006) found that girls' critical analysis and capacity to be self-reflexive were in and of themselves agential, regardless

of what outward actions took place. Starting from this premise when looking to my transcriptions, I asked whether agency necessitated action. As was covered in the section above, an understanding of power as productive and subjectivizing locates agency in the very process of subjectification rather than as an exterior, a pushback to an oppressing power. The section also began to locate agency in critical thinking- the interrogating of norms- which enabled the girls to understand the subjectification they were experiencing in terms of pushing back against certain norms while embracing others. Now, this section will further illuminate how critical analysis was agential, regardless of what action may or may have been taken. This is all towards the goal of unearthing moments of agency in the lives of girls.

The girls were quite explicit in identifying agency as not necessitating action. Instead, they focused on the value of critical thinking related to challenging norms:

> Participant 1: I feel like learning things really empowers each and every one of us as individuals, even if it's not something you can apply into everyday life or a job.
>
> Participant 2: Knowledge is power. (FG4)
>
> [In another instance]
>
> AnnaLise: What do you feel like you have agency in?
>
> Participant: Opinions. Well, I feel like that's a personal choice though, because a lot of my opinions come from me, like I'm choosing to ….I'm choosing to think freely for myself...Like, you know how some people, like their opinions are structural power, so they've been taught something and that's what they go along with, but then like, I guess I could have gone that way, but didn't, therefore it's agency. (FG3)

This last example appeals to liberal humanist notions of individual autonomy-'a personal choice….I'm choosing to think freely'; the girl's use of a postfeminist discourse enables her "to feel strong, competent, and beyond the need for help, thus eluding victimhood and claiming, instead, choice and autonomy" (Pomerantz et al. 2013:188). It is important to not conflate her postfeminist framing of her liberation with an expression of agency; she is stating in fact that oppression/liberation comes down to an individual rather than a collective problem. Nevertheless, at the same time, she identifies constraints and limits through 'structural power'. This contradiction is important; it is a window into a

"doubleness [that] exists as a feature of the relationship between postfeminism and girls", whereby girls leverage postfeminist rhetoric while also contradictorily narrating experiences of sexism and oppression in their lives (Pomerantz et al. 2013:188).

In both examples, it is clear that for these girls, the act of thinking differently, of understanding the operations of power upon their lives and being able to think critically about these, *felt* like or rather was experienced as an agential practice. As we saw in the examples related to the exercise of power above, the girls were able to vocalize and identify constraints upon the enactment of their subjectivities. They were aware of the double-standards around nipples and the nakedness of women in advertising, they recognized the call to hide one's aging and grey hair, they experienced the need to be skinny, they addressed victim-blaming, and they understood that the identifiers of lesbian, non-gendered and pansexual were disruptive to dominant femininity. Their analysis of each of these issues acted as a preventative factor, ensuring that they did not simply embrace and re-iterate the dominant narratives around gender, age, sexuality- they were not fully co-opted, they did not 'drink the Kool-Aid', so to speak. Critical analysis meant that they could locate these narratives, they could limit the discursive power they held over their own subjectivizing and refuse specific norms.

> By making clear the way in which a person is subjected by discourse, poststructuralist theory shows how agency is fundamentally illusory. However, it opens up another possibility, related to the idea of the speaking/writing subject, who can use some of the understandings of poststructuralist theory itself to regain another kind of agency. The speaking/writing subject can move within and between discourses, can see precisely how they subject her, use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other (Davies 1991:46).

Through their analysis, the girls could see how the discourses were subjectivizing them, and they could adapt or accommodate the discourses. Importantly, in understanding productive power and subjectivization, we know that gender is not simply a choice committed by the individual, nor is it forcibly imposed on that individual: "The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre- given cultural relations" (Butler 1997:410). Agency is not the abdication from gendering scripts, for

actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance.

> Just as a script may by enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler 1997:410).

One cannot step outside of the performance, one cannot simply go off-stage for intelligibility requires that girls' identities be recognizable. Girls must "struggle over, appropriate and transform cultural meanings and resources," and agency is thus the creative navigation of these existing scripts with "the critical awareness that arises from a self-conscious relation with the other" (McNay 2000:4-5). As such, agency is the awareness and reflexivity a girl brings to her "conditions of possibility and [to her] subver[sion] and eclips[ing] the power that act on [her] and which [she] enacts" (Davies 2006:426).

4.3.2   Fantasy and Girls' Social Imaginaries

One way that girls were able to locate themselves within the performance, and offer up alternative scripts, was through fantasy. Ringrose and Renold (2011) look to fantasy, or rather internalized thoughts, as expressions of agency that could present alternatives to dominant scripts. They examine what they term "'projectivity' [as] encompass[ing] the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future" (Ringrose & Renold 2012b:971). Many of the girls fantasized about their future in ways that offered alternative narratives to the dominant scripts around gender and class.

> Participant 1: I don't like that, um, people – like what I want to do is that I want to be in carpentry. Everyone's like, why don't you just do hairstyling? And everyone's like, why can't you do something more..... you're going to do carpentry? That's a guy thing. I was like, I like it.
>
> Participant 2: You get paid more because you're a girl. You get way better job opportunities. Screw them! (FG4)
>
> [In another instance]
>
> Participant 1: I'm working at McDonald's dude.
>
> Participant 2: You have a job – I don't have a job!

Participant 1: I may have benefits but I'm – like they were talking about potentially having me as a manager….

Participant 2: That should make you feel pretty powerful.

Participant 1: But I don't want to spend the next 20 years of my life morbidly obese. Free McDonald's food that'll end terribly for me, ha.

AnnaLise: Hmm. Fair enough.

Participant 1: I don't know. I might do it just to get it on my resume for about 6 months to a year, but for the most part, honestly, I feel like I'm going to feel pretty powerless till I get into my geology program, which I got to wait till next January to get started on.

Participant 2: So that's where you're going?

Participant 1: I don't know. I'm still looking into the colleges, so I don't know if I'm going to stay in [this city] and go to [the university], which I really don't want to do, or go to Guelph, or go to Lake Head. Lake Head would be amazing, but my sister lives in Guelph.

AnnaLise: So you're very hopeful for the future. That's kind of where you are, a little bit. (FG4)

In the first example, the participant fantasizes about going into carpentry. While she is aware of the gender script that incites her to go in to a feminized field like hairstyling, she nevertheless hopes to pursue something beyond that narrative. In the second example, the girl working at McDonald's understands that class is at play in the judgment she has internalized around this job. Previously, she discusses how she had to drop out of school in order to support herself and that, as a female, she did not feel safe living on the streets, which resulted in her taking a minimum-wage job at McDonald's in order to provide housing. But she also has dreams for her future that go beyond the scripts she feels confine her, based on her current class. Her dreams enable her hope beyond the reality she lives as a result of structural power. Neither of these examples is agency through actions---the girls are not currently pursuing alternative career paths that disrupt dominant scripts. However, the girls have reflected on "possibilities that extend beyond normative social constructions of female subjectivity" (Willis 2009:107). The ability to identify the performative career identities they are hailed into, to understand that these are manifestations of productive power inciting them to embrace specific feminine subjectivities, and to envisage their subjectivity beyond the hailing of these

scripts, each of these analytical steps is demonstrative of agency: "When the formation of subjectivity is understood not in one-sided terms as an exogenously imposed effect but as result of a lived relation between embodied potentiality and material relations, then an active concept of agency emerges" (McNay 2000:16).The Panopticon (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982) of self-governance has failed, the internalization process has become at least somewhat disrupted.

While there has been a focus thus far on illuminating agential moments through criticality and critical thinking according to embracing or refusing specific norms, this is not to say that critical thinking did not at times prompt specific outward action by the girls. In the section on power, we saw this when one girl spoke back against the bullying term 'lesbian', and outwardly engaged her male classmates around their negative use of this identity. We can also see it in the following citation.

> AnnaLise: So I loved it when you said earlier that you put the crib together without any guys, and I was like, why is that even weird? That's totally normal.
>
> Participant1: Yeah. And I was like, "Well you guys can move the room around because we can't really lift and move heavy stuff." And then you like –
>
> Participant2: – they tried taking over.
>
> Participant1: Yeah! They were – I was like, "No." I was like, "I want to build this crib, and we got it; it's happening."
>
> Participant2: They were like just do the one part that we could do, and we'll do the rest, and we came back and they tried to like, keep going and tried to like, take over and do it all. (FG4)

The "girls' agentive maneuverings convey their complex and inventive engagement with cultural discourses of 'femininity'" (Willis 2009:109). These girls were analytically critical of the gender prescription that required their male partners to be the ones to assemble the cribs. But they then went on to take action by insisting that they could manage, as girls, to do this typified-male activity.

4.3.3   Doing and Undoing Gender

Processes of self-identification offer opportunities for agential action by girls, arising from critical engagement with identifiers such as being a 'girl', being 'straight' or

'queer', being 'girly' or 'tomboyish'. In the citation below, we see one girl engaging in self-reflexive practice entailing questioning certain gender normative constructions, but also recognizing this awareness does not abdicate her from having to operate within the available discourses:

> Participant: Personally, I'm non-gendered and so I don't feel normal, natural or anything being in, or around others doing regular normal stuff. And so, I don't know, I feel as if, I often get…….. Yes, non-gendered people aren't girls, but I feel like that further extends the margin between me and the average female now… See, that's one thing that scares me. I haven't told my family that I'm non-gendered now. I told my one sister, whose really close, and she was like, "Oh, it's just a phase." It's like, I've felt this way ever since I was a kid – and she understands that I've felt this way ever since I was a kid, but she says, "You were born a girl. You are a girl." And it's just like, what parts you have is different from gender identity, which is a huge thing. I don't know. That's one thing, because I'm pansexual as well, so I feel as though if my family ever found out, there would be that huge stigma against it and they would just not want to be a part of my life. Because they'd be like, "So you're a tranny?"…I just, see it as, I can't group myself into bisexual because I'm also attracted to trans people and everything like that. (FG4).

Importantly, agency as being able to 'speak' as a subject does not, however, enable us to escape our discursive positioning, nor does it mean we preceded discourse as a 'doer behind the deed' (Butler 1993): "My account of myself is never fully mine, and is never fully for me […] no account takes place outside the structure of address" (Butler 2001b:26). This girl is limited by the structure imposed by her family's reception; she assumes there will be 'un-intelligibility' in her family's reaction to her pansexuality—"so you're a tranny?" She struggles to narrate her desires through knowable subjectivities: "I can't group myself into bisexual because I'm also attracted to trans people and everything like that". The categories available to her do not fit how she wants to narrate her identity, and yet these are the categories that are deemed intelligible:

> What happens when I begin to become that for which there is no place within the given regime of truth? This is what Foucault describes as 'the desubjugation of the subject in the play of….the politics of truth'…This relationship is an urgent one; it carries a certain theoretical urgency, precisely at those points where the human is encountered at the limits of intelligibility itself (Butler 2004:58, citing Foucault 1997).

This girl is meeting the limits of intelligibility around her gender. There is agency located in girls' negotiating of their identities and in the way they act in the world by navigating those discourses that call upon them to embody a certain type of girlhood or femininity. Queer identifications, such as pansexual or non-gendered, are not a definitive set of attributes. Rather, they are an active negotiation, a social praxis "through which youth urgently express longings for love, friendship and recognition" (Driver 2007:3). The act of negotiating, of engaging in alternative discourses to narrate desires and gender expressions that are at the limits of intelligibility, this becomes an agential representational practice, "an ongoing process of signifying selves in relational, contextual and multivalent ways" (Driver 2007:2). This girl understands that her subjectivity is called in to question as she does not respond to heteronormative hailings through citations of a gender and sexual identity that are intelligible and recognizable; for gender is, "from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author" (Butler 2004:1). But "one of the primary ways-probably the primary way-human beings make sense of their experience is by casting it in a narrative form" (Tolman 2002, citing Gee 1985:11). Her naming of her subjectivity disrupts powerful narratives and consequently causes discomfort in her family.

Importantly, we must understand the complexity of this girl's queering process through an intersectional lens that does not stop at the axes of sexuality and gender, but in her case, also incorporates socio-economic status. Earlier in the focus group conversation, this girl disclosed having experienced homelessness and poverty, and currently lives alone in socially-assisted housing. Her agential practice of identification emerges at the nexus of her lived experiences:

> Identifications are invariably imbricated in one another, the vehicle for one another: a gender identification can be made in order to repudiate or participate in a race identification; what counts as "ethnicity" frames and eroticizes sexuality, or can itself be a sexual marking. This implies that it is not a matter of relating race, sexuality, [read in socio-economic status] and gender, as if they were fully separate axes of power (Butler 1993:116).

We cannot leverage a singular, dominant construction of queer youth to position her story. Citing Susan Talburt 2004, Susan Driver writes that queer youth are constructed through either narratives of risk and danger, or narratives of the well-adjusted, out, and

proud gay youth (Driver 2007:28). This girl is both and neither. She is involved in producing her subjectivity through her identifications; and yet, her identifications cannot exist beyond the operations of power that prescribe certain limited options around gender and sexuality. In some ways, her citations that 'go beyond' these are unknowable. But her understanding and her analysis frees her from a complete co-option by the narratives. As such, her capacity to self-identify and to perform identifying citations that are 'other' than what she is hailed in to by the predominant gender and sexual scripts is agential. It is agency in relation to power, whereby "language inaugurates the possibility of agency because it makes counter-speech and political transformation possible" (De Clercq 2013:88).

What is important is that the presence of action is not the determinant of agency; rather agency is possible through the vulnerability created in regulatory apparatuses (De Clercq 2013). It offers one the ability to exert criticality in situating the hailings one experiences, hailings into certain identity performances, a process that entails embracing and refusing certain norms simultaneously. In summary, in keeping with the research findings from Currie et al. 2006, girls' critical analysis and capacity to be self-reflexive is agential, regardless of what outward actions may or may not result but such practices need to be understood as refusal of specific norms. Self-reflexivity allows girls to reflect upon and actively negotiate the conditions of their subjectivities and the norms governing their self-constitution as gendered subjects.

From a post-structuralist perspective, agency cannot be a personal quality of the individual. Agency as being the property of an individual is a humanist, rationalist understanding. Humanism connects agency with free will, the ability to enact actions according to one's desires. As we examined in the section above on Power, Butler voices a post-structural framing on agency, seeing it as situational, dependent upon the effect of power (Butler 1997). Put in other terms, post-structuralism sees "'will' or 'intent' [...] as an agentic effect in discourse and not an essentialized attribute of a person" (Taylor 2011). I would argue instead that exercising agency occurring through criticality can be sustained over multiple moments in time but can never be conceived as a non-normative practice. That as a girl develops her capacity for critical engagement, she hones a skill

that is transferable, a process or practice which needs to be understood in terms of the mobilization and operationalization of specific norms. There is always possibility for lack of criticality in any given interaction with power. However, she can employ her critique in limitless moments, moments that are never fully dependent on or made possible by her very vulnerability to subjectivizing processes or by ever being fully determined by a norm.

Undoubtedly, the girl's analysis arises in response to the exercise of power, and as such is an effect of discourse. Agency is a "lived relation between embodied potentiality and material relations", inherently linked to the subjectivizing operation of power (McNay 2000:5). However, a girl can develop her capacity for "reflexivity, understood as the critical awareness that arises from a self-conscious relation with the other" (ibid). Agency thus is a practice, a way of engaging with subjectivizing power, of maneuvering through the discourses that constrain and also involves the operation and mobilization of quite specific norms. It is more intimately a part of her *personal* engagement of the world than simply a momentary reaction to a specific operation of power. Again, I am not claiming that agency as critical engagement is a personality trait or a stand-alone acquired skill that allows a girl to remove herself from power relations or stand outside of them and judge its operations. As mentioned above, but a good reminder:

> Critique is always a critique of some instituted practice, discourse, episteme, institution, and it loses its character the moment in which it is abstracted from its operation and made to stand alone as a purely generalizable practice. But if this is true, this does not mean that no generalizations are possible or that, indeed, we are mired in particularisms. On the contrary, we tread here in an area of constrained generality (Butler 2001:1).

Agency as critical thinking is always momentary in that it arises in relation to an operation of power, but nevertheless it can present in a sustained manner whereby an awareness of the performative nature of all components of self and identity result in a girl critically relating to and evaluating the norms . This finding begins to fill the research void in what was identified by Maxwell and Aggleton (2011) as a limit of the writing on agency, that "agentic practices usually appear to be momentary, and it is not clear how such practice can become more sustained" (310).

Agency as critical thinking is a skill, with the potential of being mobilized in a sustained pattern across multiple moments, always in relationship to specific sorts of power relations and in response to the norms governing them. Thus, if we think of a girl's gender performativity, and of recognition as animating her desire, we see that "recognition becomes a site of power" (Butler 2004:2). The girl does not 'overcome', step outside of, these patterns of desire, of social recognition; rather, her awareness of the norms governing these desires and her ongoing practice of performativity, becomes a site, an instance, for enacting her agency.

Nevertheless, there are contradictory push-pull moments in girls' active agential engagement with their world in terms of the positions they take in discursive networks of power. We saw this earlier in regards to a girl's engagement with the discourse around 'skinny', a pushback at the call for girls to be thin but also an employment of the narrative around healthy bodies and specific curves/shapes to idealized bodies. The following dialogue highlights how critically aware girls can be in their analysis of transgender, but the possible limits of this analysis, or of its employment, in their pronoun use:

> Participant1: Speaking of that sort of genders and stuff, I actually feel like it may be beneficial for the group if we started allowing people who were transgendered.
>
> Participant2: Yes.
>
> Participant1: Because I personally as a non-gendered female – and you guys don't have to take this personally – it's just everybody else has kids and I don't. And I feel as if it would diversify it enough, because women's issues affect transgendered women as well, so if anything it affects them a little more because they not only have the stigma of being a woman against them, they also have the stigma of they shouldn't be a woman essentially. I feel like it might actually be really beneficial for everybody.
>
> AnnaLise: That's a great idea. So we're running another [group] here, starting I think this week, but if you know anyone that is transgendered, they are more than welcome.
>
> Participant1: Mmhmm. There's this guy, who identifies as a girl –
>
> Participant2: We should invite him!
>
> Participant3: Oh yeah, we should invite him!

> AnnaLise: Done.
>
> Participant1: I feel like women's issues affect everybody as a whole. The less we divide ourselves, the more beneficial we'll be for the cause.
>
> Participant1: And I think that we'll be better for him because everyone we find, people make fun of him a lot, so why wouldn't you make him feel comfortable? He's just going through a change so that he can feel more comfortable.
>
> Participant2: Clearly he's happy that way.
>
> Participants3: Yeah!
>
> Participant2: He seems way more happy.
>
> Participant1: So next time I'll just invite him. (FG4)

The girls demonstrate a critical understanding of trans bodies, and the politics around trans inclusion in female-only spaces (Namaste 2000:157). They negate the incitements towards strict gender binaries in their invitation for the trans girl to join their girls' group, and in their reference that 'women's issues affect everybody as a whole'. We could argue that this instance goes beyond even agency as critical analysis, to agency in prompting political action around trans inclusion in their own group. This critical analysis was achieved by Participant 1 prior to the focus group, and is being implemented in this given moment as likely one of many moments of sustained critical engagement.

But alongside this agential critical analysis, we see a mis-use of pronouns, or rather a reversion into sex-based pronouns. The trans girl being discussed '*identifies as a girl*', but the group references this person as a 'he/him'. While there may be other reasons informing this mis-use of pronouns, I do wonder whether it is unintentional, signifying a deeper rooted productive power that points to one's biological sex as being the authentic true test of one's gender. The pull to refer to bodies born male as 'him' is inscribed heavily in dominant discourses about sex and gender. This discursive power continues to operate in spite of awareness of a person's ability to determine their gender affiliation. Furthermore, performativity requires that an identity be instituted through "a *stylized repetition of acts* [that…] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler 1997:403). Here, there is a failure in the portrayal of the trans person's gender as being natural and abiding. In the case of transgender, where transsexualism does not come into

play, there are various ways of crossing that cannot be understood as stable achievements:

> From the point of view of those established [gender] categories, one may want to claim, but oh, this is really a girl or a woman, or this is really a boy or a man, and further that the appearance contradicts the reality of the gender, that the discrete and familiar reality must be there, nascent, temporarily unrealized, perhaps realized at other times or other places (Butler 1997:411).

Are the girls compelled to signify this trans body as being *really* male? Is this a failure of performativity, whereby a cohesive female gender is not repetitively stylized by both the girls and possibly the trans girl? Or does the use of the male signifier in effect call attention to the performative act of gender and sex at large? Does it enable us to unearth the stage upon which we all perform our gender/sex, but which remains hidden and disguised as 'natural' through the productive power of an abiding repetition of acts?

4.4   Conclusion

What this citation unequivocally does illustrate, along with others highlighted throughout this chapter, is that agential critical analysis can operate alongside co-optation by productive power; one is not 'raised in to consciousness' and forever therein able to exert agency. Agency is always in reference to the presence of power relations and is cognizant of the norms that are driving such relations. But there is the possibility of its being a sustained skill that is developed and honed, a way of critically "self-fashion[ing] in terms of the norm, com[ing] to inhabit and incorporate the norm" (Butler 2001:4). Nevertheless, we understand ourselves as subjects always in relation to specific norms that govern our self-understanding. Agency is not a light switch that is simply flicked on. What this research does show is that girls are capable of mobilizing critical reflexivity in such a way as to create a sustained agentic practice that is understood as an engagement with and interrogation of specific norms.

5 Chapter 5 Data Analysis: The Experiences of Teen Mothers

5.1 Introduction

I did not set out to specifically study the experiences of teen mothers. Nevertheless, out of the 13 girls who took part in the focus groups, five were teen mothers. This should not be surprising as one focus group was held at a social service centre where support for teen mothers was a priority. Additionally, the majority of the Girls Program groups are held in partnership with existing social services who serve 'at-risk' youth; there is an overrepresentation of lower socio-economic status girls and girls in need of social supports who access programming through social services. Consequently, it is not surprising in some ways that there is an over-representation of teen mothers[9] within these focus groups. In this chapter I focus specifically on how teen mothers understand themselves as gendered subjects and experience agency. I focus specifically on the experiences of these five teen mothers and examine how they engage with and negotiate the signifiers of teen motherhood, "reimagining themselves in alternative ways" (Nayak & Kehily 2014:1331). This chapter builds on the previous one in that it utilizes the Butlerian approach to investigate forms of resistant agency in these young women's lives in terms of their refusal of specific norms.

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[9] Teen mothers will be used as a broad term, encompassing an age-range from 13-18, inclusive of mothers who are and are not partnered, and those who have jobs or are utilizing social assistance. Teen mothers and teen moms are terms that are stigmatized, and carry a certain weight in their use. I am intentional in employing them, as the discussions these girls offered were centered on their experiences of stigmatization. I seek to call attention to this stigma, to offer up the words of these girls as resignifying acts for these terms.

As already outlined in Chapters 1 & 2 of this dissertation, the relevant theoretical and empirical literature has focused specifically on the dominant discourses defining girlhood: the 'can-do' supergirls and the 'at-risk' victimized girls (Francis 2010, Pomerantz and Raby 2011, McRobbie 2007). In the previous chapter, for the most part, the girls did not frame their experiences through or in contrast to the 'can-do' or 'at-risk' typified girls. However, the teen mothers did engage these discourses- they refused to frame their experiences of mothering by resorting to positioning themselves as being 'at-risk'. More specifically, they pushed-back at the related discourse of girls as 'risk-takers' (Harris 2004, Hussain et al. 2006). Girls as 'risk-takers' are conceived as a potential subset of girls 'at-risk' in that this narrative presents their actions and behaviours as the sources of their experiences of violence, pain and hardship (Hussain et al. 2006). As we will see below, the teen mothers engaged with the 'risk-taker' discourse through their awareness of the judgment that was levelled against them because they were teen mothers. They readily discussed how they experienced subjectivizing constraints through the discourse of 'bad mothers'. They also resisted this discourse, positioning themselves in ways that were affirming of their experiences of teen motherhood and demonstrating pride in this 'bad/risky choice'.

I begin with a brief overview of the literature on teen mothers, and situate the voices of the five teen mothers who were the subjects of my research in relation to this literature. I then examine the specific ways in which these teen mothers were agential. However, it is important to have a sense of the individuals we are discussing, to work against de-contextualization and de-humanization by offering up, an albeit very brief, sense of who the teen mothers were:

Table 4 Teen Mothers

Mother #1	Mother #2	Mother #3	Mother #4	Mother #5
FG2	FG2	FG3	FG4	FG4
18yrs old	18yrs old	17yrs old	19yrs old	19yrs old
Child was present	Children were present	Child was not present	Child was present	Child was present
mother of a one-year old	mother of a one-year old and a newborn	from a rural setting	mother of a toddler and 8 months pregnant with	a racialized woman, mother of a toddler and 8 months

			her second	pregnant with her second
Completing high school credits	Completing high school credits	Completing high school credits	Not actively involved in schooling	Not actively involved in schooling

5.2 Dominant Discourse on Teen Motherhood: At-risk or Risk-takers

The majority of the literature on teenage pregnancy has arisen out of the fields of public health, medicine and psychology. There has been very little direct engagement by feminists on the issue (Macleod 2014: 129). Overall, teenage pregnancy is seen as an individual calamity and a social problem. It is something to be avoided, and policies must be designed to prevent its occurrence. Although some literature questions the association between teenage pregnancy and negative outcomes (Ellis-Sloan 2014), the vast majority focuses on how teenage pregnancy leads to a "disruption of schooling, the perpetuation of a cycle of disadvantage or poor socioeconomic circumstances, poor mothering practices and poor child outcomes, health risks associated with early pregnancy, welfare dependency and contribution to unacceptable demographic patterns" (Macleod 2014: 133), increased adverse obstetric outcomes and poor outcomes across the board for offspring (Wilson and Huntington 2006: 62). The field of childhood development tends to position young mothers as adolescents who are naïve, distracted, and self-centered, characteristics that are in direct contrast to how good and appropriate mothering patterns have been defined within the medical health field. "Characteristics of an adolescent cannot be reconciled with the attributes of a good mother" (Breheny & Stephens 2007: 112). Efforts are made to understand causation, looking to socio-economic status, immigrant/non-immigrant status, partnerships, familial history of teenage pregnancy, availability of sexual education, and experience of abuse (Al-Sahab et al. 2012, Nordberg et al. 2014, Macleod 2014).

Wilson and Huntington (2006) look more specifically at the discursive power of our narrative on teen motherhood. The literature above undoubtedly contributes to the framing of teen motherhood as 'at-risk' or 'risk-taker', but the ways in which their own

social networks and those in their lives discursively framed them also perpetuates this narrative. Teenage mothers are

> stigmatized and condemned by a system in which 'normality' is defined in terms of white middle-class linguistic and cultural practices and family forms […]. The pattern of higher education, the establishment of a career, and then (perhaps) starting a family, for contemporary middle class women has gradually become normative, while those young women who do not follow this trajectory---have become the targets of marginalization and stigmatization (Wilson and Huntington 2006: 59 &67).

There is little or no attempt to employ an intersectional lens for understanding how women mother differently, and to deconstruct the mobilization of power relations operating through the normalization of one narrative on motherhood that is incredibly privileged (see Rogers-Cook 2011 and Wilder et al. 2009 for examples). Motherhood has been structured around race and class; for example, black mothers in North America have been portrayed as ""reckless breeders", "welfare queens", and "the heads of pathological families" (Hill 2008:109).

Social changes around "reduced social mobility and widening inequalities between women are reflected in a movement towards later motherhood for the majority and early motherhood for a minority" (Nayak & Kehily 2014:1333). In keeping with post-feminist values, 'normal' or desirable motherhood can be considered a feminine achievement when education and a career are put first (ibid 1339). Discursive framing of teenage motherhood "is commonly associated with disaffection from education, lack of opportunity, poor socio-economic circumstances and excessive sexuality" (Nayak & Kehily 2014:1333).

The linking of 'abnormal' motherhood that falls outside the bounds of desirable life progression in the quantitative scientific literature, ensures the discursive construction of teen motherhood as 'at-risk'/'risk-takers'. It is useful to employ a Foucauldian understanding of power: "each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: this is, the types of discourses which is accepts and makes function as true" (Wilson and Huntington 2006: 63, citing Foucault 1980:131). The production of knowledge is embedded in power relations. The way in which we speak about teen motherhood is not outside of discourse or prior to it.

Importantly, a critical feminist poststructuralist analysis on the issue seeks to undermine the easy reading of teen pregnancy as a social problem—it is seen as a social problem via social policy educational reforms, sexuality education initiatives, and welfare interventions. In fact, some feminists intentionally do not write on teen motherhood because they refuse "to acknowledge adolescent pregnancy as a separate reality from the reproductive lives of women who find themselves in similar socioeconomic, cultural, and racialized circumstances" (Macleod 2014:137).

While brief and far from all-encompassing, this overview of the literature on teen motherhood is intended to highlight the dominant approach to the issue, and the subjectivizing power operations at play through this discursive framing. Importantly, "the failure of research in this field to present more than a one-dimensional picture largely reflects the dominance of quantitative studies which are unable to capture the thoughts and feelings of teenage mothers themselves" (Wilson and Huntington 2006: 64). As is the case in the literature on agency discussed in chapter 1 which deals with my theoretical framework, there is little room given to enabling the girls or teen mothers to have a voice, and for this voice to be counted as authoritative knowledge. In the case of teen motherhood, this would entail the teen mothers themselves having a voice on how to frame this experience, and then providing these voices with authority as part of our production of knowledge on teen motherhood. While few in number, there are studies that take this approach (see Kirkman 2001 for a wonderful example and which I refer to later in the chapter in light of my analysis of teen mothers' experiences reported on here). This is the approach I will employ in connecting the voices of the teen mothers in my focus groups to the literature at large on teen motherhood. I intentionally seek to ensure that it is their voices that drive the production of knowledge around teen motherhood.

5.3   What do Teen Mothers Have to Say: Awareness of the Discursive Operations of Power

The five teen mothers who took part in the focus groups all demonstrated an awareness of the judgment that was levelled against them because they were teen mothers. They

readily discussed how they experienced constraints on their subjectivities as teen mothers through:

- Judgment on their mothering
- Judgment around their use of Ontario Works[10]
- Judgment around their sexuality

This judgment entailed a recognition of the discursive scripts that were operating upon their subjectivities, and a displeasure at the effects of these scripts on how they lived their subjecthood as teen mothers. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the act of identifying the constraints of this discursive positioning and framing of their personhood and being able to reflect critically on these limits constitutes a resistant agential practice for many girls and in this case, for the teen mothers in particular: "A resistant subject, is exactly the kind of subject that is produced within and through institutionalizing discourses that is also simultaneously limited by the effects of power" (Ingrey 2014:17). In other words, the teen mothers "show[ed] agency and affiliation, appearing as articulate and knowing subjects of how they and others are represented" (Nayak & Kehily 2014:1342).

In the following citations from the focus groups, we can see the way in which the teen mothers engage with discursive power operating upon their subjectivity, how they employ criticality to subvert unrestricted effects of these discourses, and in so doing, how they are "able to do something with what is done with [them]" (Butler 2004:3). There was an understanding that as teen mothers, they faced additional requirements upon their mothering. For example:

> Participant 1: If you put on like on Facebook that you had a rough day or something, then people will think that you…and it's more about your kids that your kids are doing something they shouldn't be.
>
> Participant 2: Or even if you just put up a status about like, going out, do you know like to the movies or something, people are like, oh you're not taking care of your child…like you're doing this and that and it's like, "I miss my child all the time. My bad I want a break once in a while. And then it's just

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[10] Ontario Works is a provincial social assistance program, offering income support for low-income individuals and families. http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/social/ow/

> like everyone's so quick to say something but they don't know what you're
> doing and when you're doing it. (FG2)

The mothers recognized that their actions were judged as being un-motherly, as not living up to a defined standard of being the good selfless mother. They point to social media as being a particular form of surveillance of their mothering practices (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982). Already positioned within the discourse of 'risk-taker', when the mothers fail to meet the normative expectations for mothering, "inevitably [they] are positioned as the deviant 'other' and considered to be unfit to parent. These perceptions are historically and culturally specific" (Wilson and Huntington 2006: 61). An awareness of the presence of this constraining narrative relating to good mothering, and the specific actions it includes or excludes, are seen in the following:

> Participant 1: I feel like people just like, when you do go out like in a blue
> moon, like people have so much to say, like you don't know when I'm with
> my child and when I'm not. So like, I think that's like the most irritating
> thing.
>
> Participant 2: Or people judge you how you parent your kids. Like I let her
> scream on the bus because she wants something that I won't give her. And
> they'll like give me dirty looks or judge me for it. And it really doesn't bug
> me, but.
>
> Participant 1: Or like she fell and has scrapes and bruises, it's like you beat
> your kid. (FG2)

These mothers can readily name specific instances where they have felt that their mothering is being criticized, where they are failing to live up to the subject position of 'good mother'. But judgment against teen mothers extends beyond their mothering practices. Many of the mothers called attention to the power of the discourse of the 'welfare dependent' teen mothers in shaping how they are positioned and constituted by others as specific sorts of *failed* gendered subjects (Hancock2004):

> Participant: Oh we're young moms, we can't support our children, all we do
> is party, like, tons of stuff. Like this is just another stereotype, but when
> people think like, just because you're young, like you're on like Ontario
> Works, and you're just taking advantage of it. You're not trying to like go out
> and get a job and your education. But like, you are. Like it's not like every
> single person does that. (FG2)

This mother is keenly aware of the classist discourse through which she is being constituted, the one that states that welfare dependence is something to be ashamed of. Welfare dependence as a social problem is historically and culturally specific. Women's dependency has carried different meanings over time, from socially approved to stigmatized status (Wilson and Huntington 2006:66). As part of the post-feminist hailings, the current discourse compels girls and women to pursue "higher education, the establishment of a career, and then (perhaps) starting a family" (ibid 59, McRobbie 2009, Baker 2010). This is in keeping with Ringrose's (2007) point regarding the neoliberal 'can-do' overachiever girl. Through their use of welfare, the neoliberal narrative thus states that teen mothers are not taking responsibility for themselves; they are not contributing productively to the economic social order. Thus, they cannot be 'can-do' girls with limitless possibilities, but rather they have failed and are relegated to the 'at-risk' narrative.

As mentioned earlier, this 'can-do' discourse is classed, often racialized, and definitely does not take into account the intersectional differences that allow or inhibit certain girls from embodying the overachiever subjectivity. However, when girls and women do not fit within the constraints of the discourse, they are stigmatized irrespective of their intersectional positioning and their consequent ability to constitute that particular subject position. In the case of this particular participant cited above, she was a single mother who had not yet completed high school and who had little extended family support. One must ask: is there an economic advantage to pursuing work outside of the home? Is this feasible? Is it truly something that would improve her mothering and the situation of her child? These are broader policy questions that are taken up in the literature within critical policy analysis (Baschevkin 2002, Hunsley 1997). Regardless, an understanding of the subjectivizing power of this welfare-dependent discourse helps us to see that this mother is not being positioned as the 'good mother' who is not welfare-dependent and can provide for her own child. Nor were any of the other teen mothers in the focus groups.

> Participant 1: And especially if you're a mom. Because when you do have money, then, you know, you have other things.
>
> Participant 2: You have to give opportunity to your child as well. I barely buy myself anything.

Participant: It definitely makes your life easier if you have money. (FG4)

Through such discursive frames, these mothers are at once hailed into a subjectivity and unable to embody it; they are found wanting (Butler 1997). They can feel the compelling hailing into a failed motherhood that is shamed, one that should view its dependency as failure; and yet, while the girls can identify the Call (Butler 1997:106-7), and are critical of its shaming of their particular embodiment of motherhood, this does not mean that they could fully step outside of that hailing. They might enact a subjectivity of teen motherhood that is different from that into which they are hailed by social media, by academic research and literature, by policy design and rhetoric, by social discourse writ large; however, that subjectivity may nevertheless be read as un-intelligible if it exceeds the array of existing options that can then be cited (Ingrey 2014).

Not only is the subjectivity of teen motherhood hailed as economically shameful, but as we can see in the following citations, the mothers are aware of another component to their discursive constitution as teen mothers, related to their sexuality.

> Participant: Or like when you're on the bus and people sit there and say stuff, like last year we had some old lady [...] call me and this girl, we were a whore, because [the other girl] had her kid on the bus. And she was like old, like really old. And she's like well you guys are whores, you shouldn't have had kids, blah blah blah.
>
> [same focus group, later in the discussion]
>
> Participant 1: And then moms just get bashed all the time, where dads never do.
>
> AnnaLise: So what's up with that? Why are guys different?
>
> Participant 1: I honestly don't know. Because it took two to make her. To them I guess, like whoever your child is. It took two. I guess because they came out of you, and you're the one that gave birth to them, you have to be the one to look after them constantly? I don't know.
>
> Participant 2: Guys are out having sex, and she should be keeping it for one person [said sarcastically]. Or like say you're out with somebody and they have a boyfriend that's not your baby's father, and they get judged for being out with someone who isn't the baby's father. (FG2)

As was discussed in the previous chapter, critical awareness of the subjectivizing discourses is not a state that one arrives at. Participant 1 recognizes an unfairness associated with the gendered double-standards around who bears the cost of a pregnancy, but she is unable to fully critically engage with the discourse- she doesn't quite know. Participant 1 is unclear why fathers are not judged for being sexually active while mothers are, and in fact she employs the following discourse pertaining to female sexuality:

> cultural scripts for girls and women regarding sex carry a double standard that is confusing and paradoxical. While boys are encouraged to express their heterosexuality as a sign of masculinity, girls are supposed to remain virgins or at least wait for a serious monogamous relationship and become the object of their lover's affections (Carr 2013:32, citing Tolman 2005).

In the girls' talk, we see glimmers of the thinking that it is natural for mothers to bear the brunt of un-condoned sexual activities, when the teen girl does not uphold the call to virginity and consequently becomes pregnant. We can also see the narrative that women's connection to childrearing responsibility derives from their role in childbirth ("you're the one that gave birth to them, you have to be the one to look after them constantly?"). Here, we see that "the responsibility for teenage sexual activity is particularly aimed at young women who are perceived to be guardians of their reproductive capabilities […]. Young men, on the other hand, are assumed to be acting in accordance with their natural masculine desires" (Ellis-Sloan 2014:3). Participant 1 names these discourses, demonstrating their currency and the effect they have in helping her narrate her experience as a teen mother who is judged for her active sexuality. Nevertheless, she mentions these discourses in a questioning manner and states finally that "I don't know". As put by Tolman (2002), there is a social dilemma set up for girls around the "societal constructions of female […], a choice between their sexual feelings or their safety" (45) from unwanted pregnancy, from STIs, from slut-hood. These discourses on female sexuality and childrearing are informing the girl's understanding of her sexuality, but she is also perhaps questioning their validity.

In contrast, Participant 2 leverages sarcasm in fleshing out the gendered discourse, connecting women/girls' bearing the brunt of pregnancy to slut-shaming. The girl's awareness of this critical link, and her leveraging of sarcasm enable her resistant agency

in the process of her own self-constitution. It is not about stepping outside of the influence of power, as "power can't be wished away" (Martindale 1992:330) for it is embodied rather than held (Foucault 1982). It is about identifying operations of power, recognizing their effects through one's own subjectivizing process. Participant 2 is aware of the discourse calling upon girls/women to be virginal (Carr 2013; Tolman et al. 2003; Tolman 2005), but is also critical of this discourse. Her sarcasm is resistant; her analysis is interrogating the validity of the gendered norms at play in the constitution of such subject positions. This is an agential moment for Participant 2 in that she has an ability to see the constraints upon her subjectivity as a teen mother, and through her vulnerability to these discursive constraints (De Clercq 2013:87), she can re-articulate her subjectivity in such a way that troubles these scripts. As discussed in the previous chapter, Participant 2's use of sarcasm ensures against (re)producing the very constitutive power that has led to her subjectivization as a sexually promiscuous *failed* mother. Through a Butlerian understanding of resistant agency and its embeddedness in power relations, we know that by identifying the subjectifying effects of power the girls cannot simply be free of its regulatory constraints.

5.4   (Re)articulating One's Subjectivity as an Agential Process

As mentioned earlier, while most research on teen motherhood does not center the voices of the mothers themselves, there was one study in particular that I would like to call attention to now. Research by Kirkman et al. 2001 centered the voices of teen mothers, looking at how teen mothers made sense of their lives and how they were positioned in relation to dominant narratives. In keeping with the findings of this research, the young mothers in Kirkman's study were aware of societal judgment, but provided accounts of being good and capable mothers. Similarly, in their study on 'chavs and pramface girls', Nayak and Kehily (2014) found that teen mothers were "aware of the deeply affective nature of these signs [or shaming discourses] and attempt[ed] to displace such representations by reimagining themselves in alternative ways, for example, as competent carers, friendly folk or active citizens" (1331). As we can see from the citations below, the teen mothers in the focus groups were also similar to those reported

on in Kirkman and Nayak & Kehily's studies in that they acknowledged difficulties, but refused to emphasize the disadvantages or burden of teen motherhood (Kirkman et al. 2001: 279).

> Participant 1: Oh yeah! We both started school not that long ago but then, you know, we got pregnant again and it just got really tough going to school with a 2 year old. Dropping them off at daycare, going to school and then running back – it was a little much.
>
> Participant 2: So yeah, as soon as the babies are old enough we're going to go back.
>
> Participant 1: But like I said, I'm happy we had kids young. Whereas if we had kids at 20, we would have to take time off work. We'd already have our careers and now we'd have to take time off of our careers. Now we can raise our kids and then start our careers.
>
> Participant 2: It's always hard raising kids. There's always things you don't think about. Like when he was born, I never thought, "Okay, I'm going to have to put my son in speech class because he's not going to have the right speech." And then, when something like that happens it's just extra on top. Oh, your kid has the flu – now you have to sit in the hospital and can't go to school. There's things that come up that you don't expect to happen. It sucks a little bit, but you know, like I said, "You made your bed, now you got to lay in it." (FG4)

While emphasizing the challenges associated with being a teen mother, these mothers are also quick to state that they are happy to have had children. Kirkman et al. (2001) found that teen mothers will highlight the benefits of young motherhood as a consoling plot; they will see the child was a source of pride, and they will describe the benefits for the future of having had children at a young age (287). This is true in the citation above. Participant 1 refuses to narrate her teen motherhood solely through the lens of difficulties. She also frames her young motherhood as offering possibilities. This framing of her experience as a teen mother in a way that does not conform to the dominant script highlighted above, is agential. Agency is not a capacity or attribute, but a negotiation of existing discourses and power lines; "The power to tell a story, or indeed not to tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process" (Plummer 1995). Participant 1's failure to fully re-articulate 'shameful teen motherhood' is agential, in that agency

> will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (assoujetissement) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power (Butler 1993:15).

Her agency in (re)articulating her teen motherhood is to endeavor "to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to [social norms]" (Butler 2004:3).

Maxwell and Aggleton found that one way to identify sustained agential engagement in girls' lives was to look at how these young women positioned themselves in their relationships and as actors, to look at their ongoing identity creation rather than at their individual actions (Maxwell and Aggleton 2011: 310). The teen mothers were both aware of the judgments that narrated their lived reality as teen mothers, but they also sought to discursively construct this reality as a positive event. For example, the teen mother cited below narrates her academic achievement in a particularly prideful manner, in contrast to the dominant discourse at play of the 'risk-taker' teen mothers.

> Participant 1: So I didn't care, but, yeah....I'm doing school and everything to help her – to prove to her that yeah, I had a child young, but I'm still doing my school. Most kids are failing their classes; I'm so happy with my English mark right now – I have a 95% in it. 95%! Taking a kid, doing, like, Mondays and Wednesdays are my only free nights, Fridays I go to my moms, so I get ready for that, Thursday's there's group and Tuesday I have night school. So I'm like, yes, 95! I'm doing everything to pass school to show my daughter that even if you do have a child, you can still finish your school. It's good to be with her.
>
> Participant 2: It's also, I'm sure she'll appreciate it when she's older too. Because I'm sure she won't have any doubts, thinking she – like, your life could've been better if she, if you hadn't had her and stuff, because you still have a rocking life and so –
>
> Participant 1: That's what everyone asks. "Do you regret having her?" I'm not regretting having her, because I'm pretty sure I wanted to have her... That's what I feel like when I have power. (FG3)

This mother mobilizes a pushback to the norms she knows to be driving the narrative of the 'risk-taker'. As discussed in chapter 1, the 'can-do' girl, named as such by

McRobbie 2007, highlights how girls' academic performances have solidified into a new seductive narrative about girls' educational and workplace success, where girls have become a 'metaphor' for social mobility and social change (Ringrose 2007; Francis 2010; Pomerantz and Raby 2011). As part of a binaric operation, girls who are 'risk-takers' or 'at-risk' are inherently assumed to not have access to the 'can-do' narrative. Furthermore, girls who are 'risk-takers' rather than successful 'can-dos' are "exhorted to take full responsibility for the consequences of [...] getting it 'wrong'" (Ellis-Sloan 2014:4). Interestingly, the teen mother above mobilizes pushback to the 'risk-taker' narrative through both her pride in her academic achievement and her pride in having her child. She does not re-articulate the discourse of shame in relation to her pregnancy and motherhood, but rather it is her pride in both her academics and her mothering that disrupts this subjectivizing power effect. It is important to re-iterate that agency is not about stepping outside of the influence of power, as "power can't be wished away" (Martindale 1992:330). Agency is found in the process itself (Butler 1993). The performative requirement of subjectivity offers the possibility of "a repetition that repeats against its origin" (Butler 1997:94), of a use of language that is applied differently than intended (Raby 2006:151). This mother leverages her criticality around productive power on teen motherhood, to contradictorily engage the opposing discourses of risk-taker and can-do and by so doing, calls attention to the performative nature of subjectivity.

The very expression of pride in their teen motherhood is agential-it is an active engagement with their subjectivizing process, a resistance to the dominant teen motherhood discourse, and (re)articulating of the discourse itself. It is a 'talking back' to postfeminist media constructions that successful girlhood is linked to economic productivity and social capital (Nayak & Kehily 2014). We see many examples of this by all of the teen mothers in the focus groups, when they narrate their subjectivities beyond that of the 'risk-taker':

> Participant 1: I'm proud of being a young mother.
> AnnaLise: Are you?

Participant 1: Yes. Cause I feel like most young moms do a better job than older moms.

Annalise: Do better jobs at being moms?

Participant: Yeah. Than older people. (FG2)

[in another instance]

AnnaLise: So what would be your biggest success in five years?

Participant 1: Honestly, I would say just overall, like just like, being a mom I guess because it's still just like the biggest accomplishment, but like the hardest thing to do. (FG2)

[in another instance]

Participant: I feel powerful when I look at my kids.

AnnaLise: Why?

Participant: Super mom!

Participant: My little daughter, her father isn't around, she's four years old and she knows that her dad's not around and everything – it's not like she doesn't understand – but she...just the way she talks to me and the way she looks up to me just makes me feel so fucking good.

AnnaLise: Yeah?

Participant: Like she is – she motivates me so much, and that makes me feel awesome. (FG4)

[in another instance]

Participant 1: I find that being a single mom – There's a comfort level that I didn't have before that I have now.

Participant 2: Yeah. Being a single mom is really powerful because there's so much power in the media about men. And then, raising a human by yourself is hard. And that is like, the biggest job that you can do. Raising a human? Holycrap! And you're going to do it by yourself?

Participant 1: And I could have gone to school for years and do all this stuff, but I just feel more accomplished. You buy him a bunch of clothes, you buy him all this – putting up the crib feels good, you feel confident. (FG4)

 The hailing into the dominant subjectivity of 'risk-taker' is not a passive process. The discourse is value-laden (Weedon 1987:126) with "hierarchical binary oppositions" (ibid) that incite the girls above to position themselves in ways that run counter to dominant discourses that constitute teen mothers as failed and irresponsible recipients of the welfare system. These latter discourses would seem to disallow any such pride in their motherhood as is exhibited above. The dominant focus of the literature on teen pregnancy positions teen pregnancy and motherhood as something to be avoided, as something with many negative consequences: serious repercussions on their job potential, on their welfare use, on their mothering, and on the outcomes for their child. And yet, these mothers do not confine their narration of their subjectivities as mothers to these scripts. They re-articulate their teenage motherhood, resisting the hailing into a subjectivity of bad mother/shamed mother. As was made clear in the section above relating to the exercise of power, the mothers are aware of the limits of such discourses and subjectifying effects in terms of how their motherhood gets defined and understood in terms that want to confirm their abjected status as failed subjects. As was true in the previous chapter, for many of the girls writ large in the focus groups, the act of thinking in terms that challenge hegemonic discourses, of understanding the subjectivizing processes and the particular norms governing them and being able to think critically about these norms and their effects in how they come to understand themselves as gendered subjects, is indeed understood as an agential practice. The teen mothers exert resistant agency in positioning their teen pregnancies as successes, as moments of pride, as accomplishments in ways that powerfully speak against their subjugation as abjected welfare recipients.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I focused specifically on how teen mothers engaged with and negotiated the signifiers of teen motherhood, "reimagining themselves in alternative ways" (Nayak & Kehily 2014:1331). Their refusal to frame their experiences of mothering as being 'at-risk' or 'bad mothers', the teen mothers "show[ed] agency and affiliation, appearing as articulate and knowing subjects of how they and others are represented" (Nayak & Kehily 2014:1342), reflecting critically on specific norms to subvert unrestricted effects

of these discourses, and in so doing, were "able to do something with what is done with [them]" (Butler 2004:3). I went beyond an analysis of the ways in which teen mothers engage with discourses of judgment to looking at the discursive effects of their narrations, and the positions they take up in response to refusing those norms which would reduce them to failed welfare-dependent subjects. Agency is thus manifested as a capacity that is enacted in terms of a negotiation of existing discourses and power lines; "The power to tell a story, or indeed not to tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process" (Plummer 1995). Leveraging their criticality around productive power on teen motherhood, the teen mothers were able to contradictorily engage the opposing discourses of *risk-taker* and *can-do*, and by so doing, call attention to the performative nature of subjectivity and the citational practice of simultaneously refusing and embracing specific norms governing their constitution as gendered subjects.

6 Conclusion: What Does This All Mean?

6.1 Introduction

In engaging with 13 girls through 4 focus groups, my research asked: how does girls' programming impact girls' sense of themselves as agential, as actors rather than victims in their own lives, and as capable of exerting agency in their subjectivization? Which conceptions of agency do girls mobilize, and how do certain identity categories come to bear on how they understand their agency? In examining these questions, this dissertation included: Chapter 1, an introduction and theoretical framework; Chapter 2, a literature review of the field of violence prevention programming and girls' agency; Chapter 3, laying out my Methodological Frameworks; Chapter 4 & 5, focusing on data analysis, looking first at 'What the Girls Said' in relation to gender subjectification and critical self-reflexivity as resistance, and then at the 'Experiences of Teen Mothers'. I use these last pages to highlight the significance of this study, its implications for community programming and its limits. Finally, in keeping with the feminist axiom 'the personal is political', I end with a personal reflection on my own investment in this work and its political significance for me personally.

6.2 Significance of the Study

In this dissertation, I sought to fill existing gaps in knowledge about girls' agency and their sense of embodied control over who they are, as well as to provide information and analysis that could be used to improve the effectiveness of the *Girls Program* for the community agency.

As in much feminist work, I wanted to connect the theory to the praxis (Iverson & James 2014), to imbed my work in community, to leverage the privileges associated with working in academia towards advancing the goals of non-profit violence against women community work. While I cannot claim to have fully succeeded at this balance, there are nevertheless important findings that arise out of this research both for the

interdisciplinary field of girlhood studies and for community programming engaging young women.

Rather than a focus on girls as victims, the goal of this research was to identify instances of girls' agency. I wanted to illuminate the conditions of possibility, what might enable girls' exercise of power and agency. I wanted to examine how girls' engagement in community anti-violence based programs impacted their sense of themselves as agential, as actors rather than victims in their own lives, and as capable of exerting agency in their subjectivization. Which conceptions of agency do girls mobilize, and how do certain identity categories come to bear on how the girls understand their agency and self-constitution as agential subjects? I understood that "while there is knowledge available about girls and on girls, the current landscape still does not provide substantial opportunities for girls to be a part of the production of knowledge regarding their own lives" (Hussain et al. 2006). As such, my methodology centered on girls' voices, on their own understandings of agency, on their own indicators and sense of what agency 'felt like' and hence on building knowledge about these girls' understanding of their self-constitution as gendered subjects. This was a study about girls who took part in a community anti-violence program, through four focus groups with 13 girls ranging in age from 16-21. While I did not set out to specifically study the experiences of teen mothers, it became an important focus of the data analysis as five of the girls were teen mothers. Their voices were employed to further draw attention to how they very intentionally exerted resistant agency through their refusal to frame their experiences of mothering as being 'at-risk' or 'bad mothers' and to subvert the unrestricted effects of these discourses. In so doing, as Butler (2004) iterates, they were "able to do something with what is done with [them]" (3).

One significant finding from this research was that the girls experienced agency as a negotiation of existing discourses and power lines; "The power to tell a story, or indeed not to tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process" (Plummer 1995). This was exemplified, for example, in the girls' maneuverings through the discourse of 'skinny' vs. healthy femininity, their assembling of their own cribs, their dream to go into carpentry, their pushback around the possibility of being

lesbians and slut-shaming. We saw them tell their own stories through self-identification, as pansexual or non-gendered, as 'good mothers' who are also teen mothers.

Throughout our conversations, there was a great deal of focus on embodied subjectivities, on the girls' experiences of their gendered and sexual subjectification. This is unsurprising, given the topics covered in the *Girls Program*. When discussing subjectification the girls demonstrated remarkable criticality in their understanding of how power operated upon their processes of their subjectification. Many were able to understand themselves as specific sorts of gendered subjects in relation to specific norms that had come to govern their self-understanding. They could "use some of the understandings of poststructuralist theory itself to regain another kind of agency. [They could] move within and between discourses, c[ould] see precisely how they subject her, use the terms of one discourse to counteract, modify, refuse or go beyond the other" (Davies 1991:46).

As discussed in the dissertation, agential critical analysis is not a state a girl arrives at; she is not 'raised in to consciousness', a light switch is not simply flicked on. Her agency is always in reference to the presence of power. But there is the possibility of its being a sustained skill that is developed and honed, a way of critically "self-fashion[ing] in terms of the norm, com[ing] to inhabit and incorporate the norm" (Butler 2001:4). Her agential critical analytic agency means that she understands herself as a subject always in relation to specific norms that govern her self-understanding. What this research demonstrated was that girls are capable of mobilizing critical reflexivity in such a way as to create a sustained agentic practice, particularly with regards to negotiating and refusing specific normative injunctions to think and act in a specific way. As Ringrose (2013) has argued:

> rather than always searching for easily discernable resistant acts (or revolts) through our research narratives, we need to track the regulative rhythm of the normative to find some spaces where gender 'undoings' emerge, and other understandings and convictions jostle for authenticity (Butler, 1997, Renold & Ringrose 2008). We also need to explore how girls' experiences and narratives are plugged into wider popular culture and where counter-narratives […] make new spaces for thinking and going 'girl' (147).

In this sense, my research contributes to our understandings of how girls experience subjectivizing power, and has created space for locating ways in which girls are doing

'girl', how they are thinking about and engaging with the discourses on girl, and how this feels agential.

6.3   Implications for Community Programming

This study has important implications for community programming, particularly with regards to reflecting on how to create and foster the conditions for supporting girls' critical agential capacities. Many of the focus group participants were able to employ agential criticality throughout our conversations. Conversely, many of those same participants narrated discursive oppression that ran alongside instances of their active agential engagement (think of the trans pronoun references in chapter 4). What is important to mention is that this research was not intended as a program evaluation of the *Girls Program*, assessing the causation link between curriculum content and girls' agential criticality. While that was not the intention, I do believe we can draw inferences from the qualitative data from this study. This research supports the need for the honing of critical thinking in girls as a form of agency, under the overarching mandate of violence prevention programming.

Commonly used language in community anti-violence work is that of 'empowerment'. While often loosely defined, empowerment is usually framed as a protective mechanism against the effects of violence, fostering resiliency (Berman & Jiwani 2002; Cameron et al. 2002; Janovicek 2001). Girls Action Foundation is the national umbrella organization in Canada for girls' programming.

> We do girls' programming because there is a need to create spaces where young women are empowered. Our intention is to create spaces where young women are able to talk about issues such as identity, bullying, sexuality, and sexual health or violence in an open, supportive and honest way, where they can question stereotypes, speak up, and speak out. Girls Action programming fills a gap in the current services provided. It empowers girls to take action against the injustices in their lives and their communities and encourages them to change the world (Girls Action Foundation 2009).

Empowerment is listed as one of five best practices in girls' programming (Girls Action Foundation 2015). The language of empowerment is nevertheless rife with problematics. What does empowerment actually mean? As exemplified above, it is used quite often as an ephemeral goal for girls programming. When we hone in on the core-implied

elements of the term, we recognize that it implies a giving, an enabling, and a licensing of power- by an agent, by someone who has power (Gore 1990:8). Thus empowerment as commonly used implies that power is a commodity, something that can be tangibly transferred (Fook 2012:56). However, as discussed at length in Chapter 4, power is not something that is possessed or held, it is "exercised, and […] only exists in action" (Foucault 1980:89). Modernist conceptions of empowerment ask, "what we can do for you", instituting a relation of us/them, and relying on an agent who is already empowered (see Stromquist 2015). This positioning of the agent, the teacher, as empowered can lead to a repetition of dominant discourses in that "in the focus on Others there is a danger of forgetting to examine one's own (or one's group's) implication in the conditions one seeks to affect" (Gore 1990: 14). Additionally, people do not easily fit in to 'powerful' or 'powerless' groups (Fook 2012:55). This binary denies the intersectional facets of individual's identities that make them oppressed and oppressing at the same time. When we identify girls as 'powerless', as victims, this discursive operation of power subjectivizes them- the very opposite of 'empowering'.

Empowerment is also enmeshed with postfeminism, wherein power and empowerment are distanced from

> staid, collectivist and victimizing feminism, and simultaneously [away] from any political theorization of gendered inequality and power structures. [Instead, postfeminist empowerment situates] girls' agency in their ability to consume, to focus on individual achievements, and to see themselves as already equals who can be whoever they want to be. (Harris & Dobson 2015:149-150).

In this research, girls were very clear in stating that criticality felt like agency, it felt 'empowering'. However, this postfeminist framing of empowerment does not support spaces for girls to develop criticality and a critical engagement with systemic power relations and their operationalization. Jennifer Gore offers a critical re-engagement with the modernist notion of empowerment. She argues that we can re-articulate empowerment as "the exercise of power in an attempt (that might not be successful) to help others to exercise power" (Gore 1990:10). It occurs in sites of practice; it is a process of knowledge production (ibid 21). As agents, as teachers, we must be self-reflexive about our own social locations and sense of our own 'empowerment', acknowledging that our agency has limits. "We are all enmeshed in these matrices of

power. No position affords perfect vision- the God's eye view, as Haraway famously called it" (Gill quoting Haraway, 2007:77).

My research is not so much concerned to empower as to create spaces for fostering girls' critical agential capacities. In this process, facilitators might seek to exercise power in the pursuit of helping girls to exercise power as well. Rather than teaching girls what is right or wrong with the world (which would only serve to enforce other regulatory forms of constraint grounded in certain 'regimes of truth'), "they can benefit from frank discussion about how the social world operates to construct various ways of thinking and being" (Currie et al. 2009: 207). Girls tell us that critical thinking feels agential. Critical thinking allows girls to see the "lived relation between embodied potentiality and material relations", inherently linked to the subjectivizing operation of power (McNay 2000:5). In other words, it is a practice, a way of engaging with power relations and maneuvering through the discourses that constrain a girl's subjectivity, her identity. Agential critical thinking does not mean that girls can do away with the constraints they feel around their identity formations. They cannot step outside of how their culture defines femininity, or motherhood, or girls' sexuality. They cannot take on the "notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes" (Butler 1993:15). However, a critical understanding of these operations of power means that a girl can identify internalized power; she can become aware of the constraints imposed by certain norms and seek creative ways to engage with these constraints in ways that do not fully re-articulate them. For example, the teen mother can talk about her motherhood, not as 'shameful and at-risk', but as a moment of pride. The girl wanting to go into carpentry can locate why she gets pushback from her family and friends about her choice to pursue her dream career. The pansexual non-gendered person understands why their family will not accept them, but can link this non-acceptance to larger discourses of oppression such as genderism, transphobia and homophobia. While shying away from the language of 'empowerment', this focus on developing in girls a criticality ensures "the development of a more playful ability to move between and amongst discourses, to move in and out of them, to mix them, to break their spell when necessary" (Davies 1997, in Currie et al 2009:206).

While we cannot mistake agency as being a personality trait, or a state that a girl arrives at, it is nevertheless a skill that a girl can hone, a capacity she can develop. This is the role of community programming aimed at girls. We must be intentional in offering curriculum and pedagogical interventions that are supportive of building girls' critical agential capacities.

The current programming includes many curricula activities that specifically foster a critical lens on discourses of gender and sexuality (see Appendix 5 for an overview of the curriculum). It provides language and a framework to help girls understand privilege, power and intersectionality. This is particularly important in a postfeminist context, where

> terms and subject positions from which to describe experiences of victimhood, oppression, lack, limitation, and what we might call, 'suffering-marked-by-structure' are not readily available to young women[…]. Identifying structural oppression appears to require a vocabulary, a subject position, and/or an emotional and embodied state, and not often one young women readily identify with in describing their own experiences and life paths (Harris & Dobson 2015:148).

For example, in the dissertation I employed the girls' voices to shed light on how girls engage with dress codes, victim-blaming and slut-shaming, as part of a curricular program. The way in which the girls, as well as the *Girls Program*, engage these discourses is quite intentionally a discursive resistance. As I have demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5 the girls were provided with the tools, frameworks, and language for interrogating certain grids of intelligibility for framing their lives and subjectivities as gendered subjects. They were offered possibilities to work within, between and through the subjectivizing discourses, to agentially engage these in ways that allowed for alternative forms of embodiment and ways of thinking. As Butler (2014) points out, possibility is not a luxury but is as "crucial as bread [because what] the possible does for those for whom the very issue of survival is most urgent" (Ingrey 2014:282 citing Butler). Possibility is crucial- it means girls can imagine a future that extends beyond the oppressive constraints of their current lives; they can feel legitimated in their feelings of anger and fear, and can find agency in their ability to deny validity to the discourses that blame them for their lot in life and individualize their oppression and connect their

experiences to larger structural discourses; they can see livable lives that are not framed by discourses of disparagement, risk, and stigma.

The intention behind many of the weekly topics is to inculcate in girls a critical understanding of power and privilege, and how these operate to construct gendered, racial, sexual and class identities. When presenting these topics, the facilitators engage girls in questioning where our understandings of the delineations around these identities come from. One of the indicators used in the internal program evaluation of the *Girls Program* is girls' critical thinking, as accessed through the indicator: "questions the world around her and her place in it". The girls and the facilitators are asked to fill out an evaluation post-program. Not including current groups running, the results from the past year are as follows[11]:

Indicators　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Number of Girls**

Questions the world around her and her place in it

F ... 5 ... 14 ... 21
G ... 7 ... 15 ... 29

F Facilitator Observation
G Girls Self Reporting

- A lot better
- A little better
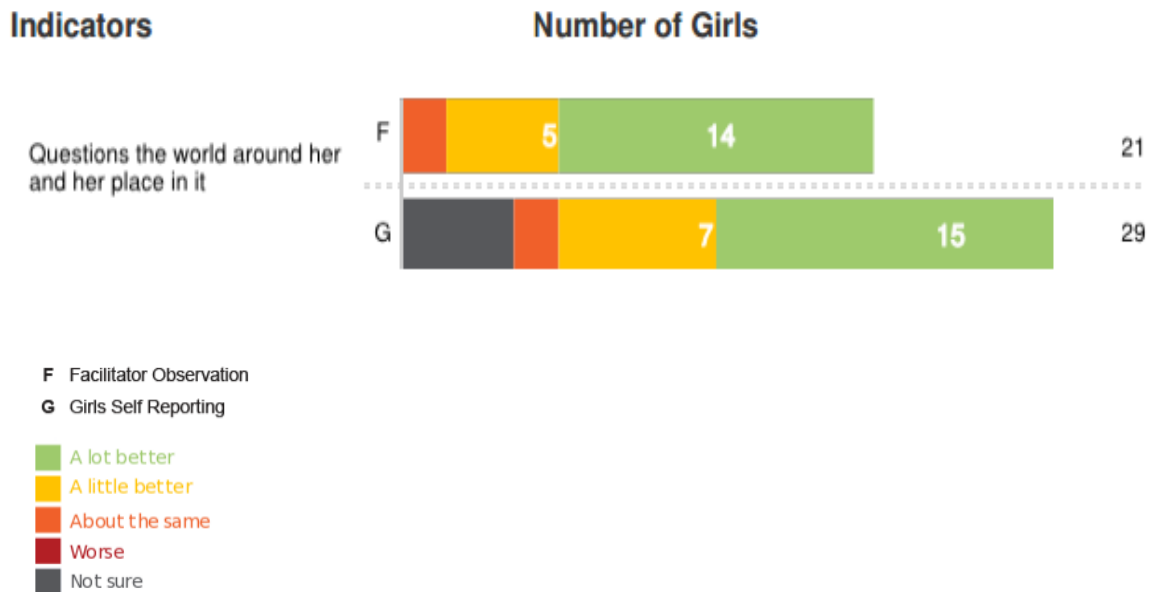- About the same
- Worse
- Not sure

Figure 6 Girls' Evaluations

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[11] The evaluation data cited here was provided as part of the partnership agreement AnnaLise Trudell entered in to with the community organization that runs the *Girls Program*, at the beginning of this doctoral research.

As we can see, 19 of the 21 girls rated their ability to critically question the world around themselves as being a lot or a little better than before they started the program. Similarly, the facilitators rated 22 of 29 girls as a little or a lot better at questioning the world. This is important in that it helps to connect the Program to what this research tells us: criticality feels agential for girls, and the Program helps foster critical thinking through its programming. The inference to be drawn is that if we want to help foster girls' agency, and girls tell us that critical thinking is an important focus of agency, then the *Girls Program* can and should focus on creating the space for girls to develop and share their critical insights and capacities.

I am inspired by the work of Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2002) who use the responses from students that were part of their research as pedagogical text, whereby the student voice becomes text that is incorporated into a critical social justice curriculum. In other words, the girls' voices from this research can be used in a written form in the *Girls Program*, in order to foster discussion around different forms of oppression. Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli offer five points that are illustrated and interrogated through their students' writings:

1. Acknowledging differences within a group as well as diversity between social groups;
2. Exploring the relationships between ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, geographical location and education;
3. Understanding that racism, sexism and homophobia are interconnected;
4. Acknowledging definitions and identities as situationally and historically specific processes in constant flux;
5. Exploring both the adherence to specific identity and community labels but also the ways in which young people resist, subvert and negotiate externally assigned labels (59)

Thus, I can see utilizing the following three quotes, which address dress codes and slut-shaming through different girls' voices and (re)articulating different discourses, to engage *Girls Program* participants around questions 1,2 & 3:

> Participant (FG3): They tell you to dress so many ways though. It's like, you have to dress naked, because it's what guys want, but then if you dress naked you're a slut. […]It's horrible. It's like, don't teach us that we're wrong for dressing how we dress – teach guys to control themselves. ..Like, I'm sorry, do you think with your penis? Like, obviously, because if they have to ban,

like, clothes that show your shoulders, or things that just happen to show the form of your body, like, congratulations, it's a body! If my ass is distracting to you, I – if it helps, I take a crap outta that! All the time.

[Talking about the social effects of a girl sleeping with a lot of guys] Participant (FG1): Because she's showing that her body, that she wants her body to be used for that. And she's not saving it for that one person that she thinks she's going to be with. She gives it to other people, she's showing them like, hey I need sex, I don't have a boyfriend, I need you, or like…

[Referencing a friend who is sexually active] Participant (FG1): She's not like, you know, like dressing like slutty, or like or a whore or anything, like that. Like you see her, she wears like jogging pants and like. Like she dresses like a little hobo. We both do, it's okay. So like, you know. It's not necessarily a bad thing to have sex with a lot of people. That's like slut shaming.

Relating to processes of self-identification, particularly discourses on gender and sexual orientation, the following quote would be helpful to unpack and foster discussion in the *Girls Program* particularly for questions 4 & 5:

Participant (FG4): Personally, I'm non-gendered and so I don't feel normal, natural or anything being in, or around others doing regular normal stuff. And so, I don't know, I feel as if, I often get…….. Yes, non-gendered people aren't girls, but I feel like that further extends the margin between me and the average female now… See, that's one thing that scares me. I haven't told my family that I'm non-gendered now. I told my one sister, whose really close, and she was like, "Oh, it's just a phase." It's like, I've felt this way ever since I was a kid – and she understands that I've felt this way ever since I was a kid, but she says, "You were born a girl. You are a girl." And it's just like, what parts you have is different from gender identity, which is a huge thing. I don't know. That's one thing, because I'm pansexual as well, so I feel as though if my family ever found out, there would be that huge stigma against it and they would just not want to be a part of my life. Because they'd be like, "So you're a tranny?"…I just, see it as, I can't group myself into bisexual because I'm also attracted to trans people and everything like that.

The value of using girls' voices as pedagogical text is that it helps to translate complex notions or "theories in accessible, relevant and meaningful ways" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli 2002:54). It looks to involve the girls who participated in this research in effecting actual practice, beyond the bounds of academic writing. Finally, it seeks to offer ways in which the "'written-about' can access the work, identify themselves, and collaborate with [me] in the portrayal of their realities" (ibid). Further work must be done at the level of the *Girls Program* to construct curriculum tools to support this

practice of using girls' voices as pedagogical tools, but the possibilities of this application are exciting.

One last important consideration in using feminist community programs to foster criticality in girls is that we must take heed of the 'incitement to discourse' as another form of governmentality. Positioned within a postfeminist context, "'critical girls' are configured as icons of the kind of feminist agentic and resistant subjectivity seen as possible, and ideal, for 'all' girls to possess" (Harris & Dobson 2015:152). We cannot create new discursive confines, prescribed regulations that require girls to demonstrate or voice their criticality in specific pre-determined ways.

6.4   Limitations of the Study

There were limitations to this study. As discussed in Chapter 3 on my methodological framework, I was intentional in using focus groups as the engagement tool with the girls. Focus groups allow for rich discussion *between* participants, "who build on each other's comments and hold each other accountable for the veracity of what is said" (Linville, Lambert-Shute, Fruhauf & Piercy 2003). Most groups were formed of girls who had previous relationships with one another, having taken a program together. This ensured some degree of familiarity, a lively group discussion, and a communal recall of the experiences they shared in the program. I also chose a smaller number of focus groups and of girls, which meant that transcription was more manageable, and allowed for more in-depth dialogue and participation by each girl. However, there were a few girls in particular who had exceptionally insightful analysis and who had a lot to share- one girl from the 3rd focus group, and one from the 4th. My choice in methodology meant that I could not speak more fully with each of these girls, through one-on-one interviews. This would have allowed more depth to the discussions and likely to the findings. Another interesting approach would have been to ask the girl from FG3 and the girl from FG4 to come and have a discussion together, seeing what collaborative dialogue would emerge from their meeting one another and sharing their experiences.

Another limitation was the one-off nature of the focus groups. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I did not have the time that is required to build a relationship and trust with the girls.

Hosting multiple focus groups with the same group of girls, over a period of time, would have allowed the girls time for reflection. I was aware that the focus groups were not moments of passive in-taking of information on my part, but were an active collective process of learning and a honing of our critical thinking (hooks 1994), for the girls and for me as a facilitator. It helped elucidate our own thinking to ourselves and exposed both me and the girls to new ways of thinking about our experiences as young women and as agents. Had there been multiple moments of interaction, we could have built upon our collective learning and critical thinking, and delved more deeply in to the research questions. Additionally, more interactions would have possibly allowed for greater trust to be built, and for more disclosure of personal experiences of oppression by the girls and then discussion of how they narrated these and navigated them.

As I did not set out to study teen mothers' experience and conceptions of agency, the focus groups in which these experiences arose were on-the-spot learning moments for me in regards to questions and prompts. During the focus groups, I prompted questions and dove in to lines of thought that were based purely on what the teen mothers were saying which necessitated further engagement with existing literature in the field. For example, I became aware of the literature on teenage pregnancy post-focus groups, and was made aware of the urgency of the form of knowledge production we were engaged in, given that "the failure of research in this field to present more than a one-dimensional picture which largely reflects the dominance of quantitative studies that are unable to capture the thoughts and feelings of teenage mothers themselves" (Wilson and Huntington 2006: 64). Most research on teen motherhood does not center the voices of the mothers themselves. These conversations were incredibly important, and it would have been useful to engage the teen mothers through focus groups that were solely for them in terms of discussing their experiences of agency. It would have been helpful for the analysis in Chapter 5, had I gone in to our discussions with greater knowledge and specific questions, or had I had the chance to organize a follow-up focus group solely for the teen mothers. Unfortunately, time did not permit me to pursue such follow-up investigations.

There are limits to the intersectional analysis that is presented in this dissertation. I did not set out to intentionally ask questions about specific axes of identity and lived experience, and as discussed in Chapter 3, I did not collect demographic data from the girls who participated in the focus groups. As explained, extensive demographic data was not collected as I wanted the focus groups to feel informal and welcoming. I wanted the girls to feel like active participants, not simply subjects of a research study. So often, girls who are less advantaged have to fill out countless surveys and information forms in order to access services. I wanted to ensure that the girls had the choice to reveal the parts of their identities that they wanted to have known, throughout the focus group discussions. Thus, many identity brackets were unknown to me as the researcher unless the girls spoke specifically about those experiences. Based solely on visual cues, there was one girl from a visible minority group, and all girls were able-bodied. Many if not all came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and four girls explicitly identified as something other than purely heterosexual (within the LGBTQ spectrum).

As four girls spoke of their lived experiences as existing on the LGBTQ spectrum, and as 5 girls spoke of their experiences as teen mothers, I was able to provide analysis that delved in to the intersections of these identities. However, I would have liked to explore how girls experienced racism, classism, or other forms of oppression based on identities that were unknown to me. As I relied on the girls to introduce their lived experiences as belonging to certain identities, I did not enable these particular intersectional conversation moments. This is a lesson learned for me, that when designing research questions and focus group guides, consideration be given to how to ask questions in such a way that girls feel they can voice different lived experiences but are not required to 'out' those experiences if they so choose. It is thus a balance between introducing possible avenues of thought to the girls, nudging them to consider whether those avenues resonate with how they experience the world, but also ensuring a safe space that does not require them or pressure them to then 'out' those identities or experiences.

Finally, I had originally hoped to be able to convey the overall research findings to the girls who participated; to provide them with a summary sheet demonstrating the effect of their participation on knowledge creation for both academic and community purposes.

This would help to negate the feeling of having been 'mined' for knowledge that they never get to see (Maguire 2008:420). A core value for feminist participatory research is that it lead to change---one way in which change is defined is through the development of critical thinking (or using Freirean terms, critical consciousness, see Freire 1985) for both the researcher and the participants (Maguire 2008:418), and indeed the focus groups were moments of agential critical engagement themselves. However, it would have been more inclusive to provide the girls with tangible proof of the effect of their words, through a summary sheet. Unfortunately, as is the case with much of community programming, I lost touch with many of the girls after the focus groups. The majority of the groups are held in partnership with existing social services who serve 'at-risk' youth; there is an overrepresentation of lower socio-economic status girls and girls in need of social supports who access programming through social services. Consequently, it is not surprising in some ways that these girls pass in and out of contact, and whose lives are structured in ways that make it further challenging to find the time and resources to remain part of certain communities and groups.

6.5   Reflections on the Struggle for Accessibility in Theory

Throughout the analysis and writing of this dissertation, I have increasingly felt a sense of unease, a struggle with the straddling of two very different worlds. As I sought to interpret the data through a Butlerian post-structural framework, it felt like a slipping, incessant sliding away from accessibility. I began my writing with the intention of producing a text that my mother and my partner could read. I was excited to share the final product with them, for them to delve in to the world I have lived in for the past five years. As I began writing and editing, and editing some more, my mother's and partner's access to my text became less and less feasible. I grieved this. I pushed back during the editing process, the incitement to include greater engagements with the theory, to delve further in to the theoretical analysis; it felt like a slipping further and further from what I could then share with my mother and partner.

I would also sit with my colleagues at the community centre and try to provide them with updates about how my research was progressing, what I was discovering about the *Girls Program*, how this might be helpful in their own practice, and I quite simply could not

translate my academic analyses into accessible language. In part, this is undoubtedly a failure on my part to do the necessary translation work, to put in the analytical labour of transforming words like 'subjectivization', 'discourse', and 'Performativity' in to reachable concepts. How to distinguish the differences between consciousness-raising, a feminist hallmark and a concept familiar to my feminist practitioners, from a critical engagement around 'choice', 'empowerment' and thus agency? This is in no way meant to minimize the intelligence of mother, my partner, and my colleagues for whom an ivory-tower feminist theory is often-times separate from their feminist practice. Nor is it to minimize the importance and utility of the theoretical work engaged in by Butler and other feminist post-structuralist theorists. As I highlight in the section below, *It's Personal*, I have found a sense of possibility through my post-structural critical analysis. However, there was a clear disconnection between the work I was engaged with academically, and the world I was engaged with in community.

As the disconnection became more clear through my process of writing, I felt disenfranchised from academia. The lack of accessibility of much feminist post-structural theory seemed at odds with the feminist value of inclusivity, minimizing power hierarchies that have supported systems of patriarchy, racism, colonialism, heteronormativity etc., and a valuing of lived experience. This is not a new criticism; in fact, it is one we are taught to develop and hone in our undergraduate feminist theory courses. Stanley and Wise (2000) suggest that many feminist theorists want to assume or retain, rather than to demolish, the signifiers of intellectual and academic status (273). They call for a critique of the production of knowledge and for innovative forms of 'feminist theory in another voice' (277). I found myself participating in upholding the signifiers of academic status, disenfranchising and hierarchizing other forms of knowledge and ways of communicating knowledge. Interestingly, in engaging with Stanley and Wise's article, Judith Stacey (2001) states that the fashion selections of the empresses of feminist theory "have become increasingly cumbersome, fussy, restrictive and ostentatious, and I wish she once again would dare to display more sensate flesh" (102). I do not think that this thesis achieved this call to display more sensate flesh. While well intentioned, my forming and tailoring of my analysis to the modes of

communication of academia has in effect meant that I used community programming and girls' voices to produce knowledge that was about them but not for them.

6.6 It's Personal

Research becomes personal when "one is transformed by the research and, therefore, open to its analytical possibilities" (Ingrey 2013:281). I was a girl, and based on some definitions, I still am. This research was personal as it linked to my own processes of subjectivization as a girl, and to my ongoing re-scripting of what it means to sit at the intersection of queer, girly, white, able-bodied, athletic, homebody and public educator in the anti-violence field. I passionately wanted to hear of their experiences of girlhood and their processes of subjectification, having navigated and still navigating identifiers and productive hailings in to certain subjectivities. Through the girls' often-times enviable critical analysis of their subjectivity that sat alongside their contradictory struggles with repressive subjectivizing power, I saw my own subjectivization reflected through their words. More specifically, having come to an outward self-identification as queer well in to my 20s, I was awed by the girl who at 19 could position herself under the banner of non-gendered and pansexual. I admired the mothers who navigated on a daily basis the scripts that positioned them as at-risk and a drain-on-the-system, and yet narrated their teen pregnancies as successes, as moments of pride, as accomplishments. I saw glimpses of myself in the girls who leveraged sarcasm as a tool to engage gender-normative media scripts in a resistant fashion ("Men nipples are allowed. Women nipples are scary nipples!"). Through the emerging understanding that agency was experienced through critical analysis, I reflected on how critical analysis has been my own tool. I have spent 11 years in post-secondary education, pulled again and again to women's studies as the lens from which I have wanted to questioningly engage the world. As I have sought to understand my own processes of subjectivization-how I embody my femininity, how I embody my queerness-I have found a sense of possibility through my post-structural critical analysis. This research has enabled me to name that sense I felt, to position it in a larger theoretical body that is intimately connected to lived experience---it is agency. Aided by the girls' narratives and their analysis, resonating with my experiences, this research has explored how critical thinking and analysis are

agential. Critical thinking cannot be purely theoretical, cannot be caught in the ivory tower and indicted as 'inaccessible post-structural rambling'. Critical thinking as agency is inherently deeply personal for all involved.

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8   Appendices

Appendix 1 Assent Form

Project Title: *Investigating girls' participation in a community-based anti-violence program*

Investigator: AnnaLise Trudell, PhD Candidate, Department of Women's Studies

Principle Investigator: Professor Wayne Martino, Faculty of Education

<u>Assent Form</u>

1. **Why you are here.**
   AnnaLise wants to tell you about a study that will look at the effects on girls of the program.

2. **Why are they doing this study?**
   AnnaLise wants to better understand how to help girls feel strong and powerful, to help them be able to speak up.

3. **What will happen to you?**
   If you want to be in the study two things will happen:

   1.   You will participate in one focus group on the evening of

           _____, for 3 hours. A light snack will be provided. There

           will be at most 5 girls taking part in this conversation.

4. **Will there be any tests?**
   No, there will not be any tests or marks on the report card from this study.

5. **Will the study help you?**
   No, this study will not help you directly but in the future it might help other girls who take part in this program or other girls' programs.

6. **What if you have any questions?**
   You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to the teachers, your family or someone else.

7. **Do you have to be in the study?**

You do not have to be in the study. No one will be made at you if you do not want to do this. I you do not want to be in the study, just say so. Even if you say yes, you can change your mind later. It is up to you.

I want to participate in this study.

Print Name of Child _____

      Date_____

Signature of Child _____   **Signature of Person Obtaining Consent**

Age _____

      _____

Appendix 2 Letter of Information

Project Title: *Investigating girls' participation in a community-based anti-violence program*

Investigator: AnnaLise Trudell, PhD Candidate, Department of Women's Studies

Principle Investigator: Professor Wayne Martino, Faculty of Education

Letter of Information

Invitation to Participate

Your child is being invited to participate in this research study looking at the effects of the program on girls' sense of their own agency. We want to better understand how to promote in girls a sense of their own capacity and the power of their voice to effect change in their own lives. They are being invited to participate because they have taken part in this program, and have unique knowledge to contribute.

Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding your child's participation in this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how girls understand their own agency, or rather their own ability to act in their lives; and how community programming aimed at girls can be used to foster girls' sense of their own empowerment and agency. I want to illuminate the conditions of possibility (what might enable) girls' exercise of power and agency.

Inclusion Criteria

Individuals who have completed the Program are eligible to participate in this study. The conversation to take place will be recorded using an audio recording device.

Study Procedures

If you agree to your child participating, they will be asked to attend a single focus group on the _____, lasting 2 hours. A light snack will be provided.
There will be a total of 5 participants in this group, in addition to myself as facilitator.

Possible Risks and Harms

It is normal to have an emotional reaction, and we will have time to talk about it and resources will be given afterwards for additional supports. Contact information will be available for the Sexual Assault Centre counselling and helpline, the Kids Helpline, and the Children's Aid Society, amongst others. I will ensure that the contact information for these services is put up on a board during the focus groups, and that pamphlets are available to take home. Your child is free to stop their participation at any time if they feel uncomfortable.

Possible Benefits

Your child may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include filling existing gaps in knowledge about girls' agency, and improving the effectiveness of the Program, contributing towards the larger goal of anti-violence programming.

Compensation

Your child will not be compensated for your participation in this research. They will however be given bus tickets for transportation to and from the site of the focus group.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on their future involvement in the community activities and groups they participate in. If your child withdraws in the middle of the focus group, their comments cannot be erased from the tape and they will be included in the study.

Confidentiality

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigator of this study. The data will be stored on a password protected computer or in a locked drawer. If the results are published, your child's name will not be used.

Contacts for Further Information

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your child's participation in the study you may contact AnnaLise Trudell or Professor Wayne Martino, the Principle Investigator.

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics.

Publication

If the results of the study are published, your child's name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact AnnaLise Trudell.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Appendix 3 Parental Consent Form

<u>Parental Consent Form</u>

Project Title: *Investigating girls' participation in a community-based anti-violence program*

Investigator: AnnaLise Trudell, PhD Candidate, Department of Women's Studies

Principle Investigator: Professor Wayne Martino, Faculty of Education

I have read the Letter of Information and I agree to have my child participate in the study. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Child's Name: _____

Parent / Legal Guardian / Legally Authorized Representative Print

Name:_____

Parent / Legal Guardian / Legally Authorized Representative Sign:

_____

Parent / Legal Guardian / Legally Authorized Representative Date:

_____

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

      _____

Signature:

      _____

Date:

      _____

Appendix 4 Recruitment Form

Western
Arts&Humanities

Women's Studies & Feminist Research

SEXUAL ASSAULT
CENTRE LONDON
Our World without sexual violence.

Research Study Recruitment

Have you taken the Girls Creating Change program?

Do you want to help make Girls Creating Change a better program?

Do you want to help us understand how girls' think about agency?

You're invited to participate in a research study because you have taken part in this program, and have unique knowledge to contribute.

Come out for a pizza/candy and a discussion with AnnaLise and other girls who have been part of Girls Creating Change. You'll get bus tickets to get to the group, and it will last 3hrs.

This research study is looking at the effects of the Girls Creating Change program on girls' sense of their own agency, using focus groups that will be audio recorded as well as previously obtained pre/post program questionnaires. The research study is part of the Doctoral Thesis research project of AnnaLise Trudell, in Women's Studies & Feminist Research, at Western University. The research is done in collaboration with Sexual Assault Centre London, at which AnnaLise is the Program Coordinator of Girls Creating Change. Professor Wayne Martino from the Faculty of Education at Western University is the Principle Investigator.

Appendix 5 Curriculum Overview

The Program is a 10-week discussion group for young women to discuss issues important to them. These include:

- gender identity and what it means to be a woman
- self-esteem
- boundaries and being assertive
- healthy sexuality
- power/privilege and its effects on our lives
- violence, self-harm and bullying
- leadership and taking action

Towards the end of the program, we move towards a focus on action and empowerment-ways in which young women can take action in their lives to promote healthy relationships and to stand for a cause/belief they identify as important. Instead of viewing girls as victims, the program helps young women find their voice and use it.

This group provides a safe space for young women to engage in meaningful dialogue about important topics that impact their everyday lives. These issues are relevant when it comes to creating the tools women need to experience healthy relationships and to addressing gender-based violence in their own lives and the lives of people they know. We have offered the program in a various settings including schools, community centers and libraries.

Participant feedback reveals that the young women who have participated in the Program experience improved self-confidence and greater awareness and understanding about the topics discussed in the group. Many have stated that they felt better able to differentiate between a healthy and unhealthy relationship, felt more knowledgeable about what to do if they (or someone they know) are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, felt more capable of communicating their needs and feelings, and felt more aware of self-esteem and body image issues and the impact of negative representations of women in the media. Furthermore, many participants stated that because of the conversations they had had in the group they now felt better informed and more capable and comfortable talking about these important issues with others – which can lead to even more meaningful conversations about healthy relationships beyond the program.

The group is designed for a maximum of ten young women as an after school activity. The participants will not necessarily be survivors of violence. The group facilitator will be available two weeks prior to the starting date in order to meet prospective group members and to answer questions they might have.

Rationale for the Program

Our program values and focuses are:

- Feminist
- Inclusive
- Community building
- Awareness and critical consciousness raising
- Making connections
- Taking action and making change

Goal: This program is aimed at providing a space in which girls can develop and express agency. When one possesses agency they are able to freely and critically act and choose in their lives, in a way that is not limited by things like gender expectations. In order to develop this form of agency one must come to not only realize the conditions that limit them, but also the role they play in maintaining those conditions. It is for this reason that the program aims to provide space in which a critical lens and perspective can be developed and practiced.

Framing: This program has been developed from the understanding that the participants involved are themselves the experts on their own lives. This means the contents of the program must come from them in order to be relevant. While the outline provided may seem too structured to allow for this, it is expected that facilitators will adjust the program and its contents according to the group they are working with. The program is very flexible and is meant to address the interests and needs of the specific group participating – facilitators have the freedom to design each week accordingly.

There is a strong need in this community for preventative and risk-reduction programming. In the healthy relationships programs delivered by the agency in the past year, almost 60% of the girls identified an experience of sexual violence. This is a staggering statistic. There needs to be a strategy that connects girls to community supports. There are so many skill deficits in addition to pressures on young vulnerable and at-risk women in many of the neighborhoods. These include peer pressure and the need to fit in, lack of problem-solving skills and inability to think critically, pressures on newcomer girls to adapt but also to maintain their cultural values, lack of knowledge about sexual violence, as well as how to build and create healthy relationships and boundaries.

The goal of the program is to empower young women with the information, knowledge and skills they need in order to build healthy relationships and a strong sense of self. The program is flexible in delivery in order to meet the particular needs of the respective groups.

Group Program Outcomes

100% of participants from previous girls' programs state that they would recommend the program to someone they know.

Based on facilitator assessments and girls' self-evaluations:

67% of girls have a strong capacity to speak up about issues that are important to her and tell when she thinks something is unfair (vs. 17% at the beginning of the program)

50% of girls have a strong capacity to question the world and her place in it (vs. less than 10% at the beginning of the program)

67% of girls have a strong capacity to pick themselves up and try again when things don't work out

Programming

Session 1: Welcome & Introduction to the Program
Session 2: Who Am I - Gender Identity, Self-esteem and Body Image
Concepts: what is gender (vs. sex), self-esteem, media influence on both
Gender stereotypes: what does it mean to be a woman?
                what does it mean to be a man?
                in a relationship, what do you expect of your partner?
                what does your partner expect of you?
Session 3: Girls in the Media, Rape Culture and Agency
Session 4: Healthy Relationships and Consent
Concepts: what are boundaries, why do we need them, what is an unhealthy/healthy relationship, what is assertiveness and how is it often portrayed for women?
Session 5: Violence and Power
Concepts: Myths vs. realities of sexual assault, different forms of violence, stats, what is power, sources of power, what empowers you, what disempowers you
Session 6: Strong Body, Strong Mind
-Guest presenter Emma O'Connor, owner and personal trainer at Femme Force Fitness, comes in to do team building, healthy body strength activities
-the goal is not to frame this as a self-defense course, but to look at how our bodies can be things other than tools for beauty…they are strong and capable
Session 7: Sexuality and Sexual Agency
Concepts: discussion of sexual intimacy, different kinds of sexualities including LGBTQ, and manipulation of condoms in order to demystify sex words and encourage voice/empowerment
Session 8-10: Let's Take Action!
Concepts: What is a leader? What is a strong woman (disrupt exclusively dominant stereotypes of what that might look like)? What does it mean to have agency? What would you change in your life?
Let's make it happen.
Over the past 7 weeks, hopefully the girls will have shown some interest or passion for a particular issue or topic. Have a group discussion as to what issue(s) the girls would like to speak out on? How would they like to take this action, in what form?

Ideas in the past for action have included:
-making a public service type video
-chalking in a park in their community
-creating posters to hang in their community centre/school

-making T-Shirts with individual messages on them for the girls to take home
Session 9: Let's Take Action!
Implement the action.
Session 10: I Am Awesome! Evaluation and Taking Action

Curriculum Vitae

Name: AnnaLise Trudell

Post-secondary   Western University
Education and   London, Ontario, Canada
Degrees: 2005-2009 H.B.A.

University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
2009-2011 M.A.

Western University
London, Ontario, Canada
2011-2016 Ph.D.

Related Work   Program Coordinator
Experience   Feminist Community Agency
2012-2016

Teaching Assistant
Western University
London, Ontario
2011-2015