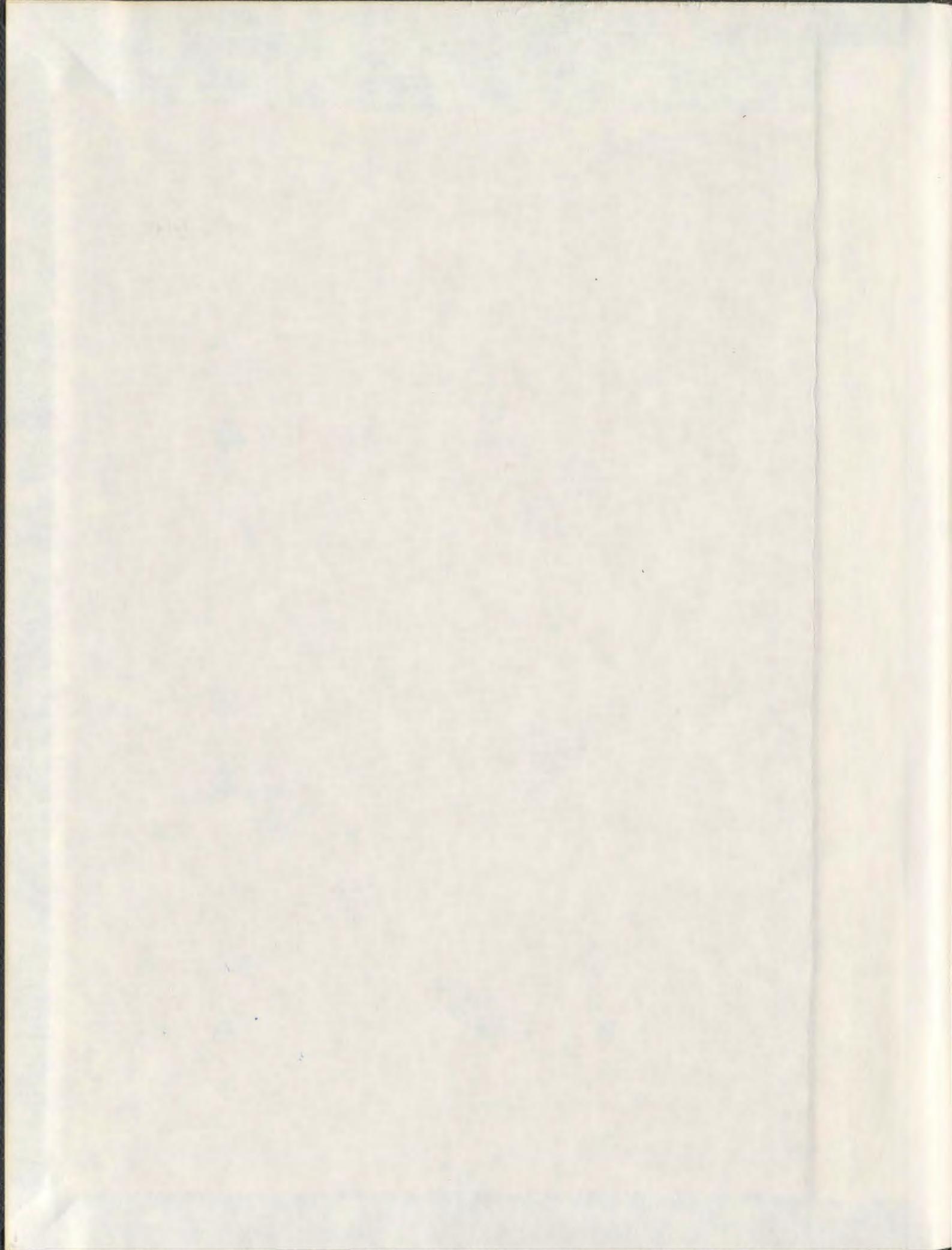
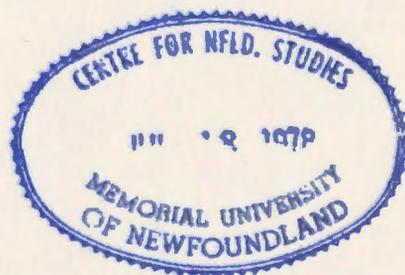


SHE HITS LIKE A GIRL:
CONTEXTS AND CONSTRUCTS OF FEMININITY,
USE OF VIOLENCE AND LIVING IN GROUP HOMES

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**She Hits Like a Girl: Contexts and Constructs of Femininity,
Use of Violence and Living in Group Homes**

By
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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Work
Memorial University of Newfoundland
May 2008

St. John's, Newfoundland

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Abstract

Public and scholarly interest in youth violence has steadily increased over the past twenty years, as governments and communities strive to address concerns regarding the safety and wellbeing of its citizens. In Canada, the tragic beating death of Reena Virk in 1997 prompted an emphasis on girls' use of violence in particular. Media representations and their resulting public anxiety often represent a chasm between popular and professional understandings of these behaviours and their use by girls, given that outward acting, physically aggressive behaviour conflicts with popular notions of what it means to be female. Further, theoretical constructs for understanding violence have been based on ontological and epistemological positions that take the male experience, literature, and research as normative.

This qualitative study explored the perspectives and interpretations of 22 young women, ages 14 to 24 years, regarding their experiences of being female, using violence, and living in residential settings. The data suggest that these girls are continually negotiating the terms of what it means to be female, shaping and being shaped by gender stereotypes, role models, interactions with boys, and the ongoing scrutiny of other girls as extensions of themselves. Further, the data suggest that girls fight each other based on principles of loyalty, morality and justice, and to convey specific messages about their relationships with boys, being verbally maligned, and having their personal possessions stolen. Finally, navigating the living space is an ongoing and intricate process for these girls. Understanding the requirements of the physical setting, the formal and informal rules, and the shifting dynamics of staff and residents, ensures that the living context is never fully known.

Analyzing the data in relation to the literature, this study theorizes that these girls are raised according to discourses of choice yet experience material and discursive constraints; that they are watching and being watched in a state of perpetual surveillance; and that they are continually bargaining femininity, neither resisting femininity nor embracing masculinity in their use of violence.

Acknowledgements

I thank each person who has facilitated the development of this project over the years, from initial experiences and ideas through to this piece of the puzzle. Questions, challenges, debates, and affirmations from my first entry into the field of social work have all contributed to my consciousness and conceptualizations evident herein.

To the young women who reflected generously and poignantly on your lives, thank you for exploring your experiences with me and challenging me to understand life in your skin. I am deeply grateful for all that I have learned from each of you.

To my thesis supervisor, Leslie Bella, I thank you for your consistent diligence and timely attention to me and to this work. I appreciate your rigorous review of my drafts and your calm wisdom in moving through the processes required. To my committee members, Sybille Artz, Jeff Karabanow, and Rosonna Tite, thank you for your thoughtful review of my work from proposal to thesis. The contribution of your collective expertise has been invaluable.

I acknowledge with gratitude the financial support of the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation through the Student Research Awards program.

To my cohort colleagues in the MUN PhD program, Anna, Carole, Bernie, John and Gail, I thank you for your warmth, humour, and emotional and instrumental support over the past five years. This entire process has been made stimulating and enjoyable through the friendships we have formed.

And to my family, who provide me with the foundation upon which I move down any path in my life, I complete this project because of you. It is the example of my parents, Pam and Doug Brown, which has inspired and shaped my politics and my passions, and it is in being an example to my children, Jack and Hannah, and to all young people, that I sustain them. It is the bonds of sisterhood and friendship that keep me grounded. And, Mark, it is your unwavering belief in me that puts everything within reach.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Evolution of the Study

The genesis of this thesis began many years ago when I was working in a group home for homeless youth. This reflection is from my personal experience with one particular young woman who I refer to as Sarah¹ in this story.

¹ Throughout this thesis, all names for persons, locations, agencies and facilities have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and assure anonymity.

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I remember Sarah distinctly. She was 16 and living in a group home where I worked. She was tall and looked people in the eye when she spoke. She described herself as a 'fighter', and indeed it seemed she was ready to take on anyone, verbally or physically, any time. She got in fights at school and was timed out of the facility on a regular basis for pushing and verbally threatening residents, throwing things when angry, and being in close physical proximity to staff while yelling. She seemed to have a 'hard' edge to her, often anticipating conflict and verbally abrasive with her housemates, social worker, teachers, and the youth care workers of the program. She was articulate and assertive in taking a stand related to rules of the house, the control she felt we had over her life, her experience within her relationships, and even how the group home choir should practice for an upcoming performance. She had a physically rough relationship with her male partner, including wrestling and pushing of each other, which made us all quite nervous, thinking that it might get 'out of hand' and Sarah might get hurt.

In my relationship with Sarah, I felt as though she tested me with every decision, in a manner I found to be confrontative and unpleasant. Yet I was also aware in the back of my mind that what I saw in Sarah was an ability to speak for herself that should not be squashed out of her; that although I wanted her to be interested in a relationship with me and more compliant with 'the rules', these attributes might not serve her as well in the world as those I was actually witnessing. It was through Sarah that I began questioning implications for compliance with conventional femininity, meanings and forms of resistance, and the politics of working with girls in residential settings.

Working in frontline service in residential facilities for youth for fifteen years, I met many young women much like Sarah. In staff groups, we struggled with how to work with young girls who expressed themselves through verbal and physical aggression, and frequently I sensed that we were not serving them well. We understood when the boys would punch and hit, kick the wall and throw the television; we generally intervened by engaging the boy in physical sport, using the punching bag or throwing the football. This we understood. This was expected of boys, to act out physically, to both feel rage and need to expel energy in this overt way. But when the girls would fight the staff or other girls, we were stymied. Young women who engage in violent behaviours, be they verbal

or physical, throw a challenge to gender binaries that form a cornerstone of Western thought and demand an either/or set of options. Here is a person who inhabits a female body yet engages in behaviours we have come to associate with boys. How are we to work with her? We would generally seek to engage her in quiet conversation about her feelings, for we anticipated she would be interested in one-on-one time wherein we could nurture a trusting, reciprocal relationship. More and more, the response was an increase in aggression and a clear message that our assumption that she was seeking care and nurturance was dead wrong.

My experience has been that when girls become violent in group care settings, we have two tasks before us: we have to 'manage' the aggressive behaviour and we have to face a challenge to our conceptions of female behaviour and dominant social norms of femininity. We may be struck by the experience that the concepts of caring and relationships we have come to associate with girls seem to be absent. Violent behaviours are beyond the 'natural order of things' and thus are doubly problematic (L.M. Brown, 2003).

Beyond my own experiences in the field, in the past ten years since the tragic beating death of Reena Virk, in Victoria, BC, media attention in Canada has maintained an interest and focus on sensational events involving girls' use of violence, from harassment and bullying, to assault and murder, contributing to a sense of moral panic on the part of the public (Moretti, Odgers & Jackson, 2004). For both male and female youth, the formal code for responses to criminal charges in Canada is the Youth Criminal Justice Act, which mandates a move toward community based placements and programs rather than incarceration for crimes (Department of Justice, Canada, 2002). This mandate has been scrutinized by citizens concerned about their neighborhoods.

Underneath the public concern and anxiety, and directly relevant for those in fields of practice from clinical settings to policy making, there is a chasm between popular and professional understandings of these behaviours and their actual use by girls. Outward acting, physical behaviour conflicts with popular notions of what it means to be female (Batacharya, 2004; L.M. Brown, 2003; Gonick, 2004; Lamb, 2001), and theoretical constructs for understanding violence have been based upon ontological and epistemological positions that take the male experience, literature, and research as normative (Artz, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998). One result is that first voice accounts of being female and using violence, and their rigorous analysis and interpretation, are absent.

This qualitative study sought to explore these paradoxes, which hinge on disruptions to ideologies of conventional femininity. In this study I sought to build understanding 'from the ground up' about how being a girl and violence are understood by young women who are involved in its use and, specifically, about the impact of living in the context of residential care on their understandings and choices. I asked about facets and expectations of femininity that often are hidden, subversive, and assumed. Together the young women and I picked apart definitions, experiences and expressions of violence, detailed their contexts and sought to understand the role of violence in their lives and in the decisions they have made. We discussed expectations the girls feel while living in group care situations. Ultimately, we explored relationships among these three strands of life, to find where and when and why they overlap and what the meanings and implications are when they do.

1.2 The Methodology

The research question for this study focused on subjective experiences and meanings as transformative for political, theoretical and social domains. This focus is congruent with the paradigm of qualitative inquiry, which accepts socially constructed and interpreted realities, localized stories, and complex, layered meanings and experiences as the bases for understanding cultural practices and effecting social change. Grounded theory methods were used to explore and theorize the relationships among being female, using violence and living in residential, group home settings. Simultaneous processes for sampling, data collection and analysis were engaged, with an explicit emphasis on examining the emergent social processes involved as co-constructed interpretations involving the research participants and myself as the researcher. This process began with descriptive data from the participants' lived experiences and extended beyond both the description and the actors to engage their ideas and develop analyses of the construction of their meanings and actions. Contrary to classic grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) I have not concluded on a substantive theory; rather I have engaged in a *process of theorizing* the meanings, actions, and experiences as they have been (re)presented to me and interpreted by me. Ultimately, the goal was to understand how being female, using violence and living in group home settings are linked for these young women at this time in their lives.

1.3 Listening to the Girls

Deciding to engage young women who currently live or recently lived in residential settings and who have been labeled as 'violent' as the core informers of this research is a political act, because it centres the voices and experiences of a population frequently on the margins of social life and social discourse. Young women living in group care are

already labeled as 'other', as outside the mainstream. These are the 'bad' girls, distinct from the 'good' girls who presumably remain in their family homes, don't get angry, and don't fight. Evaluating girls as either good or bad, nice or mean, reinforces a dualism that the girl can only be one or the other, and undermines a process toward self knowledge, a sense of personal power and promise, and health in the broadest terms. Maintaining the dualism of 'this or that' leaves out the in-between, gray areas of diverse and shifting emotion, behaviour and identity, where most of us actually live. Marginalizing girls who are considered tough and outspoken, non-compliant, and violent entrenches the idea that femininity looks and behaves only a certain way.

The participants interviewed for this study expressed their comfort in my variable use of the terms 'girl', 'young woman' and 'young female' in talking with them and writing about this research. These expressions are used interchangeably throughout the study "as much for stylistic reasons as for the political implications of the terms" (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005:6). The history and political context of the terminology used for girls and women is reviewed in the Literature Review (Chapter 2).

This research sought to understand the lived experiences of girls as acting subjects within their social, material worlds; how they make decisions within, and sense of, their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about gender identity and performance, violence, and living in residential settings, interchangeably referred to as group homes. These young women have offered articulate, insightful, deeply disturbing and profoundly hopeful accounts of their lives, and I have felt privileged to be a witness to this step along their journey.

When I embarked on this study, I had some ideas, rooted in my own experiences, of how the threads of girlhood, violence and living in group care might

interweave. In the forefront, I considered that girls who use violence are acting back against constraints of conventional femininity and that the group setting reinforces compliance with conventional scripts for femininity. These premises emanated from my personal and professional experiences within the field. As I explored the literature I found support for the first of these assumptions, with the literature largely silent on gendered experiences within residential settings.

The narratives of the participants soon sent me in new directions of thinking, with their very clear assertions regarding the contexts for their decisions to fight. First, the scripts of conventional femininity were largely irrelevant for these girls. Thus, their involvements in violence were not connected to rejection of such scripts. Indeed, they already felt beyond almost any normative expectations, and those of femininity were no different and thus not a factor in their decision making. Their project was not that of reconstructing femininity, but rather of continually constructing and reconstructing the self through performing femininity/ies according to a wide definition. Heterosexual adherence, however, remained a central anchor. Second, scrutinizing other girls is a constant venture, particularly within the transparency of group home life, where, as a matter of survival, rules and relationships are continually navigated and negotiated. Third, fighting is a means of communication and self expression according to very specific terms, with a clear sense of one's role in a fight.

The metaphor of weaving a tapestry is invoked here to capture the complex relationships among being female, using violence, and living in group care. First, there is nothing linear about current tapestries and there is no sense of any one thread dominating another. While there are common threads that run throughout all the stories, each is uniquely distinct, with differences in hue and texture, breadth and width,

complexity and technique. The journey has meant talking about each strand in each participant's tapestry, with my being an apprentice at the loom of its weaving. The task of this study was to theorize how the strands come together, what makes them hold, and how they withstand the stretching and manipulation of constant use.

1.4 Significance and Limitations of the Study

Until the past ten years or so, the study of use of violence and aggression in adolescence has focused on the prevalence and contributing factors relevant for boys (Alder & Worrall, 2004; Artz, 1998; Brown, 2003; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Moretti et. al., 2004a; Underwood, 2003). This body of work has made two assumptions: first, that girls do not use violence or aggression and a more appropriate focus is on the *sexual* risk-taking of girls (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Godfrey, 2004; Schaffner, 2004); and second, in keeping with much other research in 'traditional' frameworks, that the research findings relevant to boys are transferable to girls (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Miller & White, 2004), as evidenced by homogenized 'youth violence' prevention programs. As a result of these assumptions, theorizing the use of violence by girls has continued within a small circle of scholars influenced primarily by feminist and gender theories. First-voice accounts of violence and interpretations of their meanings have been few, and the importance of social context, social constructions, and systemic inequalities have been largely absent from the literature (Alder & Worrall, 2004; Artz, 1998). Within the past decade, however, stimulated by increased public alarm and sensational media coverage of violent events (Alder & Worrall, 2004; Moretti et. al., 2004a), a concentrated effort has begun to investigate and theorize the incidence, forms, contexts, and implications of girls' use of violence.

Early efforts in this regard developed the concept of 'relational aggression' (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), which was built on the thesis put forward by Gilligan (1982) that girls come to know and define themselves through processes of negotiating relationships with individuals and social groups, and thus aggression is manifested through relationship (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Simmons, 2002; Underwood, 2004). The focus was thus on a different *form* of aggression than observed in boys. More recently, causal factors for use of violence by girls have been theorized, including rejection sensitivity (Downey, Irwin, Ramsay & Ayduk, 2004); hormonal changes of adolescence (Underwood, 2003); insecure attachment (Moretti, DaSilva & Holland, 2004); inflated role of peer relationships in teenaged years (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004); and the 'search for equivalence' in male power (Worrall, 2004). While this research on causal factors adds to the picture of use of violence by girls, the literature reflects only sporadically the subjective meanings and interpretation of involvement in violence from the lived experiences of girls (see Burman, Batchelor & Brown, 2001 for an exception). Earlier research has taken place in incarceration facilities (Sangster, 2001; Worrall, 2000), with gangs (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Miller & White, 2004), in the public domain of streets and sidewalks (Pearce, 2004), through community organizations (Burman et. al., 2001) and in schools (Artz, 1998; 2004b). The unique setting of residential care has not been studied or theorized.

This exploration contributes to the generation of knowledge regarding the phenomena under study - constructions of femininities, expressions and meanings of violence, and living in residential settings - in that it applies and extends knowledge accumulated throughout the past decades from the fields of girlhood studies, juvenile delinquency and residential youth care. As detailed in the Literature Review (Chapter 2),

this study is sensitized by the theoretical groundwork provided by previous writings and draws on some conceptual understandings from previous research. However, by conducting this research in a new setting (residential care) with a new group of girls, and in a new temporal space, the interpretations of this study have contributed to the evolution of theory, offering a platform from which future studies can launch. These points of significance are underscored by Marshall & Rossman (1989) who note, “[t]he development of theory takes place by incremental advances and small contributions to knowledge through well-conducted and well-conceptualized research” (33).

Given the shifting landscape on which services are developed and delivered, practitioners and policy makers alike may have interest in this inquiry. The current context of economic managerialism is operationalized in the shrinking of the social safety net (Ife, 1997). Community practitioners, including social workers, youth care workers, educators, advocacy workers and street-front agency workers are left to respond to casualties, in this case, to girls who are involved with violence. A program of research that offers theoretical conceptualizations grounded in first voice data, as opposed to rooted in the agendas of the powerful elite, can be useful in the development of responses both in direct practice and in informed policy. This study can contribute to community level solutions for the practical issue of how to understand girls who use violence, which in turn can lead to concrete interventions based on these understandings. Programs built on and led by critical inquiry, as opposed to social control, cost containment and fear, have a more likely opportunity to address the needs underlying the behaviours. The mandate of the Youth Criminal Justice Act to decrease incarceration for youth crime is marching forward and community practitioners require

resources to respond attentively and effectively. This study contributes fundamental knowledge for this task.

In addition, the Literature Review (Chapter 2) reveals that the field of residential care tends today to homogenize the experiences of “troubled youth” such that understandings and interpretations of gendered experiences are diluted or muted. Residential settings are often the first repositories for girls who are ‘acting out’ in family and school settings and are considered logical alternatives to incarceration. This research may hold significant interest for workers within this sector who seek to analyze the gendered and socio-cultural context of this organizational setting.

A final and perhaps most compelling justification for this study is that in the last ten years the study of girls and violence has moved from a dearth of empirical material to a preponderance of new information on risk and protective factors “sometimes in the absence of theoretical frameworks for integrating and understanding results” (Underwood, 2004: 240). This study contributes to the development and understanding of conceptual frameworks by building theory inductively, through an empirical, subjective exploration with girls who use violence and live in residential care. The methodology used in this study centres the voices of the participants in naming the social processes, meanings, actions and choices that are prevalent to them, embracing divergence of opinion and reconceptualization of the constructs under study. Unique attunement to the voices of the participants is key to extending our understandings, exposing assumptions and theorizing the emergent analyses.

At the same time, this study has limitations. First, while the methodology proposed two meetings with each participant, this was possible with only five of the 22 participants, largely due to the transience of the population and the shifting priorities in

their lives. Second, this study offers one snapshot in the lives of the participants.

Engagement over a longer period of time, though challenged by the first limitation, might have allowed for a more meaningful collaboration with the girls, possibly leading to a longitudinal examination of their gender identity and performance, their involvement in violence, and the trajectory of their lives through residential settings. The reach of the interpretations would have been extended had we engaged over a longer period of time.

Finally, a limitation of this study refers to the “intersectional analyses” (Harris, 2004) of race and class, an important analytic component that is explored in the Findings (Chapter 6) and Discussion (Chapter 7). I believe my intersectional analyses would have been enhanced by my working with an interpretive community (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) of other researchers who reflect social locations and identity markers different than my own. I was aware of the limitations of my experiential lens even as I sought to work without borders to my ideological lens. Interpreting and theorizing in collaboration with girls and women who more closely occupy the experiences discussed by the participants, and involving the participants themselves more with the interpretations and theorizing, I believe would have broadened the reach and depth of this research.

1.5 Outline of Subsequent Chapters

This thesis continues with a substantive Literature Review, presented in Chapter 2. The system of residential care services in Nova Scotia is contextualized in Chapter 3 and the Methodology, both process and content, is detailed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 reviews key analytic terms that serve as organizing concepts for the ensuing interpretations of the data. The findings, interpreted through my analysis of the data, are presented in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7 the findings are further theorized in relation to the literature,

implications for policy and practice are discussed, and suggestions for future research are offered.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The parameters of this literature review are informed by my ideological orientation that critical inquiry into the historical and contemporary contexts and discourses within which girls grow up can illuminate often unseen layers of human action and interaction. Thus, this chapter begins broadly, examining the history and debates surrounding the term 'girl'. Next I place this study of girl violence within the wider field of girlhood studies and available discourses of growing up female. Subsequently I review the socio-political context within which girls are growing up in western societies today. These contextual layers are laid down prior to narrowing the focus on definitions and prevalence of girl violence; considering causation; reviewing socio-cultural factors, and finally, assessing the literature on residential settings.

2.2 Defining the Girl

Embarking on a study with girls assumes a coherent and straightforward definition of the term 'girl', a term variously theorized and with both rich discursive possibilities as well as varied material manifestations.

In traditional developmental psychology, 'girlhood' was typically subsumed under 'childhood' as a straightforward advancement up the maturational ladder, through adolescence on to adulthood (for example, Erikson, 1980; Piaget, 1963; 1965; 1977). Consistent with modernist theoretical models and in concert with biological development, sequential and fixed stages carry universal, normative expectations (Aapola et. al., 2005). When sex specified, they correspond with physiological changes. This standardization of development erases race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and ability; or rather more critically, assumes a template that is Eurocentric, middle class,

heterosexual, and able-bodied (Aapola et. al., 2005; Jiwani, Steenbergen & Mitchell, 2006). With reciprocal reinforcement, this template becomes a prescription for normalcy.

Traditional developmental psychology has also constructed adolescence around ideals of masculinity, where independence, risk taking, troublemaking, and autonomy are the markers of successful passage (Leblanc, 1999). Thus the construction of adolescence stands in contrast to the construction of femininity and, given that dualisms always maintain hierarchies (Butler, 2004) and patriarchy is the prevailing social pattern, femininity is deemed inferior. "Youth culture presents masculine norms that are incompatible with, indeed contradictory to, those of femininity" (Leblanc, 1999:137).

In the past 25 years, however, work led by feminist academics has conceptualized female experience and development and the path toward adulthood as historically, socially, politically and culturally constituted. For example, Wilson (1977) discusses the manipulation of women's social roles for the political purposes of upholding capitalism. Tronto (1993) points to the social needs of the industrial revolution as the origin for gendered constructions of caring. Godfrey (2004) reviews how, a century ago, the sexual risk taking behaviours of girls were managed according to the cultural codes of the day. The work of these and other scholars challenges the idea that there is any 'natural' developmental course for girls and women that innocently unfolds independent of context and its demands (Jiwani et. al., 2006).

As a political statement, second wave feminists promoted the use of the term 'woman' or 'young woman' for any female of menstruating age, so they would be taken as a mature and serious contributor to adult life (Aapola et. al., 2005). More recently, however, the word 'girl' has been reclaimed by young females who seek to make

distinctions of their own, in the public sphere. Use of the term 'girl' recognizes the androcentric homogenization of gender under the category of 'youth' (Fine, 1988; Hey, 1997) and the blurring of ages under 'women's studies' (Harris, 2004). Beyond those boundaries, however, understandings can be diverse and transient. There are official age designations, popular definitions of the category, and variable and overlapping usages of the term 'girl' according to one's politics and positioning. In critical girlhood studies, however, the effort is to problematize all the assumptions couched under the term, expose them to scrutiny, and address their politics, all the while maintaining the complexities of identity the contested label appropriately reflects (Aapola et. al., 2005; Jiwani et. al., 2006).

This politic of critical girlhood studies is captured well by Griffin (2004), who asserts that "there is nothing essential about girlhood; it is always produced and negotiated (by us all, but especially by girls) in particular historical and political moments" (29). Being a girl is individually and collectively produced and reproduced, always shifting, neither static nor linear. Girls negotiate their identities rather than 'take up' that which is given and construct themselves against that which they are not, thus always invoking the 'other' (Aapola et. al., 2005).

Constructing oneself against the 'other' signifies recognition of difference, which brings into sharp relief the material and discursive contexts of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and ability (Harris, 2004). Girlhood scholars posit that girls are always constituted by and through these identity markers, not according to an additive formula, but rather as integrated facets of life (Aapola et. al., 2005; Harris, 2004; Jiwani et. al., 2006). Their intersections are complex and particular. Eisenhauer (2004) captures this organizing premise when she states that a 'girl' is "not simply something that someone *is*

(a question of being and ontology), but... something that one is discursively constituted as" (79), through cultural norms and practices that are uniquely located.

Recognizing the boundaries and possibilities of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and ability means not only that a monolithic and universal experience is fiction, it also acknowledges that constructions of girlhood have never been equally available to all girls. For example, Gonick (2006) extends Butler's work (1999) in her analysis of how queer girls are excluded from the social constructions of girlhood. Walkerdine, Lucey & Melody (2001) focuses on how the discourse of feminized fields of work shrouds the class based requirements for these fields. Downe (2006) discusses how memories of the child welfare '60's scoop' of Aboriginal children into residential schools and the painfully slow dismantling of colonialist federal legislation continue to affect Aboriginal girls in their beliefs about possibilities for the future. The point is also evidenced in the work of Chesney-Lind (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004) as she details the variable public perceptions of girls who use violence when those girls are, respectively, Black, Latina, and white.

Who are the girls, then? They are everybody and nobody all at once, for as soon as we call them into being, they slip out from under our stories that seek to describe and deconstruct (and in so doing extend) the discourses that structure their lives. This interactive and iterative social process understands "the relationships between the discourses of girlhood and the identities of girls" (Aapola et. al., 2005:3).

2.3 The Sad, the Mad and the Bad: Contemporary Constructions of Girlhood

2.3.1 The Sad Girl

In the United States and Canada, the genesis of the academic field of girl studies is located within the epistemological backyard of Carol Gilligan (1982), whose seminal

work on the moral development of girls and women established new terms of reference in both content and process. Gilligan revealed the substance of the moral development model of Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) as androcentric and therefore not applicable to all human beings. Specifically, Gilligan's empirical research countered Kohlberg's claim that a moral orientation based on justice claims were the goal for mature development by showing that mature women make moral decisions on the basis of an "ethic of care" (Gilligan, 1982). In the process, she exposed sex-biased methodological design, which reflected an epistemological partiality that ignored girls and women (for example, Erikson 1963, 1980; Piaget, 1963; 1965; 1977). The scholarship of the Harvard Project on Women's Development, where Gilligan is based, is politically positioned as centring the voices of girls and women in research, building understanding and analysis inductively from this focus, and exposing the indiscriminate adoption of theories and models that are based on the experiences of boys and men taken to represent humankind (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995).

Gilligan's formulations have influenced a diverse array of disciplines for over 25 years, sparking an entire field of theory and scholarship on an 'ethic of care' (Larrabee, 1993). As much as her work has been endorsed and adopted, it has also been challenged on several levels. First is the concern that Gilligan's orientation romanticizes women as more nurturing, caring and invested in relationships – and thus morally superior - than men, a configuration that has been critiqued as paradoxically upholding patriarchy by reinforcing dualisms of women as emotional and dependent on relationships and men as uncaring and autonomous (Brabeck, 1993; Kerber, 1993). Subscribing to gender essentialist premises in this way, Gilligan's work can be seen as sharing ideological ground with the very people she critiqued (for example, Freud,

Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg) (Kerber, 1993). Nicholson (1993) highlights that, although including two genders in moral development research was an improvement over the uni-dimensional focus on men, *limiting* the possibilities to only two genders does not serve the interests of the broader politics of feminism. In furthering the concerns of dualistic thought, by bringing forward the distinctions between male and female voices, Gilligan has been accused of herself behaving according to 'masculine' norms, emphasizing difference and boundary between men and women (Broughton, 1993). Finally, there are conceptual challenges to Gilligan's formulation, particularly that given her interest in context, Gilligan should have developed a finer critique, addressing race, class and history (Nicholson, 1993) and moving in the directions of virtue, self concept and social context (Flanagan & Jackson, 1993). Tronto (1993) asserts that more helpful would be developing a full theory of care as a universal standard, as opposed to an ethic of care as a gendered concept.

The Harvard Project on Women's Development, where Gilligan has been associated since her graduate studies, has continued work in the field of an ethic of care. Their emphasis is on the psychosocial development of girls aimed to identify and redress oppressions upon young women, both via their exclusion from social processes and within the confines of conventional femininity. The early 1990s saw several publications that followed in this vein, including Brown & Gilligan's *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (1992); Orenstein's *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-esteem and the Confidence Gap* (1994); Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* (1994); and Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan's *Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationship* (1995). These publications emphasize that girls' self esteem and authentic voices are often sacrificed under conventional

expectations and expressions of femininity. Their findings suggest that, as they struggle to make sense of conflicting expectations within interpersonal dynamics, girls are both focused on relationship maintenance and alienated from relationships. This feminist psychology foundation has been consistently influential, particularly in the arenas of education, media studies, women's studies, sociology and social work. The central thesis for all of these books is that girls grow up in a hostile cultural climate that is oppressive to females, sexually charged, and dangerous, circumstances that break them of their pre-teen confidence and splinter their authentic selves into subservient, depressed and alienated versions of the self (for example, Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994). These are the sad girls of contemporary girlhood, epitomizing the "girlhood as crisis discourse" (Aapola et. al., 2005:40).

Central to the interventions posited by these texts is the steadying influence and support of positive relationships with the women in the lives of these girls, either by choice or by circumstance. Ward & Benjamin (2004) observe that the drawing in of adult women and educators invokes a collectivist response. These books and this notion of adult women mentorship found a large popular audience and stimulated a range of girl-focussed initiatives, including programming and camps which are widely available today (US examples include The Ophelia Project, Ophelia Speaks, and Camp Ashema²).

These books and their popular reception have brought much needed acknowledgment of the particularities of life for girls and young women in the everyday patriarchal world. They are central in recognizing gender-specific needs and experiences. At the same time, however, in ways that parallel critiques of second wave feminism, these gains have come at the price of universalizing a portrayal of girls. Early

² The Ophelia Projects can be found at www.opheliaproject.org; information on Camp Ashema can be found in Taft, 2004.

literature ignored race and class as sites for analysis in girls' psychosocial development and academic achievement. For example, in Gilligan, Lyons & Hanmer's 1990 book *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School*, school and relational experiences and maturation processes of white upper-middle class girls at an elite private school were taken as symbolic of those of 'American girls'. This process of assuming homogeneity mirrored the very process of assuming a homogenous, non-sex specified 'mankind' that Gilligan herself had exposed in Kohlberg's formulations. In the process, Eurocentric assumptions and dominance prevailed, disregarding privileges associated with whiteness and social location (Ward & Benjamin, 2004).

Although the overt exclusion of girls of colour and lower socio-economic class was addressed in subsequent publications (for example Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan's *Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationship*, 1995), the issue remains that the lives of girls from a range of backgrounds and present living circumstances are too often conceptualized through a lens saturated with the invisible privileges of whiteness and the entitlements of the middle to upper classes. For example, Walkerdine et. al. (2001) note that in the UK, it was only when researchers started writing from their own underclassed locations that a significant analysis of the lived specificities of class could begin, where "class is lived as an identity designation and not simply as an economic relation to the means of production" (13). Secondly, Chesney-Lind & Irwin (2004) assert that girls who struggle with self esteem and the loss of 'authentic voice' and come from racialized and poor backgrounds are more likely to come to the attention of police and youth courts (and group homes) than the therapeutic treatment facilities available (and amenable) to white girls of financial means.

As a further concern, some scholars question the modernist marker of age-based maturation as the signifier to the onset of these developmental crises, seeking a more fluid, as opposed to developmentally-staged, conceptualization of identity (Aapola et. al., 2005). The implications of promoting biological explanations for distress and the psychologization of social experiences and processes of growing up problematize being female. Pubertal bodily changes within the girl are considered to hold her hostage in terms of emotion, insight, decision making, risk and opportunity. Locating the impetus for anguish and agony within the developing female body naturalizes and individualizes what are socially interactive experiences and contexts. As long as this focus on individual, psychological self improvement remains the target for change, “the underlying structural causes of their emotional, attitudinal and behavioural dispositions and the material differences between girls and the interventions offered to them are unlikely to be addressed” (Aapola et. al., 2005:50).

Finally, and particularly relevant for this study with girls who live in group homes, often in a sequence of out-of-home placements, the intended audience of parents in many of the “girlhood as crisis” texts presupposes a normative family arrangement that ignores the diversity of living circumstances within which young women find themselves. Specifically, Pipher notes:

American girls are expected to distance themselves from parents just at the time when they most need their support. As they struggle with countless new pressures, they must relinquish the protection and closeness they’ve felt with their families in childhood (Pipher, 1994: 27).

This assumption is seen as a limitation in regard to the applicability of the analyses across diverse populations of girls.

2.3.2 *The Mad Girl*

Alongside this discourse of the sad girl in crisis has been the 'girl power' movement, a term both ubiquitous and nebulous, yet originally laced with political purpose and social disruption (Taft, 2004). It originated in 1991, when a day long event in Washington heralded a movement called Riot Grrrls – "girls spelt with a growl" (Driscoll, 1999:179) - comprised of female punk rock bands that experienced exclusion from the sexist male punk rock scene (Jacques, 2001). By the next year the gathering was a three day symposium including not only punk music but also workshops on violence toward women, body image and racism (Jacques, 2001). The movement became popularized as "do it yourself feminism" (Bail, 1996), fusing articulation of gender injustices with use of popular media. Fuelled by outrage over sexism, its basis is a collective and aggressive girl-centred strength attained through the overt manipulation of conventional, confining expectations of femininity (Driscoll, 1999; Jacques, 2001). Websites, gatherings, self-published magazines (or "zines"), t-shirts, and music have all been resources for "paradoxical feminist writing spaces" (Hesford, 1999, cited in Aapola et. al., 2005: 21). Importantly, however, the Riot Grrrl image did not represent, or perhaps even welcome, all resisters to patriarchy. These were young women who were largely daughters of feminists, white, often university educated, and frequently self identified as queer. Girls of colour and girls with (dis)Abilities are largely absent (Aapola et. al., 2005).

The Riot Grrrl message of politicized girl power, a confrontation to male power, was soon to be subverted, as the commodification of their political dissent and all-girl popular music bands appropriated their defiant agenda (Jacques, 2001; Taft, 2004). In so doing an abstraction of this deliberately 'alternative' movement was moved into the

mainstream. Over the objections of the Riot Grrrls foundation (admittedly no longer a unified movement), and with the quick calculation of a potential market, girl power was co-opted as the foundation for Hollywood movies, videogames, television shows, musical acts, clothing slogans, self help books, and girl-based programming (Jacques, 2001; Taft, 2004). Sanitized from its angry girl image, *this* girl power, epitomized by the *Spice Girls* band, does not resemble its originators who aggressed back upon patriarchy and obstructed femininity norms through their music. Rather, Taft (2004) details four discourses that have grown from the promising beginnings of Riot Grrrls and actively dissociate girls from potential political activity: anti-feminism, which actively discourages girls from understanding and engaging in feminism; postfeminism, the position that feminism is no longer necessary; individual power, which rests on personal responsibility and autonomy and dismisses collective relations; and consumer power, which equates empowerment with capacity to purchase. Taft (2004) is clear that these versions of 'girl power' erect "discursive barriers to girls' activism" (77) and undermine broader agendas of sociopolitical change.

2.3.3 *The Bad Girl*

A third discourse on the contemporary girl is that of the 'bad girl', who has taken many forms over the years. For example, the sexually active girl has long been a focus in juvenile justice legislation, welfare programming, and social mores, wherein the sexually liberated girl was equated with the 'bad girl' (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Godfrey, 2004). In contemporary contexts, the bad girl commits violence, ranging on a continuum from indirect and verbal aggression, to direct and physical expressions.

Much like the 'sad girl' books that grabbed public attention in the 1990s, the early 2000s maintained a distinct focus on the 'mean girl'. Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen*

Bees and Wannabees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence (2002); Sharon Lamb's *The Secret Lives of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do – Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt* (2001); and Rachel Simmons' *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (2002) all profile girls as conniving, scheming, aggressing and excluding in their close relationships with their peers. In these texts, jockeying for popularity is the guiding force, as relationships are manipulated to stay on the inside rather than the outside of the social circle.

In this discourse, gendered socialization practices subvert female anger and lead to indirect expression through relationships. Strong cultural disapproval drives female anger beneath the surface, reinforcing the message that 'nice girls' don't feel rage, much less verbalize or physically demonstrate it (Brown, 2003; Lamb, 2001; Pepler, Madsen, Webster & Levene, 2004; Underwood, 2004). This construction is supported by early studies on aggression that linked aggression and testosterone, which concluded that, categorically (essentially), boys and men were predisposed toward competition and aggression as means for survival and women were not (Mackie, 1987). Women were similarly categorized (essentialized) as nurturing and caring (Mackie, 1987). Analysis of the social moratorium upon expression of anger by females is muted by the gender binarist expectation that girls do not get angry. The power of this expectation is evidenced in the discussion above regarding the cleansing of the Riot Grrrl manifesta as it was co-opted by the marketable mainstream.

A corollary to this hormonal evidence, and built upon these gender essentialisms as givens, is the cultural prescription for girls to be socialized to want and be proficient in developing and sustaining interpersonal relationships (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Relationships are thus a central site through which girls come to know how they

are valued in society, reinforced through social feedback (Underwood, 2004). They soon come to know that punishment through this social medium of relationships - that which they are meant to value highly - can be both effective and largely invisible (Underwood, 2004).

Brown & Gilligan (1992) discuss the results of this “psychological foot-binding” (30): girls weigh out the intra- and interpersonal costs of conflict, and err on the side of conflict within the self rather than conflict with peers, in order to retain positive appraisal by others. Building on these notions, in 1995 Crick & Grotpeter coined the term ‘relational aggression’ to refer specifically to non-physical and covert aggression utilized in intimate friendships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). With this inclusion on the continuum, some studies have asserted that generic ‘aggression’ has been under-studied and under-reported in populations of young women because the concept was dichotomized to equate aggression with physical violence and the absence of physical violence with the absence of aggression (for example, Leshied, Cummings, Brunshot, Cunningham & Saunders, 2001). Relational aggression slices the concept of aggression more finely, denoting subtle innuendo, inclusion/exclusion criteria and covert intimidation (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, 1999; Simmons, 2002, Underwood, 2004; Wiseman, 2002).

Like that of the sad girl, the ‘bad girl as mean girl’ discourse is often taken up in ways that pathologize the girl, isolating the issue of meanness within the individual and stripping away layers and expressions of need, circumstance, pressures and resources (Aapola et. al., 2005). The argument is repeated that ‘by nature’ girls are catty, cutting and calculating. Adult women often have a personal story to validate and substantiate this phenomenon and therefore contribute to its perpetuation. Thus, cruelty and exclusion are taken up as natural, normal and universal to being a girl, reinforced each

time we use these terms and repeat this portrayal (Gonick, 2004). This discourse of the bad girl blurs the subtle complexities of girls' experiences, and the social and political contexts underlying individual expressions of pain are not explored. The social disquiet is addressed through private and pathologizing explanations and interventions (Bertram, Hall, Fine & Weis, 2000).

The second dimension of the bad girl discourse portrays the violent girl as one who has traversed along the continuum of noncompliance with subverted female anger, and expresses resentment and rage through outward acting physical violence toward people and property (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998). Materially as well as discursively, physical aggression and violence are stereotypically considered masculine behaviours and therefore the violent girl challenges normative gender constructions (L.M. Brown, 2003; Reitsma-Street, 1998; Schaffner, 2004). The resultant disconnect between 'objective' gender role *expectations* and subjective gender role *expressions* elicits particular scorn (Pearce, 2004). This construction of girlhood forms the basis of the remainder of this Literature Review and the research that follows.

To suggest that these three discourses of contemporary girlhood reflect any sort of linear progression or distinct existence belies the central message of the literature on critical girlhood studies, which is that girls occupy all these identities (Aapola et. al., 2005). Moreover, to the degree that we adhere to one construction and ignore others, we underserve all girls. The task, as articulated by Walkerdine et. al. (2001), is to simultaneously hold onto the social, psychological, cultural, and material dimensions of girls' lives in order to (re)present them fully and fairly, and this entails resisting the "cultural schizophrenia that divides and polarizes" (Ward & Benjamin, 2004:22) these identities.

2.4 Accounting for Contexts

The layering of discourses – the sad, the mad and the bad – sits within broader socio-political intersections of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability and all experiential and identity markers. The social engagements of the participants in this study lie within these macro social parameters.

Critical girlhood scholars demand that we take into account material and discursive socio-political contexts when we theorize the use of violence by girls because social structures and social processes heavily influence the decisions and experiences of young women as they grow up and strive to make sense of their worlds. The ideological lens of “intersectional” analyses (Ward & Benjamin, 2004) stands in stark contrast to the individualist bases of theorizing use of violence by girls, which focus on temperament, hormone levels, prenatal conditions, attachment patterns and familial environment (reviewed in Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004).

Intersectional analyses politicize behaviour and decision making, attitude and agency, highlighting that choices and decisions are made available according to contexts of race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability and sexual orientation: choices and decisions both shape and are shaped by these contexts (Harris, 2004; Jiwani et. al., 2006; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). These analyses ensure two provisos for studies of girlhood. First, they ensure against the assumption that girls are a homogenous group, explicating that given white, Eurocentric dominance both materially and discursively, homogeneity will be ‘read’ as white, heterosexual, able bodied and middle class. Second, intersectional analyses of critical girlhood studies engage the Foucauldian premise that we bring into being by doing (Foucault, 1972); specifically, that constructs of race, class, sexuality and ability are shaped by girls as they live them. Harris (2004)

adds that the intersections of “constraint, autonomy and selective freedoms” (xvii) must also be incorporated, asserting that “Western girls’ studies today must begin the encounter with young women who are standing at the corner of feminism and neo-liberalism” (Harris, 2004: xviii).

Notwithstanding its fragmentations, the accomplishments of the feminist movement in agitating for gender equity have advanced significant changes across social and political dimensions of women’s lives. All future claims for and about women’s lives rest on this foundation (McRobbie, 2004). Yet an uneasy relationship exists between the discourses of neo-liberalism and its requisite individualism on the one hand and the “emancipatory politics” (McRobbie, 2004:10) of feminism on the other, in regard to implications for women. While feminism encouraged the independence and equity of girls and women, the neo-liberal project of individualized subjects subvert feminism’s history, politics, and struggle and distort the subject as one with seemingly unrestrained choice and opportunity.

This is a world where... social relations are transformed by processes of individualization, part of which can be understood as stemming from women’s desires (unleashed by past feminist struggles) for greater independence. However there is a double failure as well as danger at the heart of this work. In its over emphasis on agency and the apparent capacity to choose in a more individualized society, it has no way of showing how subject formation occurs by means of notions of choice and assumed gender equality coming together to actually *ensure adherence to new unfolding norms of femininity*. That is, choice is a modality of constraint. (10-11: emphasis added)

McRobbie asserts that today, choice and gender equality are taken up by young women as ‘givens’ and thus they dissolve as sites of interrogation (and thus contribute to the obsolescence of feminism). At the same time, the discourses of neo-liberalism and individualism (and their material manifestations, the dismantling of social welfare structures and mechanisms for collective political action) reinforce the message that

growing up female is indeed a 'do it yourself' endeavour. Amid the breadth and depth of social messages and practices that support these discourses, young women absorb the imperatives to self monitor and self regulate as they 'emerge' as self-styled subjects. Walkerdine et. al (2001) concur that the current socio-political agenda is the "remaking of girls and women as the modern neoliberal subject; a subject of self invention and transformation who is capable of surviving within the new social, economic and political system." (3)

2.5 Definitions and Studies of Violence

Definitions in the literature review for what constitutes violence have proven arbitrary and variable. A selection of examples illustrates. The Youth Criminal Justice Act defines a serious violent offence as "an offence in the commission of which a young person causes or attempts to cause serious bodily harm" (<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/Y-1.5>). The Public Health Agency of Canada's National Clearinghouse on Family Violence defines violence as "any intentional physical, sexual or psychological assault on another person (or persons)" (<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence>). The US National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center lists under the term 'aggression', "pushing, hitting, slapping, biting, kicking, hair-pulling, stabbing, shooting, and rape; threatening or intimidating others, malicious teasing, taunting, and name-calling; and gossiping, spreading rumors, and encouraging others to reject or exclude someone" (<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/teens/aggression.asp>). McAdams & Foster (1999) define violence as involving "threat or application of force and having potential for physical damage or injury to others" (311). Worrall (2004) reviewed classifications of violent offenses in the UK and found this category consisting of "other wounding" and robbery (51). Artz & Riecken (cited in Artz, 1998) defined violence as "beating up

another kid" (27) in a survey developed for quantitative analysis. Additional ambiguity is present in the overlap with the term aggression, with 'violence and aggression' often paired. Some researchers, for example Bjorkqvist and Niemela (1992) advocate for use of 'aggression' over violence, on their assertion that its parameters are broader and have greater utility in designing research studies. Others appear to have followed suit without making their rationale transparent (for example Leshied et. al., 2001; Underwood, 2003).

Violence has been conceptualized as a dualism between the physical and verbal, direct and indirect, since the work of A.H. Buss was published in *The Psychology of Aggression* (1961, cited in Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992). Inquiry has been heavily weighted toward the former of both pairings. Two further dualisms are that of male violence and female violence and that of the nature or nurture debate regarding etiology. Subthemes are also inherent in operationalizations of the term 'violence', for example motivation for the act, intention of the act, attitude of the actor, description of the actual behaviour, and impact on the victim (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Leshied et. al, 2001; Moretti et. al, 2004a).

Girls and women were excluded from research on violence from the 1950s through 1980s on the assumption, based in a cultural ideology rooted in maternalism, that girls and women do not initiate outward-focussed acts of harm to another (Alder & Worrall, 2004; Brown, 2003; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998). Evident here is the continued prevalence of biological essentialism in concrete and applicable terms. Adolescent girls have not been studied until the past 15 years, not because their experiences were homogenized with those of boys, but because they were not seen as likely subjects for 'serious' research on violence. Rather, the pervasive interest has been in *controlling and subverting* the behaviours of girls considered inappropriate in

various cultural contexts. This has occurred largely through unresearched social programming (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Alder & Worrall, 2004). Some of these behaviours have indeed included use of violence, however, but the underlying concern was controlling the sexual behaviour of girls and the maintenance of the 'caring contract' (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Reitsma-Street, 1998).

Chesney-Lind & Sheldon (1998) note that definitions of violence and theories of delinquency have been framed in terms of what is known about violence by males, since this has been the population and expression most under study (see also Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Schaffner, 2004; Worrall, 2004). Artz (1998) counts among the 'classic' explanations of delinquency: strain theory; differential association theory; social control theory; and labeling theory. Given their exclusion from study and the small proportion of female involvement in violent behaviour, none of these can reliably account for the experiences and context of females. In large part violent behaviour has been defined as fights with weapons, assaults, gang activity, carjackings and arson, all historically the activities of boys and men. As a result, not only are theorizing and program development biased toward these androcentric manifestations, so too are the frameworks through which we consider what is violent (Artz, 1998, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Schaffner, 2004). Further, until recent years, many of these studies were conducted with North American males, thus embedding ethnocentrism in the methodologies (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992). Given that findings following method, research pursued according to these templates should be viewed with caution.

Might continuing to explicate distinct patterns of violent behaviours for men and for women run the risk of continuing to biologically and socially essentialize both? Are studies on sex differences in use of violence bound to dichomotize in this way? Political

agendas may be involved in one's approach to this question and its subsequent research. For example, early studies on sex difference and aggression conclude unequivocally that males are more aggressive than females (for example, Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Terman & Tyler, 1954, cited in Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Later explorations in the 1970s and 1980s were more guarded in this certainty, perhaps due to the influence of the biology versus socialization debates (for example, Frodi, Macauley & Thorne, 1977; Hyde, 1984). Interestingly, working in the same time period, Rohner (1976) determined that culture was more foretelling of aggression and violence than gender (cited in Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992).

Several collections of scholarly work leave a discrete definition of violence aside and focus on its materialization in communities and its meaning in social context. In this regard, girls are seen as growing up in a different world from boys and therefore experiencing and engaging in violence in different ways (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Leshied et. al, 2001; Shaffner, 2004). Girls grow up being differently victimized by violence than do boys, including the witnessing of woman battering and the experience of sexual harassment. Further, the internalization of misogyny contributes to a unique context for girls' experience of and participation in violence toward girls (Artz, 1998; Brown, 2003; Schaffner, 2004). Others note that girls who use violence are less likely than boys to engage in delinquent acts and more likely to experience co-occurring emotional problems including depression and suicidality (Leshied et. al, 2001; Pepler et. al., 2004).

Congruent with these multi-layered inquiries is the move beyond earlier studies of incidence of engagement in violent behaviour across males and females to a focus on the meanings and definitions of violence as held by girls themselves (Artz, 2004;

Burman, 2004; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998); developing analyses of the forms aggression takes (notably Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, regarding relational aggression); the interlocking social constructs of race, class, heterosexism and ability and their relationships to aggression and violence (Batacharya, 2004; Brown, 2003; Jackson, 2004; Jiwani, 2006); and the locations within which girls use violence and aggression (Artz, 2004; Pearce, 2004).

Burman et. al. (2001) turned to self-definition of violence for construct specificity. In a Scottish study, Burman and her colleagues combined quantitative and qualitative measures among girls ages 13-16 years. An emphasis on involvement in and avoidance of violent encounters emerged in 671 questionnaires, 12 interviewees and 89 girls in focus groups. Using the voice-centred approach developed by Brown & Gilligan (1992), Burman et. al. presented verbatim accounts of the meanings of involvement in violence. In this study, the participants stressed that non-physical forms of violence must be counted as 'real', because the girls felt the most damaged and assaulted by verbally abusive threats, name calling and taunts. In keeping with the work by Crick (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick, 1996; 1999) and Underwood (2003), these participants confirmed that relational exclusion and rumour-spreading, particularly related to physical appearance, sexual behaviour and racial characteristics constituted violence (Burman, 2004).

Given its influence in contemporary discourse as the more likely means through which girls aggress, relational aggression, also termed social aggression in the literature, is singled out for particular discussion (Crick, 1999; Simmons, 2002; Underwood, 2003; 2004). Here, too, definitional ambiguity persists among the terms relational aggression, social aggression, and indirect aggression. Indirect aggression was first coined as an

early distinguisher from physical violence (Bjorkqvist, & Niemela, 1992; Underwood, 2003). Indirect aggression occurs when the instigator “manipulates others to attack the victim or, by other means, makes use of the social structure in order to harm the target person, without being personally involved in attack” (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992: 52). In indirect aggression the instigator stands a greater chance of “going unnoticed and avoiding retaliation” (52). However, as defined by Bjorkqvist & Niemela (1992) the term indirect aggression conflates slamming doors, throwing things, and breaking objects with playing practical jokes and gossiping. Crick & Grotpeter (1995) and Underwood (2003) developed the terms ‘relational aggression’ and ‘social aggression’ respectively to tease out the distinctions and explore the parameters to where indirect aggression is not relational and relational aggression is not indirect.

Crick & Grotpeter (1995) isolated the notion of the use of *relationships* as the vehicle for the intended harm to another in their conceptualization of relational aggression. Their work responded to the assumption promoted by the study of physical violence among boys that girls were not engaging in any form of violence. The initial study was based on a peer-nomination instrument used with a sample of 491 children in grades three through six, which assessed use of the relationship as the means through which to inflict harm on others, in comparison to overt aggression. Crick & Grotpeter (1995) found relational aggression used most often in girls. These findings are not consistent with those from other contexts. For example, a Canadian study of 70 boys and 73 girls aged 12 years found that more boys than girls use relationships as a vehicle for intended harm (Artz, Riecken, MacIntyre, Lam & Maczewski, 1998, cited in Artz, 2004b). These findings are consistent with far earlier studies on verbal aggression where either no sex difference was found (Bandura, 1973) or where boys were found to

be more verbally aggressive than girls (Sears, Rau & Alpert, 1965, cited in Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992).

L.M. Brown (2003) cautions against focusing on relational, non-physical aggression to the *exclusion* of extroverted forms of violence that research and clinical practice has typically associated with boys. Such a focus denies the full range of emotional expression that exists within girls but is silenced by gendered dualism, gendered constructions of caring, and subversion of female anger. While detailed explorations of girls' voices relative to their experiences in their relationships with their peers helps us understand the breadth and depth of constructions of femininity, as Brown warns, we cannot focus on one thread at the expense of another, lest we continue to essentialize female experience and create more false dichotomies (L.M. Brown, 2003).

Cultural ideologies, judicial policies, organizational redesign, and young offender legislation all obscure our search for precise definitions of violence (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Reitsma-Street, 2004; Worrall, 2000). Definitions of youth crime, particularly use of violence by girls, may be as much related to these categorical issues as girls' actual involvement in violence. For example, some status offenses (those that target only youth of a certain age and generally relate to their well being and care by family) have been redesignated as criminal in Australia and the US (Worrall, 2000). What may have earlier been considered a matter of the welfare of the girl is now treated as a criminal offense, with little behavioural change among girls but a more punitive and less paternalistic system of response (Worrall, 2000). The designation of any behaviour as criminal has particular political purposes. In the case of girls who use violence, this agenda has historically included the control and restraint of those who transgress

traditional constructions of femininity (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Chesney-Lind, 1998; Godfrey, 2004; Reitsma-Street, 2004).

It is not only changing legal definitions that impact on the defining of girls' actions. Parents, teachers, welfare workers, and neighbors have always played a significant part in the defining of girls' behaviour as unacceptable and bringing it to the attention of the welfare and juvenile justice system (Alder & Worrall, 2004:10).

2.6 Prevalence of Violence by Girls

Are girls more violent at the beginning of the 21st century than in times past? While it may seem safest to begin this exploration with a review of statistics available from Statistics Canada, Gibbons (1982) cautions that statistics related to criminal charges are "among the most unreliable and questionable social facts" (85). At first glance, this seems incongruous, as certainly the 'evidence' generated through official means offsets both the biases of media sensationalism and potential inflation of victim self report. However, official statistics gathered, sorted, and analyzed by federal departments represent the activities and choices of its citizens. Herein lies the caution: official crime statistics are directly linked with public policy and policing priorities (such as the definitions cited above), which reflect cultural ideology. This ideology is fueled by the same values and beliefs, customs and practices, and underscored by the same fears, interests, and agendas as the media. Thus crime categories and arrest statistics reveal more about societal *responses* to violent behaviour of girls than the meanings and implications of those behaviours (Alder & Worrall, 2004; Moretti et. al., 2004a).

Changes in definitions of young women's actions as unacceptable or even violent can be brought about not only by legislative or policy changes, but by cultural shifts in understandings of either what is acceptable behaviour on the part of girls or what constitutes a violent offense worthy of reporting to police. It is important, therefore, to recognize that the apparent statistical increase in girls' violence may be accounted for, at least in part, by a). increased visibility of girl's violence, b). increased categorization of girls' unacceptable behaviour as 'violence' and/or c)

inappropriate use of percentages to distort increases from a very low initial base (Alder & Worrall, 2004:10).

With that caution, official statistics tell us how societies are responding. Between 1990 and 2001, charges for violent offenses among girls rose by 68% (compared to a rise of 22% among boys) (Statistics Canada, 2001). This means “violence with adolescent girls is the only area consistently showing an increase in reported rates of violent offending (considering both age and gender)” (Leshied et. al., 2001:3). Statistics from the United States also show a 2:1 increase in violent crimes for girls compared to boys over the past ten years (Moretti et. al., 2004). Several researchers report that an overall increase in the involvement of girls in violent and aggressive acts cannot be overlooked. At the same time, several important qualifiers are required in reading these statistics.

First, in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, boys still are charged with more violent crime than girls (Leshied et. al, 2001). For every 1 girl engaging in violent offenses, 4 boys do so (Statistics Canada, 2001; Leshied et. al., 2001). Thus proportionately girls represent the minority. Second, and slicing the Canadian data more finely, Artz (2004b) has demonstrated that between 1985 and 1999, the rate of violent offenses for *both* boys and girls increased, with boys' offenses charting at more than four times the frequency as girls. Second, while there was an increase in violent offending by girls between 1985 and 1993, between 1993 and 2002 that occurrence leveled off (Artz, 2004b). Third, analyzing trends according to statistics can be misleading because the actual numbers for young female offending are so low. This can distort the way crime statistics get read. For example, an increase in total arrests from 1 arrest to 2 is an increase of 100%, whereas an increase in total arrests from 100 to 120 arrests is an increase of only 20% (Alder & Worrall, 2004). Conclusions

drawn without these qualifiers are clearly distorted.

International comparison in violent offending rates by sex is challenging given the differential categorization of offenses, including the use of very broad categories, as well as, once again, the overall small numbers for young female offenders. Worrall (2004) found that violent offending has been narrowed down to robbery and assault (or 'other wounding') in Canada, the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), and Australia. However, common sense suggests that each of these exists on a continuum, for a range in intensity is assumed between robbery without a weapon and robbery with a weapon. The variability in categorization as 'violent' blurs issues of prevalence.

Several studies have been undertaken in Canada, the UK and Australia to more finely analyze forms and intensity of robbery and assault, since these are the two largest categories under violent offending in these countries. In Canada, Doob and Sprott (1998) concluded that the number of serious assaults had not increased for either girls or boys between 1991 and 1996, although minor assaults had increased. Worrall (2004) reviewed robbery arrests in England and Wales for girls under the age of 18 years and found that "proceedings actually declined from around 500 in 1996 to around 400 in 1999 and numbers sentenced declined from 240 to 190" (Worrall, 2004: 51). Alder & Hunter (1999, cited in Worrall, 2004) reviewed the records of Children's Court in Australia and found that nine percent of girls' offenses were offenses toward the person; of these, 39% were assaults. Studies in the US, UK, Australia and Canada summarize that generally, minor assault is the prevalent category of 'violent offending' for girls. Victims are generally younger girls who are known to the offender, and the assault does not usually include a weapon (Doob & Sprott, 1998; Worrall, 2004).

Moving to historical data on the prevalence of girl violence, Godfrey (2004)

asserts that the concern for the moral dissolution of youth in contemporary times, both male and female, and the rise in violence on the streets of western cities, has a familiar ring to historians. His review of oral evidence, trial reports and statistics from New Zealand, Australia and the UK through the period from 1880-1930 indicates that working girls were routinely involved in the often-violent agitation of street gangs, including drunken and disorderly behaviour. Moral panic ensued, with fear that girls were becoming more sexually liberated and taking more risks in their social encounters. "The ideological polarization permitted girls only to be either essentially good or intrinsically bad" (Godfrey, 2004:34). However, arrests of young girls were not considered worthy of an aspiring police officer, and these offenses were not recorded in the official books. Then as now, it seems, societal values regarding the behaviours of girls (which themselves reflect constructions of femininity), more than the behaviours themselves, prescribed the degree to which gender transgressions were tolerated.

Beyond history and statistics, the media are a major source of impressions of the prevalence of girl violence is the media. While on the one hand media can educate a wide range of people, and this may be desirable for researchers and the federal agenda, media also come with their own agendas and select what to report and toward what purpose. They include, exclude, and interpret to sell papers and retain advertisers. Dramatic accounts of shocking assaults or homicides by girls are often used to propel latent fears regarding what is happening to 'our girls'. The shock value of these stories often lies in their rarity, and sensationalized reports of rare violent offenses by girls allows the public to generalize the few incidents to the general population of adolescent girls (Schaffner, 2004). This fuels fear and anxiety, which translates into public policy more easily than empirical evidence. Generally, media reports are based on the thinnest

of empirical support and report the remarkable only because they are atypical and extraordinary (Brown, 2003; Schaffner, 2004).

2.7 Considering Causation

2.7.1 Individualist Analyses

The literature is tentative and equivocal regarding definitive bases for the causation of girls' use of violence. Researchers of childhood development have correlated occurrence of aggression in children and youth with particular individual characteristics, early environmental factors, and family features. Childhood aggression has been associated with biological and psychological traits, including hyperactivity, low serotonin and testosterone levels, and difficult temperament (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004). Youth aggression has been linked with maternal smoking and exposure to drugs in utero (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004). Research on the family environment has correlated use of violence by children and adolescents with absent or hostile parenting practices, witnessing violence in the home, physical or sexual abuse, use of alcohol or drugs and history of criminality by the parents, and use of physical punishment (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004).

Use of violence by girls has been linked with witnessing violence between mother and father in the home and with inconsistent parental support (Leshied et. al., 2001). Corrado, Odgers & Cohen (2000) summarize the profile of female young offenders as including high rates of physical and sexual abuse; serious substance addiction; low academic achievement and high rates of early school leaving; and chronic family dysfunction (these findings are also supported by Artz, 2004a and Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998). Antonishak, Repucci & Mulford (2004) review a wealth of criminological research to assert regardless of the origins of causation and developmental trajectory,

girls present with gender specific profiles for treatment planning (Antonishak et. al., 2004). Specifically, researchers have found higher prevalence and severity of mental health problems and a strong correlation between girls' problematic behaviours and a history of physical abuse and sexual victimization (Antonishak et. al., 2004). Further, girls in the justice system come from more dysfunctional family homes than do boys, with particular hostility in the relationship between mother and daughter (Henggeler, Edwards & Borduin, 1987, cited in Antonishak et. al., 2004).

Downey et. al. (2004) conducted both experimental and field studies on rejection sensitivity, finding that females with anxious expectations of rejection tend toward hostility in their social relationships, often in a preemptive and self fulfilling manner. Similarly, Moretti et. al. (2004b) explored use of violence by girls as an attempt to bring people into relationship with them to meet attachment needs. In a mixed method study with 105 boys and 65 girls (mean age of 14 years, $SD = 1.5$ years) referred to a centre for youth with severe behavioural difficulties in British Columbia, results indicate insecure attachment correlates with aggression (causation is not discussed). Results were not conclusive regarding gender distinction in the type of attachment, suggesting confirmation of the attachment theory principle that it is the nature of affectional bond with caregivers, rather than sex of parent or child, which determines whether or not violence will be externalized towards others.

In the effort to move beyond scrutiny on the parents in the developmental trajectory of violent youth, several recent studies look more closely at peer relationships as a causal factor for use of violence (Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2004). Nothing definitive has yet been found. Next, while there is no data to support the hypothesis, a strand of backlash against feminism theorizes that feminism is causing girls to be more

aggressive, in two ways. First is the assertion that, as a result of false empowerment that failed to deliver on the promises of women's liberation, girls and women are victimizing girls and women (Brinkworth, 1994, cited in Worrall, 2004). Second is the argument that feminism's politic of women seeking equal opportunity with men includes mirroring male violence (Adler, 1975, cited in Artz, 1998).

2.7.2 Structural Analyses

Structural analyses begin with the assumption that girls' use of violence is correlated with socio-contextual influences rather than individually focused explanations. Feminist-structuralist analyses of gendered socialization, including the interwoven threads of sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism, have become a foundation for understanding the socio-cultural contexts within which girls grow up, making clear that interpretations of the behaviours of girls must get made in the context of constructions and regulations of femininities (for example, Aapola, et. al., 2005; Brown, 2003; Harris, 2004; Jiwani et. al., 2006). So too they provide the backdrop for this discussion on use of violence by girls.

Batacharya (2004) asserts that hegemonic femininity is upheld both by more obvious stereotypic social constructions of the female and the use of essentialized characteristics (notably by both maternal feminists and anti-feminists), and also by feminist discourses that dichotomize women as either victims or resisters under patriarchy. She insists that unless and until it is recognized that the generic construction of girlhood is couched in racism, classism and heterosexism, girl violence will continue. To substantiate her point, she exemplifies the murder of Reena Virk, the 14 year old South Asian girl who was beaten to death in Victoria, Canada in 1997. Batacharya (2004) notes that the public outcry was not so much in despair for the death of the

victim, a non-white, lower class girl (descriptors that were muted in media reports) but for the fact that the *perpetrators* were largely white girls. It was an untenable association that white, presumably heterosexual, middle class girls could perpetrate such a brutal crime, because the structures of race and class privilege are explicitly designed to obscure this behaviour. Reena Virk's murder disrupted the conventions of what it means to be a middle-class, heterosexual white girl. Inherent in this disruption is the core assumption, layered with values and cultural prescriptions, that white middle-class femininity is intrinsically non-violent, a construction which can only exist within the material and discursive entitlement of white privilege and heterosexism in a class-based society (Batacharya, 2004; Jiwani, 1999).

New narratives of girl violence have arisen in the void following the death of 'girlhood' as previously known. Erosion of gender roles as a result of women's liberation has been cited as one explanation; others refer to the cycle of violence wherein girls who have been victimized by violence turn to violence themselves (reviewed in Batacharya, 2004; Worrall, 2004). Batacharya (2004) notes that both are conservative explanations, which do not allow for the possibility that girls who use violence are doing so to gain dominance and power over subordinates. By denying this possibility, girlhood is homogenized once more, again suggesting that all girls are on a level plane relative to one another, despite differences in race, class, sexual orientation/behaviour, physical appearance, ability, and language, all of which carry with them differential power (Artz, 2004a; Batacharya, 2004; Brown, 2003; Jackson, 2004; Jiwani et. al., 2006).

Where Peace (2004) asserts that the concept of 'violence' is largely and invisibly interpreted to reflect on and account for the behaviours of men, Batacharya asserts that the term 'girl violence' not only adds the qualifier that the perpetrator is female, it is

inherently taken to mean a *white* girl being violent. Furthering this assertion, Mayo (2005) has extended the analysis to suggest that, without further qualifiers, a 'girl' is *heterosexual*, white, middle class and currently able-bodied. Any alteration from this assumption requires one of the relevant adjectives to isolate a discerning feature; in so doing, the white, heterosexual, middle class and able-bodied girl is normative, and all 'others' are problematized.

Sexism and the objectification of women are central to ensuring the evolution from biological essentialism to a construction of femininity to hegemonic femininity. Young women learn to objectify themselves as a tool to locate and exert their power (L.M. Brown, 2003). The recipe to do so is supported by social structures of family, school, church and media, as well as commercialism and materialism. Given we both influence and are influenced by the world around us, the objectification and (hetero)sexualization of young women are inculcated as ways to manage the demands of growing up.

The challenge for theorists, researchers, and all those who seek to understand and assist violent girls is helping them to break free from...viewing themselves and the world through the hegemonic male gaze that includes a continual referencing of their worth and their range of choice against the standard set by males (Artz, 2004b:162).

The "tyranny of the nice and kind" (Gilligan & Brown, 1992) is a phrase used to communicate the costs involved in upholding hegemonic femininity, connoting the process of its perpetuation. Yet who enforces this code? Foucault (1979) explicates the discursive means through which pervasive ideology is internalized, to the degree that less external, overt control is required. The "disciplined body" (Foucault, 1979) monitors for normalizing practices of the self, and the internalized normative standards are the means through which we control and censor both ourselves as well as girls and women.

Regulating each other under “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980) results (L.M. Brown, 2003). As in all competitive pursuits, under hegemonic femininity not all players can be winners. Some will lose, so in the effort to attract and secure male objectification, one must ‘beat out’ another girl. L.M. Brown (2003) states:

When girls enact horizontal violence by using negative stereotypes about femininity against other girls, they do so to distance themselves and thus to avoid being victimized by those stereotypes in turn....Girls become handmaidens to insidious forms of sexism (149).

Navigating the conflicting roles and rules of adolescence, and in a society replete with misogyny (which is veiled) and objectification (which is not), girls seek power and autonomy, and reach for it in ways they see boys achieving it (L.M. Brown, 2003; Worrall, 2004). In teen culture, violence offers status, power, control and an identity that is visible to others as meaningful and valuable (Worrall, 2004). Viewed alongside the objectification and sexism that correspond with female teenagehood, engagement in violence may seem a welcome alternative. Living in a gender stratified society, violence by girls can be viewed as a set of strategies for negotiating the inherent inequities, summoning Kandiyoti’s (1988) conception of “bargaining with patriarchy” (274). Given that youth culture presents “masculine norms that are incompatible with, indeed, contradictory to those of femininity” (Leblanc, 1999: 137), by engaging in violence girls may be acting ‘just like boys’. Some researchers point to the current material conditions within which girls are growing and suggest that they are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from boys, beyond “scholastic achievement and /or domestic docility” (Alder & Worrall, 2004:11). Chesney-Lind & Sheldon (1998) suggest that some forms of deviance or involvement in delinquency may be an act of resistance against femininity. Society encourages, even demands, girls be victims and survivors, but not threats, not active agents in their own anger. The bounds for their resistance are narrow: they are

allowed to be damaged and self-inflict their anger, but not be violent (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998). The violent girl transgresses normative gender role expectations; the violent boy does not.

Chesney-Lind & Sheldon (1998) assert that girls who use violence are seen to be subverting norms of female propriety and perhaps resisting hegemonic femininity. Might they be seen as utilizing alternate means to define a new femininity?

Reconceptualizations of the ways in which gender is conceived draws upon West & Zimmerman's (1987) ethnomethodological concept of "doing gender". In addition to countering the biological determinism of gender, this idea disputes the conception of gender *role*, asserting that gender is ever present in our identities and in other people's perceptions of our identities. Everyday actions and interactions construct normative gender expectations and we engage to varying degrees with these scripts. This notion shares ideological premise with the notion of femininity as discourse (D. Smith, 1988) and gender as performative (Butler, 1999). Where critiques of socialization had postulated a one-way relationship, with gender norms constructed and visited upon subjects as recipients of these constructions, both Smith's and Butler's proposals illustrate the mutually constituting nature of discourse: gender is comprised anew each time we engage with it, which, according to West & Zimmerman (1987), is all the time. Therefore, "[t]he rules change as we play the game" (D. Smith, 1988:139). Rather than being a static construction that exists 'out there', femininity is seen as requiring subjects for its enactment and is only brought into being through engagement. Femininity is created as we live, continually reconstructed each day; therein lies some promise for its reconstitution and redefinition. Perhaps this is the promise in some way envisioned by girls who engage in violence.

Chapter 3. Contexts of Residential Care

3.1 Historical Origins

The organization of children into surrogate care sites began in industrial times, as children moved from rural to urban settings, became involved in work, and therefore became more visible in the public eye. These processes meant the separation of many children from their parents, a situation considered to weaken parental oversight and authority over their children (Rutman, 1987). In Canada, organizations and systems of residential care for children and youth began with the development of child welfare services, led by J.J. Kelso in Ontario (Rutman, 1987). Private charity merged with governmental responsibility to establish a range of services for children, leading to the passage of the Industrial Schools Act of 1874. Designed to address the needs of neglected children, this Act encouraged the opening of residential, custodial and educational settings for youth under the age of 14 who were considered “out of control” by parents and guardians or who were considered to be without appropriate parental supervision.

Although a thorough review of the placement of *girls* in surrogate care sites appears absent in the Canadian literature, examples from the United States and the United Kingdom and within correctional and training facility domains may be instructive. In the United States, Abrams & Curran (2000) report that the response to girls’ behaviour through the juvenile court system and training schools has long been associated with anticipated precocious sexual expression. Training schools and reformatories sought to re-align girls with traditional prescriptions for femininity, believing complete immersion was required. The girl was removed from society’s temptations immediately upon signs of ‘trouble’, to be returned to society prepared to become a wife and mother: domesticity

was the goal. Chastity, compliance and compassion, cornerstones of maternalism, were central to the progress of humanity and the safety of societies, and girls, then as now, were seen as cornerstones to the preservation of families, the social order, and the caring contract (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Reitsma-Street, 1998).

3.2 Literature and Analysis in the Field of Residential Care

Literature on residential youth care began to emerge in the 1950s, with the publication of Bruno Bettelheim's *Love is Not Enough* (1950) and Redl & Wineman's *Children Who Hate* (1951) and *Controls From Within* (1952). The latter of Redl and Wineman's books focussed attention on the residential milieu as the central therapeutic influence for change. While this concept of milieu had been in the literature since August Aichhorn's work in the 1920s (cited in Trieschman, Whittaker & Brendtro, 1969), Redl & Wineman used the concept to develop a framework for therapeutic programming and the role of the residential child and youth care worker. Developing these concepts further, Trieschman et. al. (1969) wrote of *The Other 23 Hours* outside the psychotherapy office and the growing legitimacy of the "lifespace" of youth as the central site of therapeutic influence. The use of daily life events for therapeutic purposes was developed as the core intervention principle in the lifespace (Garfat, 1998).

Organizational theory cites that "the central characteristic of residential settings for youth is their relative separation from the outside world" (Arieli, Beker & Kashti, 2002: 404), a position congruent with the early purposes of placing delinquent girls in reformatory schools. At the same time, the ultimate goal is re-entry to the family and community schooling so that progression into adult correctional institutions is less likely. A further component in milieu programming/residential care is the premise of normalization, wherein ordinary experiences are created and shared so that boys and

girls in residential care feel less differentiated and marginalized under the community labels of being 'troublesome' or 'delinquent', and may feel as valued as other young people growing up (Whitaker, 1981).

Garfat & Mitchell (2000) review the philosophical shifts over the years regarding the theoretical bases for programming within residential youth care facilities. In the 1970s and 1980s the orientation was toward the provision of basic care, in the belief that a safe and steady home-styled setting could provide the nurturance, guidance and structure necessary for growth toward social citizenship. More recently, through the 1990s and into the 2000s, residential facilities are expected to provide treatments and interventions to resolve the difficulties that precipitate a youth entering the residential care system. In other words, emphasis shifted to creating a therapeutic milieu with a focus on behavioural, emotional and psychological change through simplified behaviour modification approaches (Garfat & Mitchell, 2000).

As the field of youth care has developed its philosophies of treatment and intervention, proponents within the field have advocated a move away from behaviour modification to a relationship and process based approach for work with troubled youth and their families (for example, Garfat, 1998; Krueger, 1988; 1998). Relationship based approaches are founded upon John Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Snow & Finlay, 1998; Steinhauer, 1991). This theory is based on the notion that nurturance, stimulation, structure, and security are required for the normal, healthy development of all children (Bowlby, 1969). The nature and intensity of the infant-caregiver(s) bond (most often with the mother) determines the degree to which these primary needs are met (Bowlby, 1969). Best practices in residential programming advocate the child or youth being placed close to the family of origin, with collaboration of service personnel

'wrapping around' the young person in order to provide comprehensive planning (VanDenBerg & Grealish, 1996). Intervention planning is based on establishing meaningful relationships between the youth and youth care workers, with rigorous analysis of the needs underlying problematic behaviours (Garfat, 1998; Snow & Finlay, 1998).

Although no empirical data could be found for this in the Canadian context³, practice-based literature on the profile of youth living in residential care (for example those found on the discussion listserve of www.cyc-net.org) consistently highlights increasing challenges with respect to emotional and behavioural difficulties presented by youth in care. Anglin (2002) inquired into the depths of distress experienced by youth living in 10 different group homes over a period of 14 months in the effort to develop a theoretical model for staff working with "pain-based behaviour" in residents. Although not offering (or seeking) measurement, this work supports anecdotal accounts that, given the ever-increasing restrictions on accessing child welfare services, youth who are admitted to residential treatment facilities today are indeed presenting more complex behavioural and emotional disturbance than in the past.

My experience in the field of child and youth care has led to my position that, much like social work (Carniol, 2005; Heinonen & Spearman, 2006; Mullaly, 1997; 2002), residential child and youth care struggles to negotiate the competing demands of care and control, and working with girls who use violence brings that dialectic into sharper focus. While it is anticipated that boys will externalize their pain, care professionals expect and prefer girls to internalize their pain and/or reveal it clearly by communicating in relationship. When they do not, two difficulties must be 'managed':

³ See Richardson & Joughin (2000) for a UK study regarding psychiatric disorders among youth in residential care.

the externalized behaviours, for example the thrown furniture, the property damage, the assaulted person; and the contradiction before us: the girl who is not only non-compliant in her behaviour, but in our understanding of her as a young woman.

This level of analysis is absent in two ways from the existing residential child and youth care literature. First, there is an homogenization of 'youth' in the residential care field, such that, for example, an article detailing a "framework for understanding client violence in residential treatment" (McAdams & Foster, 1999) does not differentiate between male and female clients (or workers, for that matter). Arieli et. al. (2001) reviews the opportunities and risks of the residential setting as a socialization context and no mention is made of opportunities and risks associated with gender socialization, identity or performance. Ward (2004) writes of the need for a theoretical framework to guide analysis and planning of "every detail, function and interaction of daily group care practice with young people" (209) and yet leaves out the 'details' of sex, gender, and race. Consistent throughout the narrow literature on residential child and youth care is the muting of sex, gender, masculinities and femininities, race, class and ability. The result is that 'youth in care' become characterized as a single population, and in the absence of intersectional analyses, the template for normalcy based upon the Eurocentric, hetero-normative, white able-bodied male, already in evidence throughout the West, remains dominant.

Distinct from the youth in care literature, the juvenile justice literature *does* differentiate on the basis of sex, thoroughly documenting an historical trend toward sexualizing girls' involvement in delinquent behaviours (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Godfrey, 2004; Worrall, 2004). However, critical analysis of gender cannot be assumed. For example, Okamoto & Chesney-Lind (2000)

examined client and practitioner gender and practitioner fear in working with high risk adolescents. A sample of 248 youth workers (42% male, 57% female) revealed significant findings for male workers who recorded increasing liability concerns as the number of females on their caseloads increased. The authors suggest this finding “may be one reason why female youth clients are considered difficult to work with” (380) and recommend male workers have additional training in how to deal with flirting and sexualized behaviour and establish appropriate therapeutic boundaries. Viewed more critically, it is more likely that the finding is presented in a way to reinforce the discursive power of ‘girls being more difficult to work with’, while leaving the discourse itself intact.

A second ramification of the absence of gender analyses in the child and youth care literature is that corollary issues (sexism and objectification, heterosexism, racism, classism, and ableism) are also absent. Thus the material conditions that shape people's lives beyond the isolated milieu of the residential setting are ignored. Micro analysis of interaction and relationships is pursued without situating these within the material realities of the macro world.

One example is the way non-compliance by girls is conceptualized and understood. As discussed above, gendered socialization prescribes that girls are raised to care for others and define themselves in terms of relationships with others, and are often socially punished for not doing so (Reitsma-Street, 1998; Underwood, 2004). Residential group home sites typically prioritize compliance with the organizational routines of the setting and individualized development plans for each resident, under the broader rubric of the therapeutic milieu, without analysis regarding how compliance is uniquely situated for girls. The girl that resists, swears, and refuses to ‘go along’ with standard expectations is ‘a problem’. However, just at the moment when violent and

non-compliant girls in residential care seem to be a thorough challenge to the construction of females as interested and invested in relationships, one person emerges toward whom the essentialized notions of womanhood are directed: the boyfriend. Here is where non-compliance turns to compliance, primarily in regard to romanticized notions of heterosexual relationship. Here is where the persona of defiance and non-compliance is subjugated; and, it is my contention, here is where the greatest danger lies in wanting girls to fall in line with hegemonic femininity. At long last, here is the compliance that is sought, yet in a context where the young woman is most vulnerable to exploitation, violence, isolation and psychological distress (Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, Porche, 2003). This is one example of how residential care can become another instrument perpetuating a climate within which girls may engage in violent behaviour as a means of experiencing personal power within the confines of hegemonic femininity and be punished for locating and actualizing this resource.

3.3 Residential Care in Nova Scotia⁴

The system of services providing out of home placements for children and youth in Nova Scotia is a composite story of respite care provided by religious organizations, community responses to children in need, government facilities and private children's aid society-run group homes. One example is that of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, who were invited to the province in the early 1800s by the Lieutenant Governor to provide supportive housing for young women. Oral history suggests that early residential programs likely did not distinguish among the kinds of challenges faced by

⁴ Except as where cited, the details of this chapter were gathered in an interview with Vicki Wood, Director of Family and Children's Services and Don Totten, Director of Residential Services, held on August 3, 2007. Very little written information was available regarding the history of residential services of Nova Scotia.

their inhabitants, such that girls considered truant, wayward, orphaned and involved with illegal behaviours might have lived together.

Currently, the system of residential services for youth is officially termed Residential Child Caring Facilities and colloquially known as “residential care”. Age distinction is commonly made between residential children’s facilities (ages 5-12 years) and residential youth care facilities (over age 12 years). The latter are the focus of this thesis. Residential youth care facilities in Nova Scotia operate 24 hours a day in accordance with particular mandates regarding length of residency, nature of service (for example emergency, stabilization, or treatment), and degree of supervision for residents. Some facilities provide programming such as anger management, life skills, educational support, and clinical support (www.gov.ns.ca/residentialservices).

As with the development of many social service agencies across Canada in the early 1900s, two parallel systems of residential care evolved: privately run facilities (both not for profit and for profit) and government run initiatives. Over the last 100 years, government services have alternately combined and separated services for juvenile justice, mental health, and behavioural disruptions. Meanwhile, privately run facilities often were developed in response to locally identified needs and operated with the financial support of church and community groups. For example, the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children opened in 1921 in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, specifically to address concerns regarding the placement of children of African Nova Scotian descent within white communities, relying heavily on the fundraising efforts of local churches and citizens to maintain operations (Saunders, 1994).

In Nova Scotia, within both government and privately-run facilities, increasing specialization of services has developed over the years. Differentiation between the

needs of children with physical challenges, with cognitive and developmental delays, and with emotional and behavioral challenges led to the development of distinct programs. Comparison of facility mandates, however, has revealed overlapping populations (Garfat & Mitchell, 2000; Nova Scotia Family and Child Welfare Association, 1988; Provincial Placement Review Project, 1996). Currently, the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services is undergoing "Residential Redesign" in an effort to ensure there are programs and facilities addressing a full continuum of need, from preventive services, to interventions for the most challenging behaviours, to services for transitioning out of child welfare care.

3.3.1 Licensure and Regulation

The *Nova Scotia Department of Community Services' Children and Family Services Act* (1990) details and governs the processes for securing temporary or permanent guardianship of a child or youth (*Children and Family Services Act*, 1990). The *Act* defines the age of a child as less than 16 years of age and the corresponding *Children and Family Services Act Regulations* stipulate contingencies for extending temporary or permanent guardianship beyond the age of 16 years (*Children and Family Services Act*, 1990; *Children and Family Services Act Regulations*, amended 2004). All youth who reside in a licensed residential facility must be under a temporary or permanent guardianship arrangement (i.e. "in care") pursuant to the conditions of the *Act* (*Children and Family Services Act*, 1990). Once a child is in the care and custody of the Minister of Community Services, social workers are accountable to the *Children in Care Standards* manual, a portfolio of requirements and considerations to which social workers are obligated for any child to whom they are assigned as the Minister's agent of care.

Residential youth care facilities are licensed by the Department of Community Services under Section 15.1 of the *Children and Family Services Act*. Residential youth care facilities are regulated under the Community Residential Services Program within that departmental unit. Such facilities are “community based placement options for children and youth with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural problems, and who require a higher level of supervision and structure than is available in family foster homes” (www.gov.ns.ca/residentialservices). According to the *Act*, these facilities may be operated as a:

- child caring facility
- group home
- secure treatment facility
- residential centre
- residential treatment centre
- receiving centre
- assessment centre

One facility in Nova Scotia is operated by the provincial government as a secure treatment facility, highly regulated and under the authority of the *Act*. The term ‘secure’ is interpreted through common law understanding to mean entry and exit doors are locked and windows do not open. According to Section 55.1 of the *Act*, an agent of the Minister of Community Services may issue a secure treatment certificate for a child in care if there are “reasonable and probable grounds” to believe that:

- the child is experiencing an emotional or behavioural disorder
- it is necessary to confine the child in order to address the emotional or behavioural disorder, or
- the child refuses or is unable to consent to treatment

After no more than 5 days, the family court must review an assessment to be completed within that time and may make a secure treatment order for a period of not more than 30 days (*Children and Family Services Act*, 1990, Section 56.3). This order may be

renewed for up to 90 additional days (Children and Family Services Act, 1990, Section 56.4). According to Section 59.1, a secure treatment order provides police officers the authority to apprehend and transport the youth to a secure treatment facility (Children and Family Services Act, 1990).

Conditions for licensure of residential youth care facilities are contained in the *Provincial Standards for Residential Child Caring Facilities*, enacted in 2000. The *Standards* stipulate minimum requirements for all licensed facilities in organization and management, service delivery, program delivery, and physical plant (Provincial Standards for Residential Child Caring Facilities, 2000). Annual reviews of licensed facilities are conducted to ensure the *Standards* are met. Facilities licensed by the Department of Community Services are funded in whole or in part by the Department of Community Services. There are currently 26 licensed residential youth care facilities, for a total of 160 placements, in Nova Scotia.

According to the *Standards* (2000), all child and youth care workers hired after September 2000 must hold either a university degree or a Community College diploma in Child and Youth Care or its equivalent. Staff must also maintain current training in first aid, non-violent physical crisis intervention, and suicide intervention.

3.3.2 *Unlicensed Residential Youth Facilities*

A parallel system of unlicensed youth serving facilities exists in Nova Scotia. Although unlicensed facilities are neither regulated according to the Family and Children's Services Act nor accountable for meeting the *Standards*, in order to receive grant-based operational funding from the Department of Community Services, they must meet an equivalent set of requirements and approval processes. Further, the *Children in Care Standards* manual, to which all child welfare workers are accountable, stipulates

conditions required of unlicensed facilities to be approved as a 'a place of safety' for the placement of a youth in care. Amendments made to the *Regulations* effective in 1991 enable a youth in care, who is over the age of 16 years, to be placed in a non-licensed facility when the residence is approved pursuant to other provincial legislation and determined to be a place of safety by a licensed child welfare worker (*Children and Family Services Act Regulations*, 2004, section 33.2.a.i).

3.4 Situating this Study

At the time of interview, the 22 girls involved in this study lived in one of four settings: the provincially operated secure treatment facility; private not for profit licensed residential facilities; private not for profit unlicensed residential facilities; and outside of residential facility care in an apartment. There is no central body that accumulates data for the three systems of residential care, and the fourth setting within which participants lived is beyond residential care entirely. Thus the following data are reported per each living arrangement.

The provincially operated secure treatment facility (pseudonym Fundy Centre) admitted 31 girls in the fiscal year April 2006 to March 2007 (Fundy Centre Annual Report, 2007). Four girls were living in the secure treatment facility at time of interview for this study, representing 13% of the population served at the secure treatment facility over the 2006-2007 year. Taking a broader view, however, 14 of the participants in the study lived at secure care at one time in the past 18 months. This number represents 45% of the individual girls admitted to Fundy Centre in the year 2006-2007.

The private, not for profit, licensed residential facilities from which participants were drawn exist under one organization (pseudonym Harbourside Youth Programs). Harbourside Youth Programs admitted 60 girls in the 2006-2007 fiscal year (Harbourside

Youth Programs Annual Report 2007). This research involved 12 girls from this setting, representing 20 % of the population served by this agency in 2006-2007.

Four participants in this study were drawn from a private not-for-profit, unlicensed agency (pseudonym Chebucto House), which admitted 20 girls in the research time period (Chebucto House Annual Report 2007). The participants of this study represented 20% of Chebucto House's female residents in 2006-2007. Table 1 details the living arrangements of the research participants, the residential settings' relationships to licensing requirements and the total admissions per organization/facility.

Finally, two participants were living independently, having recently moved out of residential facilities, and thus remain outside the analysis of occupancy for the three above noted residential facilities.

Table 3.4.1. Residential Facility Placements of Research Participants and Relationship to Provincial Licensing Regulations

Relationship to Provincial Licensing Regulations	Placement at time of interview	Number of total admissions of girls
Provincially run facility, licensed (secure care facility)	4	31
Private, not for profit organization, licensed facilities	12	60
Private, not for profit organization, unlicensed facilities	4	20
Living independently	2	n/a

3.5 The Race Context in Nova Scotia and in this Study

Subsequent chapters discuss issues of race and experiences of racism in the lives of some of the participants. Although the *Act* requires that race and ethnicity be considered in all case planning, records maintained by the Department of Community Services do not reliably account for the race and ethnicity of youth in care. There is inconsistent compliance among social workers entering data into the database on the race and ethnicity of children and youth in care. The two non-government programs

from which the interview sample was drawn do not account for race and ethnicity in their annual statistics (Chebucto House Annual Report 2007; Harbourside Youth Programs Annual Report 2007).

While the current circumstances of residential care cannot be analyzed according to race due to the absence of data, the broader race context of Nova Scotia is substantiated through Statistics Canada's 2001 census. According to the 2001 census, the population of Nova Scotia totaled 897,565 persons, with the following breakdown attending to race and ethnicity. Whiteness is not accounted for in the racial breakdown.

Table 3.5.1. Racialized population context in Nova Scotia

	Number of persons	Percentage of total population
Total visible minority population	34,525	3.8%
Black	19,670	2.2%
Aboriginal	17,010	1.9%
Arab/West Asian	4,000	0.45%
Chinese	3,290	0.4%
South Asian	2,895	0.3%

Within this study, the racial breakdown is as follows:

Table 3.5.2. Racialized population context in this Study

	Number of participants	Percentage of sample
Caucasian	14	64%
Black	4	18%
Aboriginal	4	18%

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1 Location of the Researcher and the Research

The epistemological foundation of methodology prescribes what good research involves, justifies why research is done, gives value base to research, and provides ethical principles for conducting research (Strega, 2005: 211).

This research has sought to understand the lived experiences of girls as acting subjects, within their social, material and discursive worlds; how they make sense of their experiences, thoughts, and feelings regarding gender identity and performance; their use of violence; and living in residential group care facilities. This research is founded upon centring voices marginalized by age, gender and institutional living settings, voices typically on the margins.

Both the focus of the research as well and the location of the researcher locate gender as a central site for analysis of lived experience (Lather, 1991); this feminist ideological position is a defining feature of the study. The interest is inquiry into how young women understand and experience their gender and their use of violence within their socio-cultural settings, with gender conceived as a fluid social construct that differs in meaning and performance across people and contexts. This orientation seeks to expose manifestations of power throughout all research processes, including questions of the nature of reality (ontology), the validation of knowledge (epistemology), the politics of representation, definitions of 'truth', and the proximal relationship and value transparency of the researcher. Each of these manifestations of power is discussed below.

This research is based on an ontological view that reality is constructed through social interactions and experienced individually as well as collectively. Thus, not only are there multiple realities and contexts to be explored in the research inquiry, there is

also a focus on *processes* of construction: how and under what conditions beliefs, positions and practices are constructed, and how and what constructions rise to prominence (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This is a decidedly interpretive endeavour, interested not in causality and verification of objective reality, but rather in patterns, connections and rich understanding of subjective realities (Denzin, 2004). This ontological position is merged with my epistemological orientation, wherein the voices of girls living outside conventional family arrangements are privileged, seeking an insurrection of their “subjugated knowledge[s]” (Hartman, 1992: 483). Here, subjugation refers to lives marked by unequal access to resources, experiences of discrimination and oppression, and lower valuing on the social hierarchy. In the realm of research it is also an illustration of the Eurocentric social science / positivistic tradition of inherently prioritizing the words of the “knowing subject” over those of the “object of knowledge” (Strega, 2005: 202). For these reasons, the act of (re)presentation has a clear motive: it simultaneously honours the personal, lived stories on the individual level and seeks to raise them to the public eye, situating within socio-political discourses the everyday, ‘mundane’, isolated stories of the young women involved in this study.

(Re)presentation is considered political in that I am taking the position that there is no neutral, value-free positions or processes in research. There is no observer who is detached, there are no issues, people, situations or stories that *present themselves* to be told or investigated. People make decisions based on reasoning that prevails, and when we deconstruct who those people are, how the decisions get made, by whom and for what purposes, we see that power is implicated in how systems of value and worth are determined and established. Power here is understood as concrete, ascribed, and manifested within social structures (a critical theory interpretation, Strega, 2005) and

also “created out of social interactions” (Fook, 2002: 52) and thus not fixed and finite (a Foucauldian interpretation, Fook, 2002). In sum, “nothing speaks for itself” (Denzin, 2004:447). This is my interpretation and application of the term ‘political’ to the notion of (re)presentation.

(Re)presentation is also political in the stance of questioning how the stories of ‘others’ are told. I acknowledge there is no such thing as an objective rendering of another person’s story. First, the other person herself is re-presenting an experience, thought, question, description, and/or engagement. Even her re-telling is filtered, partial and bound by its temporality. Second, I hear, make sense, interpret and re-present it as an invested collaborator, via my filters. My re-presentation is also partial and bound by time and place. In these ways, “the Other who is presented in the text is always a version of the researcher’s self” (Denzin, 2004: 452).

(Re)presenting the stories of the subjugated, and rooted in an ontology of variant, co-existing, socially constructed realities, the matter of ‘truth’ necessarily shifts away from an objective, universal and ultimate standard that exists beyond culture and history. Truth exists within the meanings that people attach to events and experiences; reality is the sense girls make of their lives (Strega, 2005), and as such is contextual, embodied, perspectival and inextricably bound up with context (Fook, 2002).

My relational positioning as researcher was that of a partner, a co-investigator along a journey deconstructing femininities; definitions, experiences and uses of violence; and contextual specificities of living in residential care. Traditional social science research is recognized as replete with examples of colonization and appropriation of experiences, histories, knowledges, and theories (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2002), and thus there was much to ‘undo’, both discursively and structurally, in setting forth this

research interest. For example, as a white, middle class, female social worker, I embody many of the visual characteristics and presumed value bases of the central social control agent in the lives of girls living in residential care. Matters of authenticity and reflexivity in the relationship were therefore prioritized in the Research Design, described below.

With regard to value transparency, and aligned with feminist and critical theory principles, I reject the notion of value-free research, for it is my very values that motivate me to destabilize current social structures by engaging with competing discourses and naming a place for agitation and unrest in research processes. My orientation is to politicize and problematize taken for granted assumptions and social processes and in so doing exemplify that neither data collection nor data analysis can be neutral. Two important methodological consequences are evident here. First, I do not participate in the postmodern turn away from absolutes. I situate this research in the realm of social justice, which I define as holding awareness and analysis of structural/material systems of oppression (objective realities) as well as understandings and interpretations of meanings and experiences within these systems (subjective realities) (Brown & Strega, 2005). In my experience, interpretivism without structuralism (or materialist analyses without discursive analyses) risks minimizing the import of systemic, organized and institutional power structures and could undermine the emancipatory potentials of collective consciousness. It risks locating experiences of oppression and marginalization within the individual only, which seems a short step away from pathologizing experiences. At the same time, I appreciate the hope that accompanies agency, as conceived in the interpretivist view.

Second, the research process necessarily interwove my ideological frames, interests, and field experiences with those of the researched, such that the analysis represents an interaction between all participants in the process (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin, 2004). How I see and experience the world affected what I chose to research; how I collected data directed what I learned and the processes of that learning; and how I theorize the actions and meanings within the data is informed by my ontological and epistemological orientations as outlined above. In this way the data are co-constructed: according to the questions I asked or thoughts provoked in the course of discussion, participants (re)presented their processes of developing and attaching meanings both within social relationships and within self, and I interpreted their words and actions, theorizing the ways in which they make sense of and live within their realities. Accordingly I am a key instrument of data collection and my interpretations contributed further data.

4.2 Research Design and Rationale

To review, the guiding research question for this study is: How do young women who live in residential care make meaning of their experiences of being female and using violence?

Within this question there are three simultaneous points of interest. First is how young women experience and understand the processes of gender role socialization and femininities construction. This exploration focuses on how the young women have come to conceive of themselves as young women, the gender expectations they perceive, and any tensions within this meaning making process through their lives to date.

Perceptions of what constitutes violence, its precursors and purposes, form a second point of inquiry. This exploration examined definitional parameters to the term 'violence'

and situations and meanings of engagement in violent behaviours. Finally, these two threads are located specifically within the material and discursive context of living in residential care facilities licensed by the provincial department responsible for child welfare.

Consistent with my ontological and epistemological orientations detailed above, qualitative research reflects a worldview within which reality is “political, personal and experiential” (Denzin, 2004: 501). Correspondingly, qualitative inquiry disrupts the positivist ideal that knowledge is built upon and validated only by impartial, objective measures. Qualitative research is a way of thinking about and approaching inquiry into the social world that centres people within the realm of influence on their situations, positioned to act upon and build knowledge according to their circumstances (Denzin, 2004). Qualitative inquiry methods are appropriate for my research interests given that there is a “natural”⁵, rather than experimental, setting through which to work with the girls in the study. The aim is to approach a layered understanding of the many dimensions of lived experience and interpret according to the meanings attached by the people under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative approaches are also noted to require flexibility so that the site and sample can respond to increasingly refined research questions. Thus while I began the dialogue with catalyst questions, the full reach of the research questions was considered to be emergent, as I sought to discover the very prompts that would be most productive of insight into the phenomenon of girls’ use of violence. This form of qualitative research is based on the assumption that the relevant concepts will develop as the research progresses, and do not require predetermined and

⁵ The term “natural” is placed in inverted commas to denote the contested terrain of this term, given the overt social control functions of residential care settings. The term is used given its familiarity in the qualitative research lexicon and to distinguish social settings from controlled, experimental settings, however it is recognized that in the context of child welfare custody, it is a problematic concept.

definitive directions (Creswell, 1998; Marshall, & Rossman, 1989). Thus the researcher must parallel the design flexibility by being cognitively, theoretically, and behaviourally flexible (Padgett, 1998).

Qualitative methodology is congruent with the purposes underlying the research question, which were to explore, understand, define and discover (Richards & Morse, 2007) relationships between three interactions among research participants: being female plus having initiated violence plus having lived in group care. Qualitative methods validate the natural social settings of participants and welcome the complexity of such settings, providing tools through which to examine the fundamental social processes of 'what is happening'. Qualitative methods allow for the simultaneous experience of pursuing complexity and seeking clarity regarding the phenomenon under study (Richards & Morse, 2007).

The Literature Review in Chapter 2 presented a number of studies which engage with constructions and conceptions of girlhood and of girl violence and suggest their own contextualized answers for the first two components of this study (girls' use of violence). This project adds a third contextual factor, seeking to theorize the ways and meanings by which living in institutional, group contexts interacts with female gender identity and performance and perpetration of violence, during adolescence. My motivation to analyze this threefold interaction through listening closely to girls resonates with the principles of grounded theory. In opposition to quantitative dominance in social science research that privileged hypothesis, deductive logic and standardized measurement, Glaser & Strauss (1967) sought to advance qualitative methods beyond rich description, to the generation of explanatory theoretical propositions. Their focus was on systematic coding procedures, articulating each action within the data, and moving to more abstract

conceptual renderings of the basic social processes therein. Simultaneous data collection and analysis and delaying the literature review are hallmark features of a grounded theory approach, required so that the researcher's evolving conceptualizations stay rooted in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Their seminal text was a guide to clearly detailed and rigorous coding and analysis procedures and sought to secure greater credibility for qualitative research in the social sciences.

Some qualitative scholars have challenged the grounds on which this credibility was positioned, noting the proximity of grounded theory's conceptual origins to positivist, objectivist tenets (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2006; Denzin, 2004). Specifically, the focus on 'capturing' empirical data by an impassive observer considered uninvolved in the process, distilling discrete and precise coding procedures, emphasis on 'the basic social process' and its verification, and the development of specialized terminology, can all be seen to mirror the quantitative canon. In addition, grounded theory has been critiqued through postmodern consciousness on the basis that by definition, theories seek to unify a set of principles applicable across contexts, a practice that is prone to essentialize and reduce complexity (Charmaz, 2004; Clarke, 2005). Further, there is the suspicion that the interest in 'uncovering' or 'building' theory from the data does not address the myriad biases inherent in a non-reflexive researcher (Charmaz, 2004; Denzin, 2004). Even Glaser and Strauss came to diverge in their thinking and practice of grounded theory. Many researchers have further evolved the distinct components of grounded theory to cohere with more postmodern and interpretive ontological and epistemological frameworks (for example Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2004; 2005; 2006; Clarke, 2005).

Acknowledging and working with these concerns, Charmaz (2004; 2005; 2006) has applied the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) regarding constructivism in articulating

constructivist grounded theory. While sharing analytic processes with traditional grounded theory, she highlights in particular the interaction of the researcher with the participants, the data, and the collection/analysis process and embraces this collaboration as a fully interpretive endeavour. Specifically, Charmaz defines constructivist grounded theory as:

...recogniz[ing] that the categories, concepts and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher's interactions within the field and questions about the data. All of the processes reflect what and how the researcher thinks and does about shaping and collecting the data. The researcher composes the story; this story reflects the viewer as well as the viewed....we can only claim to have interpreted a reality, as we understood both our own experience and our subjects' portrayal of theirs (Charmaz, 2004: 271).

Richards and Morse (2007) also contribute to the shift in thinking about the 'nature' of data (though they do not explicate the epistemological underpinnings pursuant thereto) when they recommend considering and speaking of "qualitative data as *made* rather than merely 'collected'" (107, emphasis in original):

To speak of data as "gathered" or "collected" is to imply that data preexist, ready to be picked like apples from a tree. Gathering apples from a tree changes the context of the apples (they are in a basket instead of on a branch) but makes no inherent change in the apples themselves. This is not so with data. Qualitative researchers collect not actual events but representations....talking of 'collecting' data denies the agency of the researcher (p.107).

These elaborations contribute to my conceptualization of the research process as socially interactive and the data as co-constructed in the process of telling and hearing storied lives. However, lest I exacerbate an existing tension in the literature, I must make clear that my interpretation of the principles implied by Charmaz (2004) and Richards & Morse (2007) is that this is a process of social construction as opposed to constructivism. Although Charmaz writes about constructivist grounded theory in recent publications (for example, Charmaz 2004; 2005; 2006) she routinely calls on the concepts of social constructionism in introductory comments. For example,

Constructivist grounded theorists assume that both data and analyses are social constructions that reflect what their production entailed....A constructivist approach...sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data (Charmaz, 2006:130-131).

Constructivism may be defined as developing from personal construct theory, where “constructs are the internal pictures of the world that people build up through their own perceptions; each personal construct differs from other people’s constructs” (Payne, 2005:163). The first excerpt from Charmaz (2004, above) clearly highlights this process of taking in new information and turning it over in one’s own mind as “the researcher composes the story” (271). In contrast, social constructionism roots processes of being, knowing, meaning and experience, and the ways in which these are storied, within the social processes self-making, relationship, culture and context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Social constructions are “shared pictures of the world that people build up by interacting with each other in social and historical contexts” (Payne, 2005:163). I concur with Brown & Scott (2006) that constructivism runs the risk of perpetuating a conservative focus, as it relies on the individualized, internal processes of meaning making within one person’s mind, suggesting the basis of the self as an autonomous subject. My alignment with the process Charmaz outlines (2004; 2005; 2006) is with the principles of the approach, which I language as social constructionism.

These principles of data making are consistent with my ontological and epistemological orientations discussed above and, in congruence with them, I foreground researcher reflexivity as a key methodological issue. Social constructionist definitions of reality acknowledge that participants (of which I am one) in the research process *make real* their worlds through their thoughts, experiences, behaviours, processes which are all social; the data are (re)presentations of these worlds made real,

as are the interpretations made in analysis. In my research, consistent with founding principles of grounded theory, the participants led the foray into understanding, explanation and exploration as they addressed the guiding question “what is going on here” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), with being a girl, with use of violence, with living in group care. I gathered rich description and attended to the contexts, processes, conditions, intentions and assumptions, theorizing the phenomena (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin, 2004). Both the “viewer” and the “viewed” were conferring meaning upon what was shared, and values, views, choices, and ideologies were areas of focus as well as societal structures and institutional parameters. This approach mirrors the balancing of the material and discursive, the interpretive and the structural, and has been the process of my research with young women who participated in the study.

The content of the research question also invokes congruence with grounded theory methodology, given its roots in symbolic interactionism’s perspective that reality is a contextual, negotiated interaction among people and their environments (Blumer, 1969). Experiences of gender, expressions of violence and negotiations in group living are conceptualized as always in process, and the study focuses on understanding how their relevance and meaning have been created and shifted and/or stayed constant over time. In this fluid constellation it was anticipated that race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and ability would be fully present in the stories of the participants, given that the social locations of both researcher and participants necessarily are (re)presented and interacting within the research context, just as they are throughout the rest of life. While traditional grounded theory directs that, as extant theory, structural concepts need to earn their way into the data, the interpretive paradigm offers breadth in how they may be made relevant in the storied accounts (Denzin, 2004).

While I have presented the methodological congruence among the basis for the query, the research question, and the method, there are also points of tension. First, clearly grounded theory does not rest on a singular methodological frame, as its divergent paths attest. Though there are complexities to working within a multi-layered approach, this very tension anchors its closer ontological and epistemological fit for me. The divergent views tacitly permit my own interpretations, and I have found the analytic guidelines for coding, creating categories and writing analytic memos useful. Second, in contrast to one of the core tenets of grounded theory, a literature review was conducted as part of the preparatory work. Reviewing the literature was useful to catalyse research concepts and questions and was a necessary practical step required of a dissertation. Thus while I am aware that I entered the inquiry with anticipations, based on the literature and my experience and politics having worked in residential settings with girls who use violence, there were countless 'unanticipated discoveries' in data collection and interpretation that I welcomed, having entered with curiosity and humility.

4.3 Participants and Sampling

In keeping with grounded theory methods, there was a seamless interface between initial sampling, data collection, the refining of interview questions, theoretical sampling and data analysis, such that it is difficult to lay them out in linear and differentiated fashion. The parameters of the research question established the initial sample for this study, with the deliberate search for persons to be involved who are female, have been a perpetrator of violence, and presently live or in the past lived in a residential care setting. Purposive sampling was thus appropriate, wherein participants were selected because, consistent with the conceptual framework of qualitative research and on the basis of these characteristics, they were considered likely to possess contextualized and relevant

information (Richards & Morse, 2007). Following from the research design and questions, neither representativeness nor randomness in sample selection was sought, as the study is site and population specific. Over the course of the study and following the processes of theoretical sampling described hereto, at the close of data gathering 22 young women between the ages of 14 and 24 years of age had participated.

The age range of participants underwent a significant change over the course of the study, beginning with the parameter of 16 -18 years of age, and broadening to become age 14 years and older. Explanation for this change is prefaced by confirming that the research has recognized the vulnerability of the research participants given their youth, the topics under discussion, and the social control settings within which they live or have lived. With these vulnerabilities in mind the research was originally submitted for ethical review with an age range of 16-18 years for participants. However, early in the study this parameter proved a barrier to access. First, given the local child welfare offices' move toward terminating care agreements at the age of 16 years, I found that girls ages 14 -15 years were more accessible and available than youth over 16 years. While both groups were transient, the younger girls were transient within a smaller geographical radius. Second, the feedback offered from early participants was that our discussions were standard and typical in their daily lives, were not experienced as intrusive, and did not unearth past traumas. In practice, many of the girls interviewed contested the idea of using pseudonyms, questioning the need to masquerade their narratives. Finally, there is support in the literature for the ages of 14-16 as being uniquely situated in the process of gender identity development, a period within which girls "learn how to take up their place in hierarchies and regimes of structural

power...and occupy gendered subject positions" (Burman, Batchelor & Brown, 2001:445).

The upper age range was also extended based on the request of a young woman who was 24 years old to participate. The youth serving organization through which she learned of the study, along with many other youth serving bodies in the geographic area, defines their client population as from 16-24 years. It grew clearer to me that, given the interests of this study, the upper age range was arbitrary. These considerations were submitted to the ethics review board (see Appendix C) and consent was granted for the age parameter of the sample to be broadened to "over the age of 14 years" and without an upper age limit (see Appendix D).

At the time of interview, all participants were living within 90 km of the Halifax Regional Municipality and all but one noted Nova Scotia as their home province. Fourteen identified as Caucasian, three as African Nova Scotian, one as an immigrant from an African country, and four named Aboriginal descent. Degree of involvement in child welfare ranged across the varying combinations of:

- being in permanent care and custody and living in a licensed residential facility
- being in permanent care and custody and living with a family member
- being in temporary care and custody and living in a licensed residential facility
- previously involved with child welfare services, and now in receipt of Income Assistance
- no history of involvement with child welfare services past or present, with experience living in youth shelters

For several participants, living arrangements were fluid over the course of the research. Although the proposed methodology was to meet with all participants on two occasions, the second being to review the content of their transcribed interview, given the mobility of the girls, and despite my efforts to locate them, this proved challenging. I met eleven of the participants for one interview only, with six of these saying that they had no

interest in meeting a second time. Eleven participants I met more than once, both intentionally and fortuitously. In intentional meetings we reviewed the transcripts and discussed thoughts, questions or concerns that had arisen since our previous meeting. Fortuitous meetings occurred at various residential settings and at community based youth gatherings.

All the participants meet the study criteria, having lived in residential group care settings. Some lived in girls-only facilities, while others live in co-ed facilities, and some have lived in both. For some, living in group care was preceded by living with a foster family; others moved directly into group settings from their families of origin. Some participants had spent time living in short term shelter facilities, which they described as distinct from a longer term arrangement. All but two of the participants were still living in group care at the time of my interview with them.

4.4 Statement of Ethical Issues⁶

It is recognized that engaging these participants in conversations regarding their experiences carries unique risks pertaining to age, sex, content under discussion, and living in a social control setting, that of residential group facilities. First, regarding maturational development, adolescence is often considered to be a precarious time, when the formation of identity, mediation of competing pressures between 'growing up' and 'being a kid', and emotional maturity are well documented as volatile and therefore of concern (for example, Erikson, 1980; Lesko, 2001). Second, some literature proposes that teenaged girls in particular face additional stressors, given the operationalization of patriarchy in western societies, its manifestations of sexism and

⁶ Please see Appendices A and B for ethical and access approval, respectively.

violence, and the resultant gendered crises of self esteem (Gilligan, 1982; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994; Taylor, MacLean & Gilligan, 1995).

Third, the content that was both sought and potentially triggered is sensitive in nature. Asking girls about their girlhood, violence, and the setting within which they are living could easily segue into areas that raise intensely personal and potentially troubling experiences, concerns and fears. Content and context merge here, as it is understood that living outside one's family home, for a temporary period or permanently, signifies life experiences that include vulnerability and possibly harm and exploitation, whether physically, emotionally and/or sexually⁷. Mediating these potential harms is my experience and competence as a clinical social worker and youth care worker. For 15 years I held various counseling roles with young people and their families, from risk assessment and short term crisis intervention to long term therapeutic support. As a social worker trained in clinical practice, I am competent working in highly emotionally charged environments with this population of young women. In addition to attending to respectful rapport and demonstrating genuine interest and empathy, I overtly named the sensitive and difficult nature of the topics under discussion and the right of the participant to refuse to answer, to discontinue or to withdraw at any time if she wished. In only one instance did one participant choose to pass in response to a question, and no participants discontinued or withdrew.

It was also recognized that after-effects from a personal interview are not limited to any specified period of time following the engagement. Therefore prior to beginning our meeting, each participant and I decided strategies, both short term and long term, in

⁷ I am conscious not to suggest that living outside one's family home is in and of itself a risk factor.

the event of feeling upset after the interview. Most often approaching facility staff was the strategy of choice by the participants.

The issue of leaving the research process was considered a potential risk to involvement, a point directly tied to engaging one-on-one with a potentially vulnerable population in a captive setting. This issue of leaving refers to the relationship that can develop between participant and researcher, on which the participant may come to rely. While it was considered that participants in this study may have experienced a sense of relationship building with me through the sharing of their personal stories, no participants expressed concern regarding the terms of engagement for this study nor sought contact with me beyond them, either directly or through youth care workers or social workers. Clearly outlining the purpose and duration of the engagement in information sessions, interviews and follow up meetings is considered to have been useful to offset this possibility.

Finally, the matter of free and informed consent is acutely salient in the context of young people living in residential facilities, which are recognized to exist on a continuum of institutional control. Girls under the guardianship of the Minister of Community Services are placed in residential care facilities regardless of their desire to be so. This population represents a captive audience, subject to the social controls, both material and discursive, available and endorsed in these settings. Girls not under the guardianship of the Minister of Community Services are voluntarily placed, representing a position less captive, but still with regulatory confines again both material and discursive. In order to address this overarching context of choice and constraint, it was named as such, when sharing information with social workers, youth care workers and potential participants and in discussing the informed consent process with the young

women who decided to be interviewed. I experienced great care taken by social workers and youth care workers in acting on an understanding of the covert operations of influence and taking a very deferential approach in both providing information to potential participants and leaving them to decide.

A second consideration in a social control setting such as a residential facility is the possibility of retribution or duress for participation or non-participation, with attendant consequences, based on the prevailing group culture and norms of the day. This potential risk was mediated primarily by the approach taken to introduce the study, which was informal and purely invitational. In practice, it was frequently the case that more than half the potential participants in a particular setting declined, which was heartening to see, given concerns regarding duress to participate. While the full extent of after effects cannot be known, informal follow up conversations with both participants and facility staff corroborated that there were no damaging group dynamics as a result of participation or non-participation. Ultimately, the message from those who participated was that these interviews were typical of their usual encounters with 'professional adults' in their lives and did not warrant or provoke any further attention or discussion.

Regarding benefits to involvement, girls who participated in this study took the opportunity to author their stories and present themselves according to their choosing. This centring of first voice experience and expression is considered a significant benefit particularly in light of literature that suggests girls 'lose their voices' during adolescence (Pipher, 1994; Taylor et. al, 1995). Further, in keeping with Padgett's (1998) call for research that attends to larger socio-political contexts within which social workers and participants engage, the processes and 'products' of this research are conceptualized as owned by the girls themselves, loaned to me for interpretation and understanding, which

I corroborated with those who were available and willing to do so. No external influences threatened to subvert the interpretations and implications according to an agenda outside of the research partnerships outlined herein. In my clinical experience, the focus on the telling of one's story is valued highly among young people about whom much is theorized and written, often with insufficient subjective input and interpretation. Participants who reviewed their transcripts and sought to remain involved verbalized that this process felt respectful and inclusive.

4.5 Site Access and Recruitment

Gaining entry to this population involved several steps. First, permission was granted by the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services for research involving children and youth who are in the permanent or temporary guardianship of the Ministry. This process involved the preparation of a proposal in accordance with the Department's protocol for access. Once permission was granted, contact by telephone and in person with four senior persons within the Children and Family Services Division was made in order to provide context, promote interest and generate involvement with the study. After this point, concurrent recruitment efforts were made across multiple means and were repeated on an ongoing basis between July 2006 and April 2007. Contact was made with child welfare district managers and casework supervisors, and I followed their direction regarding contacting social workers directly or through them. In speaking with individual social workers, I asked that they consider if any of the females on their caseload met study criteria. If so, I asked that they share information about the study with those potential participants, and offer to facilitate contact with me.

At the same time, I made contact with Executive Directors of local residential and non-residential programs, seeking permission and opportunity to address program staff

on the nature of the study and recruitment efforts. If granted, I asked coordinators of programs to consider their active participants in light of the selection criteria and help make the connection to me, through relayed messages, use of telephone, or provision of my contact information. Once a participant expressed interest, I contacted her directly or through the means she provided.

Recruitment posters and informational flyers were circulated around community youth serving agencies, child welfare offices and residential programs, and individual contacts were made on a regular and repeated basis (please see Appendices E, F and G for samples). I sought invitations to attend resident meetings, programming events and youth-in-care events at the facilities and in the community to inform potential participants of the study and invite their participation. While (re)establishing contact with professionals in the field may have been important in ways that I did not see (for example, enhancing my credibility, promoting overall awareness of the study, and confirming my adherence with the appropriate governmental channels), few of these numerous contacts yielded participants. Only one phone contact was made to me directly from a potential participant who had seen a poster and wanted to participate.

In contrast, two other strategies were most effective in bringing forward participants. First, having opportunity to be among potential participants in informal ways, over a period of time and in the comfort of the residential setting, led to requests to be interviewed. For example, previous working relationships with particular group homes enhanced early invitations to come in and address groups of young women. In one such situation, following an informal discussion wherein I explained the research, its purposes and processes, and addressed questions, each of four young women 'signed on' for individual interviews. Being at that group home several times in the next few

days led to further inquiries from other residents about what I was doing and why, some of which led to more interviews. Being in 'their space', through an introduction by 'their staff' seemed key in establishing my credibility and in granting me access. In this way, the context and resources of the living space greatly facilitated contact with participants.

By extension, snowball sampling was another effective recruitment method for this study, given the context of group living, the fluidity of living arrangements, and a relatively small community. 'Word of mouth' connection and the testimonial of current participants promoted my credibility with potential participants. Conducting interviews within the group facilities, which was the choice of participants, also enhanced this access. By physically being within the facility, other potential participants had the opportunity to informally evaluate me and consider their comfort in signing on for the project. During smoke breaks and informal conversations, participants spread the news regarding this project, and several times as I would be leaving one interview I would have another one scheduled⁸.

All the interviews occurred in a time and place of the choosing of the participant, and all but three chose the residential setting within which they were living or spending time⁹. This meant that staff were aware of the meeting. While not a condition of participation in this study, staff involvement became instrumental in contacting potential participants and facilitating our meetings. Group home and youth facility staff made space available in their settings, knew the schedules of the participants and could anticipate delays in start time, relayed messages between me and the participants and

⁸ These formal routes to access, while critical, do not account for my attention paid to informal access, essentially 'getting in' with the girls themselves. This issue is discussed within the 'Researcher Reflexivity' section below.

⁹ Of these three, two chose to meet at my office, for privacy; this meeting was coordinated through staff members. The third was living independently and chose to meet at my office.

also provided an informal atmosphere within which I could enter and become 'known' somewhat, to aid a potential participant in making her decision regarding whether to participate. The acceptance by the staff appears to have added to my credibility in the process. As the study progressed and formal advertisements were not assisting recruitment, the staff that I became familiar with also helped spread the word about the study, and provided touchstones for periodic calls to see if any new participants had come forward.

In addition, staff played a variable role regarding providing information. In settings where I was known to the staff, information regarding potential participants, or participant whereabouts, was readily shared. In settings where my professional credibility was not known, facility protocols regarding confidentiality precluded my relaying messages or having direct communication. For example, in the one instance when a potential participant contacted me directly, I returned the call however direct contact could not be made given the privacy policies of the facility from which the call originated. The message I left for the young woman was not returned.

This example served as a reminder of the priority of immediacy in follow through in my interactions with the participants. Specifically, I learned early that the opportunity to collaborate was fleeting and that any delays in communication or scheduled meetings might preclude an interview. Thus when I was at a facility meeting with one young woman, and another expressed interest in participating, wherever possible I tried to extend my time at the facility that day, thus capturing the moment and overcoming barriers to participation originating in the transience in the girls' lives.

4.6 Data Collection

Data collected for this research included individual interviews and their transcriptions, informal group discussions with girls and handwritten notes from these, my observational field notes and journal reflections, and use of the researcher as methodological tool. Encounters ranged from scheduled appointments to informal encounters both within and outside the research agenda and co-mingling in common spaces with participants. This range of data collection methods built a breadth and depth of data that ensures their credibility.

Given that the core interest of this study is the subjective telling of lived experiences by young women, individual interviews were a central method for data collection, allowing them to describe contexts of choices and meanings attached to behaviours, in their own words and ways. Face to face interviewing provides “one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings” (Fontana & Frey, 1994: 361). However, the interview is much more than the passive offering of answers in response to questions, operating in a social vacuum by neutral participants. The interview engages at least two people, acting subjects, in a particular time and space, “historically and contextually located” (Fontana & Frey, 2005:696), in a collaborative effort wherein both interviewer and interviewee contribute to the creation of an understanding. Questions are posed according to a research purpose, positioned within a politic, which help to shape the intention and stance of the questions. As a social encounter, the mutual and reciprocal influence of process (the ‘what’) and content (the ‘how’) occurs at all levels in research interviews (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

The interview is an active social site, thus process and content include gender, race, class, ability and sexual orientation as well as their intersections. Feminist, Black and Queer researchers, in particular, have highlighted the need to account for gender, race, class and sexuality in research interviews with girls and women, which means acknowledging the myriad ways in which patriarchy, racism and heterosexism and their attendant systems of hierarchy seep into the exchange (for example, Collins, 2000; Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002; Lather, 1991; Reinhartz, 1992). Social location is not neutral; it filters data collection methods, analysis, interpretation and representation. For example, feminist scholars have warned that the very template of the research interview carries a masculinist cast, with the interviewer traditionally advised to take control, remain passive so as not to taint the data, and not engage with the material as it is being shared (Lather, 1991). I embarked on individual interviews conscious of these cautions and vigilant of the potential corruptions to ethical and purposeful practice.

I originally proposed two semi-structured interviews of 60 minutes each in a setting comfortable for the participant that was private and quiet, wherein the first meeting was shaped with catalyst questions (see Appendix I). The second interview would provide opportunity for reflection on the first interview and the transcript, and the subsequent return to any topics previously discussed. Attention to ensuring that the interview process was an authentic and respectful exchange emerges from my belief that the poignant and nuanced first voice accounts of girls in residential settings, their experiences of being girls, and their experiences using violence, has not been adequately captured in the literature. The variables at play in the lives of girls living in residential settings are not easily identified and a distant review rooted in extant theory does not provide the detailed understanding that is deserved and required. The primary

data collection method of in depth interviewing highlighted the narratives of the participants as the central means through which to get close to their realities and the details of their lives.

Establishing 'neutral territory' was considered critical, given that I sought to engage in research with young people who have been subjected to professional intervention, much of it outside of their choosing. Consideration for privacy, comfort and a sense of ownership over the interview setting were also central in this regard. The interviews sought to cover a range of topics that the participant thought relevant to the three anchors of experiences, perceptions and messages about what it means to 'be a girl'; experiences, perceptions and messages about violence; and experiences, perceptions and messages regarding living in residential settings. The interview style was flexible, with invitation to the participants to tell stories and bring in artifacts that they felt spoke to the issues involved.

Informal group discussions with participants were held sometimes as precursors to the individual interviews, to increase comfort and familiarity and address questions, and sometimes as successors to the individual interviews, based on participants' requests to review summary thoughts in this way. These data added new dimensions and layers, yet could not be seen to replace or make redundant the one to one opportunities to hear the girls' stories somewhat less encumbered by an audience.¹⁰ On the basis of overt social pressures to perform and conform, particularly within teen culture, and concerns for privacy and confidentiality for girls already living in the fishbowl of institutional care, individual, private interviews were prioritized.

¹⁰ The concept of the audience features prominently in the Findings chapter and is fully explicated there. The reference here is to underscore that in the one to one interview, there is still an audience: both the self and the other.

In accordance with informed consent procedures (see Appendix H), participants were told that a typed transcript of the audio recording would be delivered to them for review, so they could alter or delete any portion of its contents. This opportunity to re-author was a key consideration of design, given the vulnerability of the population, the topics under discussion, and the myriad ways in which living in a socially controlled setting can impact a young person. As noted, a second meeting was not possible with eleven of the participants, given changes in placements and loss of contact. Further, two participants declined to be audiotaped. In those two interviews I took handwritten notes; both declined the invitation to review their copies.

Observational field notes focused on the physical environment, the atmosphere, the verbal exchanges and the site specific customs that I witnessed while in each interview setting. A minimum of three single spaced pages were handwritten in detail following each entry into an interview site with the intention of recording that which might be taken for granted or considered mundane in the field setting (Angrosino, 2005). These were largely descriptive, where I sought to strip away filters and preconceived ideas of what might be pertinent to the data collection. My observational notes were also interpretive, as I 'read' the interactions I saw and reflected on the settings as elements of the data making process with each participant. These notes added context to the interview data. They helped to round out the explicit stories shared with me, bridging words and actions. Specifically, I recorded the day, time, weather, and length of time the interview occurred. I wrote about the location and physical structure of the facility setting, the room within which we met, and the ambience I experienced or that was remarked upon by people in my midst. I wrote about the words and tone of voice used between staff and the girls and between the residents; I wrote about appearance

and presentation of girls and other residents. I recorded daily routines that I witnessed such as mealtimes, quiet/study time, smoke breaks, and customs particular to each facility, for example the absence of footwear among the residents in the secure facility.

My field journal held my questions, concerns, feelings and reactions pertaining to both process and content of each interview and my evolving role as a researcher. I noted when I felt nervous, forced, and at ease. I wrote several pages regarding each young woman about the sense that I had of her in the full context of her life; I wrote details that would capture each one in her uniqueness (for example, style and content of speech, physical presentation and the way she related to me), enough that nuances would not blur over time. I reflected on the degree of engagement that was created and the factors that led to interactions that were less than satisfying. For example, in my first set of interviews I could not connect with one young woman, in three informal conversations prior to the interview. On one level, I internalized a feeling of judgement from her; on another level, I reconciled this as her way of being comfortable in our engagement. Regardless, throughout that interview my approach seemed stilted, my questions incoherent, and the data yield minimal. This led me to question the purpose of my inquiry and the relevance of my questions, within an overarching uncertainty regarding asking other people about that which interests *me*. Writing in my journal helped to draw connections between my assumptions and feelings and the progress of data collection, as well as to stay rooted in the broader social processes worthy of study in this research.

Over the course of the research my field journal grew to include my developing analytic codes. I drew tables of data segments, explicating their properties, corresponding them with ever deeper conceptual levels, and aligning empirical topics

with theoretical concepts. As I developed codes into categories, I asked questions back to the data and compared across codes for similarities and distinctions. This repository for emerging thoughts and questions, a place to draw diagrams of relationships among the codes and categories, was a central tool in my theorizing and one that contributed to my steady enthusiasm for and investment in this project. While active since the first interviews in October 2006, I met the commitment to write in it every day beginning February 2007, making notes, asking questions, recalling specifics and re-working concepts in order to prioritize the data and my deepening analysis.

4.7 Data Analysis

Grounded theory data analysis centres on the empirical world of the participants from the study's first step into the field and focuses on approximating deep understanding of the meanings, intentions and interpretations of the participants (Charmaz, 2006).

Analysis in this study began with hearing the stories of the participants and seeking to understand the relationships within and between constructions of femininity, use of violence and living in residential care. In accordance with the defining features of grounded theory, coding structures were not taken from extant theory and imposed upon the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Rather, as the sole researcher, I audiotaped interviews as prescribed in the informed consent procedures¹¹, took observational and experiential fieldnotes, listened to the audiotapes, and read the transcripts repeatedly, seeking deeper and deeper understanding of the data. I moved between conceptualizing broad descriptions and explanations to honing in on specific segments, as I repeatedly read and listened to the interviews.

¹¹ Audiotaped interviews were transcribed by a professional who signed a confidentiality waiver.

I began with line by line coding, reading and re-reading every line of text and asking 'what is the *process* that is occurring in this section of data?' Wary of the slippery slope toward merely labeling a topic of discussion, I coded data in the verb tense, to stay focused on action. No a priori codes, categories or concepts were imposed on the data. With repeated attempts and a list of questions to guide me (see Charmaz, 2006: 47-51) I practiced the method of explicating processes, actions, meanings, assumptions, consequences, and created codes as I moved through each segment of data. I then moved to focused coding, recognizing patterns of frequency within the line by line and bringing together larger segments of data under these more prevalent codes. Next I began to consider conceptual categories for the active codes, pondering the underlying analytic components and raising the level of abstraction. Beginning to theorize continued the practice of interpreting meaning, patterns and relationships and remained an activity, a process. I held fast to the empirical data, re-reading the transcripts that comprised the local context and manifestations and at the same time considered the broader questions of how the participants understand their realities and how they form their actions in the world. This was an interpretive, active and analytic process, seeking to push to more abstract levels of conceptualization the meanings, actions and social structures that I was theorizing.

Methodological congruence was maintained through my repeated visits to the field to continue to gather data alongside analysis of the data. One of the defining features of grounded theory is its constant comparative method, achieved through simultaneous data collection and analysis as well as through studying relationships between statements, accounts, processes, codes, categories, and analytic memos both within interviews and across interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As

inconsistencies as well as consistencies arose in my conceptual interpretation of the data, returning to the field for more data helped to refine the analyses, pursue their relevance, and evolve the properties of the emerging theories, and compare again within and across participants' stories, within and across contexts, and within and across emerging categories¹² (Charmaz, 2006).

I completed six interviews in October 2006, recording my processes and experiences, observational notes on the setting and overall environment of the meetings, methodological concerns and challenges, coding of data, and analytic memos of the codes I was using in my research journal. I coded those data in detailed, line by line fashion, defining the action or process contained in each statement. From these I developed several codes that were promising as future abstract tools for analysis, yet too shallow in data to withstand rigorous explication. Analysis ground to a halt; there was simply not enough material to render anything analytical. Thus I engaged theoretical sampling, the process of "seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in your emerging theory" (Charmaz, 2006:96) and interviewed 9 more participants in February 2007. I re-ordered and re-worded interview questions and added new ones, seeking to refine the codes that I had begun to name (see Appendix J). I used the same recording means for capturing my experiences and thoughts. I engaged line by line coding once more, naming processes and actions, staying immersed in the data. I worked with existing and new codes, developed categories, and began to make comparisons within and across data, codes and categories. However here too the analysis was broad, not focused and rich. When I returned to the field in

¹² Although I have found it most often explicitly associated with grounded theory, literature review yielded sources that note simultaneous data collection and analysis as a hallmark for all qualitative research (for example, Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Padgett, 1998).

April and May 2007 and completed 7 more interviews, I honed in on emerging categories with my questions, seeking to fill them with data, to develop the concepts and theoretical premises that propelled the analysis.

NVivo software was used to store and organize the data. This program allows for easy retrieval and accessibility, and its primary use was in moving the “raw” data (observational notes and transcriptions) through to intermediate stages (transcripts, codes, diagrams, and analytic memos).

4.8 Methodological Evaluation

To reiterate, research is not a neutral, apolitical activity: not in its rationale, design, sampling, site access, data collecting, data analysis and theorizing, and not in its evaluation. What are the criteria for evaluating a methodology? Who decides on them? For what purposes? Through what processes do some, and not others, rise to prominence? These questions problematize the question of evaluation and reveal the processes of social construction beneath. And they are critical to ask, given that research results often become legitimized knowledge. Feminist, Black, Queer, Indigenous-centred and critical theorists and researchers have traced back Sandra Harding’s blunt questions “Whose science? Whose knowledges?” (Harding, 1991) in locating the politics and power that propel much academic research (for example, Collins, 2000; Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002; Lather, 1991; Reinharz, 1992).

With this consciousness, the qualitative methodology literature reviewed here consistently addresses rigour in data collection and analysis (for example Brown & Potts, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Denzin, 2004; Lather, 1991; Strega, 2005). Although early frameworks (for example Lincoln & Guba, 1985) created concepts analogous to quantitative concepts, recent writings spend less time defending qualitative research’s

approach to evaluating its research (for example, Brown & Potts, 2005). These later writings begin with the position that the criteria for rigour in critical, interpretive research is the degree to which analysis of data coincides with the meanings imparted by participants and is endorsed as reliable by participants. Brown & Potts (2005) note, "in contrast to most positivist work, this assessment [of rigour] is a theoretical, principled question as opposed to a technical concern" (277).

Congruent with this orientation, my position is that mirroring the traditional canons for validity and reliability reinforces the hierarchical and dichotomous ideologies of positivist designs. Thus I have concern regarding Lincoln & Guba's (1985) renominalization from internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. It is incompatible to on the one hand assert that the subjective, naturalistic explorations of qualitative research are independently legitimate and equivalent to the value of quantitative methods, and on the other, parallel the processes for legitimacy on the model forwarded by an objectivist epistemology. This process seems to be an example of a "categor[y] of western thought [that] need[s] destabilization" (Harding, 1986: 245). Such destabilization occurs most convincingly not by replicating positivist dominance in language more palatable to qualitative ears but by reconceptualizing criteria for rigour entirely.

For example, Lather (1991) notes that there is no infallible equation that meets the demand for legitimate collective knowledge and suggests "vigorous self-reflexivity" as the cornerstone for rigorous research (66). Strega (2005) advocates an action-manifestation of rigour through investigating social inequalities and articulating the findings to mobilize collective action. Brown & Potts (2005) discusses anti-oppressive research principles as the basis for the assertion that research be evaluated on the basis

of the degree to which the researcher maintains the commitment first to participants to interpret and (re)present their stories in ways that hold meaning for them, and second to be transparent in her biases, assumptions, and limitations. For Charmaz (2006) rigour is achieved through “successive levels of abstraction through comparative analysis” (178) and intense scrutiny throughout the activity of theorizing.

Charmaz (2005, 2006) has established criteria for grounded theory studies which diverge considerably from those of Glaser and Strauss both together (1967) and independently (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) yet maintains the focus on social processes as opposed to social actors. Credibility is based on having breadth and depth of data and the use of grounded methods (active coding and conceptual categories that have been directed by the data; systematic comparisons across data and processes) such that the emerging analyses are compelling. Originality focuses on the theoretical treatment of the data in ways that extend existing understandings. Resonance refers to the degree to which the analysis digs beneath the social givens and makes sense to the research participants. Usefulness refers to evaluation of the study’s contribution to understanding and bettering the social world (Charmaz, 2006:182-183). It is noteworthy that, despite Charmaz’s emphasis on the interaction of researcher with the participants and making data as a co-constructed process, no part of this interpretive social interaction is made explicit in her evaluation criteria.

Drawing from a collection of qualitative researchers, rooted in feminist analysis, critical theory and the grounded theory methods’ criteria laid out by Charmaz (2006), I have evaluated the rigour of my research methodology against the following composite framework. The questions are anchored in theoretical principles and qualitative hallmarks such as prolonged and repeated engagement in the field, multiple methods,

reflexivity, and member checking (Denzin, 1994; Lather, 1991; Padgett, 1998). Each one is addressed in turn:

- Have I reached “intimate familiarity with the setting [and] topic?” (Charmaz, 2006:182)

My conclusion that I have indeed reached intimate familiarity with the setting and topic is based on several considerations. First, collecting data over a nine month period allowed for prolonged reflection on each entry to the field, ongoing review of my field journal, repeated review of the audio files and readings of the transcripts, and reflection on my epistemological and ontological contributions to the data. Further, constant comparison across interviews and member checking with participants, with positive review of my developing interpretations, confirmed that I was working with credible and comprehensive familiarity with both setting and topic. Finally, my 15 years of frontline experience referred to in the Introduction (Chapter 1) serves as underlying contextual understanding to the issues present in group home and with girls who use violence.

- Is there sufficient breadth and depth to the data for my conceptual renderings?

My conceptual renderings, as detailed in the Findings (Chapter 6) and Discussion (Chapter 7) are grounded throughout the data, comparing both across interviews and within interviews. All catalyst questions were asked of all participants, with discussion points diverging and converging according to each particular story, and all of which contributed to my theorizing and analysis.

- Where have my assumptions and biases been implicated in the research process and how have I managed them?

I acknowledge that I came to this research with assumptions and biases based on my social location, my politics, and my practice experience in social work, as referred to in the Introduction (Chapter 1) and Methodology (Chapter 4). I interrogated these by

asking myself questions, such as: “where does this belief come from in me?”; “why do I consider this thread important?”; “what am I not considering important?”; “what am I missing by asking/not asking/noticing/not noticing/analyzing/not analyzing that which I am?” As described in the Methodology (Chapter 4), I managed my reflections by writing in my personal journal and actively deconstructing their origins and their implications in this research. I talked about my reactions, feelings and questions with colleagues and discussed strategies for managing the layers of my experiences and politics when theorizing other peoples’ lives.

- How have I maintained consciousness and transparency regarding the interpretive, interactive processes throughout this research?

Primarily I have maintained consciousness and transparency by writing in my personal journal in stark terms about my concerns regarding how, when, where and why I might subvert the critical inquiry orientation to this research. My vigilance stemmed from commitment to be reflexive and congruent with my epistemological and ontological orientations detailed on pages 63-74 of the Methodology (Chapter 4) and was reinforced through regularly writing out my thoughts, feelings, challenges, and questions.

- To what degree “[c]an participants see themselves in the study?” (Brown & Potts, 2005: 277)

When I talked and met with some participants following the research, both formally and informally, and shared synopses of the findings and interpretations, the participants expressed satisfaction with my renderings.

- To what degree “[d]oes the analysis ‘ring true’ to participants?” (Brown & Potts, 2005:277)

My findings, for example “all about the boy” and “watching and being watched”, reportedly ‘rang true’ with participants. However, it was regarding my conceptual analyses of choice and constraint, surveillance, and bargaining femininity detailed in the

Discussion (Chapter 7I) where participants were not 'with me'. I believe this is a broader issue about a tension between that which is meaningful and useful on the level of 'street knowledge' and that which is required for academic writing. The writing and theorizing processes required me to abstract and conceptualize on levels beyond the data itself, and the academic context requires language that may not be accessible to these participants. In my view both the writing process and the academic context moved me away from 'ringing true' with the lived and languaged realities of participants. In further research I would focus inquiry directly upon each of these three abstractions to see if my emerging ideas connect with the experience of participants.

- What is the relationship between my emerging grounded theory and broader theoretical positions on social processes? To what degree am I revising, extending, refuting, or corroborating other theories? (Lather, 1991)

The relationship between my emerging grounded theory and broader theoretical positions on social processes is introduced in the Organizing Concepts (Chapter 5) and fully explored in the Discussion (Chapter 7) following presentation of the data.

4.9 Researcher Reflexivity: Identity, Power and Collaboration

As is evident throughout this thesis, my social location and context, values, interests, politics, and all manner of interpretations of these by others, are woven throughout the research process. My role as researcher is recognized as a key instrument of data collection, thus I entered discussions regarding site access and with participants with deference, respect, curiosity and collegiality. I sought to parallel the design flexibility inherent in qualitative methods by being flexible in engagement, thinking and theorizing (Padgett, 1998). Naturalistic inquiry, occurring in the context of people's lives and oriented toward variant, co-existing realities can be compromised if approached otherwise (Padgett, 1988; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). My commitment to be reflexive,

to turn back on myself, compelled me to vigilance regarding the impact of my subjectivity as a methodological and substantive issue (Lather, 1991).

Integral to feminist, critical and constructionist grounded theory methodologies is understanding the role of power in the researcher-researched relationship, particularly salient in this research with young women who use violence and live in social control settings. Yet postmodern critical theory disrupts the idea that power is a tangible, concrete body that one has or does not have; a static configuration rooted within a hierarchy considered to replicate 'true relations' (Brown, 2007; Fook, 2002). I will address a few points that emerged in my research process that illustrate tensions around conceptions of power.

First, in my recognition of the existence of structural power, I recognize that I am a white, middle class social worker, and as such I embody much of the social control function in the history of social work. Knowing that many girls who have lived in group homes have had social workers who look like me, in the figurative sense, I deliberately tried to offset this association, by dressing casually, having a relaxed, easy going demeanor, using humour, sitting on the floor with others, demonstrating ease with colloquial language and flexibility with time, smoke breaks, and explaining the informed consent process in accessible language. Early on I was providing my business card for my contact information, however, realizing its formality and the potential perception of incongruence between introduction as a student and this professional marker, I devised informal contact cards that named me as I was explaining myself in person: a student interested in research with girls who live in group homes and have used violence, not a professor at a University (see Appendix K). At the point I recognized this discrepancy it seemed glaring, and I reflected on how I had taken for granted that this piece of

identification was irrelevant or invisible to the participants. This early example remained a salient prompt for always considering the view of me and our encounter as seen through the eyes of the young women participants.

Also in terms of structural power, given my position as a 'professional', as an 'adult', and as someone known to or introduced by the facility staff or the social worker, I have reflected on the degree to which it may have been difficult to say no to an interview with me. How did compliance and noncompliance with staff requests (which may be taken as expectations) play a role in who came forward, and when? Further, I defined the research agenda, chose and asked the questions, and shared less of myself than the young women participants. I also have the central role, inscribed with attendant power, to interpret the data, which is not easily reconciled with the shared, social process of gathering the data.

In terms of discursive power, I was aware that my body language speaks loudly, encouraging some threads more than others with my leaning in, head nods, and sounds of affirmation. I also followed up on the pieces that I found most relevant for further exploration; in these ways I controlled the interview session. I recognized a potential role of discursive power when, in an informal session with one of the participants, she told me she thought she was pregnant, having hoped for and planned to become pregnant. I struggled with my reaction to this 14 year old, trying to set aside my 'social worker' hat and continue asking, observing and understanding in light of my research agenda. The participants could be seen as expressing discursive power through missed meetings that were previously scheduled and agreed upon, taking impromptu breaks when hearing someone arrive home or the phone ring, and delaying the start time after my arrival. Some interviews needed rescheduling, as the participant was gone without

permission from the facility. Sometimes the participants re-routed my questions to more comfortable or safe areas of discussion, which fits not only informed consent/ethical procedures but further I took as the girls communicating their agency in our encounter.

The matter of compensation is one with which I have wrestled in this research process. I agree with the premise of paying youth research contributors for sharing their expertise, and complied with the policies of the youth serving agencies to do so. However, I have been uncomfortable with comments such as 'it's an easy ten bucks' and 'that's a pack of smokes, yup I'll do it'. One participant asked repeatedly if we could continue to meet, so she could get 'ten bucks' each time. I recognized within myself ideological congruence with paying for these girls' expertise, but I experienced discomfort with setting up the dynamic that 'the more you say, the more I pay'. It borders exploitation when considered in this way and moves away from the ethical premise of payment for one's expertise.

In another sense, however, money is valued currency, and girls living in group care or just beyond group care are no different than the general populace in this regard. One participant spoke of money equating with control, another spoke of money as offering autonomy. Almost all talked of how they would choose to spend their money, and articulated the importance of choice in this and other ways. Further, for me, social class was both visible (via an understanding of the structural conditions and processes that often lead to being under the scrutiny of child welfare care) and somewhat invisible (through the provision of material goods while in residential settings in ways that seek to level the playing field). It is easy for me, sitting in my white middle class privilege, to critique the exchange of money for a research encounter, however I cannot dismiss the discursive and material meanings of having an extra ten dollars.

Chapter 5. Organizing Concepts

5.1 Introduction

Throughout the analysis of the data for this study, I developed and refined theoretical codes that grew from my interpretations of the girls' stories. These organizing concepts come from the literature and from my experiences as a social worker in residential care and resonated in the analysis of the data. All of them have been defined and refined as a result of my interpreting and theorizing within this study.

This chapter begins with my explanation for how I conceptualized the central analytic points of materialism, discourse, construction, agency, the self, the social, and the story. Throughout my analysis, I sought to go beyond description, to unpack the layers of the girls' experiences, words, processes, and meanings. At each layer, I was guided by the question, 'what is the *underlying* social process here?' which advanced my analysis up the ladder of abstracted thought and drew on particular organizing concepts. Materialism, discourse, construction, agency, and the self, the social and the story were repeatedly conceptual foundations to which I traced back the data, below the spoken word. Their further definition in this chapter draws on the relevant literature. The concept of femininity is detailed below as I consider it a basic consideration in asking young women about their experiences as young women. I began with the literature, in naming some parameters to femininity, yet I engaged in wide ranging explorations with the participants regarding its meaning and utility in their lives.

The concepts discussed in this chapter are defined here to make transparent my usage of them and clarify the interpretive lens through which the subsequent chapters are written. One other central theoretical concept is that of surveillance, which I have reserved for full explication in the Discussion (Chapter 7). This chapter delineates

theoretical grounding relevant to study findings, anchoring the way my theorizing refines and extends key sensitizing concepts. These anchors to my theoretical lens are evident throughout the research formulated and presented in the ensuing chapters.

5.2 Materialism

Material refers to that which is “materialized in the external social world” (Ritzer, 2003:18). It is the existence of a concrete entity that can be seen and touched. My use of the term *materialism* originates within theories of structural oppression, which assert that oppression exists and persists because exploitation, appropriation, manipulation and control are wielded through physical structures that house social interaction (Mullaly, 2002). A focus on the material, for example, illuminates that the size, shape and seating arrangement of a room, and its particulars (for example presence or absence of windows and whether or not they open), gives messages about its function. Further, material analysis recognizes that physical settings in the social sphere (organizations, agencies, institutions) get structured according to priorities. Theories of structural oppression hold that societal structures are rooted in historical arrangements and expressions of power and governed by the interests of the dominant, with concrete realities visited upon subordinates, for example through policies, practices, and legislation (Moreau, 1989; Mullaly, 2002). Alternately referred to as *structural* or *material analyses*, this orientation begins with the premise that social inequities are inscribed via structures that shape social relations.

While Karl Marx’s theory of social class oppression was the first formulation of structural oppression, his concept of materialism has been broadened beyond economic dynamics of society (Fook, 2002; Ritzer, 2003). Drawing from modernism’s conceptualization of power as a concrete commodity, material analyses include study of

the ways in which social structures allocate power and resources according to gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability, and sexual orientation (Fook, 2002). These sweeping narratives detail social injustices based on hierarchies of worth and swing the locus of responsibility away from individuals and onto social arrangements, making the personal political. Arrangements of power within social structures such as family, school, religion, health and work form the basis of material existence. Structural theories seek particular and concrete underlying explanations or causes for the conditions of people's lives (Fook, 2002).

One example of a material analysis relevant to this study of young women centres on naming the nuclear family as a core site for entrenching the capitalist system (Wilson, 1977). Materialist feminist analyses articulate that the state has a clear investment in directing and controlling the lives of women so that they can continue to produce (i.e. reproduce) a supply of workers for the market. The private lives of girls and women are critical to the maintenance of the public system, therefore girls and women become sites for moral and political examination. This is one example that illustrates the contribution of material analyses to my understandings of the lives of girls in relation to macro social arrangements.

5.3 Discourse

Michel Foucault (1972) introduced as *discourse* the idea that as human subjects engage in an activity, be it talking or doing, we actively impose meanings, expressions, and expectations that further shape that with which we are engaged¹³. Discourse is the idea that things do not exist outside of our doing or naming them; it is the act of doing or naming that creates things (Chambon, 1999). Discourse may be defined as “the ways in

¹³ Discursive is the adjective form of the noun.

which we make meaning of and construct our world through the language we use (verbal and non-verbal) to communicate about it" (Fook, 2002:63), although here language is recognized as more than simply the words one uses. Words not only reflect meanings; they actively shape meanings as we use them.

Stories, such as those shared by the participants in this study, are constituted in language and shape that of which we speak. Because we have a selection of terms from which to choose, our choices reflect something about that which we are seeking to construct. Stories always have a purpose, and we select language which supports that purpose. Language does not mirror what we believe, see, and experience; words are not empty vessels waiting for us to pick up and use them. Rather, language is shaped by our use of it. In short, stories and the language through which they are communicated are made available through culturally mediated processes, which are further shaped in the telling. In this construction it is clear that there is never only one scribe to the story. The language practices from which we draw are themselves drawn from socially available discourses and meanings, and our stories have meaning because of their historical, contextual, political standing in a particular time (Foucault, 1972).

When one uses a language or tells a story of girl violence, for example, there are particular associations that become attached, supported by particular logic and assumptions. A group of ideas, scenarios, evidence, and consequences are attached, with notions of causality and predictability. There are also signifiers and cultural customs outside, yet constitutive, of societal structures. Conceptualizing girl violence as discourse problematizes the idea that girl violence is a fixed entity that exists before we speak of it. "Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the

fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (Foucault, 1972:199).

Discourses, then, are parameters of thought and methodologies for dissecting thought, that act back on the thought itself.

5.4 Construction

Use of the term *construction* and its derivative *constructionism* originates in the conceptualization of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The social construction of reality captures the idea that people interacting together form patterns, customs and habits, which through repetition and routine become concretized and institutionalized (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Meanings become attached to those patterns and customs, and when those meanings correspond with prevailing ideologies regarding worth and value, this legitimacy strengthens and sustains them. Repetition and meaning solidify as reality what was once simply a decision. This is the production of societal material structures and discursive practices, wherein human invention and adaptation is concealed and manipulated as producing ‘real’ entities. Through the process and the end result, the impression is that said entity is factually, materially real, outside of our contribution to its existence as something real.

Central to my interpretations of this study's data is the active shaping of one's identity as a girl, among influences that are material and discursive. Using the term *construction* calls attention to the role of social interaction and human invention that is often obscured or muted. It draws equally on the role and influence of social structures and their material reality as well as on the role and influence of discourse.

5.5 Agency

Following from the idea of unpacking the socially constructed facets of our social worlds, agency refers to a “sense of a capacity to act effectively” (Fook, 2002:49). By

conceptualizing growing up female as a social construction, we can conceive of girls taking an active role in carving out or constructing their identities. This conceptualization contrasts with a structurally-inspired interpretation of growing up, wherein processes of socialization are conceived to be a one-way relationship, with norms and practices imposed upon the girl child (Butler, 1999). Importantly, however, girls construct identities within the context of social and cultural influences and demands. Agency is not synonymous with having unfettered choice, nor does it conflate with an individualistic enterprise. When the girls in this study speak of dressing as they want, coiffing their hair and applying makeup when they want, they are not without bounds. Within a framework that blends material and discursive analyses, there is recognition of parameters imposed by the state care system and group home policies, as well as unspoken social practices that similarly and simultaneously regulate, promote and punish (Foucault, 1972).

5.6 The Self, the Social and the Story

Conceptions of the self from which I have drawn in this thesis can be traced to the works of Charles Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and Erving Goffman. Each conceptualized the self and the social world as inseparable: the self is constituted and interpreted through social means and the social world is developed, extended and expressed through selves. Cooley's metaphor of "the looking glass self" (Cooley, 1913) is founded upon rejection of the Cartesian divide of the internal self from the external social world, focusing rather on their "interpenetration" as the self grows through interaction with others in the social world. The stories of this research are just such causes and effects of this interaction.

In parallel fashion Mead posited that only after one's position in the social sphere is understood can one's individual consciousness develop; specifically, that self

appraisal is developed through that which we consider others' appraisal of the self to be (Mead, 1956). Mead further theorized that human beings configure and convert the social world anew as we engage with it. In this way human beings are agentic, socially produced yet not socially determined. Conceptualizations of the self as both socially produced yet not socially determined are invoked in interpretations of this research regarding the means through which the research participants constitute and convey their language and stories.

Mead's conceptualizations are affirmed in Goffman's use of the metaphors of self as actor, environment as audience, and social interaction as performance, developed to express the intentionality behind the construction of social identity (Goffman, 1959). Goffman conceived of actors having a 'front' and a 'back', the sides of the actor shown or not shown to the audience to control communication. Constructions of the self as congruent with idealized social expectations are performed in 'front' and those that are incongruent are shielded in the 'back'. Goffman's later work on stigma (1963) focused on people marginalized by social standards, and emphasized the point that managing these front and back sides is most prevalent for those marginalized, given their tenuous social membership. These points resonate in the conceptual renderings of the data for this research, both in regard to ongoing configurations of the self depending on audience, as well as the marginalized social status of the girls who participated. Together, the works of Cooley, Mead and Goffman form a key analytic concept used in the forthcoming chapters, that of interpreting ourselves through what we assume or perceive to be the interpretations others have of us. Madigan (2007) terms this process "watching the other watch" (133), an apt abbreviation of this contingent relationship that informs both self and other.

Extending the analysis of the self as in perpetual social interaction and construction, the experience and stories of these participants are also taken as socially constructed: we make meaning of our experiences based on the culturally constructed norms and processes within which we are situated. We language them according to available discourses. As social beings, we cannot stand outside ourselves as we tell our stories; they are vested fully in our social processes, which are time and space bound (C. Brown, 2007).

This is the lens through which I have listened to, engaged with, and made meaning of the self-stories shared with me by the girls in this study. I have focused not on the story as truth, rather on analysis of the production of the story. These stories are understood to be fragmented, partial, temporary and overlapping discourses of the individual and collective "girl". By asking how girls understand and experience their gender, violence and group care, I have come to partial interpretations of what these may mean to them in this moment, or at least, what they want me to believe these may mean to them in this moment.

5.7 Femininity

The Oxford English Dictionary defines femininity as "the characteristic, quality, or assemblage of qualities pertaining to the female sex" and feminine as "of the gender to which appellations of women belong". Definitions of the female sex within in the same source are found to be "belonging to the sex which bears offspring".

Definitions of femininity, such as these, are embedded within the historical context of their writing and the epistemological and political orientations of the writers. Conservative treatments of gender often posit that femininity is the cluster of characteristics that are inherent to the female nature, rationalized as gentleness,

nurturing, relationality, and emotionality (Mackie, 1987). So rooted in nature, these definitions of femininity cannot be argued, thus roles and responsibilities in social settings are assigned according to the functions and features emanating from biology (Mackie, 1987). Under this definition, the prescription for femininity is a democratic one: as female, all girls and women are born with the possibility to maximize their inherent capacities for moral virtue, kindness, and servitude. Conceptualizations based on this kind of biological essentialism have been promoted by both maternal feminists as well as anti-feminists, for distinct purposes. It is their use by maternal feminists that led to political critique and overhaul by other feminists (see Saulnier, 1996).

Definitions of femininity as gentle, civil, caring and invested in relationships are considered modernist in that they seek a unifying conceptualization applicable to all women. As a basis for feminist analysis and action, this monolithic representation was first challenged by women of colour who revealed its Eurocentric and colonialist biases and thus its inappropriateness for solidarity among all women (for example, Collins, 2000; Grande, 2004). Concurrently, the influence of postmodernism was increasing. Postmodernism recognizes multiple, diverse, conflicting and fluid identity positions and in so doing addresses this particular limitation of modernist conceptions of social location (Fook, 2002). Postmodern scholars have raised skepticism about sweeping knowledge claims, which often sacrifice complexity and difference, as in this case of traditional definitions of femininity (Flax, 1992).

Further, the reflexive action of postmodernism encourages dissection of context, process, parameters and frames of reference often more than the dissection of content under study (Flax, 1992). For example Nicholson (1993) addresses the historical context of femininity when she says, "it is only with the growth of the more nuclearized

family and the nation state in the early modern period in the west, and particularly amongst the middle class, that masculinity and femininity take on many of those specific qualities with which we are familiar" (92).

Recognizing the centrality of historical and cultural context, and calling on postmodern sensibilities, Dorothy Smith declares that "the notion of femininity does not define a determinate and unitary phenomenon" (D. Smith, 1988:37). She refutes that femininity is only a result of patriarchal domination. Rather, she upholds women's participatory selves in the social organization of gender, and posits that femininity is discourse: it is "implicated in the social construction of the phenomena it appears to describe" (37).

This conceptualization merges with that of Butler (2004), who broadens the discussion beyond femininity to gender. Butler (2004) asserts that "what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (94), a position congruent with the principles of social constructionism and postmodernism. Butler posits gender as a social performance, in that through our repetitive forays into the world, others constitute us through our genders, in ways that may or may not concur with our own constitutions of them (Butler, 2004). Moreover, race, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability all variably shape and are shaped by gender, meaning that gender norms are differentiated according to norms for race and class (Butler, 2004).

At the same time as I align with the premise of being 'made, not born, a woman' (deBeauvoir, 1952) in the sense of the social construction of femininity, negotiations of gender are not boundless. First, we express gender according to the culturally available prescriptions, endorsement and regulations which exist in structure as well as discourse.

That we can enter into or engage gender presupposes these pre-existing parameters. Second, while we are configuring gender anew each time we enact it, gender possibilities are not without limits, as is clearly evidenced through the physical violence and the violence of social exclusion perpetrated against those who transgress the sanctioned possibilities (Butler, 1999).

Chapter 6. Findings

6.1 Introduction

The interpretations presented in this chapter and the Discussion (Chapter 7) are based on listening to twenty-two young women as they have shared their experiences and thoughts of what it means to them to be female, use violence, and to live in group homes. I have interpreted their stories from the basis of considering each girl uniquely constituting something of 'girlhood', such that their stories are component parts as well as stand-alone entities. Each girl is at once both an individual and also part of something bigger, simultaneously constructing girlhood. In her daily, local existence, she is constituting that which is being named as "girl". Conceptualizing identity as both individual and collective, my process has been to hear disparate accounts of life, personally held meanings and intimately experienced relationships, and at the same time theorize the broader social processes under discussion.

Searching for each girl's lived experience was a core feature of this research, providing the opportunity to engage the participants as acting subjects within their social, material and discursive worlds. A consistent theme in the stories of the girls was their clear and present agency in not only *defining* who they are as girls, but *constructing* who they are as girls, experiencing and acting back against expectations and shaping new expectations, resisting notions of static identity. The stories of these girls point to very little that is essential to being a girl, very little that is naturally present, fixed, and/or without the influence of the girl herself.

While the written word suggests linearity to the process of theorizing girlhood, use of violence, and residential care, necessarily laying out headings and their contents, neither conversation nor real life are linear. For example, discussions of expectations of

females were necessarily interwoven with discussions of perceptions of girls who use violence, recognizing that expectations convey dominant perceptions through the media, family, school and peers. Discussions of the living space of group homes unavoidably addressed the ways in which girls understand themselves in relation to one another. Talk about boys permeated discussions of what it means to be a girl as well as the reasons for girls fighting. Each participant has her own construction of girlhood, to be sure. And yet, underlying social processes bind these constructions together in a collective story that also resonates for the individual girls.

The following three sections organize my theoretical premises created through interpretive, emergent grounded theory data analyses as described in the Methodology (Chapter 4). Section 6.2 explores the stories of what it means to be female, which involves knowing the expectations congruent with conventional femininity and evaluating one's compliance with them. Each girl selectively adheres to some of the norms that surround her. At the same time, consistent with conventional norms, the ubiquitous male gaze influences her feelings, thoughts, choices and behaviours. Further, there is a continual scrutiny of both self and other, through which group norms, cultural customs, and dominant discourse are upheld and manifested. Here the girls are both subject and object under study, by themselves and with others.

In Section 6.3 the ways and means through which the participants conceptualize and contextualize violence is theorized. The girls are actively reasoning violence, which has been or is now a central experience and feature of their lives. Because of their disruptive behaviours, including aggression and violence, all the girls have lived outside of their family homes. They have all known violence since childhood, and in this context relationships have been negotiated and the self has been variably at risk, protected,

nurtured, and/or victimized. The girls talked about why they fight, the sense they make of their fighting, and of the fighting of girls and boys generally.

Section 6.4 examines the layers of negotiation and navigation within the group living space. These processes hinge on social relations with other girls and staff, while simultaneously centring the self. The girls tell stories of rules and privileges, the ever present possibility of 'drama' in the house, and their continual self evaluation amidst expectations both internal and external. Reflection on staff roles figures prominently in the girls' descriptions of their daily lives, as they consider the dynamics and deeply held meanings of their relationships with these professionals.

6.2 What It Means to Be a Girl

Each of the participants engaged the question of what it means to be a girl. Some had never considered this reflection, for example Ciara who said "I don't know what you mean", while others, for example Jackie (16, white) took a deep breath and said,

Being a girl for me is a very, very or young lady or young woman, however you want to put it - is a very, very hard thing and being in group care and being a young lady too is very, very hard.....because we have a lot of pressure....Some people look at women as- excuse my language - as whores, sluts and everything....People have expectations of young ladies. The pressure on whether we're going to come home pregnant or not. Um what we get ourself mixed into, our appearance, the way other people look at us, our self appearance, our self esteem levels, how we're going to wear our hair, what we're going to wear....Whatever - it's a lot of pressure to be a girl.

Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) said she never thought about it "because I grew up with a whole bunch of people...a whole bunch of guys and also a bunch of women. So, you know, it's all the same after a while." Whether referring to specific life experiences or calling on more abstract conceptualizations of what it means to be a girl, all participants found their way to engage the question.

6.2.1 *Noticing Gender*

The girls know the conventional expectations of femininity; they have experienced them through family members, friends, boys, schools and media. They have heard clear messages from parents, grandparents, and peers both male and female. They have compared their treatment with that of their brothers, male cousins and male friends, and they have registered discrepancies. Schools played an important role in early learning and internalization of normative expectations, making very clear to the girls what was expected of them. Television, movies, popular music, video games, and magazines were named as the tools through which the media impart messages about how a girl ought to be. Conceptualizations of what it means to be a girl included physical attributes and behaviours as well as character traits, with behaviour and appearance frequently mutually reinforcing each other. Girls are to be thin, pretty and blond, with long flowing hair. Girls are to sit with erect posture and legs crossed, not get dirty, not spit, and not play with boys or toys with which boys play. In terms of character, girls are meant to be quiet, polite and gentle natured. These messages were consistent and readily available for naming and discussion.

Raylene (16, African Nova Scotian) conjured physical attributes when she said "In people's lives generally, girls are meant to be thin, pretty and perfect. [The messages come from] celebrities, television, magazines." Zoe (15, Aboriginal) listed important physical characteristics as she described,

...long hair and skinny and big butt and big boobs and nice and tall....While I was growing up we...tried to look like models in magazines and guys were always what they are after and so we need to always be being skinny and losing weight and...it really seemed like everything was about the most important thing is to be skinny.

Suzanne (16, white) recalled the influence of group norms when she said that

in elementary school like you always had to be like pretty and skinny and...I remember in grade...seven or eight, where blond hair was the 'in' thing, where everyone...was dying their hair blond....If you didn't have blond hair and you weren't skinny and pretty, you had pound of make-up on your face and guys think you're ugly and everything.

There was a seamless merger of material appearance and behavioural expectations evidenced here by Shelina (18, white):

In my family [being a girl] just meant that you would be proper – use, like, “please” and “thank yous” and umm dress nicely....Girls dress nicely, actually brush their hair, and we weren't allowed spitting or anything like that. We wash our face and our hands; we weren't allowed being dirty and if we umm were dressed up, taking more showers....Umm just like playing with dolls and playing with other girls rather than me being a girl playing with boys. It didn't seem right for a girl to be playing with all boys.

Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) recalled similar precise and enforced guidelines:

I was told how to act, how to walk, how to talk, how to sit...we always had to keep good posture, like we always had to sit very, very strictly, even if it was uncomfortable, we just had to put up with it....It's like you have to be polite, you're always kind, never speak up, you never speak your mind, you know, you do what you're told, when you're told how to do it.

Raylene, (16, African Nova Scotian) added in to the dimension of socially constructed manners, differentiated by gender:

...lots of guys think that...a girl's meant to be thin, pretty and perfect....Ok, now if I went up in front of a bunch of guys and farted they'd be so grossed out by it because girls aren't supposed to fart. Girls aren't supposed to burp, girls don't poop.

Household and family activities blended with the material appearance and behavioural expectations. Shannon (20, white) said in her family “the girls do the girly things, did the laundry, did dishes, made meals, that sort of stuff.” In Chantal's (24, white) family, girls did chores and the dishes, had an earlier curfew, and could only watch certain TV shows.

No sooner were these expectations and standards spoken, however, than the girls were finding ways to detach from them. While everyone knew of and felt those

expectations, they were not comprehensively adopted. Alternatives are conjured through comparisons to boys and the expectations placed upon boys' physical attributes, behavioural expectations and character traits, thus making available means through which to subvert femininity expectations. The participants compared what they experienced as expectations of them as females with what they observed being expected of males in their lives and registered the discrepancies. This led to questioning, implicitly or explicitly, the 'givens' of conventional femininity. For example, Shannon (20, white) described coming to awareness about the role divisions in her family:

[Gendered role divisions] seemed normal. I just thought that's the way everything was supposed to be, you know. But then as I grew up...I started arguing with my mom, "How come he doesn't have to do anything? Why do I have to if he doesn't? Why am I always helping you out?" Could get very frustrating....Some people still go by the old fashioned ways so that the girls gotta do all the house cleaning, all the home stuff, and the guys when they're home, just lay around and do nothing.

While girls are *meant to behave* in certain ways, boys are *allowed to behave* in other ways. Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) said,

Girls, it's like I'm polite, you're always kind, never speak up, you never speak your mind, you know, you do what you're told, when you're told how to do it, you know, it's always stereotypic things. [Acting like a guy means] doing anything you want, basically....You can be loud, you can be quiet, you can be really saucy, you can be polite if you want, [but that's] usually not expected for a guy.

Jackie (16, white) theorized and evaluated the divergent and gender based expectations for males and females. She seemed to be resisting how conventional femininity diminishes women when she said:

I think the main thing for a female is just the pressure of having to do certain things or feelin' that they have to do these things [such as] cooking, cleaning.... people say "oh yeah, that's what a women's good for: cooking, cleaning, laundry", all that good stuff. It's just like no, no, no, that's not what a woman's for. If we *want* to cook, clean, do the laundry, give our body away to any man that's

your decision, that's not a *woman* ...but when people look at women that's what they assume, that's what they believe.

Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) spoke of the impact of these messages deep within herself, harbouring a sense of being more closely supervised as a girl:

Sometimes I like being a girl, but sometimes I don't, like sometimes I wanna be a boy. Why, I don't know, just to see how it feels, and like I don't know, like do they get treated different than girls do?I think they don't trust girls as much as they trust boys, like I don't know, that's what I find....Like I find some parents have a lot of trust in their boys than their girls cuz they...that the girl's just gonna be like one of them other girls that just walks along and does blowjobs for money and stuff like that....

These girls share a growing recognition that 'something is not quite right'. Their antennae are raised to the possibility/probability of inequities in the gender system. Each in her own way, the girls are connecting their personal experiences with broader social contexts of gender dynamics and are considering themselves within these dynamics. The accounts of these girls suggest that they are figuring out what it means to be a girl amid the multiple influences and expectations of family, peers, school, and media.

Acknowledgment of the steady stream of expectations on girls and the discrepancies from expectations on boys was followed quickly by resistance to a femininity that must look and act in certain ways. This resistance was facilitated in several ways. While conventional expectations were all around girls in their communities, extended families and schools, sometimes they were not enforced in their homes. Raylene's (16, African Nova Scotian) mother had told her to "never clean up after no man's stinky ass", saying "the most valuable lesson I think I had from my mom about being female is that there's no woman on earth that's meant to take care of a man. She'd say it." Raylene recognized this message counters dominant discourse when she said: "Because when you watch tv and stuff it's always the wife's doing this for the

husband. She's the one that's takin' the kids there, doing this for the kids, cooking his supper." She recognizes both the dominant discourse and her mother's concerted efforts to undermine it.

When asked about the expectations about being a girl she felt upon her while growing up, Erin (17, white) said,

My mother's the kind of person that like, not that she didn't care about us, she just like wanted us to grow up ourselves and be who we wanted to be. Um, cuz like my mother herself, she was never one of the girlie girl type of people. She was always out playing like basketball, baseball, when she was younger. So I was never really told anything and find I grew up that way too.

Thus the conventional femininities script is well preserved and readily available in some venues of the lives of the girls, yet disrupted in others. Or sometimes, preservation and disruption existed simultaneously. Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) conjured both clothing and behaviour in her example of selective adherence to conventional femininity:

I just do whatever I want. I wear clothes for the attention, sometimes I'm bossy and yelling, sometimes I just go polite, act like the way girls are supposed to act....I would wear a dress, like a Sunday dress, next day I'll be dressed in black, day after that I'm in blue, blue, pink, you know, I'll just jump back and forth and then it could be a winter jacket, like a pink jacket, black pants, and then I would wear like a semi-dressed with jeans and then I'll wear high heels and then I'll wear a sweater....Even my make-up would change almost daily, but not for much, it's too expensive.

Some girls said that while conventional expectations were all around them, they had subverted them since their earliest memories. Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) resisted through her clothing:

When I lived with my mom I just wore boy clothes....everybody would think I was a guy....when I went to my Nan's I had to literally...dig through my closet to find girl clothes because at her place....I had to at least wear something that looked exactly like a girl top. Like I have a pink boy top and I'd wear it because it looks like a girl top, for my Nan. And my Nan [would say] "Oh that's a nice top. It's a girl's?" I'm like "yeah, it's a girl's top" (laughs).

Hanna (15, white) went beyond clothing and surface behaviours as she talked about experiencing subtleties in femininity expectations, highlighting the distinction between subverting conventional femininity and actually *feeling* unconstrained by it.

It's like they're [other girls] trying to change me, they don't like who I am. If I changed and...sat in front of a mirror all day, then they'd like who I am, but I don't care, they can like me for who I am or they can go somewheres. If they say anything I'll probably just like stay in the house all day and there'd be nothing they could say to me then, but I won't change my clothes or anything like that cuz I wear my own clothes and stuff like that.

6.2.2 *Tomboys and Girlie Girls*

Weighing and subverting expectations, and invoking the gender script for boys, a femininity dualism quickly emerged, as girlie girls were decried and tomboys were heralded. Without exception, all the girls referred to themselves as 'tomboys', consistently defined as a girl who is more comfortable with boys, playing outside, enjoying sports, wearing loose clothing, often preferring the company of boys, and essentially, playing outside the bounds of conventional femininity. Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) said:

Well when I was little they always tell me to act proper, "oh no spitting and sit straight up, cross your legs out" and I was like 'humph' and after that I went to school and all the girls were sitting like that and I was like uh how can they sit like that....(laughs)...Cuz I can't cross my legs like cuz if I cross my legs I have to sit to the side....I say 'humph' because I'm used to tomboy style.

Being a tomboy has status and being a 'girlie girl' is like 'selling out'. Tomboys are seen as having more possibilities and fewer limitations and this equates with being cooler and having more fun. Girls who fell in line with conventional femininity expectations, derided as 'girlie girls', were "those girls that are just like perfectly manicured nails and their hair is always done and their eyebrows are waxed" (Emily, 16, Aboriginal); "the stereotypical girl of like, always has to wear make-up, always has to have their hair done, and wear nice clothes and stuff like that" (Erin, 17, white). Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) said that girlie

girls "like wearing really short T's, looking like they can't breathe in their shirts and tight pants and you wonder how did they get into them."

In stark contrast, tomboys play outside, play physical sports, and wear baggy clothes. Raylene (16, white) said,

I was a little bit of a tomboy when I was growing up....I wasn't really 'girlish' per se, like you had to fight to get me into a dress and skirt and stuff like that and the colour pink - you had to fight. It just wasn't a given.

Alex (18, white) said "I was a tomboy...(laughs) which means I hung around with guys. I was raised around guys. Most of my neighborhood was guys. I would rather play with dinky cars than dolls." Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) again referred to clothing as a means to express identity when she said,

...tomboy, guy clothes ...are just pure baggy - you have more room to move. That's what I like about them....Like they're more loose. And like guys they have nothing, they're moving around and girls are sitting there right ...(laughs) like right tight and I'm just like "I can't move!"

The ready self definition as tomboy expresses both a set of socially desirable characteristics and defiance of the conventional femininity discourse. It suggests that hegemonic femininity has taken a hit; the monolithic expectations are not only being subverted, but joyfully displaced in this backlash against the 'girlie girl'. The languaging suggests a clear dualism of girlie girl and tomboy, seen as either/or, mutually exclusive and categorically conclusive. But being a tomboy, so thoroughly represented in the stories of these girls, can also be taken as a new construction of femininity, one of the available choices under the rubric of being a girl. None of these girls was saying that she is any less of a girl, in being a tomboy. To the contrary, the girls are describing how they experience themselves and make decisions *as girls*. In so doing, they are shaping the conventions of which they speak; they are actively constructing that which they represent. Moreover, they construct their experiences again as they speak of them in

this research. They are agents acting back on the construct of 'girl', in the doing and in the telling, and as they act back, they are constructing it anew.

6.2.3 *Role Models*

Some girls spoke of their preferred set of characteristics and attributes for being female, which sometimes supplanted the expectations with which they were raised, by invoking a role model of the perfect girl. Their justifications may suggest their priorities for ultimate femaleness. Erin (17, white) spoke of teenage celebrity Lindsay Lohan: "I don't know, she's just a beautiful woman....she has a nice face, she has a nice body, she wears nice clothes." Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) spoke of actor Angelina Jolie "...you know she has those lips, she has this perfect face, the eyes, the hair, the nice small tits, not too big, not too small, nice height, nice figure, right? She's like as perfect as we can actually get." As perfect as we can actually get, a pronoun use that raises the question of a need for proximity to one's role model. Angelina Jolie was also noted for her perceived character attributes by Alex (18, white) who said,

She does more for the causes that she looks into than the fame and shit. She's the only - I want to say role model - but she's the only like celebrity person that really stands out and makes that point to not be talked about and accepting the whole bribe thing. She makes it a point to go out and do stuff. All these other celebrities are 'oh lose all this weight' and they gotta be so skinny and da da da, wear ten pounds of makeup...she's got a little makeup and don't really care.

The girls also reflected on girls and women closer to home as exemplars of a definition of admirable femininity. Instead of physical appearance and charitable works, these women were role models because of their personal characteristics, experienced in relationships. Alex (18, white) spoke of one of the youth care workers at her group home:

She's a working mom and you can tell she's a working mom but she still comes in and puts up with all our shit (laughs). I love Trina (laughs). She doesn't try, she doesn't lay her advice on you, you know what I mean? She doesn't try to

stick her opinions in your face. She'll put her two cents in if it gets two out of it, you know what I mean?

Melissa (18, white) spoke of a previous teacher:

She just glows, I guess, in a way. She just, she's absolutely brilliant....I don't know, in my opinion, like she is the smartest woman I have ever met. Seriously, like I don't know, like just, she always has a view on everything too, but she's not...she's not really biased at all though, umm, I don't know. She's, she's just a very good role model.

Discussing role models also raised the possibility of girls internalizing the question and locating the role model within themselves. Being one's own role model rests on wanting to be different from other girls and deliberately avoiding patterning oneself after others, even in the face of pressures to do so. Bobbi (14, white) said, "I don't know, I just be different, I just like to be me and do something that no one else would do. Something different." At the same time, there are consequences:

[Being different], you get put down. A lot. Before I had my hair like dyed black it was like over my eyes like that, and like, I'll like cut holes in clothes and all this stuff and people walk around and they give me dirty looks and they just, you can hear, like they talk behind your back and they say like "look at that one, she's weird and she looks like a goth", you know. I just ignore it, I don't even care. That's why I like being different because no one expects it. And I think they just, they're scared to be different, that's why they just, they say stuff like that about me. I don't care about fitting in [and] um, it feels good, I guess.

Bobbi embraces being the 'other'. This reclaimed space on the margins, when self directed and chosen, creates a new centre and can offer its own form of liberation.

6.2.4 *All About the Boy*

The apparent rejection of conventional femininity described above began to fracture as girls consistently returned to discussing efforts and strategies for securing the male gaze. The *means* of femininity may be broadened, varied or even dismissed but the *ends* remain consistent: heterosexual union. The implicit journey's end is acceptance by

and relationship with a man. Jackie (16, white) said "I want to be 25 and start a family and be married or be engaged." Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) reflected,

Talking to him [boyfriend] was the only thing that got me through. I'd talk to him and then I'd think "Ok, somebody loves me." I have to tell you about him because he is the one that changed me. He sat me down, held my face in his hands and said "You don't have to do this, you are pretty, you got a nice shape, you don't need to show it to everyone, you been through so much." Everybody else tried but I only heard it from him because he's a boy. Not my mom because she don't love me, not my dad 'cause he's a crack head, not group home staff because they are paid to care, not my friends cause they're doing the same as me. He done so much for me, told me how much I'm worth, if it weren't for him I'd be the same old Tonya.

Both currently and in the future, success is equated with a heterosexual relationship. This compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) is the air these girls breathe, simply taken for granted as the outcome toward which everyone is moving. The girls spoke of this expectation being reinforced regularly through pervasive messaging from family, friends and media. As a result, figuring out what guys want "is a big deal...cuz everyone wants to have a boyfriend I guess" (Zoe, 15, Aboriginal).

Even prior to the presumed destination of a healthy, mutually agreeable heterosexual relationship, making oneself desirable to men filters through daily life.

Jackie (16, white) reflected,

I would dress with low-cut t-shirts and show my boobs, just because I know that's what men liked....I was always the type to "Oh yeah, he's cute, let's give him a shot," you know what I mean? Because that was the attention I was looking for.

Each of the participants spoke of boys as a central reason for girls getting into physical fights with each other, explored fully in section 6.3 (Reasoning Violence) below. Having sex with another girl's boyfriend, being too friendly with another girl's boyfriend, and spreading stories (both true and untrue) about a girl's interaction with a boy, figured as the most prominent basis for conflict in the girl-girl relationship. Shannon (20, white) exemplified such reasons for fighting:

Guys, that's the main one (reason). I seen like best friends that, they were best friends because one girl was bein' with this guy, even though the other girl didn't like him, they got in a big fight because ...the girl was mad at her for liking him, and she didn't think that that was right.

Erin (17, white) said,

Well I know that people fight over who's gonna get this boyfriend ...or there's also the cheating part, the boyfriend cheated on his girlfriend with the other girl, so those two girls are gonna fight now. I've been involved in that one.

Shelina (18, white) added that "sometimes it's just over like guys in general, not necessarily sleeping with them, maybe just talking to them."

6.2.5 *Watching and Being Watched*

These girls recounted many experiences of telling each other, and being told, how to behave, how to dress, with whom to talk and socialize. They tell teach other both directly and indirectly. Telling someone directly is considered almost an honourable thing to do, evidencing character strength. There is an entitlement to not mince words, to be blunt, even rude, in the name of providing clear feedback on clothing, choices, behaviours and all else. For example, Alex (18, white) laughed and said, "I'll just tell ya, I don't even care". Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) said, "I don't let no one talk to me...like if you say something rude to me, I'll get right in your face, like 'who're you talking to?' Like I'm that kind of person..." Hanna (15, white) shared that "I got a big mouth and if I think of something I'll say it. Like about anybody. Like if I thought you were ugly I'd tell you right to your face. Like I'm just like that." In particular, in the eyes of the commentator, there is entitlement to comment on another girl.

Girls speak of "telling you straight" (Lisa, 15, white) as an expression of standing up for oneself as customary to their daily lives. If one does *not* participate in this exchange in the group setting one may be at risk. For example, Jackie (white, 16) spoke

of a girl who does not stand up for herself and who as a result is considered everyone's 'bitch', meaning someone to whom the others can turn at any time to do their bidding.

The concept of surveillance is developed in the Discussion (Chapter 7) to analyse the widespread practice among the girls of monitoring each other, about clothing, behaviour, choices made, and particularly regarding being a "girlie girl", as discussed above. The surveillance is on a continuum from noticing and watching, to scrutinizing and commenting, to policing, a term used for its connotations of regulation, control and investment in ferreting out deviance¹⁴. The policing of the girls - both self and other - occurs from within the membership. This insider vantage point holds greater credibility when offering commentary on what it means to be a girl. Emily (16, Aboriginal) said:

Lots of girls here...they're always like "Why do you dress...". Like when I first came here I dressed in tight pants and stuff and they're like "Do you always wear tight pants?" and I was like "No, I don't like them at all" and they're like "Why do you wear them then?" and I was like "Because I don't have any clothes." And they were like "What kind of dresses do you wear?" and I do, I wear like usually baggy pants, like pants and a jersey and stuff, right, I don't wear pink at all, I think it's a girl colour and I don't like it at all. You know, they're like "You should wear pink, it would look nice on you" I was like "No, I don't have to" and they were like "You should though" and I was like "No, I shouldn't" and they were like "Why don't you do your make-up, your whole make-up" and I'm like "What do you mean?" and they're like "The whole thing" and I'm like "I don't want to" and they're like "Girls do that, you should."

Emily is experiencing the scrutiny of other girls here, and their messages are not lost on her, regardless of her alignment with their 'suggestions'. And the scrutiny goes both ways: girls are both subject and object. Alex (18, white) is engaged as the subject when she spoke of her disdain for girls who put on "pounds of makeup" for hours, saying "There's only so much makeup you can put on your face until it doesn't look real

¹⁴ The term 'policing' is credited to the work of Marge Reitma-Street (1998), who conceptualized the onus of other-focussed care and responsibility upon girls in this way.

anymore.” In contrast, her own decision to wear makeup is conceptualized as completely different from the behaviour of girlie girls: it is minimal makeup, quickly and tastefully applied, and Alex is still her main self, not masked or cloaked in artificial casings. Describing her assessment of what is going on here, Melissa (18, white) theorized, “There’s always the group of girls that don’t like girls and always a group of girls that don’t like the girls that don’t like girls. You know what I mean?”

Several of the girls bore out this assessment. Alex (18, white) said bluntly, “I hate girls; they are so stupid”. Carly (14, white) added, “They’re all little whores.” Girlie girls are “stupid” for spending so much time on how they look and behaving “right pissy”, said Aja (14, white), with palpable disdain, a shaking of the head, and the sense of creating oneself within a distinct and separate sphere from the mass of girls considered “stupid”. There is an effort to craft oneself anew and clearly demarcate from this group.

Policing other girls does not occur in a vacuum and is not a psychological aberration, practiced by some particularly nasty girls. It mirrors the social processes that support and promote the competitive and individualistic ideology of western neo-liberalism, a critique expanded upon in the Discussion (Chapter 7).

6.3 Reasoning Violence

Talking about violence was a straightforward focal point in this study. Both being female and living in group care were considered by the girls to be obvious identity markers that sometimes found less ready articulation. In contrast, descriptive definitions of violence moved readily into detailing contexts and more finely tuning the construct of violence.

The nature of violence by girls within the geographic area of central Nova Scotia requires social context, to situate it within the subject of youth violence so steadily in the

news media across Canada and beyond. Some parameters are required so the reader has a sense of the scope of the definitions, incidences and their impact on the communities involved. All the participants recruited for this study have been in physical altercations with at least one group of the following: other girls, siblings, parents, teachers, foster parents, and group home staff. All defined violence as physically hurting another person. While we considered including verbal harm, there is a clear distinction between the two in the nature and degree of harm incurred. Violence is defined as physical violence, in the absence of other qualifiers. All but two participants agreed that they had been labelled violent according to the definition of physically hurting another person, and most agreed that this was indeed an appropriate label at some time in their lives. More than half the participants spoke of having been perpetrators of violence as *past*, not current, behaviours. At the same time, most of the girls said they would still fight if they 'needed to'. What follows is an exploration of the grounds on which girls feel they 'have to' or are drawn to, fight.

The central means through which physical violence occurred was through use of force against another person, and generally without weapons. Cognizant of incidents that occurred within the period of this research project within Canada and the United States where guns and knives were modes of violence in an attack, it is notable that all these participants talked of hand to hand fights, with little mention of use of weapons and no talk of involvement in gangs. These parameters mark this study as distinct from the sensational coverage of recent shootings and stabbings within school settings and the literature on girl violence that centres on participation in gangs.

Conversations with each participant recalled early encounters and experiences through which definitions of violence emerged and the processes through which she located herself within violent behaviours.

6.3.1 *"It was all around me"*

The girls' familiarity with violence began when they were small children. It was part of the scenery, an accustomed contributor to daily life. As Zoe (15, Aboriginal) said, "It was all around me." There was no demarcation point signalling when violence entered the lives of these girls. Mothers, fathers, stepmothers, stepfathers, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, cousins, relatives in the community, friends, boyfriends, and school experiences provided models for violent behaviours. Violence pervades the lives of these girls, in their homes and neighborhoods, on television, in music, movies and videogames, such that they are all intimately familiar with it. Thus, from early in the research it became clear that there is a porous boundary between having perpetrated violence and having been victimized by violence. As a result, some overtly reflected on their childhoods as a frightening time. Bobbi (14, white) said,

...All the violence and stuff happens around me and it was mostly because of everyone drinking....Family, friends, like my family's friends, [when I was] five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. [I felt] bad, scared, not safe.

Others readily rhymed off concrete messages of violence in their midst. For example Hanna's (15, white) mother's tattoos said "fighting bitch". Erin (17, white) was chased by her siblings with a knife, and Shannon (20, white) watched her parents "practically kill each other". Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) said,

My sister and I, we would play fight, where our version of play fight, basically, would be pulling out each other's hair, punching each other in the guts, you know, really beating each other up, pushing each other down stairs, slamming each other's head into doors, people slamming each other to the floor, full nelsons, half nelsons. You know, and that was our play fighting (laughing)....We basically...try to break your nose first so you'll hold your nose up and so basically

get the stomach, see punched in the stomach, so you know, you go down faster. So once you're down you kick, like a few times, in the stomach, and if you're really violent you kick them in the head.... Yeah, my uncles taught me how to fight.

Jodi's (15, African Nova Scotian) words *imply* harm rather than name it explicitly when she spoke of her mother:

I'm not allowed to see her. If she comes to see me she'll be in jail. I don't know why. I never got to talk to her yet.

Inside the home and out in the neighbourhood, violence is indeed "all around"

these girls. Shelina (18, white) talked of the environment of her neighbourhood:

I grew up in Riverview when I was younger, like really younger. So, whenever somebody talked about violence and stuff in Riverview it was always shooting, stabbing, gang fighting. So, that kind of was already in my head when I was young.

Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) reflected similarly on the region where she grew up: Where I lived, violence every day, just the area I lived in..... Finding people getting shot, people getting stabbed, people getting drowned, people getting ganged.

Description soon led to thoughts on coping and surviving in the setting. Shannon (20, white) spoke to her means for coping with her early environment when she said "That's just how I was brought up. If someone wants to fight ya, it doesn't matter if you're gonna win or lose, you just gotta stick with it and try your hardest." Alex's (18, white) strategies led toward one outcome: "Don't come home and say you got beat."

Going to school brought more examples of violence, with fights at school and the opportunity to learn techniques as well as try them out. For example, Zoe (15, Aboriginal) spoke of taking a knife to school and threatening her teacher, an act she connected with having seen something similar on a talk show, which she reasoned would help her cope with her anger and jealousy toward the teacher.

In this pervasive context of violence, it becomes routinized as part of the family, community or neighbourhood fabric. Violence is so normalized that there is a closer proximal step to its enactment. The girls did not cross a line one day, moving from victim to perpetrator. Their use of violence was not re-told according to a catalyst event. The move was seamless, between being witness to and living in an environment of violence to using violence to protect or express oneself. Further, the 'violent' label was at once both situational and integrated. To be violent depends on one's assessment regarding the requirements of the context. Violence emanates from the conditions and circumstances, rather than from whom one is as a person. At the same time, the requirements for violence are intimately experienced and persistently reinforced, shaping the actions and behaviours of these girls.

6.3.2 Fighting on Principle

The young women made very clear choices about when, where and with whom to fight, based on clear ideas about what was appropriate to fight over. In this way, their choices to use physical measures to impart messages are interpreted as being positioned on principle. They described in detail the reasons and circumstances under which they fight. They justified decisions according to a set of internal guides regarding appropriate reasons to fight. They were aware of their conditions for fighting and they actively assessed each situation, either prior or following, to determine the legitimacy of their fight.

6.3.2.1 Loyalty

The girls fight when they are motivated by loyalty to another person. This is seen as a valid reason for fighting. Offering to fight in a show of solidarity with a close friend or a family member is respected as a legitimate reason to fight and never dismissed as

'stupid'. Indeed there is a *call to fight* when a family member or close friend is in need; it is disrespectful and disloyal *not* to fight. For family, the criteria are self evident. Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) said,

My brother and my sister have me. So, if...my sister calls [and says] "This person tried to stab me," I'd be like "Well I'm on my way". And I'll go up and be like "Well if you're gonna stab her, then try it, just try, just try". They'd be like "Oh, well if we try it then you're gonna get hurt", I'd be like, "If I get hurt, I get hurt protecting my family." I can't let nothin' happen to them. No matter what, if somethin' happened to them, I...my life would be ruined.

The criteria for what friendships meet this marker also are established and well known to the girls. While at other times acknowledged to be fickle and fleeting, an internal code or criteria is in place among particular, selected friendships. Alex (18, white) said of one friend,

She was there when my shit went rough. Like, I thought I was going to hit rock bottom as far as rock bottom can be when you're seventeen (laughs), but my whole world literally collapsed. So, she was there for that and she was there for some other things. That's my girl. [With fighting now] I'm just like "ok, your business is your business, don't come to me with your shit, don't ask me to get you out of it", unless it's [her].

The lines of loyalty are strong, although the relationships shift between contexts and across time. For example, several of these girls have moved between the same group homes in Halifax. They have been on opposite sides of a dispute in one setting, and then happy to see each other in the next. They have fought each other and then developed a relationship in situations where there is enjoyment of one another or a reason for an alliance. For example, both Raylene (16, African Nova Scotian) and Alex (18, white) spoke about how they met. Alex said, "Raylene wanted to beat me up because Veronica jacked my shit, and so Raylene came to my house to beat me up with fuckin' broomsticks." Raylene recalled this incident with the same details, then fairly blithely said that afterwards, the two "started hanging out". Further, Raylene referred to

Alex as somewhat of a role model, yet also talked about how Alex had changed over the year when they had no contact, when Raylene was living in a secure facility outside the province:

She changed so much. She's not my same Alex that she was before I left. I can't even..like she's changed in everything. She wears makeup now. She wore makeup before, but she was just like plain makeup. She - she's just different completely. [We're] not as close as we were, cuz we were away from each other for a whole year.

The process at issue here is one of defining important relationships and investing in the relationships that are privileged at a particular time. The definition includes assessing what is of shared importance, at the moment, for some symbiosis in the relationship. It seems that there is some status in fighting for loyalty: one is imparting a message about backing up a friend or a family member. If there is status in loyalty, this suggests that there is status in relationship, for without a relationship, loyalty is moot.

6.3.2.2 Morality

Girls also fight when their internal sense of right and wrong is violated; they spoke of needing to make a statement when something is "just not right". As with fighting on the principle of loyalty, these judgments are made according to subjective criteria.

Examples of situations where decency and fairness are experienced as compromised are condensed to being "just not right". Erin (17, white) told of such a situation:

There was this girl and she was pushing around my pregnant friend and uh, I didn't like that very much cuz, uh, she's pregnant. That's just not right and uh, I went after her and started smashing her face off the ground. And then my other friend came up and booted her in the face. She had to go get stitches from her nose to the corner of her eye and the other side of her face was burnt from the ground. We kept smashing her head on the ground. I was like "what do you think you're doing, she's pregnant, you know that's just not right at all" and this girl that I fought with was quite big and Mandy was quite small. So, I got pretty angry.

Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) explained an example where she moved from being an aggressor to an advocate of the victim in a fight that she felt was unfair:

I seen the girl on the ground literally crying, getting kicked in the head and stuff, and I was just like 'no, I gotta switch it around'. I'll help, like if people are fighting a girl that I know that can't fight. I'd be walking with these people and [they'd say] like "Oh we don't like you," and go back and fight and I'd look over I go "Leave her alone, she can't fight" they're like "Oh, easier for us" and then after that when she gets beat I might switch around. I would only fight someone who can fight... cuz...I'd be like why just beat up somebody who don't know how to fight. That's rude.

Alex (18, white) drew on both loyalty and morality in explaining a situation where she addressed her concern with beating up her adversary:

There's certain things, lines that you don't cross. Family. You don't talk shit about somebody's family. You can say "your mother" or something like that just joking around, but you *do not* dis somebody's family and that's what that Chelsea girl did. My stepmom had breast cancer. [My stepmom] was dying in the hospital when I went down in December and my friends were calling here. She knew why I was home, my friends were calling here "Where's Alex?" "Oh, she's in Toronto, she took off, went prostitutin". Oh, that's nice! So, I had to deal with that when I came back here three weeks after, two weeks after my stepmom died. I explained to everybody "no, I'm not a fuckin' hooker". Like you don't do that. That's severely disrespectful.

In this study girls described a moral code regarding when and with whom to fight.

Erin decided she was obliged to fight the girl who beat up her pregnant friend. Natasha acted on her belief it was wrong to fight someone of lesser fighting ability. Alex fought to send the message that it was wrong to say untrue things about her while her step-mother was dying. Perhaps involvement in weighing loyalty and fair play offers an opportunity to make sense of the conflicting and confusing socio-cultural expectations upon them growing up female, particularly wedged in with experiences of economic hardship and fractured family experiences. These interpretations are expanded in the Discussion (Chapter 7).

6.3.2.3 Racism

In this study, only the eight girls of colour (African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal) talked about colour: race and ethnicity. The white girls either did not notice colour or conceived

of transcending colour, rendering it immaterial to who they are and what they do, their relationships and lives. In this regard, race and ethnicity were quickly dismissed. For example, Carly (14, white) said "It don't matter, I'm just me. I don't see the colour of people." When asked about her culture and ethnicity, Aja (14, white) responded, "I don't even know what you mean. I'm not black." In contrast, girls of colour clearly situated themselves within a discourse of race awareness and racism. Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) said,

I experienced, like, how I'll be walking down the street with just me and a black guy [and] there's a whole whack girls, white girls would walk by "oh look at them girls. I don't think I'll go over and walk by there, dadadadada" and just looking over at me like I was a piece of shit and shouldn't be doin' that and I was like "we weren't born back then and the years have now changed" and they're like "well not in my family, my dad always believes that they should still be like that." I said "well then I guess your dad has to talk to someone because that's rude."

Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) spoke of the role of racism in a fight with another girl in a group home:

She was acting hard cuz her friends were there, right? She was saying "this black nigger". I was right behind her. I stumbled down the stairs so fast, I said "you girl, I'm a fuckin' nigger, I'm a fuckin' nigger, turn around and look at me" and she wasn't turning around looking at me, she was ignoring me and talking to staff. I punched her in the back of the head, I fuckin' hit her, right? I was trying to get her hair, grab her face and beat the hell out of it.

Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) shared a similar account:

In camp one time a girl was making fun of me cuz I was Native and I know that she use to call us 'savage' with my cousins and basically I was freaked out and I beat her up then. I think she had a broken arm and a broken wrist and a fractured rib. I beat her pretty bad for saying that.

Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) named a troubling experience for her:

We see like a lot of rude stuff and my own coloured people be sitting there "oh come here nigger, you're my nigger, you fuckin' nigger" and I'll be like what is going on with that shit? You hear people calling niggers and calling girls bitches and I'm just like how could they treat girls like that?

Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) had another divergent experience. Her story spoke of alienation from shared heritage and a desire to distinguish herself from other black people. She said,

White people - grownups - talk to you with respect. Black people are so quick to...jump on you – “what the fuck you lookin’ at?” White people raise their kids right; I feel comfortable around white people. Living in Westview, there’s lots of family things, I liked living there. But in Larson parents don’t do nothin’ with their kids, they don’t talk about nothin’, just defend yourself and don’t let nobody talk to ya. Parents raise them to be like that, telling people to “suck your ass.”

There is not a unified, essential story about race, its construction, its manifestations, or its implications, among this small number of girls. Analysis of the context of race is developed in the Discussion (Chapter 7), where this data is joined with the literature relevant for further theorizing. These data suggest that it is important to these girls that their decisions to fight are made on principles, with the central principles interpreted as loyalty, morality, and racism. Examination of each principle offers understandings as to the reasoning and experiences of these participants.

6.3.3 Fighting on Message

All the girls involved in this study fight for a reason. Fighting always serves a purpose; it communicates. Thus the reasons offered here are conceptualized as ‘fighting on message’. When asked why girls fight, there was a consistent triad of responses from all the participants, in prioritized order: boys, stealing, and “talking shit”, also referred to as “talking trash”, the sharing of untrue or damaging stories. Ciara (16, Aboriginal) listed these right away: “trying to get with my man, trying to steal my friends away or stole my shit, or spreading rumours around about. Talking shit about me.”

6.3.3.1 Boys

Girls fight to send a message when their boyfriend or male love interest is getting too close to another girl, when they want the boy, or when they don’t want the other girl

to get the boy. Girls fight when another girl looks at their boy, has sex with their boy, or “acts like a ho” around their boy, primarily through promising sexual favours. Boys are the primary reason for girls fighting. Emily (16, Aboriginal) said,

Like if a guy says that he doesn't have a girlfriend and he really does and then you like that guy and then he finally tells you that he has a girlfriend, then she finds out, she's gonna beat you.

Alex (18, white) detailed her conflict with another girl:

She was sleeping with my boyfriend....Me and Hailey waited outside for her and then beat her up right up on her head....She told staff that I threw her in front of a car, which is a lie cuz she ran out in front of the car. And said that we ganged her and no, we didn't. The other girls - there was two other girls with me, Tash and Jessie - and they kicked a couple times, but no, none of us were all beatin' on her at one point in time. Like you know what I mean? It was my fight.

Erin (17, white) recalled a similar confrontation:

He never even cheated on me with her, he was just friends with her, but I didn't like the way they were friends, I knew something was gonna happen....I waited at her friend's house for her and then I was like “so, are you trying to be with my boyfriend, are ya?” and then I drug her downstairs and beat her face off a tree.

The male gaze is also implicated in a convoluted way in the fight scenario that Ciara (16, Aboriginal) pitched:

Like you wanna fight because I slept with your boyfriend, but you don't want to fight me because you know I can beat you. So, you're gonna fight with my friend that brought me...to the party.

6.3.3.2 Stealing

Fighting also regularly occurs as a message sent regarding stealing, a frequent phenomenon reported by the girls in this study. Ciara (16, Aboriginal) said bluntly: “In group homes your stuff gets stealed. It's that world.” Melissa (20, white) recalled a fight that was brought on from having something of hers stolen:

I was living in a shelter...and this girl kept stealing all my stuff and then she stole my hundred dollar discman that my mom had just bought me, and I freaked out, and I was just like “oh my God, I just want to hit her”. I'd never fought before...and I lost it, I went outside and walked up, she punched me up side my

head and I lost it on her, all I saw was red and she walked away crying and I went back in the house with one scratch on me.

Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) explained her assessment of situations and her attempt to pre-empt an incident of stealing:

When people steal from me, I don't know if I want to fight them or just.....I'm just like fight them, fight or not? And I tell them, I tell the girls, like I told them this year I'm not playing no more childish games, like if you steal from me it's over, like I'm not your friend, I will beat you, don't talk to me, don't look at me, don't ask me for nothing.

Stealing can feed into the drama detailed below, an example of overlapping categories and experiences, as noted here by Alex (18, white):

Some people were telling me stupid shit. A bunch of my stuff got stolen - somebody said it was her. So I proceeded to steal her things and smashed them all.

Ciara (16, Aboriginal) says that, in contrast to foster homes,

...in group homes, new people can come in each day, residents wise, and you won't know who stole your shit. If you go up to them and say "did you take my shit?" they'll be like "what are you talking about?"

6.3.3.3 Talking Trash

Fighting because of unkind and/or untrue words, spoken by and about these girls, was the third anchor to the triad of reasons for fighting on message. "Rumours, calling people names and stuff, 'he said, she said'" (Emily, 16, Aboriginal) are all reasons for a fight. Shannon (20, white) defined trash talk as when another person might say,

"Oh my God, did you know like I totally seen her being like a skank." Ya, putting somebody down. Or talking somebody's business, like if someone had told you something, you know, about them, and you went and blabbed it to all these other people, there you go talking behind someone's back, they're gonna getcha.

Suzanne (16, white) talked about the precursors to fights in group homes:

Most of it starts with like, you get mad at a girl, and of course, you start gossiping and then it's like you start getting other girls to be on your side and the more girls you have on your side, then...it's like a never ending war, you can sort of push

them down and, you know, keep them down, or whatever you want to, kind of thing.

Shelina (18, white) added,

I find with a lot of them it's about, like girls being pissy with another girl, like talking trash, umm just like the way girls talk about each other, that has a lot to do [with] a lot of fighting. [Like] that girl's a tramp...actually like sleeping with people.....Like that girl did this thing, she went and did this and ...just like telling secrets with another girl.... I think, the girls, they just like to talk, talk a lot more shit than the guys do.

Talking trash was a point at which many gender comparisons were made, as Shelina's commentary above suggests. There was consensus that a central component of girls' violence in particular was presaged by such verbal battles. Erin (17, white) offered this comparison:

Girls will fight emotionally a lot more than guys will. Guys will just fight physically and be like, beat the other person up and that's it. But girls will like play games with people, like, I don't know, like groups of people, groups of, like my group of friends will be like doing things to this one other girl, maybe, because that's how we fight....We'll pick on them and we'll like say mean things about them, and stuff like that. But guys aren't like "oh look at him, he's stupid", or stuff like that.

As these data proffer, these girls are conveying particular messages through their fighting. These messages offer windows through which to understand the socially embedded priorities of these girls in these contexts.

6.3.4 Fighting Mad

Girls also named their involvement in fighting when they are just plain angry. Several, like Jackie (16, white), reported being "a really angry as a child". Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) said,

I was violent and I wanted to destroy things. I would like literally destroy whatever was in my way. If I'd get real mad, I'd be looking, I'd be like I'm destroying that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, if someone I don't like, that I truly hate, is in my way, I'd be like "and that too". And I would sit there and destroy everything else.

Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) said,

I never had a mom or dad. My dad was a crack head; my mom, this woman don't give two fucks about me. She cared for me in her own way but she never gave a fuck about me. Who wouldn't be angry?

Chantal (24, white) told that use of drugs enhanced her anger:

I would go home and lash out after getting kicked out of school....I was looking for attention from my parents but they didn't see it that way. I wasn't ready to stop, I don't know why. I finally stopped when I was in the hospital. I was out of control, they didn't know what to do with me – I'd jumped out my window.

While living in a group home, Shannon (20, white) said she

...had the reputation of, you know, I'd just kinda flip out. I wouldn't hit anybody else, I'd hit, I'd slam, like go out the front door...almost smashed the front door one time, cuz I was so mad, like flipping out like that. Slamming doors, throw things around, never hit anybody else.

Girls talked about 'blacking out' when they got very angry and lashing out with their arms, fists, and legs. Some girls talked about anger when the staff would be "all up in my face" in ways that would get them boiling with rage, not specific to rules, but as a culmination of frustration and pent up fury. Emotion is highlighted in these data, though still clearly carrying messages and principles.

6.3.5 Counter Discourse: *Fighting as Stupid*

Running consistently throughout the conversations on violence is a counter discourse that fighting is stupid, both one's own fighting (often framed as in the past) and that of other girls. Even as one is recounting a story that is rooted in principles of loyalty and morality, and well articulated messages, the steady reflection is that fighting is stupid, a term used with remarkable consistency. Shannon (20, white) said,

"I'd have to say that fighting is stupid. There's other ways to resolve your problems, which I have learned over the past couple of months....[there's] a lot of other different ways to deal with problems besides fighting people.

Jackie (16, white) said that girls fight about "stupid petty things, people saying something, trying to show off for other people." Bobbi (14, white) concurred, saying "It's

just stupid to fight anyway. Like, I don't know, like it just, it's stupid to fight." Zoe (15, Aboriginal) shared her thoughts:

I was in fights [but]...I don't really get into fighting, I find it stupid. Sometimes girls fight about the most stupidest things. I see people fight all the time and it looks pathetic. Makes you look like a loser.

Emily (16, Aboriginal) and Alex (18, white) offered further expansion on the basis of the stupidity. Emily said, "I think it's the better part to get, not even fight...Who cares if you get beat, you're being the bigger person there, you're not fighting over stupid, pathetic things." Alex opined,

Once you get about 20 -21 if you're still fighting, I think you're fuckin' stupid. What are you still fighting these young girls about?

Many times the girls compared girls fighting to boys fighting, consistently privileging how and why boys fight over those of girls. Jackie (16, white) reported,

Guys...they all fight, but I think they're more just like...two guys can fight and they can be buddies right afterwards; girls you hold a grudge against them for god knows how long. The difference between the two, I think men or guys are more mature about it.... I think that ...after they fight they just don't care anymore - it's done, it's over. Girls can go on about it for days and argue about it. Stupidness, that's how I look at it. I think it's all stupidity.

Zoe (15, Aboriginal) concurred when she said "I find guys let things go a lot, but girls don't. Girls hold a grudge against you." Shelina (18, white) explained distinctions in means, reasons and aftermath of fighting, by gender:

Guys just fight and girls like to bicker then fight. Guys are more clean about fighting than girls. They just, they fight like they're boxing. Girls just want to hurt the girl the most that they can, any way possible....I find when guys fight, when one guy is on the ground the other guy doesn't get on top and start pounding them, they have to let them back up, and that's called a fair fight. But when girls fight they don't do it fairly. They pull hair, they scratch, they jump on each other...and even when it's over it's not even over....I think it's just cuz the guys, they're not fighting over stupid stuff err..well maybe, but they wanna find out who's going to beat who, and then as soon as it's over it's over.

This counter discourse is conceptually linked with the idea of watching and being watched and practices of surveillance that were introduced in Section 6.2.5. Theorizing surveillance and its roles in the interpretation of these data are integrated and synthesized in the Discussion (Chapter 7).

6.4 Negotiating the Living Space

The context of living in group care provides the unique overlay to both what it means to be a girl and reasoning violence. Context both shapes and is shaped by the girl's engagement with femininity and violence. The girls have all lived in institutional settings because of concerns regarding their disruptive behaviours, often including violence. At the same time, figuring out what it means to be a girl and reasoning violence are projects that preceded living in group care, and they will continue to be part of the girls' lives beyond their time in group care. The living space has a direct and profound impact on the other two domains, and yet the other two domains exist outside of it. Indeed, without the disruptive behaviours and the girls, these particular group homes would not exist as they do now.

The girls in this study lived in a range of living spaces, including the biological or adoptive nuclear family unit, extended kinship care, hospital inpatient units, foster homes, assessment facilities, homeless shelters, short term receiving centres, secure facilities and long term group homes. The facilities varied widely in terms of structure, supervision, staff presence and thus the experiences of the girls varied widely as well. They had lived outside this province and across Nova Scotia and most had experienced multiple moves since childhood.

The stories of the girls reveal that negotiating and navigating the living space is an ongoing, intricate and sophisticated process. The girls described that it begins with

concrete understandings about the written rules and extends to figuring out the unwritten expectations, unspoken norms and codes of relationship within the program. There are always girls (or in co-ed facilities, boys as well) moving in and out, always shifting the relationship dynamics in the facility. Staff members come and go on their shifts, with different combinations of staff also altering dynamics. The stories of the girls suggest that the living space is always in flux, shuffled daily, hourly and moment by moment, with so many disparate personalities and roles in the mix. Becoming adept at managing the shifting relations becomes an unarticulated yet required skill.

Ultimately, the narratives of negotiating the living space are interpreted as carving out strategies through which one can survive. Reading the physical setting, the codified rules and the people within, and managing as much as possible the reading others have of you, is necessary to just get by.

6.4.1 Choice and Constraint

The girls reported that the first order of business upon moving into a group setting is to learn the written, formal rules, such as curfews, chores, phone and television time, regulations regarding contact with family and friends, bed times, and expectations regarding school and/or programming. Given the range of mandates among the facilities within which the girls lived during this study, the rules varied considerably. Representing opposite ends of a continuum, independence-oriented homes were consistently more highly valued by the girls than those with strict rules and secure care facilities. For girls in independence-oriented group living settings, choice was highlighted as a defining feature. However, the recognition of choice was not conflated with appreciation for it. Girls who now live with individualized routines feel they have earned it through their current choices and record of compliance with the structured expectations of social

workers and youth care facility workers. For example, Raylene (14, African Nova Scotian) has lived in a range of group settings, including a secure care facility out of province, and is clear that she deserves the relative lack of scrutiny she feels now. She is entitled to it, as opposed to grateful for it. Jackie (16, white) addressed some variables for maintaining her independence-oriented placement:

It's an awesome house. I love it. I wouldn't want to be at any other group home. To tell you a matter-of-fact I probably wouldn't go to another group home. If they tried to send me, I (tsk), I don't know where I'd go but I wouldn't go because I'm not one for group homes. It's pretty laid back; it's pretty much "do what you want to do". You know go out first thing in the morning, just come back by your curfew. That's it. You don't have to come home for supper, whatever. This house is an independent living house, so your stay is up to you. If you want to live in Samuel House and not follow through and not go to school and not do what's expected of me, you get kicked out - point blank. They'll give you a couple of chances but you get kicked out.

At the other end of the spectrum is the secure care facility, where a family court judge has suspended the civil liberty of freedom and ordered a secure care certificate, for 30 days (Children and Family Services Act, 1990, Sections 55-59). Although sometimes refuting the reasons for being placed in the secure facility, while placed there the girls seemed to accept the structure and its confines. The girls seem to recognize that being in secure care has its place, or at least cannot be argued. Emily (16, Aboriginal) reported that she recommends anyone living in secure make good use of the time: "You just take what they give you, learn it, and don't do it to just do it, actually learn what you're supposed to be learning; then you can get out of here faster." Similarly, Bobbi (14, white) talked about staff helping her learn how to talk when she is angry, or develop alternate means for expressing frustration than violence.

Looking back on being there, however, can be a different story. Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) talked about the windows that can't be open or broken: "Full of windows, you're in there looking at where you want to be". Emily (16, Aboriginal)

echoed the same thought when she said "They give you this room and all you do is look out the window and there's nothing there, you need space. You can't lock a kid up in a small room when they're mad, then you just think." Jackie (16, white) expanded on the concern:

It's not a sensible experience for kids I don't think....I just disagree with the whole situation [because] you've gotta know if you want to change....Someone can't make that decision for them. [Being in secure care is] going to kind of make them more pissed off and more aggravated and that's going to lead to anger for someone making that decision for that person.... They have to have a slap in the face of reality to not want to continue fighting.

In the middle of the continuum, what seems most difficult is living in community group homes, with unlocked doors and windows but with strict expectations regarding curfew, contact and activity. Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) said,

I think it's like pretty strict [here]. Like they're telling me they want me to stay in - that they want the girls to stay in. Like how are we going to do that if you've got strict, strict rules? Here, here when I say "I'm going over town", they say "Where over town?" "In the square." "Where in the square?" Like you have to tell them which street you're going to walk on. They're too strict. I dunno - they like need to change their system bad. Cuz I'm like, ok how am I going to stay here? If you guys are always strict that's what makes me want to leave....Like girls like being free and they don't like people being right in their businesscuz, like that's not a normal life, no, that's not freedom at all. They said we're mostly, we're more, we're more stable having them rules in place. I think that's false.

In contrast, the same young woman, when I saw her while living in the secure facility two months later, said,

Whatcha gonna do? I gotta be here, I was here before and I know what I gotta do. Ain't nothin' I can do but do my 30 days. (Jodi, 15, African Nova Scotian)

Sometimes the rules make no difference to the choices of the residents. At times the girls plan on serving their consequences when they decide to stay out all night, as in the case of Carly (14, white) who said that weekends were her time, and after going to school and complying with other expectations for the week, she would do what she wanted on the weekends, including being "gone without permission". She knew she

would incur consequences, and she would serve them, but they were not going to deter her from spending her free time the ways she chose. In other cases, regardless of the rules, as Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) said,

The girls did whatever they wanted, we'd go out, stay out all night, we didn't go to school, do chores....it might have been the expectation that we do those things but they [staff] didn't do nothin' if we didn't.

The subtext to this feature of living in group settings is one of choice and constraint, and assessing oneself against that continuum. Personal behaviours and decisions as well as rights and entitlements are assessed as part of the equation. Questions of responsibility are weighed as well: to what degree is it my responsibility to comply with the (structural) expectations? Self assessment holds precedence over the assessment of social workers and facility staff, whose evaluations are considered partial (Aja said, "They never know the whole story"), biased (Jodi said, "They only see what they wanna see") and/or unreasonable (Tonya said, "They can't expect me to do that"). The only authentic judge is oneself. Upon this self assessment rests the degree of acceptance of one's placement on the choice to constraint continuum.

While sorting out the material setting, its expression through rules, and conceiving their responses, the girls also embark on an unspoken process of dissecting the unspoken realms of choice and constraint: the tone, the atmosphere, that underscore the house dynamics. First among these, for Bobbi (14, white), is assessing trust:

It's kinda different though, because like...there's this whole group of people that you can't, some of them you can't really trust. And it's hard to get close to those [new] people cuz you didn't know them for a long time, you're just moving around from group home to group home, so it's hard to talk about things. Total strangers. That takes a while to build a relationship.

There is also the discursive adjustment to make, in addition to the material, that this is where one is now living. Shannon (20, white) named this explicitly when she said,

The first time I went in it was really scary cuz I never been in anything like that, I'd never been hospitalized, I'd never been away from my mom, it was really weird, and there was all these people in there, and like one of my good friends I'd known forever, she was in too, she was like "oh, you're living here now?" I was like "*living*, what?" It was really scary sometimes, after a while I just got use to the staff, got use to the people, was just like 'whatever'.

This data suggests that the culture of the group setting is maintained by the internalization of norms and expectations; indeed, that discipline is maintained more in this way than via any external means. This analysis is an important emerging concept discussed under Practices of Surveillance in the Discussion (Chapter 7)

6.4.2 "*Managing the drama*"

Alongside sorting out the structural components of the rules and the discursive layers thereof, there is the "managing of drama" in the house. Aleisha (16, white) said, "Oh my God, there is so much drama. You're always managing the drama". "Drama" is the term consistently applied to the machinations of relationships: scrutinizing the interactions, the choices made, the feelings involved, the continual wariness that something is afoot. Aleisha (16, white) said "It's just drama. There's no other name for it. It's just people trying to be something else cuz they got nothing better to do".

Managing the drama is interpreted to mean handling, manipulating, coping with machinations of relationships. It involves the steady attention of the girls, an ongoing process that necessarily entails the managing of *oneself* in relation to it. The stories of the girls suggest the overall atmosphere of the house is one of ongoing and potential tension in managing relations and dynamics, always shifting, never secure. As Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) reported, "You can be best friends for about a week and next week hate each other."

There is also the recognition that these girls are acting agents involved in creating and sustaining drama, invoking it as an engrained presence in the house. Alex (18, white) acknowledged this when she said "We can have life peaceful and if we want drama we can make drama, it's not hard to do. Any of the girls could. It's not hard. One little fight and you can shake everything up in like thirty seconds." Ciara (16, Aboriginal) placed herself within the drama when she said, "If I don't like the girl I'll try to get the other girls not to like her and stuff like that if I don't like her. But some of the girls, if they don't like her either, they'll, we'll just talk mean stuff about her or we'll write notes about her or we'll give her dirty looks."

The girls described drama as "naturally" occurring when a group of females lives together. The naturalizing of drama as a gender specific expression is drawn from direct and personal experience: the girls report that girls living together equals drama. Locating the origins of this gendered construct, the girls were quick with their responses: Erin (17, white) said "we're very bitchy people"; Melissa (18, white) added "you're always in cliques". Carly (14, white) reported, "It's just all the girls. They are so stupid." This contrasts with experiences of living in co-ed facilities. There are specific reflections on the emphases that girls bring to the living space and boys do not. Zoe (15, Aboriginal) said,

I find it that the guys are more easygoing in here than the girls and I don't know....Cuz the girls are very, I don't know, they're just girls and, I don't know, it's like with the guys it's like no one talks about your hair and like what you look like but with girls like it's all they talk about, that and like talking about guys.

Lisa (15, white) posited that "Girls are always so jealous, thinking someone else is prettier". Jackie (16, white) concurred:

I think there's just something inside a girl that just hates that girl because that girl has a nicer coat than them or she's got longer nails or she's got pretty features and the other one's just like "Oh she's got a bigger butt and she's got this and

she's got a perfect body". And those things kind of trigger girls and they get jealous and girls have a jealous spot. Girls are a lot jealous - a lot more jealous than guys.

The narratives recount that girls comment on physical appearance in ways that make other girls feel bad about themselves; boys comment on physical appearance in ways that inspire girls to improve how they look, which in turn may garner positive male attention. More male attention is considered better than less, whereas more female attention is not considered better than less. Male attention and commentary is success, a marker of something done right. Attention and commentary from females in the living space is more often experienced as scrutinizing, judging and belittling. Paradoxically, although their potential attentions and intentions are invoked, in the *managing* of drama, boys are primarily seen as immaterial. It is as though they are above it, beyond it. What boys do is distinctly removed from the calculation of what creates the drama; it is the interpretations of their actions, desires and feelings *by girls* that are constructed as creating the drama.

Drama, then, is constructed by the girls as gender specific. It is also contingent on the process of living together every day and every night ("24-7"). There is no getting away from each other when one is placed in a group facility, or at least not for very long, according to the mandates and structures of most of the facilities. This continual proximity is considered a central contributor to the escalation of drama and tension that always ebb and flow. Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) said, "I was here 24-7 with the other girls, looking at faces. Like something's gonna start, you know that there is trouble gonna start." There is a correlation among group homes, girls, and time spent together that "trouble gonna start." Alex (18, white) named it as well: "We're around each other 24/7. We don't have a choice - we like this person or not, we have to live here....It's the

tension. People talk behind your back and you can't just not say anything if somebody does that. You just - I can't - I don't do that." Erin (17, white) echoed the same: "When you're around a girl for so long, I don't know, things clash, like personalities and the different types of people that lives here. I'm surprised there aren't more fights." Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) concurred: "There's so much girls beating new girls up, and ganging up on this person, and shouting and screaming at each other. All the time." As a specific example, Ciara (16, Aboriginal) recalled her experience with the fickle loyalty of the group:

Cuz, like I remember I did it [punched a staff member] and then staff locked me outside and then I went to the window and I heard the residents, "oh my gosh, I can't believe she punched you." They were talking to staff and that and I was like "what the fuck?" Like, they were just saying "come on, punch her" and stuff like that, and then they were talking to her, the staff member, and saying "oh my, I can't believe she punched you" like when they got back in.

The stories of the girls are clear that living with girls 24/7 is the issue. There was little recognition that these may be girls who have experienced particular challenges that might bear on one's contribution to the group drama. In other words, there was little differentiation between girls who live in group homes and any group of girls, little articulation of the particular circumstances that have led to this point. Melissa (18, white) came close to making a distinction when she said "there are so many girls...so many different...like you know what I mean? I dunno, baggage - really - *baggage*." Then after a pause she said, "But then, show me someone who doesn't have baggage." Life circumstances did not get problematized; female gender did. Melissa (18, white) said,

Living with girls in group homes? No, I'm not going to comment on everybody's business, like you know what I mean? The whole drama scene and everything, it's really hard not to get caught up in. Because you hear, breathe it, smell it everyday (laughs) in a sense - really you do. Just everything - like just I don't know - and it's just really bullshit (laughs).

Since living with girls means anticipating drama, strategies are required. Alex (18, white) named the necessity: "You've gotta figure out what's going on, how you're going to fix it." One of the central strategies is seeking autonomy from the group, either through physical distance or through behavioural messaging. Physical distance occurs through staying away from the house as much as possible, during the days, evenings and weekends, either in accordance or discordance with the rules. For those living in independence oriented programs, this can be an individually designed and condoned option. At other places along the continuum, however, there are consequences for being "gone without permission". Suzanne (16, white) shared,

[Moving into Jollimore House] was really stressful and at first I didn't really know how to handle it cuz I hadn't been around that many people, and...you know such a closed space, and staff, I didn't trust them. So then I'd be like well I'm just gonna, you know, run and find some friends or something, or hang out at the mall, go bum a cigarette, or go out over night or do stuff like that and I didn't realize the consequences until I had them. Until I came back and they're like "oh, you're going to Fundy Centre" and I went "uh-oh."

Emily (16, Aboriginal) spoke of the limitations she felt while living in a secure facility:

I don't like it here, I want to get out of here, there's too many people and if I wasn't with like eight other residents, I think I'd be better off too, especially when they're all like picking at each other and I get in to, like try and stop it or something or, um, I heard something and they're talking about it and I'm like "Ya, she actually did say that," and they'll be like "What, you weren't even there," and I'd be like "Ya I was," and she's like, "No she wasn't." I'll get into like other people's business and stuff and then they just freak out. It's not very good cuz when I'm at home I can usually just go for a walk or something or go outside and have a smoke, you know, go for a walk to like calm me down a lot but now, I can't get away or do anything in here at all.

Strategies to manage the drama in more tightly constricted settings is a significant challenge, and most girls named the need to enact through their mannerisms and demeanor, as well as through their words, that they want distance and separation from the group. Lisa (15, white) said "you have to be strong, don't let nobody walk on ya, so they know you're not scared of them. But be nice enough too, not all hard,

because then there will be problems [with people wanting to fight you]". Carly (14, white) said "I'll just turn it on somebody else before it can turn on me". Jackie (16, white) spoke of her strategy:

You have to kind of ...understand what kind of attitude and what kind of structure you need to be in a group home, what kind of walls you need to put up. I'm me, but if you touch my stuff I'm breaking your fingers. I told them the first day I came here, you steal anything that belongs to me and I'm breaking your fingers. You come across me I'll in a negative way, I'll come across you back. Don't expect me to put my hands on you cuz I won't, but you raise your hands to me and you whack me it's over. I broke it down to each girl slowly and I think they started to learn.

Developing and honing strategies for anticipating and managing drama is another in the long list of steady and complex formulations required of girls living in group care. Whether the end goal is to maintain the placement and/or to keep peace in the house, the girls recognize their active effort is required, because in their experience, the status quo living with girls is drama, tension, competition and conflict.

6.4.3 *"Making me worse"*

The participants often said that the very behaviours that social workers, family members, school personnel, youth care workers, and therapists wanted to interrupt and extinguish were developed, enhanced and subversively encouraged while living in group care settings. Aja (14, white) said, "I swear to God this place is just making me worse." Techniques for stealing were learned, different drugs tried, new accomplices met, networks for selling stolen goods established, and the ever-present peer audience prompted, cajoled, cheered and endorsed engagement in all things forbidden. Given these experiences, some girls expressed surprise this model of care is promoted by the state. Others such as Carly (14, white) voiced that "if they're so stupid to put us all together, then oh well." Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) detailed her experiences relative to behaviours and their consequences:

Like group homes, I don't think they should even exist...cuz I never used to take off. I never - like I wasn't as bad as I am now. Now, I'm starting to do drugs because of group homes. I take off every day, I don't do as good as I used to at school. Like, group homes just mess up your life I think....Because there's so much negativity around. There's so much pressure, you don't even know. I try - I've been in group homes for two years now...and I've been trying to fight it off all those months and all those years. I would try to fight it off so bad and...I was doing good but sometimes you can't be around negativity and pressure all that time. You just end up like fucked. I'm not that fucked up yet, but I'm gonna if I don't stop myself. And I am trying to stop myself. I am trying to get myself help and stuff. Just uh, it's not like working.

The process underlying this description relates to having different hopes and plans for one's life that are not being actualized presently. What is happening now is not what ought to be happening: this period is an interruption to the constructing of a preferred identity and future.

Regarding fighting in particular, Shannon (20, white) described how girls learn the group norms and make decisions in accordance with them:

I don't know why but everyone else was egging me on: "Come on Shan, come fight her, come fight her." [I was] like "Okay, let's go". I wanted to show people that I wasn't weak, that I could do it.

Carly (14, white) similarly reported that "fights are always worse in group homes, because there is always a crowd there, always someone wanting you to fight." Ciara (16, Aboriginal) said that the group can influence the continuance or termination of a fight: "It depends, like if the person thinks they're done with you they'll stop but sometimes people will be like 'oh, come on, continue, continue' or they'll just pull people off and they'll say 'okay, I'm done, I'm done'". According to Shannon (20, white), fights in group homes are

...way more likely to happen because like, you don't always get along with someone in the house. Then the group is like "fight, fight, come on," [and] you just wanna like knock her out, and it's like...all these people are really yelling and then you're in trouble....And like, it's, if you're in a fight it's on purpose. Normally there's one person in the house that nobody likes [and then a fight is] way more likely to happen, cuz ... if you're the person fighting the one that nobody likes and

you actually get hurt, then everybody else is in on the fight, then you just have to stage house war, which happens in this house a lot.

Zoe (15, Aboriginal) locates the power in the hands of the incoming resident in the dynamic that has affected her:

New kids come there right, and then everyone looks up to them and you want to look up to them too so you do whatever they're doing and makes people get in trouble and stuff, depending on what they're doing and I find that happens in a lot of group homes from the stuff I did....I loved going to school and stuff and when I went to Connexion all that went down the toilet, I don't know. Then when I started living at Atlantis I wanted to fit in with the other girls, like. [That meant] like running away, doing drugs, sleeping around, not following rules, being plain ole sassy and bitchy, and...then I got use to being like that...cuz I saw other people doing it.

With ample group encouragement to follow the norms and to establish oneself in a particular way, these girls make their decisions. Hanna (15, white), who had been living in group homes for 8 months, reflected on the changes in her behaviour:

I used to be like a normal kid but now I'm starting to act hard too....acting big for everybody else, and picking up on other peoples' stuff like. Me, I don't like people staring at me. If someone stares at me for too long, I'll tell them, like "stop staring at me". [Before living in group homes] I'd just walk by and I wouldn't care. [Before living in group homes] I didn't say stuff like that, right, I wouldn't tell nobody, I'd just keep it to myself because I didn't want to mess with people. But now, I just tell people and I basically pick fights for myself and I actually win....And now it just kinda grew on me and I'm getting in trouble all the time and getting charged all the time and stuff like that.

The girls were clear that the negative influences of the group setting, the other residents, and the new acquaintances and involvements that have resulted from moving into the group setting, have by times led to decisions and behaviours that they consider unhealthy, unlawful or "just a very unacceptable thing for me to do" (Jessie, 16, white). This result can be interpreted as assessing what the group setting demands and strategizing how these demands can be managed. The girls' narratives suggest that the consequences for not falling in line with the influences of the group home subculture are often social ostracism and the violence that frequently accompanies it. That their

decisions in these circumstances may result in “making me worse” should then hardly be surprising.

6.4.4 Negotiating Staff

Within this tempestuous current of choice, constraint, drama, strategies and influence, the staff team is experienced by the girls as a contested site of care and control. For the most part, the girls refer to “the staff” as a single body rather than as a number of individuals. “It”, not “they” are seen as representing unified rules, with little internal variation, though with practice, one can learn to identify discrepancies. The staff team are at once known and unknown: their role as purveyors of the basic care (housing, food, personal care items and log writing) is known and they are known to have power to give and take privileges and consequences, both within and beyond the house, via contact with social workers and teachers. Yet the girls know there are myriad layers of interpretation, discretion, bias, values and unique personality that surround these concrete, known parameters. The staff can be valued advocates and allies, and formidable foes.

6.4.4.1 Reflecting on the staff role

The girls reflected in detail on the approaches and specific interventions of the staff of group homes, from their vantage point of experience in the living space. They know this space acutely well, and the process of reflecting on the staff’s role, from the despised to the desired, is always current. Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) is clear that “Staff at the group home, they all get paid, they get money for it. They don’t care, they can’t help you with nothing....They didn’t get through to me, they were nothing to me.” At the other extreme, Melissa (18, white) compared her current living situation in a supported

independence home where she feels somewhat isolated in contrast to the sense of support she felt while living in a succession of group homes:

Well it's just cuz you're used to like being in group homes and stuff and they're always wanting to know like everything - in a good way too, like I'm not putting them down - but I mean when you're so used to that and then just it goes, like you really miss it hey, cuz it shows ...that they do really care, right.

Ciara's (16, Aboriginal) evaluation of the staff orientation offered some of each: "Some of them [the staff], me and my friends think they're just there for all the money. Some of them we think they're there to take care of, like to look after us and try and help us get outta there and make better choices in our life." Alex (18, white) reflected her assessment of the staff when she said,

I would just tell them [girls living in the group home] "you're basically fucking stupid - you guys are going to sit there and yell at staff? They're only doing their jobs. They don't get paid half as much as they should to fucking put up with this shit."

The girls clearly expected the staff to keep the peace within the living space, through means ranging widely along a continuum, from tightened admission criteria to giving the girls time and space to address their concerns without interfering, in even precarious altercations. Jackie (16, white) said, "This house is supposed to be sixteen and up and that's what I agree with. There's some girls here that are younger but I totally disagree with it, because they're not at the same maturity level." Alex (18, white) reported that when girls in the house are in conflict, the best thing for the staff to do is,

...listen in on it, but don't try to directly involve yourself and don't suggest anything. It just gets you really, really heated. It makes you think about everything, because you're both firing at each other's face when you hear that.

The wide range of preferred interventions appears to be an expression of what each girl has found personally helpful or meaningful in her own life. Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) provided such an example:

I don't know how they can say "don't use your body for money" and then not give them [girls] money. There's no other way to get it. Money is important because otherwise you're bumming cigarettes and who wants to do that. You want to go out to eat, buy clothes at the mall, and go to the movies, so you have to steal or feel shitty. How can you feel mature when someone's controlling your money?

Girls' frames of reference for suggestions came from their own direct experience of staff intervention. What each had found helpful or unhelpful and the suggestions put forward as helpful or unhelpful was directly related to suggestions put forward for interventions with other girls.

6.4.4.2 Feeling scrutiny

The girls reported experiencing staff as having significant control over their daily lives, in both the material and discursive realms. The material control is manifested through curfews, privileges, chores and access to money. Discursive control begins with feeling scrutinized: the girls know they are watched and evaluated. The eyes of the staff are always upon them, an experience which fits squarely into the choice and constraint balance always at hand. They know that surveillance is a central feature of living in group care settings, as determined by the mandate of the program. All the girls know that this is a feature of their present living circumstances. The girls bristle under the watchful evaluation of the staff, in general and specific incidents. Reflecting broadly, Alex (18, white) spoke of knowing surveillance through her having lived in group homes for two years:

I don't need that shit anymore....It's just too much. Staff are always right up in your business.... [T]hey know everything, like you know what I mean, we live here. It's like, how long can they sit there and write logs for us? I've been doing this for two years, I don't want them to do that anymore. I'm tired of it. I just want to be able to walk around.

Recalling a specific incident, Bobbi (14, white) said,

One time I was on the computer and someone else put pornographic things on the computer so I went on the computer and I tried to get it off and then staff said

that I put it on the computer and I was on the computer when I was trying to help so they misjudged me and that makes me mad.

Strategies to cope with the surveillance varied. Jackie (16, white) talked about being “the type that would just say it to get them off my back but not apply it”, something Alex calls “therapeutic bullshit”. In contrast, Emily (16, Aboriginal) said “you just take what they give you, learn it, and don’t do it to just do it, actually learn what you’re supposed to be learning then you can get out of here faster.” Evidence of a range of strategies aligns with personal and situational interpretations of need and circumstance.

6.4.4.3 Aggravating anger

The girls think that the staff know what will and will not be helpful for the girls in terms of responses and interventions, and believe that the staff make conscious decisions accordingly. The girls know that the staff’s job is to assess the girls’ needs, behaviours, emotions, relationships, potentials and risks. The staff are expected to get their assessments ‘right’, which to the girls generally means congruence with those of the girls themselves. The girls believe the staff have the skills necessary to perform their assessments, such that when the staff intervene in ways that aggravate the girls, they are considered to be doing so willfully, deliberately undermining the wishes, interests, even safety and health, and ultimate growth away from violence, of the girls. The frustration of the girls toward the staff in these times is remembered in detail, felt intensely, and analysed by each of the girls according to their personally held understandings.

For example, Raylene (16, African Nova Scotian) spoke of living in a facility where she was physically restrained by the staff: “If someone comes on top of me, grabs me, that just makes me want to be more violent, like you know what I mean?” According to Raylene’s construct, physical restraint is contraindicated in the goal of decreasing

violent behaviour. There is often detailed explanation about how a rule was inappropriately applied or a circumstance incorrectly interpreted, resulting in the girls' aggravation. Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) shared that,

I went to Fundy Centre because they thought I was at risk of prostitution, which was bullshit. I was so angry I assaulted anyone - girls and staff....I picked up a phone and chucked it at their face, kicking the doors, sayin' "you guys are child abusers!"

Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) told a lengthy story about the staff at her group home thinking that she had homemade knife in her possession (a "shank") and as a result calling the police to come to the group home and remove her:

Staff changed the story. Staff said that I said that...I had a knife and...I was going to do something. But I didn't tell them what I was going to do. So... I couldn't do nothin' about it cuz the police got all the, all the power in the world. Like I couldn't - I'm only little - I can't do nothing about it. I was so mad out of my mind...I was like, I was just out of my mind. I was saying "how can you say, tell me you care about me and then change my words? Like seriously get the hell out of my -' Like I was like going crazy. I was saying 'Bye, I do not want to talk to you guys.' They were saying 'Oh just take care.' Take care?! Like don't fucking talk to me, seriously! If you have the guts to sit there and call the police on me and say I said something that I did not say then first of all I'm chucking my whole room and chucking me.

In these occasions the girls are clear that the staff could have prevented the incident, had they been more reasonable, more understanding, or more inclusive in hearing the girl's testimony. In short, if they had discharged their duties more appropriately.

Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) told her story of being incorrectly assessed as at risk of stripping and her approach in response:

They thought I was strippin' cuz ...I would never go out in the day time. I would stay home, and at night time ...I would go out and come back late at night, like 4 o'clock in the morning whatever, 5, 6 o'clock in the morning, they thought I was stripping and shit like that. They asked me, I said "no". They didn't believe me, right, they kept asking me, asking me, so I said, 'are you happy here, ya'. They said, "you know, that's not good." "Shut up, get outta my face, get outta my face", that's what I was saying. That's when I was becoming real bad. Like I don't go stripping, I was just going chillin' and stuff like that, right? And then they took me serious, like *one time*, my social worker, everybody. I was like what are

you talkin' about? I said they want to play a game with this, then I'll act like I'm strippin'. My friend was a stripper, right, so she had things like dresses that were really short and stuff like that. So I wore, it was so funny, I never wore that short a skirt, I just wore it, I put it, I put it on in my friend's car, I put it, I put the heat on, then went in the house, check em out, they said, "don't you think that's showing too much?" I said "remember, I'm a stripper" and I said I know I'm making them mad right now....but you keep asking me like ten thousand times, it's gonna get me mad, I'll say "get away from my face" and like staff, they assume so much....And they [staff] say "oh, I'm trying to help you, I'm trying to help you". Well let girls have a little bit of freedom, and maybe they would be more stable.

Tonya (16, African Nova Scotian) referred broadly to her experience of staff scrutiny when she said "They were all up in my face making me this fucking angry". Here Tonya hones in on a key element in this process: the staff are '*making her* this angry'. It is an intentional act on the part of the staff. She reacted to the watchful eye of one particular staff member, whom she said "was always checking on me, coming in my room, turning the lights off and on, checking my closets in case I snuck someone in there. One day she came in and was checking all through my room and I punched her in the fuckin' eye." Alex (18, white) reflected on the approach taken by a staff person in one incident:

Yeah she pissed me off. She told me I was in a state of mind from my step mom [dying]. I was all upset and I was freakin' out man - my family's in Digby. So, she said 'I'll give you a quarter to go outside and call'. I said 'Um, it's long distance otherwise I wouldn't ask you to dial the number for me, I could call on the resident's line. Like, think about it, you work here, you should know that.' And she said 'well you're not in the state of mind' and I said '*Fuck my state of mind*'....She [staff] could've calmed me down...but fuckin' you don't tell me no, I can't talk to my family.

The girls report that the staff ought to "know better" than to intervene or respond in the ways that escalate anger. This anger is understandable, because they have been provoked. What could sound like rationalizing is interpreted here as part of the larger construct of managing oneself and one's actions in relation to surviving in the context. It

is interpreted as a means through which some discursive power can be balanced against the (material and discursive) power that so clearly rests in the hands of the staff.

6.4.4.4 Feeling support

As much as the staff are considered a unified body, their interventions and responses are not uniformly cast as surveillance, scrutiny, and aggravation. There are significant accounts of staff as supportive and encouraging, playing important roles in moving toward the future. Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) contrasted her experiences of living with a foster family and living in a group home, preferring the group setting because "...you see that there's more people that care about you....They won't sit there and tell everybody your business....That's why I like group care cuz I can trust these guys." Shannon (20, white) said "They just encourage you to be the best that you can, just work your heart out and all that...they want you to be like a lady, not like a little kid fighting." Suzanne (16, white) specifically appreciated the long term investment of her community group home staff over a series of placements:

I was amazed...that I was running and running and running for a, usually, um, I'd run every day but then there, because I went for a month at a time and then after that I got up here and then ...like they'd still keep my placement and then, like I'd come here and I'd call them up and be like "Am I going back there?" And they'd be like "Ya, you're coming back." At first, I took it for granted but then I really sat down and thought about it, like wow like, you know, they must really want to help me and care for me or they would just kick me out. That made me smarten up a little bit and be like "okay, I gotta settle down now and think about what I really want in life and why I'm running and why I should stop."

Feeling supported by the staff often hinges on reflected praise: hearing from the staff that they think one is moving forward in healthy and productive ways. Jackie (16, white) said,

Heidi, the staff here, said to me yesterday, she said "Jackie, I was iffy about you coming back but you...for the past month you have done excellent." Everybody said they know that I was capable of doing it but I just never applied myself.... Some of the things that the stuff say don't, haven't really stuck with me because

I've heard it too many times before, but them saying "Jackie do it for you, don't do it for others" and "you're smart and you're capable and you're - you can do so much", stuff like that I hold on to.

Zoe (15, Aboriginal) learned from staff that she holds admirable qualities, specifically trustworthiness:

I love the staff there. The staff are good....They cared for me and they trusted me and everything, like I was allowed being with their kids and all that stuff and at their homes, some of them let me see their homes and stuff, and ya, one time I was with one staff and she had to go with her husband to the store...and I would actually like go with her, her husband, and her two kids. So some people actually trusted me a little bit which felt good.

The support and commitment from the staff was appreciated and boosted the ongoing appraisal of self in the group living context. Positive review on the part of the staff is contingent upon the qualities and efforts of the girls themselves, and thus feels doubly satisfying: it is encouraging to hear positive words, and the positive words rest on the being and doing of the young woman herself.

6.5 Conclusion

Figuring out of what it means to be a girl, reasoning violence, and negotiating the living space are constants in the lives of the girls in this study. These three primary processes mutually inform and constitute each other, together offering a partial glimpse of how to understand these girls. While they are constants in process, these findings make clear that the substance and meaning of these three components of life are always shifting beyond the one moment within which they are spoken.

Figuring out what it means to be a girl begins in childhood, with messages from within the family and beyond. The girls interact with contradictory and confusing expectations and strive to carve out a way of being a girl that has some resonance within them. The message from these girls is that there is no one way to be a girl, and that they do not feel constrained by conventional, stereotypical expectations regarding

femininity. They are invested in new constructions of femininity. I conceptualize this process as *bargaining femininities* and detail my interpretations on this data in reference to the literature in the Discussion (Chapter 7).

The girls in this study were articulate and insightful in reasoning their use of violence. Their reasons interweave with their bargaining of femininities, as is clear in their reflections on boys, tomboys and girlie girls, which are all gendered interpretations. These girls fight for particular reasons of loyalty, morality, experiences of racism, boys, stealing, and people 'talking trash' about them. They do so in the context of living 'in the fishbowl' of group homes and public places. These girls' stories are unpinned with a strong sense of watching others and awareness that they are being watched. I theorize these themes as *practices of surveillance* in the following chapter (Chapter 7).

Finally, the overarching context within which these girls are living includes both the group home setting and the larger macro social processes of living in communities. Their stories of managing choice and drama, negotiating multiple people and expectations, and, for some, of dealing with racism, are nestled between *discourses of choice and experiences of constraint*. These interpretations are expanded in the Discussion that follows (Chapter 7).

The stories of these girls, (re)presented here, make clear that there is no single recipe for what constitutes a girl who uses violence and who lives in residential group facilities. These readings offer moving images of individual girls and a collective sense of girlhood, recognizing that both are always just out of reach.

Chapter 7. Discussion and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The data constructed through the research processes and my interpretations thereof hold several key threads in the weaving of these lives of girlhood, violence, and group homes. In this chapter I return to the literature and draw from these data, and theorize beyond the data, to continue the analysis.

This discussion details the components that I propose as a conceptual framework for understanding the use of violence by girls. I begin with detailing the context within which I interpret these girls to be experiencing themselves and others and making decisions: a context which is framed by discourses of choice and experiences of constraint. I then explore how surveillance, the monitoring and scrutiny of everyday social engagements, occurs in the lives of these girls. Amid the tensions between the discourses of choice, experiences of constraint and practices of surveillance, is the daily experience of the girls in sorting out what it means to be female, a process I conceptualize as bargaining femininities. This conceptual framework is discussed in the sections that follow.

7.2 Discourses of Choice and Experiences of Constraint

The interpretations of the data for this study are situated within a stance of critically examining the individualist, middle class, white, heterosexual template for normalcy that dominates readings of gender performance, violence and the social setting (Batacharya, 2004; Jiwani, 1999; Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, & Porche, 2003; Walkerdine, 2001). The discourse of individualism offers promise and possibility for all, yet for the girls of this study, experiences of racism and white privilege, classism and heterosexism constrain and contain discourses of choice.

7.2.1 Individualism

The interwoven discourses of neo-liberalism and individualism, what I refer to as discourses of choice, promote the illusion that choice and opportunity are equally available to all (Aapola et. al., 2005; Harris, 2004; Jiwani et. al., 2006; McRobbie, 2004). Neo-liberalism upholds freedom and autonomy as limitless opportunities, and creates the individual as fully responsible for both success and failure (Ife, 1997; Mullaly, 2002; Swift, Davies, Clarke & Czerny, 2003). The individual alone, or at most, her family, is responsible for all manner of any difficulties that play out in the social sphere (Gonick, 2004). Locating the difficulty within the individual both psychologizes and individualizes what are fundamentally *social* experiences and obscures the vested interests that perpetuate socio-economic inequalities. Neo-liberal emphases on individual fortitude and intrapsychic resilience encourage this shift, as do stories of incredible individual triumph over adversity. The continued fascination with individually located, psychological pathology as causal bases for violence has prevented diligent critique of material inequities and structural obstacles (Aapola et. al., 2005; Walkerdine et. al., 2001).

Discourses of individualism also create clients who require professional intervention, which is valued as the central means through which to legitimize personal need (McKnight, 1995). I learned that responses to young women who use violence often include referral for anger management counselling or emotion management sessions. This the case for almost all of the girls involved in this study. By assessing each person's difficulties via an individualist lens, the shifts and impacts of cultural and/or social contexts and discourses can be ignored. In short, a politicized analysis can be avoided and interventions can remain insular, isolating and conservative. The

individualization of social relations combines to keep private and pathological the parameters of "livable lives for young women" (McRobbie, 2004:12). It leaves out the systemic, structural, material dimensions within the lives of the girls that they face in a patriarchal society, as well as both the discursive, relational barriers and opportunities for their agency. Such a subjectivist emphasis reinscribes the hierarchialized dualism of individual triumph or pathology, stripped of the cultural practices of power that are always at play (Foucault, 1980).

The girls in this study tell stories drawing on discourses of choice, describing the process of ceasing to fight as one where autonomy reigns fully. They see the self as fully self-directed and self-sufficient, naming themselves as the key variable in their futures, depending on how they decide to pursue their next life stages. While others may help along the way, it is the girl, on her own, who must change and move forward in a new and different way.

For example, Raylene (16, African Nova Scotian) stated "Everybody makes their own choices". Erin (17, white) reflected, "I just decided that I needed to change and get away from everything that I was doing." Moving away from fighting sounds as though it is about making the personal decision to do so. Jackie (16, white) spelled out the process of autonomous decision making with more detail:

You can't make another person stop....That's your decision....You are the one that's going to say this way or that way... .You're the only person that knows what you want.....Nobody can tell that for you; nobody can make that decision for you. You know what I mean? I just tell people life is all about experience. Life is what you make of it. Whether you decide to go down the good path that's your decision. If you want to end up being a hooker and having a pimp and selling drugs or living on the street or being a bum or being a panhandler, that's your decision. If you want to take what people provide for you and know what you're capable of and be the bigger person and go down the good path...do it, that's all I say.

The words of the young women mirror those promulgated by western culture, saturated with the promotion and accomplishment of the individual and ignorant of relationships, culture and context, and their myriad social processes. Congruent with western standards for success, there is a pride in lifting oneself up out of this life and drawing attention to the efforts required of the individual to do so. Autonomy means needing no one, to do what one needs and wants to do. Given the breadth and depth of societal influence, it is little wonder that discourses of choice are invoked in the narratives of the girls.

7.2.2 Class

If the ingredients for success, as laid out in the capitalist, liberalist recipe, were truly available for all, then certainly there would be a different arrangement for many in our societies. Inequitable access to and allocation of resources exist in Nova Scotia as elsewhere. Poverty remains a concrete reality in the lives of many, with deepening disparities between those who have lots and those who have little (Report Card on Child Poverty for Nova Scotia, 2004). The absence of progressive social policies further widens the gulf (Op. Cit.).

This research did not seek analysis of class and the girls did not speak of the material conditions of their lives. Yet my practice experience is that girls who live in group homes experience the vulnerabilities of the economic inequalities in Nova Scotia and that class divisions maintain stereotypes about 'group home kids' that often prevent them from shifting their positioning on the class hierarchy. Future research with girls in group homes should investigate the potential discrepancy between neo-liberalist promise of living a life of unencumbered choices (which in this case means a girl choosing to pull herself up out of her context and 'simply' deciding that violence will no

longer be a part of her life) and the material realities of girls. Without directly calling attention to reaches of the discourses of choice, analysis of and response to issues of stealing and fighting are focused on individuals and families. In the context of this study, the girl who fights the girl who steals from her is considered a personal failure, although she may be protecting her ownership of goods which in many other circumstances is prized by the culture in which she lives.

Class analysis is also required in response to the popular construction of girls who fight (and otherwise transgress conventional femininity expectations) as immoral (Abrams & Curran, 2000; Godfrey, 2004). This is a version of the moral panic argument (Tronto, 1993). The girls' use of violence in this study is a clear target for moral scrutiny, because it is practiced in the public spheres of schools and community spaces, including group homes. Middle and upper class girls have the sanctuary of the private sphere into which to retreat to express social and physical aggression (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004). They often live their lives in suburban enclaves, with involvement in extra curricular activities occurring in clubs and other supervised adult settings, shielded from public view. When there are behaviours of concern, including those of violence and aggression, girls from financial means can connect to an array of services (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004). In contrast, the stories of the girls in this study speak of lives on the streets, in public parks, hanging around in schoolyards, at the mall, and in the fishbowl of the residential setting. I suggest that our reactions to girls who use violence, in neighbourhoods and the media as well as in staff meetings at group homes, are fuelled by middle class values of wanting to control behaviours in public spaces. Violent behaviours in public spaces, enacted by girls perceived to be from below the middle class, are responded to with punitive corrections (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004), or

intrusive measures such as placement in group homes, as this research recounts, rather than high end therapy and treatment. This example illustrates how discourses of choice can obscure material differences and their manifestations, creating significant barriers to understanding the lives of girls in group homes.

7.2.3 Race

Girls of colour were the only participants of this study who talked about colour. This is consistent with the ethos of white privilege, or the system of entitlements and advantages that are invisibly ascribed onto people with white skin and of European descent (Macintosh, 1989). The use of the term *privilege* deliberately turns attention to the *absence* of historical and collective disadvantage and discrimination against white people. In contrast to focusing on the hatred and violence of racism, which often insidiously become localized as individual problems of racialized people, white privilege addresses the other side of that same coin. Ethnicity, race, and culture are invisible in the stories of the white girls, for example when Carly (14, white) said "It don't matter, I'm just me. I don't see the colour of people." Asked about her experience of her race, Aja (14, white) said "I don't even know what you mean. I'm not black." In Western contexts at a minimum, without an explicit inclusion of race, the template for generic girlhood serves the vested interests of white dominance.

The stories of the girls of colour involved in this study reveal no unified, single construct of 'race' and show that race is a social dynamic experienced and mediated in relationship with self and others. In other words, it means different things to the different girls. This was evidenced by Tonya's (16, African Nova Scotian) displeasure regarding how African Nova Scotian parents raise their children and Jodi's (15, African Nova Scotian) pride in her heritage. However, the deconstruction of race and racism cannot

be a purely academic exercise. Identity markers matter because people notice sameness and difference and treat people according to them. Race can be one such identity marker. Racialized people, as I interpret Natasha (15, African Nova Scotian) to have said, feel the very real effects of living in a broad social context wherein the foundation of racism, that is white privilege, is denied. The stories of the girls of colour in this study suggest that race and racism are experienced as structural/material realities in their lives and the world treats them in ways tied closely to their membership in certain 'race' categories. Social justice can be advanced by merging the structural/material emphasis on anti-racist standards, policies, practices, allocation of resources and services, and discursive emphasis on personally held meanings and possibilities available through individual agency. However, while I reach to theorize and abstract from people's experiences, as a white scholar I risk re-colonizing and effecting knowledge imperialism when I forget that the local meaning is what grounds the global phenomenon.

7.2.4 Sexual Orientation

The stories of this study make clear that analyses of constructs and contexts of girls' use of violence must take into account expectations and assumptions regarding heterosexual orientation. Heterosexism is the predominant and pervasive preferencing of heterosexual relationships and lifestyles over all other alternatives (Appleby & Anastas, 1998). It is rooted in the belief that heterosexual unions and norms are healthier, safer, more sustainable, and more desirable than other unions and norms, and thus there are no legitimate alternatives. It is reinforced through the social institutions of education, medicine, popular culture and in many family customs and practices. It is codified overtly through health insurance plans, pension plans, legal definitions of

marriage, and covertly throughout messages regarding cultural values and mores, such as those communicated in group home settings (Blumenfeld, 1992; Herek, 2000; Pharr, 1988).

In Western societies at a minimum, girls and boys are raised to assume and prefer heterosexuality (Blumenfeld, 1992; Mallon, 1999; Schneider, 1988). Even if these are counterbalanced in their families of origin, Western culture advertises heterosexual desire and romance. Countless storybooks, regardless of the peripheral details, centre on the notion of a girl/woman defining her worth relative to the amount and degree of attention and affection she receives from a boy/man. The surrounding trappings may be variously colourful, interesting, or provocative, and the storylines may change, yet the persistent intention behind them is to reinforce the heterosexual ideal (Blumenfeld, 1992; Mallon, 1999; Schneider, 1988). In the teenage years, although adolescent sexuality is a challenging topic generally, those who experiment within heterosexual parameters are afforded some latitude, while those who seek or are drawn to experiences outside this prescription do so knowing they are defying cultural and popular expectations. They risk increased social isolation and rejection, verbal and physical harassment, and legitimized violence (Herek, 2000; Mallon, 1999; Schneider, 1988).

What occurs, then, for the girls in this study who are not heterosexual or exclusively heterosexual? The insidious reach of heterosexism and the violent social exclusion of homophobia seem to have stifled exploration of this 'transgression', with one exception. Emily (16, Aboriginal) spoke of being bisexual and talked about social tolerance of her fight over a boy, but no tolerance for her to fight over a female love interest. Girls in group homes fight about boys. There is no fighting for the amorous attentions of a girl because the culture does not allow it. Emily knows the contexts within

which she can pursue a female and it is not in group living settings. The tacit expectation is for heterosexuality and the prize in the game is a boyfriend, not a girlfriend. As a microcosm of the larger heterosexist society, the group setting is a site in which the presumption of and the preference for heterosexual activity and lifestyle are communicated both covertly and overtly. Herein lies a vivid example of discourse: in group homes, the boundaries to affection and intimacy are created as we continue the silencing of anything not heterosexual. For silence is not the absence of discourse; rather it “functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies” (Foucault, 1980: 27). Therefore rather than taking up the story of compulsory heterosexuality as complete, fixed and true, it must be recognized as sustained within culturally normative social practices. Once recognized as a culturally normative social practice, compulsory heterosexuality can be dismantled as a social construction.

Taken together, the discourses of choice and experiences of constraint underscore the analysis that the girls of this study are growing up among conflicting messages of possibility and peril, or as Fine (2004) states, “ ‘choice’ within conditions of enormous constraint glamorized with neoliberal commodification” (xv).

7.2.5 Implications for Practice

The dire tones of popular conceptions and media coverage regarding use of violence by girls are rooted in foci on individualism and pathology, encouraging and allowing social workers, youth care workers, teachers, police officers, and neighbours to distance themselves from the social contributors to the issue of girls fighting each other. My focus on the intersections of class, race and sexual orientation resists micro analyses and emphasizes discourses and structures within which we all have responsibility.

Racism, classism and heterosexism exist because we all – professionals included – participate in ways that reinforce them. Although such structural analyses are sometimes critiqued for locating the target for action high above individual subjects, I propose that structures change through the daily, even mundane, actions, decisions, language, approaches and interpretations of individuals. Opportunities and resources for influencing the factors that contextualize girl violence – constructions of race, class and sexuality in particular – are available to all people living in the midst of these girls. Practice approaches must resist individualism, pathology, and the abdication of collective, social responsibility, all of which rest upon the discourses of choice upheld in Western societies. Seizing opportunities and actualizing resources requires a reconceptualization away from individualist responses and toward collectivist responses, the first practice principle emanating from this research. Practitioners need to understand the discrepancy between discourses of choice and experiences of constraint, evidenced in this research.

And yet, it must be recognized that practitioners are operating within the same discursive contexts as the girls themselves, in particular regard here to the neo liberal focus on individual responsibility for both peril and possibility. In my call to practitioners to enact structural change I am cognizant of the discursive barriers to doing so, aware that a focus on practitioners could be taken as feeding the very individualist discourse that I critique. Indeed I am asking them – us – to shape and be shaped by a different discourse, of collective responsibility and structural analysis. Practitioners must personally and collectively participate in reconstructing race, class and sexuality so that the parameters and opportunities within which girls are growing up expand into new dimensions.

A second practice implication from this analysis is the need to critically review programming in residential facilities for class, race and heterosexual biases. Baines (2000) has critiqued parenting programs for clients of child welfare as built upon middle class ideals that subjugate anything other than middle class values. Based on the data for this study, I extend her critique to suggest that, as one example, anger management programming of residential programs similarly mirrors the androcentric, middle class values of rational thought, emotion containment, and autonomy in handling difficult situations. Such a template can easily become entrenched through unquestioned acceptance and repetitive use, reinscribing Eurocentric homogeneity and perpetuating the race, class and sexuality constructs that contextualize girls' use of violence. Given their invisibility, it is likely that white privilege, middle class dominance, and heterosexism pervade program planning and in so doing reinforce the discourses of choice and experiences of constraint found in this study. One means through which programs can be regularly critiqued and broadened is by the establishment of advisory groups comprised of parents, former youth in care, and community elders who reflect the social locations and life experiences of the current population residing in the residential facility. In addition, academics who theorize the issues can be involved, as conduits through which the literature can be accessed and further analysed.

7.3 Practices of Surveillance

Use of the concept *surveillance* draws from the work of Foucault in his 1979 publication *Discipline and Punish*, wherein he reviewed the practices of penal institutions and discussed instruments of disciplinary power. Foucault distanced himself from the modernist notion of power existing as a concrete entity in the form of social structures (for example prisons or group homes) or as possessed substantively within people (for

example prison guards or staff at group homes). Rather, he wrote of power as a “certain type of relation between individuals” (Foucault, 1988:83) and discipline as a means for enacting power (Foucault, 1979).

In processes of discipline, surveillance is a central feature, with visibility a key means through which the person remains socially disciplined (Foucault, 1979). Subjects are monitored through hierarchical observation, with those on top watching over those below with a single gaze, making normalizing judgments of the degree of conformity with established codes, and determining attendant consequences. The normalizing gaze is “a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates...and judges” (Foucault, 1979:184).

In this section I draw a parallel between Foucault’s analyses of prisons and inmates and my treatment of group homes and girls, in specific regard to the mechanics of surveillance. Hierarchical observation is present for girls living in residential care, as youth care workers and social workers observe and make case notes and planning decisions about and for the girls. The concept of normalizing judgment is a key interpretive frame used with the data for this study, drawing on the idea that through visibility to and with others, disciplinary practices become internalized as self regulation and self surveillance. Supposedly, therefore, external controls become decreasingly necessary. Far from this being a coincidence, Foucault details the intricacies of how means for discipline are refined through social processes and relations to ensure the inmate or group home resident becomes complicit with the social machinery (Foucault, 1979).

7.3.1 Surveillance by Staff

If disciplines “guide behaviour at a micro level” (Chambon, 1999:66), then in group homes, log writing is a means of discipline. Data from the girls support Foucault’s idea of “micro-technologies” of surveillance. Specifically, the daily log writing of youth care workers enacts a more powerful dynamic in the behaviours and decisions of the girls than the provincial legislation of the Children and Family Services Act. For example Lisa (15, white) referred to logs written about her as “gonna make...or break” any plans she wants to pursue in the near or distant future. Thus the logs are interpreted as a concrete manifestation of the processes of surveillance within which the girls are engaged (with self and others) at all times.

Continual comparison between self assessment and the assessment of self by staff, both to the positive and the negative, permeate the girls’ daily lives. For example, Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) stated her belief that the staff think she is at risk for prostitution:

My other group homes didn’t say that to me but they gave me hints, like that is what they are tryin’ to say. They don’t think I know but I do.

At the other end of the spectrum, Jackie (16, white) seemed to experience reflected appraisal when she spoke of the staff encouraging her recent positive decisions matching her self appraisal that she is indeed prioritizing in more healthy ways. Both examples illustrate the central role of surveillance and normalizing judgments in the girls’ lives.

Upholding self assessment and the self as authentic judge can also be unpacked through the concept of resistance, for these girls know acutely that others are continually assessing them, and choice or constraint are offered on the basis of such evaluation. Their resistance is informed and deliberate, and as with all forms of resistance, it shifts the dynamics of power (Foucault, 1980). Through developing and expressing conditions

of autonomy, the girls imbue their relations with new meanings, re-shaping the environment and its influences.

7.3.2 *Surveillance among the Girls*

The interactions *between the girls* can also be conceptualized as micro-technologies of surveillance, through which regulating practices of the self are constituted and internalized in accordance with established discourses of girlhood and group home living. Examples within this data include:

- Girls calling each other stupid
- Girls equated with “drama”
- “Talking trash”
- Girls fighting over boys
- The experience of living in group homes as “making me worse”
- The experience of loyalty within some girl-girl relationships

7.3.2.1 Girls as stupid

As reviewed in the Findings (Chapter 6) the girl who is speaking generally does not count herself as “stupid”. Nor are friends and role models so consistently and disdainfully referred to as “stupid”. What then is the process of differentiation? And where is the self in relation to “stupid” girls?

These questions can be addressed with a reference to a postmodern reading of the self, wherein the self is understood as created via social interaction, and a boundary between self and other is considered fiction (C. Brown, 2007; Smith, 1999). The self stories throughout this thesis offer clear evidence of the girls constructing themselves against that which they are not and evaluating themselves against the versions of themselves proffered by others. The concept of surveillance includes always noticing what the other is doing, and where one is watching the other, one is *watching oneself* and *watching the other watch oneself*.

“Watching the other watch” (Madigan, 2007: 133) derives from the “looking-glass self” (Cooley, 1918). The premise is that I am looking at myself, but I am also looking at you looking at me. What do you see? What do I want you to see? The case can be made that we are always performing for an audience; even alone, there is an audience of one. Foucault’s work (1972; 1980) is again relevant in this reading of the gendered, social performances of the self, particularly illuminated when examining the group care setting. In particular, the dualism of self-surveillance and audience is deconstructed to reveal two sides of the same coin that serves to discipline the social body (Foucault, 1979). There is always an audience: staff, whose purpose is to watch, record and convey and often accord benefits or demerits on the basis of that watching; other girls, who watch, wonder, learn, assume, judge and police. Outside the home there are social workers, whose purpose is to watch, record and convey; teachers; family members, and all layers of community interactions and the cultural landscape. Further, the girls themselves are their own audience as they (re)presented themselves to me, in this research. As they speak their narratives, culturally embedded expectations interweave with individual agency as they configure what is appropriate to present publicly (Bruner, 2002). This regulation to social conformity shapes the self story. Jackie (16, white) invoked this regulation when she described,

I find most girls now, they dress to impress other people, but they don’t dress to impress themselves.... It comes from your parents. It comes from your own self being. It comes from the men you deal with or you meet. It comes from not knowing any better.

7.3.2.2 Girls as drama

The girls in this study reinscribe the discourse summarized in the Literature Review of the naturally catty and calculating girl, these characteristics were spoken of as indigenous to female nature. The stories of girls as stupid and girls as drama provide a

compelling focus and draw examination away from context and circumstance and the layers surrounding the girl in the moment. These stories also obscure the normalizing judgments of girlhood that are vested in the practices of surveillance while living in group homes.

When the girls speak of stupidity and drama as particularly gendered phenomena, they are engaging in an ontological debate in the sense of defining the 'basic human nature' of girls. A fixed core of 'girlness' is implicitly postulated, with engrained and unalterable characteristics. And yet the speaker's self identity may be quite different, wherein there is a greater sense and understanding of range, fluidity and circumstance. The process here, then, is one of 'othering' girls in their midst, through identifying oneself in opposition, constructing themselves against that which they are not. When Alex (18, white) said, "I hate girls", she was clearly demarcating herself: watching her peers, these hated girls, and making sure others would watch her differently.

A social constructionist account of gender identity and performance suggests that to the degree that we verbally and textually constitute girls as stupid, catty, calculating, and as personifying "drama", we materially constitute them in this way (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 1995). The meaning of girls as stupid and as drama does not exist in and of itself as a naturally occurring phenomenon; rather, meaning is inscribed through social processes of interaction, language and cultural symbolism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Yet this rendering does not address the quandary of what is behind the need to differentiate, a question which leads to theorizing 'difference'.

Among these girls, to self define as 'different' seems to be a positive identity marker, an interesting juxtaposition to the modernist, developmental theories of

adolescence which highlight the drive to fit in and belong. But fitting in and belonging are only desirable to the degree to which the particular group membership coincides with one's aspirations. Looping back around to the social constructionist argument, it must be recognized that this discourse, this verbal and textual rendering of girls, shifts the material meanings inscribed in girlhood. This interpretation signals the resounding message throughout this treatise that the entire category of 'girl' is troubled, and furthermore that a unified construct is not what is sought or experienced.

7.3.2.3 Talking trash

Talking trash is the telling of stories, and where we tell a story about another, we are talking about ourselves. Thus talking trash is rooted in the reflexive scrutiny of self and other (the self as other and the other as self). Moreover, stories (with their elusive boundary on who constitutes the subject) rest upon socially sanctioned enactments, and therefore they play a role of regulation. In Foucauldian terms, talking trash is an extension of surveillance, a cultural exercise of power that has been internalized within the group home culture (Foucault, 1979). Talking trash represents such internalized surveillance through its constant individual and collective commentary on the individual and collective identity of girls.

Talking trash can include what I have referred to as the counter discourse of fighting as stupid, which focuses on the apparent renouncement of all the reasons for fighting that the girls articulated so well. Surveillance here is manifested as a judgment pronounced upon the behaviours of other girls as well as the self. The girls sought to define themselves in opposition to that which they see before them, sometimes including their own behaviours. The assessments and intentions of other girls are under continual

scrutiny, as an extension of one's *self* scrutiny. Girls pursued an interlaced, dynamic investment in puzzling and assessing other girls as continual feedback on oneself.

7.3.2.4 "Making me worse"

Finally, the process of living in group homes and falling under the influences of people and situations which lead to "making me worse" (Aja, 14, white) is another example of regulating practices of the self, through surveillance and "watching the other watch" (Madigan, 2007). In this manifestation there is awareness of invitations to transgress the expected norms of group homes and the clear knowledge that one will be "read" according to one's response to such invitations. Ensuing decisions are thus made in negotiation amid a confusing array of competing and converging interpretations of what the consequences may be.

As these examples illustrate, being a girl is a central basis for the surveillance enacted and experienced by the girls in this study. From within the membership, the scrutiny and monitoring commence and continue. Thus I propose that the sorting out of what it means to be female occurs within the broader context of surveillance.

7.3.2.5 Constructing loyalty

There are exceptions to the examples of scrutiny and surveillance that lean toward negative evaluations of girls, by girls. It is not, for example, *all* girls who are considered "stupid". Loyalties to female friends were evident and some role models inspire ways to be, as a girl or young woman (presented in Chapter 6. Findings).

The notion of relationships carrying status merges with feminist psychology and girl studies literature that focuses on the nature of friendships among girls, much of which grew from maternal feminists' interests in validating "women's ways of being" that highlight reciprocity, mutuality and commitment (for example, Belenky, Blythe,

Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Yet interpretations of 'women's ways' of anything diverge considerably, contesting the premise of fixed, static and essential elements of femaleness (for example, Aapola et. Al., 2005; Jiwani et. al., 2006). Rather, the discourse of 'women's ways' is considered to be constitutive of that which it speaks. The interpretation of loyalty in relationships, particularly of fighting on the principle of loyalty, is similarly constitutive of particular social and cultural practices. Girls fight according to their definitions of loyalty, which cannot be subsumed under what has become a universalist discourse regarding women's connections with each other. These girls' experiences of loyalty have to be taken up within the context of their particular situations, knowing violence so well, and living in the fishbowl of residential care and all its scrutiny. It is not a straightforward congruence with the 'women's ways' literature that universalizes reciprocity, mutuality and commitment.

7.3.3 Surveillance by Boys

Fighting on the message of boys falls under the broader interpretive framework of harnessing the male gaze, wherein compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) is flourishing within the group home context and girls surveil each other and themselves to conform to this cultural practice. That fighting over boys can be seen to prove one's normalcy and 'fit' with expectations within girlhood should not be surprising given the hegemony of heterosexuality that silences all else. Growing into adulthood leans on notions of sexual maturity, constructed most often as involvement in heterosexual romance and intercourse. This normative recipe elides nicely with fighting over boys, which is popularized further through advertising, movies, television, and music. Within this conceptual frame, girls who fight on the message of boys are not conceived as hypersexualized, with rampant libidos or pathological crushes. They are understood as

performing according to a detailed and deeply honed script that permits little variation, given heteronormative assumptions and parameters so well established. Here a central construct of normalizing practices of the self is evident: the processes and conditions of policing ourselves and other girls are so engrained that external policing (by boys) is unnecessary.

Moreover, none of the girls' stories about fighting over boys brought any responsibility to bear on the boys themselves. They were invisible; exempt, it seemed, in the machinations preceding a fight between the girls. Their role in the surveillance of femininity is unrecognized altogether. And yet within the "cultural logic" (C. Brown, 2007) of the girls' stories, the stories of the boys – their expectations, preferences and desires – are evident.

Situated within a consistent context of material and discursive heteronormativity, bargaining one's interests and needs relative to boys featured prominently in our conversations. Evaluation of boys' interests and needs is internalized to the point that the self is regulated into compliance with these evaluations.

7.3.4 Implications for Practice

According to the pathologizing and individualizing discourses discussed above, girls who use violence are considered failures at accomplishing culturally prescribed expectations of girlhood. My analysis of the intersections of race, class and sexual orientation make clear that I do not locate the problem identity of fighting with each other *within the girls* as individual, autonomous actors. Further, my analysis of practices of surveillance substantiates my position that the regulation of social participation *requires* discourses of failure, in order to ensure that the girls continually monitor and scrutinize themselves and other girls. This analysis necessarily premises practice directions on locating the

problem outside the individual and understanding the problem as a transitory confluence of factors. The problem of violence, then, is neither essential to the girl, nor static within the girl. This conceptualization is critical to progressive interventions for practice.

Insofar as use of violence is an indicator that something is wrong, we need to listen to the stories the girls offer, mired as they may be in contradiction, ambivalence, and confrontation. Focusing only on the control or extinction of violence and aggressive behaviours silences the voice that is suppressed in her use of violence and does not attend to nor help in any way to potentially re-author the underlying story (C. Brown, 2007).

Interventions with girls who use violence must probe deeply beneath the surface layers about how, when and where violence is used and how other girls are conceptualized. These stories must be explored line by line for their myriad meanings and for what they can reveal of the cultural discourses of regulation. For example, we need to hear the accounts, as I did with these girls, of the distrust toward and situational distaste for other girls. We cannot shy away from the contradictory feelings and messages that girls receive and absorb about each other. To silence those stories is to reinscribe the construct that 'nice girls' can only look and act in particular ways, ways which do not include feeling, speaking and behaving negatively toward each other. Yet we also cannot leave intact these reinscriptions of damning portrayals of each other. Rather we need to be in these conversations and seize the opportunities to talk about the "cultural logic" (C. Brown, 2007) of misogyny and sexism in ways that are accessible to girls. Solidarity among girls and women is a legitimate possibility when the mechanics of misogyny and sexism are made transparent and understood. Extending from such

conversations we can work with girls to explore what it would take to see other girls as allies, as opportunities for safe spaces within which to feel support and kinship.

Extending from the conceptualization that power exists not as a tangible entity but as an energy that can be enacted in multiple ways, interventions need to explore a broad array of means through which girls can feel power, control, and responsibility within their constructions of themselves. Use of violence can be interpreted as one such means, a stance I posit is required to counter balance the prevalent messages that a girl who uses violence is a failure at girlhood. Second, if fighting is a means through which girls feel some power in an otherwise dispossessed existence, as these data suggest, we can work with girls to discover additional means through which they can feel power. We cannot assume, however, that the ways in which girls feel power is through relationships, as the ethic of care argument contends. A basic implication from this research is that gender specific interventions must not subscribe to gender essentialized assumptions and biases. If girls seek power and strength valued in the same ways that power and strength are valued for boys, as this data suggests, program development must begin with listening to the stories of girls to hear how they experience power and strength among “contradictory social demands” (Walkerdine et. al., 2001: 212).

Finally, the accounts of surveillance reviewed above suggest that these girls are always assessing and evaluating how and who they want to be and how others expect them to be. Both the content of these evaluations and their processes lie beneath manifestations of violence. They will be different for everyone. If, as Foucault suggests, discourse is a violence done to all things (1980), we need to understand that practices of surveillance and discourses of failure will continue in the lives of girls and to continue to explore their implications.

7.4 Bargaining Femininities

Bargaining femininities is a phrase I have adapted from Kandiyoti's article *Bargaining with Patriarchy* (Kandiyoti, 1988). Bargaining femininities is my emerging concept of an active engagement and negotiation with the expectations and entitlements, rights and responsibilities of being female. The interpretation I am invoking builds upon the concept of social construction, in that the girls are agents in sorting through and reflecting upon the possibilities under femininity. This is an iterative process that includes looking inward, evaluating, honing and bargaining femininities within the self, and looking outward, evaluating, and appraising the constructions of femininities within her midst, within the local culture of group care, and within the broader social realm, as discussed above under Practices of Surveillance.

Bargaining calls upon notions of agency, the self determining energy and ability to act on and from one's knowledge and intention, which I saw among the girls. For example, Carly (14, white) said, "I don't really care, I'm just doing what I want. I guess I'm just choosing what fits for me, with all that 'what makes a girl' stuff". Like others in this study, Carly is actively and continuously constructing the femininities within which she lives and makes decisions, weighing and measuring the options before her.

Critical analysis of the femininity scripts of the girls has led me to a very different place than where I began. I entered this inquiry theorizing that girls who fight do so as an expression of active resistance against the confines of conventional femininity. While indeed I appreciate such resistance for its potential liberation from the confines, by taking the normative definitions of conventional femininity as given, I was in fact reinscribing the pervasive discourse that girls who fight transgress gender norms and disrupt the socially constructed gender scripts on which western culture is so firmly

based. This was not the story that I heard from the girls. Rather, the dominant theme from these girls is that the scripts of conventional femininity are known, yet there is little sense of needing to adhere to them when they want or need to fight. While they know of parameters to gender performances, these girls spoke of feeling largely unconstrained by them in their decision making. They know the expectations 'out there' but do not incorporate them wholesale into their internal processes and ways of being in the world, particularly in regard to fighting. They selectively adhered to assorted expectations of femininity, the processes of their selection housed within discourses of choice and constraint and practices of surveillance.

Thus the data for this study suggest the girls are neither resisting femininity nor embracing masculinity in their use of violence. In other words, there is no being less of a girl, in using violence. Rather, the consistent message was one of "this is who I am as a girl": the behaviours, choices and decisions – as disruptive as they may be by other people's constructions – still sit within the domain of being a girl. These girls' bargains with femininity *include fighting*.

I have found this bargain with femininity to be refreshing, given the prevailing discourse which seeks to pathologize girls who outwardly express anger (Aapola et. al., 2005; Batacharya, 2004; L.M. Brown, 2003). The subversion of female anger, in myriad ways, is a prevalent and normative practice in Western society. We are surrounded by the reinforcement that girls don't feel rage, much less verbalize or physically demonstrate it. Regardless of evidence across cultures to the contrary, there has been, in the Western world at least, an enduring perceived congruence among concepts of girlhood, caring, and an absence of anger as a deeply felt and expressed emotion (Aapola et. al., 2005; Batacharya, 2004; L.M. Brown, 2003).

On the basis of this analysis, I theorize some alignment between this data and the notion discussed in the literature that girls who fight are searching for equivalence with boys (Worrall, 2004), though this must not be read that girls who fight are seeking to *be like boys*. The consistent self naming as tomboys, and its definition as girls who do things with boys and that are expected of boys, blurs the distinction, but does not erase it. Sylvie (15, Aboriginal) said, "tom boys are girls that act like boys, but boys are really just being teenagers". She went on to equate acting like a boy with being a teenager:

They're both rude, they're obnoxious, like you know, swearing (laughs), or they're interruptive and they say "my way or the highway - right now!"

Sylvie's words suggest that definitions of boyhood are synonymous with definitions of teenagehood. This data corresponds with Leblanc's (1999) thesis of the paradox within which girls find themselves throughout adolescence. Specifically, milestones of contemporary adolescence equate with androcentric priorities: autonomy, independence, risk taking, and competition. In order to succeed at adolescence the girl must fail at femininity and embrace the cultural validation of adolescence as male defined. Use of violence could be an "inventive resolution of the paradox of femininity" (Leblanc, 1999:135).

7.4.1 Implications for Practice

These girls are bargaining femininities among a confluence of discourses of choice, experiences of constraint, and practices of surveillance that require discourses of failure. I find it remarkable that within these parameters they express experiencing a wide buffet of gender identities and performances. In practice, professionals need to draw out and expand upon this sense of possibility and promise, which speaks of agency - the ability to act upon one's circumstances - a central requirement for invoking

change. Strengths based (Saleebey, 2006) and narrative approaches (White & Epston, 1990) as well as resilience oriented theories (Ungar, 2004) inform many direct practice interventions, perhaps because of their humanist orientation to highlight and build upon capabilities and capacities.

But what of the practical constraints that, as a practicing social worker for 15 years, I have witnessed being visited upon girls who live in group homes? While their expressed optimism is remarkable, I cannot discount my longitudinal view of girls in similar circumstances to these participants, who have met with structural obstacles and have felt the violence, themselves, of racism, sexism, discrimination, and the seeming inability to move beyond their 'station' in life. As Jackie (16, white) said,

I said "yeah Jackie, yeah you're capable, but what the hell? You know what, this is your life - accept it. You're not going nowhere. You know you can try and try and try, but the society is going to look at your resume and they're going to look at you and say yeah 'you're just a foster kid, she's not worth anything'."

Similarly, Jodi (15, African Nova Scotian) said "I know other people think I'm lower than them cuz I live in a group home". Stereotypes of girls living in group homes persist, and Jackie's and Jodi's words suggest they know that there are boundaries to the optimism they otherwise expressed. The practice challenge is to draw out and utilize the strengths, the hope and possibilities within girls who use violence, while working also to understand and act upon the structural, material barriers, all of which provide shape to their lives.

7.5 Conclusion

The structure of a thesis often suggests a definitive conclusion, the end of a process. However, in this study, girlhood, violence, and the living space are considered always under construction, shifting based on discourses of choice and constraint, practices of surveillance and bargains with femininity, terms requiring continual scrutiny for local

meaning. My project sits on a precarious fulcrum, striving to be specific and thorough, comprehensive and nuanced about what and how girls, violence, and the living space are constituted, while knowing that such precision is in fact elusive and constraining. In the preceding chapter I have theorized an emerging conceptual framework for working with girls who use violence and live in group homes that draws upon the literature and accounts for the data of this study.

There are several implications that can be offered from this study for future research. This data does not account for the socio-political contexts within which girls in group homes are growing up today. Future research could focus specifically on experiences and expressions of class and economic status and explore more fully the role of the discourses of individualism and neo-liberalism on gender identity and performance. While I consider these discourses to play a role in how these participants constitute themselves and consider their decisions and choices, this research did not seek out dimensions of political economy to the extent where further analysis is possible. A future research focus on the material conditions of girls living in group homes could more comprehensively theorize the requirements for their triumph over structural obstacles.

Critical girlhood scholarship maintains an intersectional analysis, wherein material and discursive realms of race, class and sexuality are theorized (for example, on race, Batacharya, 2004; Jiwani, 1999; on class, Walkerdine et. al., 2001; on sexuality, L.M. Brown, 2003; Gonick, 2006). While this multi-dimensional focus is committed in words, there is much more empirical grounding required to truly represent the dimensions of girls' lives. My own future research program will look carefully at constructions of sexuality in particular, seeking to build understanding and transfer

knowledge of the lives of transgender, lesbian, bi-sexual and questioning girls through their participation in studies regarding gender identity and performance.

Longitudinal study of girls' use of violence is a further recommendation from this research. The interviews undertaken here provide a picture of one moment in time in the lives of these girls. Engaging a methodology that allows for meeting participants a few times per year over a period of 5-10 years would strengthen the points of analysis and offer feedback on the relevance and utility of the conceptual framework detailed herein.

The interpretations presented here can provide a useful frame for interpreting other pieces of research in the fields of social work, critical girlhood studies, youth care, psychology, sociology and other related disciplines. At the time of this writing, girls' use of violence is a topic of debate in Nova Scotia. While the media and local citizens emphasize dysfunctional parenting and the girls' individual pathology, this study destabilizes such an individualist focus on use of violence and posits practice implications for professionals in many fields. Importantly, it also adds the first voice accounts of when, where and why some girls use violence. While this study deals exclusively with girls living in group homes, it is not yet clear if the results, in part or in whole, can be applied to any other populations of girls. Continuing to investigate, from diverse backgrounds and from a longitudinal perspective, how girls who fight experience being female, reason violence and their living spaces can extend and build upon the analysis put forth here.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval from Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)



Memorial
University of Newfoundland

Office of Research

May 2, 2006

ICEHR No. 2005/06-076-SW

Ms. Marion Brown
School of Social Work
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Brown:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) entitled "*She hits like a girl: contexts and constructs of violence among young women in residential care*". The ICEHR is appreciative of the efforts of researchers in attending to ethics in research.

The Committee has reviewed the proposal and would like to call your attention to an issue that should be addressed. The consent form should be modified to include two points:

1. The participants, especially those who are wards of the Province, should know that the study has been approved by the Department of Community Services.
2. The contact information for the supervisor should include a telephone number. There should also be a statement that the proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR); and, if they have ethical concerns about the research that are not dealt with by the researcher, they may contact the Chairperson of ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 737-8368.

Subject to the change noted above and in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS), the project has been granted full approval for one year from the date of this letter.

If you intend to make changes during the course of the project which may give rise to ethical concerns, please forward a description of these changes to ICEHR for consideration.

If you have any questions concerning this review, you may contact Dr. Ken Barter at kbarter@mun.ca. We wish you success with your research.

The TCPS requires that you submit an annual status report to ICEHR on your project, should the research carry on beyond May 2007. Also, to comply with the TCPS, please notify ICEHR when research on this project concludes.

Yours sincerely,

T. Seifert, Ph.D.
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

TS/en
cc: Dr. K. Barter
Supervisor

**Appendix B: Access approval from Department of Community Services, Policy,
Planning & Research**



PO Box 696
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 2T7

www.gov.ns.ca

May 30, 2007

Ms. Marion Brown, RSW, PhD (candidate)
Assistant Professor
Field Education Research
School of Social Work, Dalhousie University
6414 Coburg Road
Halifax NS B3H 4B7

Dear Ms. Brown:

**Re: Research Proposal "She Hits Like a Girls: Contexts and Constructs of Violence among
Girls in Residential Care"**

Further to your recent request, and to follow-up on my e-mail message to you of June 29,
2006, I am writing to confirm that the research project was approved.

I look forward to reading the results of the research.

Yours truly,

Brenda M. Murray
Director, Policy, Planning & Research

BMM/rmw

Appendix C: Letter to ICEHR Chair re: change in participant sample

February 22, 2007

Chair, ICEHR
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland

Re: Change to previously approved Ethics proposal (ICEHR Ref. No. 2005/06-076-SW)

To the Chair,

In my original ethics application to the ICEHR I sought to interview participants for my research on girls, violence, and living in residential care who were over the age of 16 years of age. In the months since receiving approval from ICEHR, and in active recruitment for this PhD study, I have found that many girls ages 14 and 15 would like to be involved. In addition, given the local child welfare offices' move toward terminating care agreements at the age of 16 years, I have found that girls ages 14- 15 are more available, willing, and less transient for the research transparency processes I have sought to utilize (namely, meeting a second time to review and confirm/alter the typed transcript of the initial interview, an important component for the ownership of the process by the participants).

In addition to securing ethical approval from the ICEHR, in order to negotiate site access, I completed the approval process of the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services Policy, Support and Evaluation division in order to interview girls in the care and custody of the Minister of Community Services. This submission paralleled that of the ICEHR, to interview girls over the age of 16 years. Pending this requested approval from the ICEHR to make the amendment to lower the age requirement by two years, I am required to also secure approval from this body in order to proceed.

I fully recognize the vulnerability of the research participants given their youth, the topics under discussion, and the social control settings within which they are living or have lived. At the same time, the feedback offered from participants thus far is that our discussions are normative to their daily lives, are not experienced as intrusive, and do not unearth past traumas. Rather, in one example to the contrary, many of the girls interviewed thus far have contested the idea of using pseudonyms, questioning the need to masquerade their narratives. This questioning concurs with my experiences having worked in residential youth care for 15 years: that when sought as experts on the issues of their lives in a respectful engagement, many youth are eager to take up the opportunity to tell their stories, their ways.

Another nuance has entered my research processes that may offset potential concerns regarding including 14 and 15 year olds. Each participant thus far has sought the

involvement of their social worker and/or residential facility worker in some way, in the research encounter, either by informing him/her, getting her/his approval (official or unofficial), using an office of the facility, discussing the interview, or relaying messages through that intermediary to me. This layer may act as a buffer to concerns regarding the lowering of the age. In particular, if the social worker, as the legal guardian, is aware and consents to the process (which could be added to the signed informed consent process), I submit that lowering the age requirement maintains allegiance with the ethical standards of protection of human subjects.

Thank you for considering this adjustment to my original ethics submission.

Sincerely,

Marion Brown
Student # 200285849

cc. Dr. Leslie Bella, Supervisor

Appendix D: Response letter from ICHEHR Chair re: change in participant sample



Memorial
University of Newfoundland

Office of Research

February 23, 2007

ICHEHR No. 2005/06-076-SW

Ms. Marion Brown
School of Social Work
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Brown:

The Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICHEHR) acknowledges receipt of your correspondence dated February 22, 2007 requesting that your ethics clearance for your project entitled, *"She hits like a girl: contexts and constructs of violence among young women in residential care"* be amended as described in that correspondence.

The ICEHR has reviewed your request and is pleased to give its approval to this amendment.

If you propose to make any other changes either in the planning or during the conduct of the research that may affect ethical relations with human participants, these should be reported to the ICEHR in writing for further review prior to implementation.

We wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

T. Seifert, Ph.D.
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

TS/emb

Cc: Dr. L. Bella, Supervisor

Hey Girls, come tell your story

There are lots of stories these days about girls who fight -
Is that YOU?

I want to talk with girls who have been
called 'violent'

You can talk about the things you want to talk about and help me understand how things work for you in this confidential research project.

So if you:

- Are 14 or older
- Live in, or have lived in, a residential program (shelter, group home, or independent living program)
- Want to talk about your role in and ideas about 'violence' & fighting

...Call 494-1192 or email Marion.Brown@dal.ca or talk with staff for more details. *You will be compensated for your time.*

This study is undertaken by Marion Brown, PhD student at Memorial University of Newfoundland. It has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University of Newfoundland, with supervision by Dr. Leslie Bella, Honorary Research Professor and by the Dept. of Community Services Policy, Support and Evaluation of the Family and Children's Services Division. If there are ethical concerns about this research that are not dealt with by the researcher, please contact Dr. Bella at lbella@tcc.on.ca (tel: 709-737-4512) or the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca (tel: 709-737-8368).

Appendix F: Information flyer for youth serving agencies

Information to Child Welfare Agencies

Please consider assisting in the recruitment of participants for this research project in your agency

She Hits Like A Girl: Contexts and Constructs of Violence
Among Young Women in Residential Care

- Researcher:** Marion Brown, RSW, PhD (candidate), Memorial University of Newfoundland
- What:** A study on young women who live in residential care and their use of violence
- Who:** Girls ages 14 and over who are living in residential care, or who have in the past, due to concerns about their violent and/or disruptive behaviours in their family homes, schools and/or communities
- Where:** The research is happening throughout Halifax Regional Municipality
Interviews will be held in a place comfortable for the participants
- When:** beginning September 2006
- Why:** To develop understanding and analysis of how gender, use of violence and living in residential care are experienced by young females.
- The request:** To consider participants on your caseload who may be eligible for this study and provide this information to them and my contact information, or help to coordinate a meeting with me. I am available to meet with any youth and/or social worker and provide more information before any commitment to participate.

The Department of Community Services has granted permission for youth in the care and custody of the Minister of Community Services to participate in this study. The research will include one 1-hour interview with each participant, with an invitation to meet a second time to review the typed transcript of the first interview. Transportation will be arranged or costs for transportation will be covered for attending the interviews, and with the permission of the participants' interviews will be audiotaped for transcription. In the second interview participants will have the opportunity to read a transcript of what they said in the first interview and make any changes desired. Summary findings will be shared with the participants and agencies. Participants will be financially compensated for their time.

For further information and/or to review the full submission granted ethical approval, please contact Marion Brown. Email: Marion.Brown@dal.ca (902) 494-1192 6414 Coburg Road, Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7

Appendix G: Information flyer for potential participants

Are you interested in being involved in a research project on
VIOLENCE and *LIVING IN GROUP HOMES*?

Please contact: Marion Brown at 494-1192 or Marion.Brown@dal.ca

What is it?

A study on females who live in residential care and who have or been called 'violent'

Who is involved?

Girls ages 14 and over who live now, or who have lived, in group homes and who have been called 'violent' and/or have been involved in fights

Where is it happening?

The research is happening throughout Halifax Regional Municipality
Interviews will be held in a place comfortable for the participants

When is it happening?

Right now!

Why is it happening?

To hear what you have to say about what it is like to be female, live in group homes and shelters, and be called violent or use violence sometimes – plain and simple. No strings attached and no hidden agendas. There are some questions I will begin by asking, but the discussion can go in the directions that make sense for you.

Other details:

- Participants will be paid for their time
- I would like to meet with you for one hour, and, if you agree, tape our discussion. I will give you a copy of the typed-out version of our first discussion. You can review it and make any changes you choose.
- This study has been approved by the Dept. of Community Services for interviewing youth in care

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions about this project, and/or talk with your key worker, social worker or a familiar person about it. I can provide more information without any commitment from you, by talking over the phone, over email, or in person.

Email: Marion.Brown@dal.ca ; (902) 494-1192

Appendix H: Informed Consent Process

Before you sign this form, please take the time to read it, or have it explained, and ask questions about anything you do not understand.

I understand that I am being asked to participate voluntarily in a research study about girls, violence and living in residential care. The research is being undertaken by Marion Brown, PhD student at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

I understand that:

- I will be asked to talk about my life in ways that I find acceptable. I will be asked to share in ways that are comfortable for me what I think and experience about being a girl, use of violence and living in residential care.
- This sharing will happen in a time and place comfortable and convenient for me. It might involve the researcher visiting me where I live, asking me questions, and observing me as I go about my life. I may also be asked to write or draw about my thoughts and experiences. I am invited to find expressive ways of sharing what I want to share about my life. I understand I am asked to meet with the researcher two times.
- I may stop participating at any time I choose.
- I have the right to ask questions about anything I do not understand.
- I will be treated with respect and sensitivity at all times.
- Though I have the right to have my confidentiality respected, if I share information that I am at risk of being hurt, harming myself, or harming others, the researcher is required to report this to people like the police or staff of the facility where I live, whose job is to ensure my safety and the safety of others. I will be told if this is to take place.
- My contributions to the study will remain anonymous, meaning that my real name will not ever be used. If I agree to be audiotaped, the tape will be transcribed by a professional who has signed a confidentiality waiver, and Marion Brown will be the only person to read the transcripts. I understand transcripts and tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet until the project is completed and then destroyed. In the reporting of findings through reports, presentations and publications, identifying names and information will not be used.

- My confidentiality will be limited since the staff of my program may need to be informed of my involvement, depending on the degree of independence in my program.
- While there are no identified risks to being involved in the study, I may feel uncomfortable at times if interviews or group sessions bring up emotions that are unsettling. If something troubles me while participating, the researcher will provide me with resources that may help me.
- The benefits to my involvement include the opportunity to share my experiences and participate in research that may be useful for girls in similar circumstances.
- At any time, if I have questions or concerns about the study or my participation, I am free to contact Marion Brown at 494-1192; by email at Marion.Brown@dal.ca; or by mail at 6414 Coburg Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 2A7. I may also contact Marion's supervisor, Dr. Leslie Bella, at lbella2@mun.ca regarding concerns about this study.

I have read the explanation about the study. I have been given opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in the study. I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

I agree to be audiotaped: _____ yes _____ no

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Appendix I: Interview Questions (original)

In accordance with the emergent nature of qualitative exploration, these questions will be used as a guide, not a given. The questions provide structure to the interview, given it is a "goal directed" exchange (Padgett, 1998: 59). Probing questions will be used to go deeper with what has been shared, asking for more reflection on something already mentioned.

Introduction: "There are lots of newspaper stories and television specials these days about girls and violence. I am not always sure that the people interviewed for these stories are talking with girls themselves. I would really like to know more about what it is like to be a girl today, how and where and when girls use violence, and what it is like to live in residential care. Would you help me try to understand these things better?"

Guiding questions

- Can you tell me a story about what 'being a girl' means in your family? How did you feel about those(use her words, for example, expectations or rules or standards)
- Can you describe a person who, for you, is a picture of the 'perfect girl'? What makes her a perfect example? (expand on the details she provides, probe for more clarity and understanding)
- Where do you get your messages from, about ways to 'be a girl'?
- If someone were to call you violent, what would you think that person meant?
- Can you think of a time when you thought someone was violent? What was it that was happening? What was it that made you feel that way?
- People get ideas about what violence is from all sorts of places – sometimes people, sometimes experiences – where do you think you got your ideas and feelings from, about what violence is?
- Can you tell me about what led to you living at(the name of the residential facility)?
- I am really interested in hearing about what it is like for you to live here. Can you describe for me 'a day in the life of -----(name), living at -----House'?
- Can you share with me some of the messages you get, from the staff here, about how you should behave or choices you should make?
- Coming back around to the ideas of what it is like to be a girl today, is there anything about living here that has an influence on how you live your life as a girl?

Appendix J: Interview Questions (revised)

Introduction: “There are lots of newspaper stories and television specials these days about girls and violence. I am not always sure that the people interviewed for these stories are talking with girls themselves. I would really like to know more about what it is like to be a girl today, how and where and when girls use violence, and what it is like to live in residential care. Would you help me try to understand these things better?”

Guiding questions:

- Can you tell me how you came to live at(the name of the residential facility)?
- I am really interested in hearing about what it is like for you to live here. Can you describe for me ‘a day in the life of -----(name), living at -----House/Centre’?
- Knowing that I am interested in talking with girls who use violence and live in group homes, what led you to think that you would like to share your experiences?
- One of the experiences I am interested in learning more about from you is what ‘being a girl’ meant in your family as you were growing up. Can you share with me some of the messages you heard and/or learned? How did you feel about those(use her words, for example, expectations or rules or standards)?
- Family is one place where we get messages from. Are there other places or people through which you learned, or learn now, about ways to ‘be a girl’?
- Can you describe a person who, for you, is a picture of the ‘perfect girl’? What makes her a perfect example? (expand on the details she provides, probe for more clarity and understanding)
- Moving now to talking about violence, when you hear the word violent, what do you understand it to mean?
- If someone were to call you violent, what would you think that person meant?
- Can you think of a time when you thought someone was violent? What was it that was happening? What was it that made you feel that way? How did you feel about it?
- People get ideas about what violence is from all sorts of places – sometimes people, sometimes experiences – where do you think you got your ideas and feelings from, about what violence is?
- What are the reasons why girls fight?
- To what degree is a girl sending a message when she fights? What are those messages?
- Can you share with me some of the messages you get, from the staff here, about how you should behave or choices you should make?
- What does it take to live, or live well, in a group setting? What are some of the challenges and benefits of living here and other places where you have lived?
- Coming back around to the ideas of what it is like to be a girl today, is there anything about living here that has an influence on how you live your life as a girl?

Appendix K: Researcher Identification Card

To participate in a study about
girls, violence and living in group homes

Contact: Marion Brown, PhD student
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This study has the ethical approval of Memorial
University of Newfoundland (icehr@mun.ca ; tel: 709-
737-8368).



