

DEALING WITH THE MEAN GIRL:  
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TEACHER RESOURCE MATERIALS

By  
Jennifer Bethune

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Education (Curriculum Studies)  
Mount St. Vincent University

December 9, 2011

### Abstract

In this project, I examine how girl bullying and the “mean girl” phenomenon are produced in teacher resource materials. I undertake a critical discourse analysis of four texts including two teaching guides, a picture book, and an informational article from an education trade magazine, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the discourses of girlhood, gender, education, and bullying that shape these texts?
2. What are the political, social, and discursive effects of this body of pragmatic literature?

In an analysis informed by Foucault’s (1977, 1990/1976) notion of disciplinary power and Butler’s (1990) theories of gender and subjectivity, I argue that these teacher resource materials construct gender and femininity in ways that entrench gender stereotypes and limit the ways in which gendered subjectivities may be taken up by young people. Furthermore, I suggest that the texts serve as a technology of disciplinary power that regulates feminine subjectivity. I argue that the texts operate discursively within a neoliberal policy environment to produce both girlhood as a site of unmanaged risk and girls as rational, autonomous subjects. In considering the effects of these texts and texts like them on educational policy, I suggest that these texts work within a neoliberal policy climate to limit common sense understandings of gender.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many, many thanks, to Dr. Marnina Gonick, for her invaluable guidance, thoughtful advice, and constant support; and to Dr. John Plews for his enthusiasm, encouragement, and fine eye for detail.

I would also like to thank Ella Bedard for her helpful comments on certain sections of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my family, without whom this would not have been possible.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One: Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Biological approaches to gender and bullying	
Gender and aggression: Developmental psychology approaches	
Sex role socialization theory and girl bullying	
Poststructuralist approaches to gender and the mean girl	
Responses to dominant approaches to girl bullying	
<b>Chapter Three: Theoretical Approach and Methodology.....</b>	<b>21</b>
Conflicting approaches: Developmental psychology and feminist poststructuralism	
Theoretical background: gender and subjectivity	
Melancholia, gender and the heterosexual matrix	
Psychoanalytic theory and language	
Impossible femininity and the fashion image	
Disciplinary power, pedagogy, and psychology	
Methodology: Critical discourse analysis	
Applying critical discourse analysis	
The data: Teacher resource materials about girl bullying	
<b>Chapter Four: Producing Gender, Girlhood, and Power.....</b>	<b>48</b>
How to be a proper girl: Producing femininity	
Regulating femininity	
Reconfiguring girls' relationship with power	
Power as motivation	

Power as manipulation and control

Contradictions: empowerment discourses and power-hungry girls

**Chapter Five: Choice and the Neoliberal Girl Subject.....73**

The dangerous world of girls

Girlhood as the site of unmanaged risk

Girlhood as a proxy concern

Choice and responsibility

Risk management: girlhood and the psy professions

**Chapter Six: Neoliberal Educational Policy and the Mean Girl.....88**

A limited ontology of gender and identity

Re-investment in traditional norms of femininity

Girl bullying and policy in a neoliberal educational climate

Conclusion

**References.....108**

**Endnotes.....121**

**Figures**

<b>Figure 1:</b> <i>Confessions of a former bully</i> (Ludwig, 2010, p. 16)	48
<b>Figure 2:</b> <i>Mean Girls</i> (Randall & Bowen, 2009, p. 6)	56
<b>Figure 3:</b> <i>Girl's World</i> (Senn, 2007, p. 77)	56
<b>Figure 4:</b> <i>Girl's World</i> (Senn, 2007, p. 102)	58
<b>Figure 5:</b> <i>Girl's World</i> (Senn, 2007, p. 132)	59
<b>Figure 6:</b> <i>Girl's World</i> (Senn, 2007, p. 38)	60
<b>Figure 7:</b> <i>Confessions of a former bully</i> (Ludwig, 2010, p 23).	70

## Chapter One: Introduction

In November of my first year teaching grade five, a parent called me to discuss her daughter. I was surprised, since the girl was doing well academically and seemed to get along well with her classmates. The mother explained that her daughter spent her evenings crying because of the way the other girls in her group of friends treated her. Her daughter was a victim, the mother explained, and she demanded to know what I was going to do about the bullies. In subsequent years, girls' conflicts continued to be a central theme in the grade five class. Eye rolling, "just kidding" insults, exclusion, false compliments, and rumour-spreading created an invisible tension in the classroom and the playground that went unnoticed by many adults. When the tension erupted, however, teachers, parents, administrators, and students all launched into crisis mode. My experiences as a teacher seemed to echo those of Valerie Hey (1997), which she describes in the introduction to her book, *The Company She Keeps*. She writes that as a teacher she "frequently mopped away tears and lost count of the times the minutiae of girls' passions fractured the rhythms and flows of our official classroom routine" (p. 27). Aside from occupying precious instructional time, the involvement of parents and administrators was stressful, and I didn't feel equipped to deal with it appropriately.

The "mean girl" (Dellasaga & Nixon, 2003; Randall & Bowen 2007; Sparks, 2011), alternately dubbed the "Queen Bee" (Wiseman, 2002) and the "capital-P-Popular Girl" (Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz, 2007), has emerged as a sensationalized figure in

popular media, and interest in girl-on-girl bullying has exploded. Media portrayals of girl bullying are often presented as revelatory, as though a secret world has been discovered for the first time (Gonick, 2004; Ringrose, 2006). In movies, news articles, websites, and books the “mean girl”<sup>1</sup> is characterized as a popular, high-achieving girl—a beacon of white, middle-class femininity—who nevertheless cruelly manipulates her peers and a rigid social hierarchy to maintain her place at the top (Ringrose, 2006). The tension and conflict surrounding the mean girl was echoed in discussions with my students. I asked them why they didn’t just walk away or sit with someone else at lunch, pointing out that there were at least thirty other girls in grade five. I wondered why they couldn’t just *not* be friends with the mean girl. “You don’t understand,” they would reply, “then we’d be alone.” These conversations with girls, and the ensuing conversations with their parents and with other educators, led me to search for ways of understanding and addressing girl bullying in my classroom.

In this project, I examine how girl bullying and the mean girl are produced in resource texts for teachers, and what the discursive, pedagogical, and socio-political implications of these representations might be. My inquiry is guided by the following questions:

**What are the discourses of girlhood, gender, education, identity and bullying that shape these texts?**

**What are the political, social, and discursive effects of this body of pragmatic literature? How are these resources situated in the current educational, political, and social context?**

Since a great deal of young people's social activity takes place in the context of the school, teachers and the resources that inform their practice have an important role to play in the production and/or reproduction of discourses surrounding youth and education. In this project, I undertake a critical discourse analysis of a collection of teacher resource materials about girl bullying. Working within a theoretical framework informed by poststructuralist theories about gender, identity, and power, I examine four texts: two teaching guides, an informational professional magazine article, and a picture book about bullying designed to be read and discussed with children. My research questions, methodology, and analysis align with McRobbie's (2009) suggestion that under the influence of poststructuralist theories, feminist inquiry is increasingly focused on discursive aspects of culture and society:

Under the prevailing influence of Foucault, there is a shift away from feminist interest in centralised power blocks, e.g., the State, patriarchy, law, to more dispersed sites, events and instances of power conceptualised as flows and specific convergences and consolidations of talk, discourse, attentions. (p. 13)

The project begins with a review of the literature on girl bullying. In this section, I discuss the various theoretical approaches that have been used to investigate girl bullying as well as sociological theories about the cultural, social, and educational context within which research about girl bullying is situated. In Chapter three, I draw on Butler (1990, 1997) and Foucault (1976/1997, 1977, 1979/1984) in elaborating the

theoretical foundations for my research and analysis. I focus on poststructuralist theories of subjectivity and gender as well as the concept of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977). I also engage with psychoanalytic theory as I examine the productive role of language within the Symbolic order, a key factor in critical discourse analysis. In the latter part of Chapter three, I define critical discourse analysis and describe my application of this methodology. Additionally, I introduce the four texts selected to make up the data for my analysis. In Chapters four and five, I present a detailed analysis of the teacher resource materials introduced in Chapter three. Chapter four focuses on an analysis of the way that these texts produce gender, identity, and girlhood. In Chapter five, I direct my analysis towards the mobilization of discourses of risk, individual responsibility and autonomy in the texts. In the final chapter, I rely on Foucault and Butler once again as I consider the political implications of these regulatory discourses for girls and for the political project of feminism. I present a discussion of the political, social, and discursive effects of teacher resource materials like the ones I analyze, concluding that these texts, and others like them, may work to limit the way that gender and girlhood are conceived, both in educational policy and in common sense.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Early research on bullying often neglected to consider gender (and other socio-cultural aspects, such as class, race, or sexuality) and focused implicitly on physical (typically masculine) aggression (Ringrose, 2008). The concept of girl bullying, which has been sensationalized in the media and taken up with concerned enthusiasm in educational literature, originates with an assertion of girls' difference. The notion of difference provides a framework for my review of the literature on girl bullying. I begin by exploring several theoretical approaches to gendered identity and consider how these relate to girl bullying and aggression. Then I consider some feminist poststructuralist responses to dominant understandings of bullying.

### **Biological Approaches to Gender and Bullying**

Sociobiology and its close relative, evolutionary psychology, claim that gender differences in aggression are attributable to evolutionary adaptations to women's physiological difference from men (Campbell, 1999; Chesler, 2009; Vaillancourt, 2005). This approach has been key in debates within criminology about violent behaviour and criminality in women (Campbell, 1995, 1999, 2001), a field that has influenced academic research and popular reporting in the area of girl bullying (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008). Evolutionary psychology seems to have experienced a resurgence as a way of understanding gender and bullying, appearing in the introductions to several recent books for both teachers and young people (Burton, 2009; Field, Kolbert, Crothers, & Hughes, 2009). The direct descendant of sociobiology, a field which created

controversy in the 1970s for suggestions that current human behaviours may be attributed to vestigial survival-of-the-fittest traits, evolutionary psychology accounts for gender differences in bullying by connecting children's behaviour to the behaviour of pre-historic humans and other organisms. In this approach, female aggression is linked with competition for scarce resources, in particular, quality male mates. In this argument, males are understood to be a resource because, by their strength and prowess in hunting, they control access to food. In order to ensure her genetic continuation, the female competes with other females, doing whatever is necessary and possible to prevent other females from gaining access to the quality mate in question (Campbell, 1995). Campbell (1999) argues that cruelty to other females, including rumour spreading and gossiping, represents human females' aggressive competition for scarce resources.

The implication is that aggression is an immutable aspect at the core of human identity and that the differences between boys and girls are attributable to a pre-historic sexual division of labour that is somehow hard-wired into perpetuity. This approach is problematic for feminists who argue that, in neglecting to consider the effects of drastically changing cultural and historical contexts, sociobiology is rendered irrelevant as a way of understanding and addressing gender inequality, and that it provides a justification for misogyny and the historical oppression of women. This claim is supported by the position that women's subordination throughout history is more usefully attributed to the social and political dominance of patriarchy rather than the behaviours of pre-historic primates (Tang-Martinez, 1997).

### **Gender and Aggression: Developmental Psychology Approaches**

Dominant approaches to girl bullying implicitly incorporate biological approaches to gender and aggression. The assumption underlying dominant notions of gender difference in bullying is that girls bully differently than boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Some of the first to examine gender differences in aggression, Björkqvist and Niemelä (1992) challenge the notion of the non-aggressive female by suggesting that previous studies of gender difference in aggression did not consider differences in forms of aggression. They argue that previous research about aggression focused almost exclusively on males, a fact due, in part, to male bias in research. Male researchers defined aggression from a male point of view, which, they claim, “finds it favorable to conceive of women as friendly, virtuous and giving, and caring for man’s needs, while he himself is brave and aggressive” (Björkqvist & Niemelä, p. 5). Pointing to the qualitative differences that make comparison difficult, Björkqvist and Niemelä question the expediency of comparing male and female in order to determine which is the more aggressive sex. Nevertheless, they conclude that females may be as aggressive as males if indirect as well as direct forms of aggression are considered. A central question remains pointedly unanswered: Is “physical violence the most important form of human aggression, the one that causes the greatest amount of suffering?” (Björkqvist & Niemelä, p. 11).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) elaborate on Björkqvist and Niemelä’s research, using the concept of relational aggression to examine girls’ “attempts to harm others [as being] focused on relational issues” including “behaviours that are intended to

significantly damage another child's friendships or feelings of inclusion by the peer group" (p. 711). The research conducted by these developmental psychologists did in fact find that when gender-specific forms of aggression were included in the measures of aggressiveness, girls rated as highly as boys (Crick & Grotpeter). Thus, the conjuring of a feminine form of bullying takes girls' difference into account in order to assert their equivalence with boys. Central to the developmental research about gender differences in bullying are essentialized understandings of the differences between boys' and girls' social behaviours which have their roots in biological and psychological understandings of gender and identity (Hey, 1997).

The research surrounding girl bullying began as a feminist claim that male-centered developmental research privileges "masculine" ideals of individual rationality while devaluing "feminine qualities" like caring and nurture. Ringrose (2006) argues that ironically, this research served as a launching pad for developmental research that "use[s] female difference to re-pathologize girls" (p. 411). She cites Gilligan's (1982) feminist challenge to male-centered psychological research, which suggested that it is "girls' relational approach to the world that differentiated them from boys" (Ringrose, p. 412). In the developmental psychology research, "feminine" qualities such as caring, nurturing, and sacrifice are used to explain girls' uniquely feminine aggression, which is based in their intimate friendships. Within this framework, girls' essential qualities, such as caring and nurturing become weapons against other girls. Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) distinction of a distinctly different, female form of aggression positions relationally aggressive behaviour as 'other' to normative (typically masculine) direct aggression and constructs the feminine as different and abnormal, "reconstituting the

gender-dichotomized symbolic terrain where the feminine originates as lack—as universally different, inferior and ‘other’ to the masculine” (Ringrose, p. 412).

### **Sex Roles Socialization Theory and Girl Bullying**

Gender-roles socialization theory is another approach to understanding gender difference and girl bullying, and it has gained some traction (but only enough to merit a mention in one of the many lessons and strategies suggested in the resources I analyzed) thanks in part to the commercial success of Rachel Simmons’ book, *Odd Girl Out* (2002). In this approach, children are on the receiving end of explicit and implicit instruction about how to behave in such a way that they are in line with societal norms. This approach assumes an intentional instructional agent (parents, teachers, television programming) and views socialization as a process that is more or less completed at some point in the individual’s development. Gender differences in bullying are ascribed to girls’ being taught to conform to traditional norms of feminine behaviour by taking up “feminine” characteristics and interests, and repressing those characteristics (such as assertiveness or aggressiveness) that do not correspond with the dominant understanding of feminine behaviour (Letendre, 2007). Identity is viewed as something that is acquired throughout childhood before becoming fixed at a certain point in an individual’s development; the possibility of re-socialization, however, remains. According to Davies and Harré (1990) “in role-theory, the person is always separable from the various roles that they take up” (n.p., conclusion). Like developmental psychology and sociobiology, this approach assumes the unity and autonomy of the self as well as certain foundational or essential “truths” of human nature (Davies, 1989b).

### **Poststructuralist Approaches to Gender and the Mean Girl**

Poststructuralist approaches to gender and bullying diverge foundationally from the approaches described above, rejecting humanist understandings of the self and biological explanations of feminine difference. Davies (1989b) suggests that common-sense understandings of masculinity and femininity rely on the assumption that sexual difference has a biological basis. Within this dualistic framework, the sex roles that adults teach children (through socialization) are “dressing laid over the ‘real’ biological difference” (Davies, p. 5). Citing Walkerdine, Davies suggests that a poststructuralist approach to understanding gender in educational settings permits a move away from the theories of difference that focus on individual identities that have dominated gendered discourses in schools.

In a poststructuralist understanding of the individual, the term “subjectivity” replaces the term “identity.” This terminology points to the poststructuralist assertion that individuals are the products and producers of multiple, fluid discourses, in contrast to the humanist notion of a fixed identity that has its origins within the self (Gonick, 2006). Individuals’ subjectivities are produced through “the positions made available within one’s own and others’ discursive practices” (Davies, 1989a, p. 229). Individuals take up subject positions as they are made available within various discourses, positioning themselves within narratives and categories and adopting a moral and emotional system around the categories of belonging.

Feminist scholars working within this framework (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2007; Davies, 1989a; Davies, 1989b; Gonick, 2004, 2006; Hey, 1997; Kehily, Mac An

Ghail, Epstein, & Redman, 2002; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Willet, 2006) suggest that girls' subjectivities may be constructed through hegemonic discourses that dictate norms of femininity. As such, children may take up subject positions based on the "proper" or "correct" way to "do" or "perform" girlhood in order to become part of a friendship group, for example (Kehily et al., 2002). Butler (1990) argues that "the injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object" (p. 145); in the case of young girls (and boys), to be accepted as part of a friendship group might also be seen as a discursive route through which gender is constructed.

An analysis of the discourses at play within popular and educational culture can show how and when the subject positions available to girls are produced and constrained by dominant discourses (Willett, 2006). According to Hey (1997), "girls have to make sense of themselves *against* other girls but they have to do so not in conditions of their own choosing" (p. 136), since they are constrained by discursively produced notions of normative femininity. Ringrose and Renold (2010) employ "a feminist, poststructuralist theory of power ...[that] outlines how norms and symbolic structures construct 'intelligible genders' and how such symbolic structures of gender are performative" (p. 591) to show that hegemonic discourses dictate the ways in which girls and boys aggress: They are "incited to 'perform' conflict and violence in particular ways through affective norms of masculinity and femininity" (p. 591). Children whose behaviour transgresses hetero-normative expectations are often labeled as bullies, and adults frequently demand normative gendered responses to aggression (Ringrose & Renold).

Currie et al., (2007) argue that while the mean behaviour defined as relational aggression by developmental psychologists may contribute to problems related to girls' lack of self-esteem, as the developmental literature suggests (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Owens, Slee & Shute, 2000), this connection does not necessarily imply that the problem stems from the aggressive behaviour of individual girls. Rather, within the context of the hegemonic hetero-normative discourses of girls' social lives, girls' aggression "is symptomatic ... it tells us as much about dominant culture as it does about individual girls" (Currie et al., p. 32). Currie et al. suggest that meanness operates within the culturally dominant discourse of "emphasised femininity," and that its power "comes from the fact that it is 'productive' as much as it is regulatory; within the school culture, the regulation of group membership 'produces' girls' identities" (p. 26). Dominant discourses of femininity demand niceness of girls, and thus inform the way girls deal with conflict; covert meanness provides girls with a way to express feelings of personal power without upsetting these hetero-normative discourses. In their study, Currie et al. found that the girls characterized as mean-yet-popular by their peers performed gender in a way consistent with the notion of "emphasised femininity." The unspoken rules of acceptable feminine behaviour are thus policed through the discursively constructed power of popularity and meanness.

### **Responses to Dominant Approaches to Girl Bullying**

Developmental psychology is the dominant framework for understanding girl bullying within popular and educational cultures, and essentializing biologically and psychologically defined notions of identity play an important role in this discourse.

Feminist commentators have responded critically to popularized “bully discourses” (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Several broad themes emerge in this critical literature. Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2008) suggest that mean girl discourses popularized in parenting books and in the media are largely responsible for the criminalization of girls’ behaviour, which has translated into an increase in arrests of girls for minor offenses. The effect of this has been the representation of girls and “girlworld” as toxic, resituating the “well-documented problems of girlhood away from abusive families, schools that ignore and silence girls, and peer groups that reward hegemonic femininity to the girls themselves” (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, p. 184). Like Chesney-Lind and Irwin, Ringrose (2006) critiques the dominant bully discourses in education as well as in popular culture claiming that the emergence of a psycho-educational field of study surrounding it creates a “pathologized feminine behaviour,” framing it as “a disease that must be treated to prevent peer rejection, depression, loneliness and much worse” (p. 411).

Several scholars suggest that the panic playing out in the media and in policy-making circles represents a movement that has occurred within a political, social, and educational climate increasingly characterized by neoliberal values and beliefs. This broad, cultural shift is manifested in policy and political and social sentiment as an emphasis on individualism, personal responsibility, and choice, and coincides with the destabilization of labour markets and the dismantling of the welfare state (Gonick, 2004; 2006; Ringrose, 2007). The developmental psychology approach to girl bullying, which emphasizes individual pathology and personal responsibility, is compatible with these ideals. Writing in the context of the UK, Ringrose (2008) argues that educational

policy influenced by neoliberalism has adopted developmental psychology's gender differentiated theories of aggression, ignoring the socio-cultural aspects of girl bullying. This has the effect of entrenching dominant bully discourses as legislation without consideration for the difficulties involved for girls managing conflicting discourses of a competitive school climate and normative femininity. Ringrose (2007) draws upon McRobbie's (2004, as cited in Ringrose, 2007) notion of "feminism taken into account" in her analysis of the competing discourses surrounding girls' success and meanness in popular and educational culture. McRobbie (2009) argues that "feminism taken into account" is symptomatic of a shift towards neoliberal social and economic policy, and describes the "undoing" of feminism that she sees as central to post-feminism. Applied to educational settings, this narrative underpins the competing discourses of success and meanness problematized by Ringrose (2006; 2007).

Like Ringrose (2006; 2007), Gonick (2004; 2006) examines the connections between discourses surrounding girl bullying and the contemporary movement towards neoliberal economic and social policies, suggesting that there has been a discursive shift in dominant understandings of girls and their relationships with one another. She identifies two narratives that are mobilized to define contemporary girlhood. The Reviving Ophelia discourse takes its name from the enormously successful book by psychologist Mary Pipher, which presents girls as vulnerable and weak, like "saplings in a hurricane" (Pipher, 1994, as cited in Gonick, 2006, p. 12). Gonick suggests that this discourse emerged nearly concurrently with the Girl Power discourse, which provides "an image of the ideal feminine subject demanded by neoliberalism" (Gonick, 2006, p. 11). Both of these discourses contribute to themes of

self-invention, self-help, and determination that construct the mean girl as a rational subject within bully discourses (Gonick, 2006). Gonick (2004) problematizes the figure of the mean girl, arguing that popular discourses surrounding her suggest an individualizing approach to a problem that represents broad-reaching social anxiety about a rapidly changing political and economic environment. Within this climate of risk and responsibility, where the individual is presumed to be “actor, designer, juggler and stage director of his or her own biography, identity, social networks, commitments and convictions” (Beck, 1994, p. 14), girls are constructed as rational, autonomous, psychological subjects (Gonick, 2004). If girl bullies are viewed as rational, autonomous subjects, then so too must their *potential* targets. Within contemporary discourses of autonomy, personal responsibility, and risk management, it becomes the responsibility of individual girls (and often their parents) to detect the risk of, and thus prevent, misfortune (Barron & Lacombe, 2010).

These critiques of the dominant discourses surrounding the mean girl and girl bullying inform my analysis of teacher resources. The importance of understanding the effects of these discourses in a post-feminist educational climate is illustrated in this quote from Davies (1989a, p. 232): “It is possible to see teachers setting out to teach equitably and failing to do so because their discourse constitutes the pupils in exactly the ways that they were saying is no longer appropriate.” The discourses that are mobilized through dominant bully discourses echo this idea.

The dominant educational discourses surrounding girl bullying are framed within the equivalency-seeking notion that girls are different but equal (even when it

comes to negative behaviour), yet they discursively position girls as “other,” pathological, or near criminal. In the next section, which establishes a theoretical framework for my analysis, I engage with feminist poststructuralist theory in a discussion of the role of language with respect to the subject and the Symbolic order. I also return to the concepts of risk and responsibility as I consider the interconnectedness of language and disciplinary power.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach and Methodology**

Girl bullying has clearly captured the attention of both the academic and the popular media. Its hot-topic status, though, is also acutely felt by educators: the teachers, guidance counselors, and school administrators who interact with young people, their parents and guardians, and educational policy makers on a daily basis. With this in mind, my purpose in this project is to critically examine some of the resources available to educators about girl bullying, and to explore the ways that gender and bullying are constructed and situated within the current educational, political, and social context. My methodological approach is informed by my research questions:

**What are the discourses of girlhood, gender, education, and bullying that shape these texts? How are the texts shaped by these discourses?**

**What are the political, social, and discursive effects of this body of pragmatic literature?**

These questions point to a relationship between texts and society, in particular, the relationship between the language of teacher resource materials about girl bullying and the social phenomenon that they define and describe. The relationship between language and society is of particular interest to critical discourse analysis. Using this methodological approach, my aim is to analyze a collection of teacher resources in terms of the following questions: What modes of feminine subjectivity are offered through these texts? How is language used to produce and regulate understandings of

gender? How does the language of these texts position subjects within late-capitalist culture and society? What discourses are produced in this language, and who is interpellated by these discourses?

I will begin this section with an overview of the approaches to gender and bullying that are central to this project: developmental psychology, which underpins the resource materials I analyzed, and feminist poststructuralism, which provides the framework for my analysis. My focus is on feminist poststructuralism, complemented by some aspects of psychoanalytic theory, as these theoretical approaches emphasize the central role of language in the production of subjectivity. This concept is at the crux of critical discourse analysis, which attempts to uncover the ways that discourse is produced in language, and how discourse works within specific sociopolitical contexts to produce and regulate individuals' subjectivities. My approach draws on Butler's (1990; 1997) and McRobbie's (2009) approaches to gender and subjectivity, which I outline below. I use these theories of gender together with Foucauldian theories of disciplinary power (1976/1990; 1977) to show how girls' gendered subjectivities may be produced and regulated by the language and discourse surrounding girl bullying. I will conclude by defining critical discourse analysis and explaining how I applied this method in my research.

### **Conflicting approaches: Developmental Psychology and Feminist Poststructuralism**

Girl bullying and the "mean girl"<sup>2</sup> as a phenomenon have been approached from various theoretical angles. For the most part, these approaches are grounded in

psychology. The most prevalent of these approaches is developmental psychology, which takes its cues from behavioural psychology and social psychology. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this approach began as a challenge to earlier, androcentric research on aggression. The identification of relational aggression by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) as a uniquely feminine form of aggression serves as a starting point for this approach, which is premised on essentialized understandings of boys' and girls' gender identities and, like psychology in general, the unity of the self (Parker, 2005). Ringrose and Renold (2010) argue that this approach to understanding gender differences in bullying obscures the social contexts and power relationships within which bullying occurs, as well as contributing to and legitimizing existing "norms of feminine and masculine difference" (p. 577).

Feminist poststructuralism diverges from the developmental psychology approach described above in that it rejects the notion of a "universal" human or feminine essence and the idea of a fixed, unitary identity. Davies (1989b) argues that humanist notions of the individual and of identity encourage disconnection from the social. In this way, discursive practices come to be seen as belonging entirely to the individual, rather than being understood as embedded within cultural, political, and social practices. Theories that draw upon poststructuralism, however, are concerned with the connection between the social (especially language and other forms of semiosis) and the subject. These theories focus on individuals' multiple and changing subjectivities and the discourses that produce these subject positions. In terms of gender, this approach is concerned with how the regulatory discourses of compulsory heterosexuality and normative gender produce gendered subjectivities. A

poststructuralist analysis of the discourses at play in shaping girls' gendered identities can show how and when the subject positions available to girls are produced and constrained by dominant discourses (Willett, 2006). According to Ringrose and Renold (2010), hegemonic discourses dictate the ways in which girls and boys behave in conflict: They are "incited to 'perform' conflict and violence in particular ways through affective norms or masculinity and femininity" (p. 591). In this approach, bullying and the mean girl phenomenon are understood as a social phenomenon (Currie et al., 2007) rather than as the result of individual pathology. According to Currie et al., "aggression is constitutive rather than maladaptive of dominant culture" (p. 33).

Feminist poststructuralism has engaged with psychoanalysis by incorporating aspects of Freudian and Lacanian theory into understandings of how gendered subjectivity is acquired and sustained (Weedon, 1997). An engagement with psychoanalytic theory can show how cultural and social structures are incorporated into the psyche, and what the impact of this may be in terms of the production of gendered subjectivity. Butler (1997) critiques Foucault for neglecting the psyche in his formulation of subjection, arguing that "one cannot account for subjectivation and, in particular, becoming the principle of one's own subjection without recourse to a psychoanalytic account of the formative or generative effects of restriction or prohibition" (p. 87; see also Salih, 2002).

### **Theoretical Background: Gender and Subjectivity**

My text-based research uses critical discourse analysis as a methodology, therefore my interest in incorporating aspects of psychoanalysis and feminist poststructuralism into a study of the discourses surrounding girl bullying is focused on the role of language with respect to the production of gendered subjectivities. Following McRobbie's (2009) lead, I will draw on Lacan and Butler in my analysis. In the following section I will outline Butler's account of gender identification and the heterosexual matrix. Following this, I will draw on Lacan in a discussion of the role of the Symbolic order and language in the production of gendered subjectivities. I will return to Butler's conceptualization of gender and sex as "regulatory fiction" (1990, p. 32) in an investigation of how "impossible femininity" (McRobbie, p. 116) may work to regulate girls' subjectivities in the context of the teacher resource materials I analyzed.

**Melancholia, gender and the heterosexual matrix.** Butler's (1990) conceptualization of gender draws on Freud's notion of melancholic gender identification. As I will explain in detail later in this section, Butler argues that gender identification is psychically produced through the Oedipal family drama, but that this occurs as an effect of a cultural prohibition against homosexuality. Rather than being attributable to innate and fixed "dispositions," for Butler, gender is a precarious fiction; a "*stylized repetition of acts*" (p. 140), the constant iteration of which creates the illusion of its naturalness. These repetitive acts are a form of pastiche—what they represent are repeated attempts to embody something that is itself fictitious. The "stylized repetition of acts"—the performance of gender—is required and enforced by the Symbolic order, which is represented by language. Language (and here we might

include all semiosis), doing the work of the Symbolic order, maintains the phantasm of gender by containing it within the cultural laws regulating desire that constitute the heterosexual matrix.

For Freud and for Butler, the process of acquiring gender identification is played out within the Oedipal family drama, in which gender is produced through the repudiation of, and subsequent psychic identification with, the same-sex parent. Melancholia is the response to the imagined loss of an object of desire. Unlike mourning, which is the response to a material loss, the death of a loved one, for instance, melancholia may be the response to a loss so abstract that the individual is unaware of having lost anything at all (Salih, 2002). In the Freudian formulation, the infant's primary object-cathexis (desire for an object) is the parent. The object is withdrawn or given up in the Oedipal stage as a result of the taboo against incest. In response to this loss, the lost object, which cannot be mourned or grieved because of the incest taboo, is preserved in the structure of the ego as a gendered identification. In other words, since the child cannot *have* the parent in question, it introjects the parent into the structure of the ego by identifying with it.

In Freud's account, the melancholy gender storyline starts and ends with the notion of masculine and feminine dispositions, the innate facts of object-cathexis that determine which of the parents the child first desires and later identifies with. Butler's formulation of melancholic gender identification diverges from Freud's. Rejecting Freud's notion of innate masculine and feminine "dispositions," Butler (1990) argues instead that they "are effects of a law which, internalized, produces and regulates

discrete gender identity and heterosexuality” (p. 64). While Freud suggests (tentatively, according to Butler (1990)) that gender identification depends on individual children’s innate dispositions towards masculinity or femininity, and thus their respective desire for the mother or the father, Butler argues that these seemingly natural dispositions are in fact the result of a cultural prohibition against homosexuality. For Butler, it is the taboo against homosexuality, rather than the incest taboo that is responsible for creating, and most importantly, sustaining, stable gender identifications. According to Butler (1990), the prohibition against homosexuality sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire. Thus, it is the psychic process of melancholic gender identification that solidifies the heterosexual matrix and the Symbolic investment in upholding what Butler reveals to be the chimera of gender. Gender, and as a result, identity, is only intelligible within the framework of the heterosexual matrix. In Butler’s words, “persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility” (Butler, p. 16). In the context of compulsory heterosexuality, it is through the “stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality” that the coherence and intelligibility of the self are assured.

**Psychoanalytic theory and language.** In Lacanian theory, desire is the precursor to language and subjectivity. Language is structured around the symbolic position of “the Other,” which is identified with the phallus, and is the source of language and the law. The inability to satisfy desire for “the Other” gives rise to “the need to symbolize control through language” (Weedon, 1997, p. 50). Reflecting on

Lacan's linguistic approach to subjectivity, Mitchell and Rose (1982) explain: "The human animal is born into language and it is within the terms of language that the human subject is constructed" (p. 5). Together, language and the law structure the Symbolic order, "the social and cultural order in which we live our lives as conscious, gendered subjects" (Weedon, 1997, p. 50).

In her analysis of the connections between post-feminism and the individualizing, market-based economic and social policies of the current neoliberal political climate, McRobbie (2009) argues, "the Symbolic discharges (or maybe franchises) its duties to the commercial domain (beauty, fashion, magazines, body culture, etc.) which becomes the source of authority and judgment for young women" (p. 61). Since language underpins the Symbolic order, we can use this concept to explore the role that language plays in regulating young women's and girls' subjectivities. I suggest that language operates in the same way in the context of educational discourse as it does in the commercial discourses with which McRobbie is concerned.

**Impossible femininity and the fashion image.** For McRobbie (2009), impossible femininity reflects the chimerical nature of sex and gender; the idea, from Butler (1990) that, "gender norms are finally phantasmic, impossible to embody" (p. 141). In an analysis of the connection between women's consumption of fashion images and their self-harming practices, McRobbie takes up Butler's insistence that cultural values that privilege heterosexuality consolidate normative femininity. Young women,

she claims, are heavily invested in an un-attainable self-hood, in the pursuit of a chimerical feminine identity that they cannot achieve. These processes “work to institutionalize and consolidate this state for young women, so that seemingly inexplicable anxiety, pain, rage, and self-harming behaviour, become accepted ways of being” (McRobbie, p. 115). In the following chapters, I will argue that the texts I analyzed also put forth a kind of unattainable self-hood, a normative femininity that is rife with contradiction. Through the production of an “impossible femininity” (McRobbie, p. 116), girlhood is pathologized.

These texts produce subject positions for girls that can be understood in terms of Butler’s Foucauldian reconfiguration of melancholic gender. These texts produce a certain kind of subject—the “proper girl—a subject position that is impossible to achieve (Nayak & Kehily, 2006).

The Symbolic order creates cultural intelligibility through the mutually exclusive positions of ‘having’ the Phallus (the position of men) and ‘being’ the Phallus (the paradoxical position of women). ... Lacan casts that drama, however, in a phantasmic domain. Every effort to establish identity within the terms of this binary disjunction of ‘being’ and ‘having’ returns to the inevitable ‘lack’ and ‘loss’ that ground their phantasmic construction and mark the incommensurability of the Symbolic and the real. (Butler, 1990, p. 44)

In this reconfiguration of gendered identity, the subject position of “proper girl,” can be understood as a “fantasy that is both hankered after and embodied through and approximation of its norms” (Nayak & Kehily, 2006, p. 465). Culturally and historically sanctioned and produced prohibitions have important psychic implications in the

production of gendered subjectivities; it is the taboos first against homosexuality and secondly against incest that result in the repudiation of the primary love object and the resulting internalization of that object as gender. These taboos and laws, along with language, constitute the Symbolic.

The Symbolic is the “universal organizing principle of culture itself” (Butler, 1990, p. 79), and the social and cultural norms it establishes take on a productive effect. McRobbie (2009) personifies the Symbolic (e.g., “The Symbolic has had to find a new way of exerting its authority” (p. 61); “The Symbolic here shows itself to be highly adaptable and capable of operating at high speed” (p. 64)) suggesting that it responds to threats from feminism and from a changing social and economic climate by intensifying regulative incitements about gender. The mechanisms of the Symbolic as a personifiable entity are elaborated in McRobbie’s review of *Antigone’s Claim* (Butler, 2000):

What if the Symbolic is thus nothing other than a threshold of jurisdiction in favour of reproduction and heterosexuality, which is able to evoke the horror of incest to instill fear and anxiety across a much wider field of activities as a way of sending out warnings to its subjects, and thus reining them in, alerting them to the dangers of other irregularities? (McRobbie, 2003, p. 131).

For McRobbie (2003; 2009), the Symbolic order is maintained by the authority of patriarchal law and produces certain kinds of feminine subjects, exerting its authority through the mechanisms of the fashion-beauty complex, for example. The Symbolic also produces a certain kind of subject through educational discourses, both within the

education establishment and within broader cultural discourses in the popular media and “common sense.”

### **Disciplinary Power, Pedagogy, and Psychology**

In order to understand the role of the Symbolic authority in the production of gendered subjectivity, I think it is helpful to consider the notion of the Symbolic authority in terms of Foucault’s redefinition of power. The connection between language and power is of primary importance in my analysis. As discussed above, language precedes and produces the subject. In order to produce the desired kinds of subjects, power must also work through language. In the following sections, I will look at some of the discourses of disciplinary power that are operational in the educational context. These provide a starting point for my project, which analyzes teacher resources to see how these educational discourses and other forms of disciplinary power are operationalized.

Foucault (1977, 1990/1976) demonstrates that the technologies of power are multiple and diverse, and that power is more appropriately described as a network of relations that operates within the every-day institutions of society than as a repressive, “top-down” authority. The regulative mechanisms of discipline embedded in institutions such as schools and hospitals facilitate the “infinitesimal distribution of ... power relations” (Foucault 1977, p. 216). Power, then, is found in the most minute details of social and cultural life, and it exists in a dialectical relationship with discourse. According to Foucault (1990/1976), “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power” (p. 101).

Foucault places pedagogy alongside psychiatry and penology as a field in which disciplinary power is exercised (Foucault, 1977) and links the emergence of pedagogy as a science with the introduction of frequent school examinations. As I will show, assessment and evaluation has a regulative function within educational discourses surrounding girl bullying. Foucault argues, “the examination introduced a whole mechanism that linked to a certain type of the formation of knowledge a certain form of the exercise of power” (1977, p. 187). Shifts in curriculum design have resulted in varying approaches to the school examination, and the science of pedagogy continues to devise new ways of observing, inspecting, ranking, categorizing, and otherwise subjecting individuals to this form of disciplinary power. Under current educational policy, assessment (to use the currently preferred educational jargon) is of increasing importance (Ringrose, 2007). According to *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Government of Ontario, 2010), assessment should be “ongoing and varied in nature” (p. 6), and provide opportunities for students to develop self-assessment skills. Here, academic performance is separated from “learning skills” for the purpose of assessment. In grades one through 12, skills such as responsibility, collaboration, and self-regulation are assessed, both by the teacher and by the student, compounding the self-regulatory aspect of this assessment policy. The current emphasis on the assessment and self-assessment of character can be understood as a technology of power, a discourse that has found its way into numerous aspects of social and cultural life, both within the school and without. Assessment, “surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a ‘case’ ... it is the individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality; and it

is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc” (Foucault, 1977, p. 191).

Formal assessments such as standardized tests and report cards represent only part of this discourse. Informal forms of assessment, particularly self-assessment, are pervasive in school and youth culture, as young people rank their peers on popularity websites and assess themselves through magazine quizzes and school-based character programs. The effect of this discourse is to individualize each student and produce a self-assessing and self-regulating subject. As I will show in the following chapters, this disciplinary practice is present in teacher resources about girl bullying, and works to enforce gender binaries as well as to regulate and maintain dominant understandings of femininity.

The dominance of psychology as a framework for understanding gender and bullying can also be understood in terms of disciplinary power. Foucault (1990/1976) describes how psychiatry, as a modern incarnation of the confession ritual, functions as a technology of power in the regulation of sexual discourses. Psychiatry and its relatives (the psy professions, among which can be counted counseling, psychotherapy, and psychology) function as technologies of power within educational discourse as well. At the end of the nineteenth century, developmental psychology came into use in education as a way to “produce a pedagogy of the natural development towards rationality” (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001, p. 32). The pervasiveness of the psy professions within educational discourse is “intrinsically bound to problematics of government” (Rose, 1996, p. 3). Like the school examination, the “psy discourses” are

technologies of disciplinary power that operate through the regulating institutions of government, including schools, the penal system, and healthcare to produce a certain kind of individualized subject. It is through these peripheral institutions of the state that the “truths” of the psy discourses are iterated and normalized (Blackman & Walkerdine). Psychology works on a rational, autonomous subject, and the self-help practices it prescribes become “the very basis of a person’s self-forming activity” (Blackman & Walkerdine, p. 104). Thus, the “truths” of psy discourses are incorporated into individual subjectivities, and a failure to achieve autonomous subjecthood is interpreted as the result of individual pathology. My analysis attempts to locate the ways in which the language of the teacher resources about girl bullying engage with psy discourses, and how this works as a technology of disciplinary power.

### **Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis**

Foucault’s project in *The History of Sexuality* (1990/1976) is to “locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behavior” (p. 11). Many branches of critical discourse analysis draw upon Foucauldian notions of discourse and power in their attempts to explore the connections between discourse (including language and other forms of semiosis) and the social world (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & O’Garro Joseph, 2005). Critical discourse analysis is particularly interested in the imbrication of ideology and discourses, and in the ideological implications of particular discursive practices. In this approach, discourse is seen as “socially *constitutive* as well as socially shaped” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.

258), and the relationship between discourse and ideology is emphasised. By focusing on texts as well as the social processes from which they emerge (Wodak, 2003), critical discourse analysis aims to expose the “ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

Critical discourse analysis is distinguished from other forms of discourse analysis by its focus on the relationship between language and society. Rogers (2004) elaborates on this definition by unpacking the significance of each part of the term, *critical discourse analysis*, arguing that while interpretations of it may vary in the relative importance placed on each component—*critical*, *discourse*, and *analysis*—each of these aspects must be present in a critical discourse analysis. The “critical” refers to critical theory, which examines inequality and power relationships. Critical discourse analysis is interested in revealing how social problems are produced, legitimized, and sustained through discourse. Unlike many forms of social science research, critical discourse analysis begins with an explicitly clear political agenda (Wooffitt, 2005). The “discourse” in critical discourse analysis is not simply a “reflection of social practices” (Rogers, p. 6) or a pattern of language in use. Rather, it is “a set of consumptive, productive, distributive, and reproductive processes that is in relation to the social world” (Rogers, p. 5). Critical discourse analysis is concerned with the dialectical relationships between language and discourse and between discourse and social, cultural, and political life. While most versions of critical discourse analysis agree on the “critical” and “discourse” aspects described above, there are diverging views regarding “analysis.” Scholars influenced by critical linguistics and systemic linguistic

theory place relatively more emphasis on linguistics, and focus on a fine-grained analysis of grammar and syntax (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Other critical discourse analysts focus on the sociohistoric context of the discourse, arguing that because ideological discourses are defined by sociohistorical contexts, purely linguistic analyses of texts decontextualize and render unintelligible the ideological discourses with which they engage. Rather than focusing on the linguistic form of texts, scholars approaching critical discourse analysis from this angle highlight the importance of allusion (Wodak, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), argumentative strategy (Wodak, 2003), intertextuality, and “collective symbols” (Jäger, 2003, p. 35).

My approach to critical discourse analysis is informed by Wodak’s (2003) discourse-historical method and Jäger’s (2003) five-step methodology. Both of these scholars emphasize the importance of the social, political, and historical context of discourse in their methodologies. This focus is significant for my project, as my analysis of teacher resources about girl bullying is situated within the context of the current social, political, and educational climate and shifting notions of girls and girlhood.

As I mentioned above, Jäger’s approach to critical discourse analysis calls attention to the sociohistoric and political context of discourse. In an approach that draws heavily on Foucauldian theories of discourse and power, Jäger suggests an analysis that is divided into five stages. First, he suggests a brief characterization of the “discourse plane,” or the category of text that will be examined, which is followed by the collection and processing of the material in terms of broad discursive themes, including the discourse’s position, the discursive events that underpin the discourse, and the

discourse's entanglement with other discourses. Next, the material is evaluated in terms of the "discourse strand" or the "thematically uniform discourse processes" to be analyzed. This is followed by a fine analysis of one or several pieces of text. This analysis could include an examination of the appearance of the text, including the graphic layout, the structure of the writing, and the rhetorical means used, for example, the kind of argumentation, the intertextual references, figurative language, vocabulary, style, and so on. This is followed by consideration of the ideological effects of the texts.

Wodak's (2003) discourse-historical approach focuses on the evaluation and analysis of discursive strategies: discursive and non-discursive practices that are "adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim" (p. 73). Wodak (2003) focuses on five discursive strategies. Nomination refers to the naming of categories and the creation of in- and out-groups, and may be accomplished through the use of naturalizing or depersonalizing metaphor and synecdoche. Predication is the implicit or explicit labeling of social actors using stereotypically positive and negative traits. Argumentation strategies use various linguistic means to justify a particular position, and perspectivation establishes the writer's or the speaker's point of view through the use of narrative, quotation, and reporting style. Intensification/mitigation is the final discursive strategy elucidated in Wodak's (2003) methodological framework. It involves an evaluation of whether the "epistemic status" (Wodak, 2003, p. 73) of an utterance has been modified so as to intensify or mitigate its force. These five discursive strategies are evaluated in terms of discourse theory and an eclectic range of middle range theories—those theories that deal with specific social phenomena or subsystems of society—and can then be linked to grand theories. This

approach emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinarity, eclecticism, and a constant back and forth between theory and data. It is problem-oriented and practice-driven: The results of the analysis can be applied with the goal of changing social or discursive practices.

Along with other models of critical discourse analysis, these methodological approaches attempt to describe, analyze, and critique the effects of dominant discourse on “socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 259). Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive branch of critical discourse analysis goes on to problematize the process or processes through which discourses become hegemonic, suggesting “we need to know how specific discourse structures determine specific mental processes, or facilitate the formation of specific social representations (p. 259). Working within the field of discursive psychology, Parker (2005) argues that Lacanian psychoanalysis can provide insight into the “subject as discourse user” (p. 480). Drawing upon this notion, I suggest that psychoanalysis can be understood as a link between hegemonic discourse and the subject through Butler’s (1990, 1997) poststructuralist appropriation of Lacan. The question here is: How are discourses incorporated into the subject at the psychic level in such a way that they become hegemonic, that is, tacitly accepted despite the fact that they sustain social problems and inequality? An examination of the language within which desire is framed can help to understand the material repercussions of regulative, hegemonic discourses. According to Butler (1990), discursively constructed prohibitions produce, regulate, and enforce gender norms, committing “everyday violence... through the imposition of such normative phantasms” (Nayak & Kehily, 2006, p. 465). These productive and regulative discourses are sustained and

legitimized through their incorporation into the psyche. An investigation into the psychic processes at work in the context of girls' friendships and conflicts might provide insight into the production and regulation of girls' gendered subjectivities.

**Applying critical discourse analysis.** In this study, I use critical discourse analysis to analyze a collection of widely available teacher resource guides about girl bullying. In keeping with the aims of critical discourse analysis, my research is problem-based. Ringrose (2006; 2007), Ringrose and Renold (2010), Currie et al. (2007), and Gonick (2004; 2006) have argued that girls are subject to troubling and conflicting discourses about risk, success, and femininity—discourses McRobbie argues may represent a “disarticulation” of feminist aims (2009). My research uses critical discourse analysis to show that the troubling discourses surrounding girls also have currency in educational discourse, in particular, in teacher resources about girl bullying. The abductive nature of this approach is a central characteristic of Wodak's (2003) discourse-historical version of critical discourse analysis; however, it is a source of concern for critics of this methodological approach.

One of the main criticisms of critical discourse analysis is that analysts are politically motivated, and they are looking for what they *want* to find (McLoughlin, 2008), a suggestion that practitioners of critical discourse analysis might agree with, given the argument that critical discourse analysis is by definition politically motivated (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Despite this, McLoughlin (2008) suggests that this issue can be mitigated through the consideration of the “beliefs of likely readers of the texts” (p. 176). While my project does not investigate the beliefs of the teachers who use

these resources in their classrooms or the students who take part in these lessons, I do consider how the use of the lessons and strategies proposed work within the imbalance that characterizes many relationships within the education establishment. Following McRobbie (2009) and Ringrose (2007), I suggest that current educational policy is increasingly oriented towards a business model, and that this has resulted in a curriculum-teacher-student power structure that disempowers both teachers and students. Despite rhetorical shifts in curriculum development, this model discourages critical practice on the part of teachers (Portelli & Hare, 2003) while positioning the teacher as the primary source of authority and the student as a receptacle for information. My analysis is situated within this limiting institutional structure, which I examine in more detail in chapter Six.

**The data: Teacher resource materials about girl bullying** I begin this section with a caveat. Critical discourse analysis is by name and definition critical; it is a politically motivated and problem-oriented approach. My analysis of a small collection of teacher resources has the explicit aim of uncovering and examining discourses that create, legitimize, and sustain social problems, including gender inequality and heterosexism. Nevertheless, it is not my intention to malign the individual authors of these texts, much less the educators who use their texts in their classrooms. I am sensitive to the overwhelming demands placed on teachers by school administrations and anxious parents as they attempt to address the reality of teary recesses and lunch hours. As an elementary classroom teacher, this was my reality, too.

Instead, my aim is to emphasize the idea that language exists prior to the subjects it produces. Citing Butler, Salih (2002) explains: “a speech act is the ‘condensation’ of past, present, and even future unforeseen meanings”(p. 102). The relationship between the author and the ideological function of language is elaborated in the passages below from Foucault (1984):

There are reasons for dealing with the “ideological” status of the author... We are accustomed, as we have seen earlier, to saying that the author is the genial creator of the work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations. ...that, as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely. (p. 118)

The truth is quite the contrary: ... the author does not precede the works... One can say that the author is an ideological product, since we represent him as the opposite of his historically real function. (p. 119)

My approach in this project accepts the notion that authors and speakers do not have sovereignty over their words and focuses instead on the dialectical role of discourse in the use of language.

The resources about girl bullying for schools and teachers fall into two broad categories: school-wide pro-social or anti-bullying programs and resources designed for use by individual teachers to deal with instances of girl bullying in their classrooms. In this project, I focus on the books and articles that are available to teachers for use in their classrooms. The starting point for my data collection was practical: I began by

reviewing the books and articles that I had purchased or that had been given to me during my time as a grade five teacher. To ensure that these books were among the most widely available titles, I checked for their availability through the Halifax Regional School Board Library, the Halifax Public Library, or one of two national teacher resource retailers: Scholar's Choice and Scholastic Canada. While the books I already owned were among the first to surface in this search, the process yielded several more recent titles for addition to my collection. I also searched the online archives of several widely available professional and trade journals for articles and resources about girl bullying. In order to be included in this search, a journal had to be in wide circulation or be available to teachers for free.

I was surprised to find that parenting books (e.g., Dellasega & Nixon, 2002; Wiseman, 2002) make up the bulk of the "professional" resources that are available to teachers to use in their classrooms. While I problematize this blurring of audience and purpose in my discussion, my analysis will focus on three general categories of teacher resources: resource books and professional articles aimed at teachers and bibliotherapeutic fiction about girl bullying written for children.

Articles appearing in professional and trade magazines for teachers generally provide a description of "the problem," referring (often indirectly) to Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) findings about the long-term effects of relational aggression on both bullies and victims. These articles often offer anecdotal evidence about the gravity of the problem and may provide tips or strategies for detecting and dealing with relational aggression. Resource books designed for teachers about girl bullying generally contain

lessons, worksheets, and information for teachers and administrators about the importance of addressing relational aggression; however, books in this category are scarce, and seem to be supplemented (or even supplanted altogether) in some education libraries by parenting manuals. Bibliotherapeutic fiction is an interesting category for consideration. According to Davies (2005), language and images in children's storybooks "can be understood as a disciplining force—a means of creating the coherence and the consistency of a culture" (p. 154). This is explicit in bibliotherapeutic picture books. These books address a sensitive or difficult issue overtly and are meant to be read with an adult, whose role is to guide discussion and help the child make connections between the story and real life (Gregory & Vessey, 2004, p. 129).

While my search yielded several book titles and many articles, my research focuses on four texts: two resource books designed specifically for teachers, one trade-journal article, and one work of bibliotherapeutic fiction. *Bullying in the Girl's World* (Senn, 2007, hereafter referred to as *Girl's World*) contains activities, worksheets, and lesson plans, as well as guidelines and handouts for staff information sessions, parent information sessions, and ideas for small group counseling sessions. The central theme of the book revolves around the idea that girls form their identities and their relationships within a complex and dangerous "girls' world" that adults need to understand in order to address girl bullying. The author is an education specialist in school guidance and counseling and has co-authored several other books for teachers on character education and dealing with conflict in the classroom. *Mean Girls: 101 ½ creative strategies for working with relational aggression* (Randall & Bowen, 2007,

hereafter referred to as *Mean Girls*) presents a more loosely organized collection of lesson plans, worksheets, and tips for teachers and guidance counselors. Its authors are both social workers with clinical counseling practices, a fact that highlights the entanglement of psy discourse and educational and curricular discourse. In the introductions to both books, the importance of addressing girl bullying is emphasized through the use of statistics correlating girl bullying with outcomes such as teen pregnancy, criminal behaviour, and self-harming. These texts were chosen for close analysis because of their accessibility and appeal to educators, as evidenced by sales figures (provided by the books' publisher, YouthLight): *Girl's World* has sold more than 8,000 copies, and more than 17, 500 copies of *Mean Girls* have been sold.

*Confessions of a former bully* (Ludwig, 2010, hereafter referred to as *Confessions*) is a positively reviewed (Kirkus, 2010; Schulze, 2010), albeit blatantly bibliotherapeutic (Kirkus) picture book aimed at upper-elementary-aged children. The book is written in the first person singular, and its casual "notebook" style emulates the popular *Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2007) series of children's novels. *Confessions* is the answer to Ludwig's earlier book, *My Secret Bully* (Ludwig, 2005), which tells the story of Monica, who is the target of girl bullying. In *Confessions*, Monica's tormentor, Katie, tells her side of the story. After being sent to the principal's office because of her mean behaviour, Katie is referred to individual sessions with Mrs. Petrowski, her school's counselor. Through counseling, Katie learns about the different behaviours that constitute bullying, why kids like her bully, and what the targets of bullying can do to protect themselves against bullying.

This text is not overtly about *girl* bullying; in fact, it makes claims of gender blindness, stating in several places that both boys and girls can engage in indirect forms of bullying. However, gendered discourses are enacted in the text as well as in the illustrations. In a passage explaining different kinds of bullying, indirect bullying (like the kind Katie is accused of) is positioned as a feminine other to direct, masculine bullying through caricature (Figure 1). Like the previous texts, this text was chosen because of its appeal both to teachers, as well as to children. It is widely available through mainstream booksellers and provides an example of the currency of gendered bully discourses within mainstream culture.

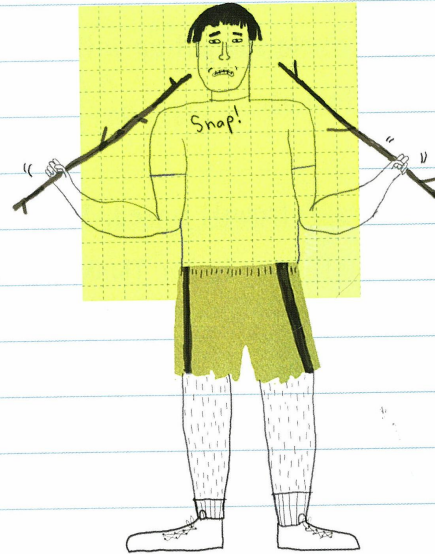
## NOT ALL KIDS WHO BULLY LOOK LIKE BAD GUYS.

Take it from me—this is NOT what most bullying kids look like:

They can be boys or girls, and they come in all shapes, sizes, and ages.

People who bully can even be grown-ups. (Sheesh! You would think older people would know better!)

Mrs. Petrowski says that younger kids who bully, if they don't get the help they need, turn into even meaner grown-ups.



Kids who bully can look a lot like you . . .  
. . . or me!

(This is me, by the way, writing this very important book!)



Figure 1. *Confessions of a former bully* (Ludwig, 2010, p. 16). Indirect bullying is positioned as girl bullying against the masculine norm.

The fourth text I analyzed, “Do mean girls rule your school?” (Rosevear, 2007) appeared in *Scholastic Instructor*, a magazine which is self-described as “the most read,

most valued, and most trusted K to 8 professional educator magazine,” with an audience of 1.2 million (Scholastic, Inc., 2011). The article identifies indirect bullying as a problem and provides advice for educators about how to address it. Like *Confessions*, this text makes claims of gender blindness, or at least gender equivalency in bullying, stating in the introduction: “Backstabbing and cruel jokes are all too common among middle-school girls and boys” (Rosevear, p. 8). As in *Confessions*, though, this article clearly engages with gendered discourses about bullying, a fact that is evident in the article’s title. Trade journals such as *Scholastic Instructor* are widespread, and their short articles and accessible style are attractive to busy teachers. This article was chosen as representative of this genre of resource for teachers.

In the analysis that follows, I aim to show how discourse produces and constrains the subject positions available to girls in the context of girl bullying, within the context of a neoliberal social and educational climate. In this section, I have demonstrated: a) the importance of the cultural/the social in the production of gendered subjectivities; and b) the regulative effect of disciplinary power, as exercised through the day-to-day functioning of institutions such as schools and the media. In the sections that follow, I use critical discourse analysis to show how these broad concepts are at play in the context of four texts described above.

## **Chapter Four: Producing Gender, Girlhood, and Power**

The teacher resource materials I analyzed produce gender and girlhood/femininity through humanistic discourses that understand gender as a biological imperative, where masculine and feminine are exclusive, binary opposites. In this view, women and girls are differentiated from the masculine norm by a set of essential feminine characteristics: traits such as caring, sacrifice, and a relational approach to the world. These characteristics ultimately relate to an evolutionary biology framework for understanding gender, which underpins the essentialist rationale for much developmental psychology thinking about gender differences in bullying, as I described in the previous section. In this chapter, I will show how the texts I analyzed use language and images to define and regulate “proper femininity,” that is, the narrowly circumscribed version of femininity called for by humanist understandings of gender. Then, I will show how this is manifested in these teacher resource materials in conflicting narratives about girls and power.

### **How To Be a Proper Girl: Producing Femininity**

Through lessons, assessments, information sheets for parents, and images, the texts I analyzed produce and regulate a narrowly circumscribed version of femininity that has roots in the same essentialist notions of feminine difference that provide the foundations for psycho-educational understandings of girl bullying. In this section, I will begin by showing how the texts produce proper femininity within the norms of traditional, nostalgic femininity, reinforcing the notion of gender as a male/female

binary opposition. Next, I will examine the implications for girls of the texts' emphasis on the social and relational aspects of girls' lives. Finally, I will discuss the homogenizing effect of the texts' illustrations. Using an example from *Girl's World* (Senn, 2007), I tie these concepts together to show how these texts produce a constrained yet contradictory femininity.

The texts I analyzed produce girls as at once cruelly power-hungry and inherently sweet. Later in this section, I will explore how these texts construct the relationship between power-seeking behaviour and girl bullying. Here, I explore the production of "proper femininity" in these texts: a femininity that embodies the essentially feminine characteristics through which feminine difference is established in the conceptualization of gender underlying the texts.

Many of the lessons and strategies offered in *Girl's World* (Senn, 2007), *Mean Girls* (Randall & Bowen, 2007), and *Confessions* (Ludwig, 2010) focus on developing or teaching "feminine" characteristics (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Gilligan, 1982) such as kindness, empathy, and caring. In *Girl's World*, for example, lesson two is titled "What's in your heart?" and its purpose is to help students work "toward being kind and caring to others" (Senn, 2007, p. 89). The discussion guide contains questions for individual reflection: "Have I done something this past week, above and beyond, to help someone else?" and statements for class discussion: "Don't be a wrinkle in the heart." Strategy 17 in *Mean Girls* is called "Butterfly Surprise" (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 25) and also focuses on "feminine" traits such as kindness and compassion. Designed to "Help C/A [Children/Adolescents] discover the characteristics that attract others to her" (Randall

& Bowen, 2007), this activity uses a sugar-based butterfly feeder as a metaphor for appropriate feminine behavior. The discussion and follow-up questions solidify the relationship between sweetness and proper femininity.

What do you think attracted the butterflies to your Butterfly Surprise?  
Discuss the ingredients that are 'sweet' and relate this to the concept of kindness and caring and behaviors that "attract" other's [*sic*] to us.  
(Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 48)

Strategy 51, "Pick the Pumpkin" focuses on teaching empathy, nurturing, and caring.

- This is an activity to emphasize the component of empathy. Each C/A [Child/Adolescent] is sent home with an item (i.e. an egg, small pumpkin, bag of flour, etc...) to keep for one week. They are responsible for caring for this item as if it were their child. They should name it, feed it, bathe it, read to it, take care of it and nurture it as a child. They must bring it to school everyday and take it with them wherever they go.
- Explore with the C/A's [*sic*] how it feels to care for someone else. Discuss with them the idea of nurturing, caring and showing empathy for others. (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 94)

A classic family studies/sex education lesson, this activity engages with educational discourses surrounding teen sexuality and parenthood, and has found its way into popular culture through television and popular fiction. In its usual context, this activity's aim is to reduce teen pregnancies by showing students how difficult caring for a "baby" is. In this context, though, the objective of the lesson seems to be to give girls the opportunity to rehearse proper femininity by performing sacrifice, nurturing, and empathy. Like the previous exercises, and many of the other strategies, these activities

perpetuate the “restricted range of (thinking about) gendered embodiments” (Hey, 2006, p. 444) by specifying a narrow conception of femininity, and enforcing its enactment through educational activities.

In *Girl's World*, the narrow conception of femininity and, indeed, its binary opposition to masculinity originates in the process through which girls form their identities. In *Girl's World* and *Mean Girls*, girls' identities are conceived as being shaped through their friendships, the natural result of girls' relational orientation. This draws upon the feminist-inspired notions of difference articulated in Gilligan's (1982) challenge to male-centric psychological research, which highlighted girls' and women's caring, nurturing, and sacrificing characteristics, and their “relational approach to the world” (Ringrose, 2006, p. 412) as the site of their difference from men and boys. Following Crick and Grotpeter (1995), who use this theory of difference to construct relational aggression as a uniquely feminine form of aggression, both *Mean Girls* and *Girl's World* focus on girls' relationships as the site of identity formation. This assertion that girls' identity status are dependent upon their friendships is linked to claims that girls bully differently than boys, and that girl bullying can do more damage than physical (boys') bullying.

Girls typically bully different [*sic*] from boys. Girls form their identity within their social relationships. It is within their friendship groups that girl bullying (relational aggression) can be extremely harmful. ... Physical bullying can hurt the outside of the body, but emotional/social bullying can hurt the body from the inside and do more damage. (Senn, p. 17)

This excerpt begins by eliding girls' "typical" bullying behaviour with the process by which they (actively) search for and gain their identities. The juxtaposition of the statements: "Girls bully different than boys" and "Girls form their identity within their social relationships" entangles dominant discourses about gender differences and bullying with this texts' understanding of girls' construction of the self. Bullying becomes entwined with the active process of *gaining* a feminine identity. However, this view fails to take into account the broader social situations within which girls' subjectivities are produced. Hey (1997) argues, "when girls relate to each other, they do so through the public certainties and structures of class, race and gender" (p. 144). While girls' positioning vis-à-vis other girls may open up various modes of subjectivity for girls, these are moderated by the socio-historic, material, and discursive contexts in which they are located.

In another, similar, excerpt, girls are characterized as "typically more social oriented beings who form their identities from relationships with others. Girls value the importance of fitting in and having friends" (Senn, 2007, p. 24). Through the use of comparative language and the absence of the object of comparison, these excerpts engage with the "the social force of hegemonic masculinity" (Hey, 1997, p. 129). Within the context of difference, the claim that girls are *more* socially oriented positions boys as *less* socially oriented. The implication here is that while girls search for and gain their identities through their relationships, boys "find" their identities from within. This establishes female (dependent) and male (independent) as binary opposites, and sets the stage for the contradictory ways that femininity is discursively produced in these resources. Hey argues that dominant assumptions about normative gender

difference (within education and elsewhere) create the conditions within which girls' friendships are produced. Here, universalized "feminine" values, such as "fitting in and having friends," are linked with the production of girls' gendered selves. Essentialized feminine traits are implicit in the notion of femininity invoked in these passages: It is a construction of femininity in which women and girls are understood to be naturally inclined to be social, instinctively caring, sacrificing, and nurturing (Davies, 1989a; Gilligan, 1982). In this view, girls' relational qualities facilitate not only their intimate friendships and their desire to "fit in," but their capacity for bullying as well.

The importance of conformity and the correct performance of proper femininity are most visible in the photo illustrations in *Girl's World* and *Mean Girls*. These two texts present a homogenous visual representation of girlhood in terms of race, and also in terms style, body shape, ability, and behaviour. This narrow depiction of girlhood can be seen as an incitement to perform gender norms (Butler, 1990) and to embody rigid standards of beauty and appearance (McRobbie, 2009).

*Mean Girls* and *Girl's World* use photo illustrations in their materials for teachers as well as in reproducible handouts and overhead transparency slides designed to stimulate class discussion. The images in Figures 2 and 3 are examples of images from a lesson in *Girl's World*. These images are intended to be shown on an overhead projector and are accompanied by discussion questions such as: "What do you think is happening in this picture?" In these, and the other photographs in *Girl's World* and *Mean Girls*, virtually all of the girls depicted are white. This is consistent with Ringrose's (2006) argument that popular culture and media reports produce relational aggression (girl

bullying) as a white, middle-class pathology. The texts that I analyzed situate girls' friendships and conflicts within a discourse of white, middle-class girlhood. White, middle-class girls then stand in for all girls, and their experiences become normative truths. Thus, girl bullying is constructed as a white, middle-class problem.



Figure 2. *Mean Girls* (Randall & Bowen, 2009, p. 6). Girl bullying is situated as a white, middle-class pathology.

**A PERSON USING BULLY BEHAVIOR  
IS SOMEONE WHO GOSSIPS  
OR REPEATS BAD RUMORS  
ABOUT OTHERS.**

Do you  
know what I  
heard about...



Figure 3. *Girl's World* (Senn, 2007, p. 77).

The girls in the photo illustrations in *Girl's World* and *Mean Girls* range in age from elementary-aged to high school-aged, but they are invariably slender and attractive. They all have long hair, wear very similar “mainstream” clothing, and the teen-aged girls wear natural makeup and delicate jewelry. None of the girls are depicted as choosing different or alternative styles, rejecting mainstream fashion, or engaging with subcultures. The visual emphasis is on sameness: In these images, girls wear the same clothes, the same make-up, and they style their hair the same way. These images can be understood as “repeated incitements to perform a register of restricted acts to conform to an illusion of an appropriately gendered self” (McRobbie, 2009). They reinforce the notion that in order to secure their femininity and their place in the heterosexual matrix, girls must appropriate the highly regulated norms prescribed by compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1990).

The emphasis on sameness seems to reach beyond appearance in the resources I analyzed. In the text of *Mean Girls*, *Girl's World*, and *Confessions*, heterosexuality is emphasized as normative. Even in the activities and resources aimed at younger children, many of the scenarios presented for discussion or role-playing are about crushes on boys or boyfriends. Girls' activities are also presented in a way that homogenizes girls' experiences. In the photo illustrations in *Mean Girls* and *Girl's World*, girls' activities are, with few exceptions, limited to decontextualized chatting and gossiping giving the impression that this is *all* that normal girls do (Figure 4.). The richness and complexity of girls' lives is removed here: We do not see girls depicted as students or basketball players or singers, but solely as socializers. This visual

representation of girls solidifies the theme, dominant throughout *Girl's World*, that girls are defined through their social relationships with other girls.



**Figure 4.** *Girl's World* (Senn, 2007, p. 102). Girls are defined through their relationships with others.

The texts identify relationships with other girls as the defining location of the self. This works in conjunction with images of nearly identical girls to produce femininity as a subject position that can be taken up in one way only. In other words, there is only one way to “do” girlhood, and that is to be the same as other girls. In the texts, “proper” femininity is performed through conformity. In order to appropriate the position of the proper girl, a girl’s construction of her gendered self must be shaped by the intimacy of her relationships with other girls, she must value “fitting in” and being

part of a group, and she must embody the “highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler, 1990, p. 33) of gender norms that maintain the illusion of the fixity of gender.

In many of the images in *Girl's World*, the complementary concepts of conformity and the defining of the self through relationship with other is taken to the extreme. In this text, pairs of “best friends” shown in photo illustrations look strikingly alike—so much so that the girls might be twins (Figures 5 and 6). This imagery certainly reinforces the rigidity of the regulatory frame that girls must negotiate as they take up proper femininity. It might also be seen as an embodiment of the process through which girls’ gendered identities are formed in this text, which repeatedly insists upon the notion of girls’ identities being gained through their friendships. The “twins/best-friends” imagery draws upon an idealized notion of girls’ friendships and seems to suggest that in gaining their identities through one another, girls *become* one another.



Figure 5. *Girl's World* (Senn, 2007, p. 132). *Best friends or twins?*



Figure 7. *Girl's World* (Senn, 2007, p. 38). *Best friends or twins?*

Twins are the topic of a variety of tropes in fictional representations. In the “Twin Telepathy” trope (tvtropes.com, 2011), twins appear to be psychically linked, sharing a secret language, perhaps, or experiencing each other’s injuries. A common narrative in television, movies, and fiction (tvtropes.com), twin telepathy has also been featured in news reports (Bell, 2011; Bingham, 2009). It is often associated with the paranormal, bringing twins’ uncanny closeness into the realm of the unintelligible. In the words of psychologist Tom Bouchard, a twin expert interviewed for a BBC television documentary about twins: “They’re a mystery! They get us kind of excited about what’s going on!” (Petterle, 2009). The twins/best friends imagery in *Girl’s World* seems to draw on this sensationalized and disquieting idea that in their closeness, twins are

somehow psychically linked, presenting girls' friendship as a mysteriously close twin-like relationship.

The unintelligibility of girls' social world is reiterated in the text of all of the resources I analyzed, which present girls' social worlds as alien and difficult to monitor, a theme I discuss at length in Chapter 5. Not only do "proper girls" look alike, their identities are so interdependent that they *become* one another, joined by a mysterious, psychic connection. In these images, conformity is taken to impossible extremes. In fact, the making of the self as another girl in these images might be seen as a literal incorporation of the Other—an impossible ideal, yet one that recalls McRobbie's discussion of impossible femininity that I outlined in the previous chapter. McRobbie (2009) argues that in order to sustain the stabilizing effect of gender coherence and the heterosexual matrix, the Symbolic authority promotes the "vampiric" (Fuss, 1994) consumption of images of other women. The effect of the impossible yet normative directive to become the desired Other is to "institutionalize and consolidate" melancholia for young women "so that seemingly inexplicable anxiety, pain, rage, and self-harming behaviour are accepted ways of being" (McRobbie, p. 115). Here, twins/best friends imagery seems to suggest that girls should aim to reinvent themselves as—or incorporate—another girl, while accepting the normative discontents that might accompany such an unattainable ideal of self-hood.

The psychic connection between twins suggested by the "twin telepathy" trope is related to another common "twin trope": the good twin/evil twin trope. This collides with the good girl girl/bad girl dichotomy that is pervasive in Western culture, and

through which girls negotiate their feminine subjectivities (Encisco, 1998). The texts I analyzed present a contradictory message about essential, natural girlhood. On the one hand, femininity is defined by essential “good girl” traits such as caring and sacrifice, traits which paradoxically lead to the “bad girl” characteristics such as power-seeking and manipulation that I will describe in more detail later in this chapter. This contradiction is laid out clearly in Strategy #26 in *Mean Girls*, titled “Girls... girls... girls....” (Randall & Bowen, 2007). The activity asks girls to complete the following sentences with respect to relational aggression: “Girls are...”; “Girls can be...”; and “Girls should be...” (p. 59). Here, what “girls are” is positioned against what “girls can be” and what “girls should be”, reinforcing the texts’ contradictory construction of femininity and girlhood. The twins imagery in *Girl’s World* can be seen as an embodiment of this dualism. In the following section, I will explore how the texts I analyzed draw upon technologies of disciplinary power within educational discourse to assess and regulate these aspects of femininity; in other words, “what girls are” and “what girls should be” (Randall & Bowen, p. 59).

### **Regulating Femininity**

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Foucault identifies the school examination as a site of disciplinary power (1977), arguing that the examination “makes each individual a ‘case’” to be described, compared, measured, and ultimately, corrected or excluded. I argued that both formal and informal forms of assessment have become increasingly pervasive within education, but also within youth culture, and that self-assessment is particularly prevalent. Two of the texts I analyzed contain

assessment tools. *Mean Girls* features an informal self-assessment titled “Sisterhood Survey” (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 27) which provides girls with a “Sisterhood Score” based on their answers to multiple-choice questions, and *Girl’s World* contains an assessment checklist designed to be used either by teachers or by students as a self-assessment. Both of these assessments can be understood as technologies of disciplinary power, producing girls as self-regulating and self-assessing subjects.

The “Sisterhood Survey” mimics the format of the personality quizzes that are a common feature in girls’ and women’s magazines, as well as on their associated websites (Pattee, 2009). In the “Sisterhood Survey,” as in personality quizzes found in magazines, answering “correctly” earns praise (“You are the Queen of Nice”), while answers that deviate from the proscribed version of femininity meet with admonishment (“Sister, you are the Queen of Mean”), as well as advice about behavioural changes that may bring the respondent’s behaviour in line with circumscribed norms:

You are destroying the Sisterhood and depriving yourself of having truly meaningful relationships. Girls were not created to destroy each other but to delight in our bond as sisters. Let’s figure out where all this meanness is coming from and bring you into the Sisterhood where empathy and loyalty prevail!” (p. 28)

While the “Sisterhood Survey”’s cross-over into the popular culture genre of teen magazines seems humorous, this reach across genres draws in gender discourses that work to regulate girls’ subjectivities. By drawing upon an established regulative mechanism, this feature of the *Mean Girls* text presents circumscribed correct and

incorrect versions of femininity. Pattee argues that personality quizzes in girls' magazines "are potent sites in which specific and magazine-supported subjectivities are encouraged and negotiated" (p. 195). Using "problem-solution" structure, the quizzes associate girls' problematized behaviours with a standardized assessment form, implying that normative standards of behaviour are "objective and learnable" (Pattee, p. 203). Teen magazines (like the women's magazines upon which they are modeled) aim to establish and represent a standardized norm of femininity; they reinforce normative femininity by attempting to instruct readers how to conform to these standards. The use of this device in *Mean Girls* strives for the same goal — the establishment of desirable, or acceptable feminine behaviour. By applying the format of the magazine, including the tone and the language used, to an educational context, the regulative effect of the magazine context, specifically, the construction of femininity as it is produced by teen magazines, is carried through into the educational context. Like the personality quizzes in teen magazines, the "Sisterhood Survey" is a transparent device: The "correct" answers are not only obvious, but always located in the same position within the set of responses; its message is therefore readily understood. Thus, the "Sisterhood Survey" can be understood as an example of a "manipulated form that work[s] to discipline readers and emphasize and naturalize the 'rules of femininity' to which the score descriptions allude" (Pattee, p. 204).

The "Sisterhood Survey" also engages with the feminist "sisterhood" discourse. The "sisterhood scores" provided at the conclusion of the quiz engage with the construction of sisterhood as being about caring and nurturing. The full title of the activity is "Sisterhood Survey: Who are you? Answer the following to find out..." The

descriptions alongside each scoring category suggest a privileged role within femininity (the sisterhood) for those girls identified as “the Queen of Nice,” and a spot outside of the sisterhood for those girls whose behaviour falls outside of the norms of behaviour prescribed in this piece. These girls, identified as the “Queens of Mean,” need guidance in order to be brought “into the Sisterhood where empathy and loyalty prevail.” The notion of “sisterhood” has been proposed as a solution to girl bullying and relational aggression (Ringrose, 2006); however, this excerpt highlights some of the problems with the use of this broad theme as a solution. For Ringrose, “sisterhood evokes motifs of sameness, nurturing, caring and feminine bonding that don’t seem to grapple with feminism’s own difficult history of eliding differences between women, differences that are in part this problem of who meets the developmental ideal of femininity and who is cast out from its bounds?” (Ringrose, 2006, p. 413). Moreover, the notion of sisterhood denotes solidarity in the context of struggle (against patriarchy and oppression). In a decidedly post-feminist move, the connotation of struggle and solidarity remains here, but the adversary is lost, confounded with the symptoms of the struggle itself. Instead of being united against oppression, girls are united against other girls!

Proper femininity is also presented as formally assessable and teachable in *Girl’s World*. One of its features is a student assessment form: Its first item (to be scored as “strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree” by the teacher) reads: “She understands what is meant by being in the ‘Girl World’” (Senn, 2007, p. 180). The phrase “Girl World” is a term devised by Senn, and it is used frequently throughout *Girl’s World*. In order to progress towards her potential as a “worthwhile person” a girl must buy in to her location within the author-proclaimed treacherous terrain of

girlhood. Subsequent questions produce this perilous realm by assessing the girl's responses to the various threats inherent in a life inside the "Girl World." Thus, the category "girl world" is discursively produced by the categorizing of girls within it. The questions also assess the girl's adherence to proper femininity; for example, "She enjoys talking in a caring way with others rather than teasing and making fun of people" and "She is loyal and honest with others and does not betray or talk bad about people behind their back" (Senn, p. 180). The assessment form is also included in a "self-assessment" version. Here, as in the "sisterhood survey" girls are invited to construct themselves in relation to acceptable norms of feminine behaviour. The complex positions represented by the "girls' world" become mandatory aspects of girlhood in this text. Like the "Girls... girls... girls..." activity discussed above, here, girls feminine subjectivities are constructed against a normative good girl/mean girl dichotomy. In the following section, I discuss the texts' construction of mean girl behaviour, focusing on the contradictory role of power.

### **Reconfiguring Girls' Relationship with Power**

In the teacher resources I analyzed, power emerges as a dominant theme; however, the texts present contradictory messages about how much power girls should have, how they should get it, and what power means to girls. While several of the texts claim to be about empowering girls, I will argue that these resources are actually about reconfiguring girls' relationship with power. In other words, rather than being about meeting girls' needs for control and power, these texts are about regulating and shifting girls' needs away from a desire for power and control. The excerpt below is

representative of the conflicting discourses surrounding girls' power that are produced/reflected in the texts I analyzed. The concept of motivation is operationalized to suggest that mean girl behaviour is the result of inherent need or desire for power and control. At the same time, empowerment discourses are mobilized.

### **Fear, Insecurity, Control, Power—**

#### **all motivators of behavior in the girl world.**

Don't ignore it—don't just say it's what girls do... it has been taken to new lengths with cell phones—text messaging, internet—Iming [sic]. It is doing more damage than ever before... damage to the person's develop [sic] of a worthwhile productive person... damage to a person who is getting reinforced for using hurtful ways to get what they want... damage to the adults they are becoming. We need to become more aware of the hidden ways that girls bully one another. We need to give support and empower the victim, to encourage the bystander to take a stand, and to guide the aggressor to find appropriate ways to meet her needs. (Senn, 2007, p. 5)

A tension is created through the texts' conflation of girls' motivation to aggress with their sense of power and control. In this section, I discuss the way that a need for power and control are set up as the innate aspects of girls' identities that act as motivation for engaging in "mean girl" behaviour. The complex relationship between femininity and power becomes a dominant yet contradictory theme in these texts. I argue that the theme of girls' empowerment here is mitigated by the implication throughout that in order to take up a position within proper femininity, girls must reject their need for control and power.

**Power as motivation.** The texts I analyzed present the desire (or need) for power and control as the root cause of mean girl behaviour. They seem to suggest that girls are alike in their relentless quest to acquire and preserve power, and that it is this urge that creates the conditions for girl bullying and gives rise to mean girl behaviour. The heading on the introductory page in *Girl's World* reads: "Fear, Insecurity, Control, Power—all motivators of behavior in the girl world" (*see paragraph reproduced above*). This section of the text is in a bigger, bolder font than the following paragraph, and each of the "motivators" is capitalized. The effect of this is to highlight the motivation—the urges, the unfulfilled needs and desires—behind the (presumably bad) behaviour making them *more* important than the behaviours themselves. By emphasizing motivation rather than behaviours, the category "girl" becomes one which can be pathologized; it is not just bullies and bullying behaviour that are problematic, but girls' unnatural, yet deep-rooted desire for power and control that becomes the issue<sup>2</sup> (Senn, 2007, p. 5). In *Girl's World*, we learn that all girls will "typically end up in each role [bully, bystander, and target] at some point." Not only do all girls have the *potential* to be bullies by virtue of their urge to have power over their social network, they will all actually engage in this behaviour at some point. In this text, the principal motivation for bullying is "underlying fear and anxiety" about maintaining power within a social hierarchy, and having one's "weaknesses exposed". Since all girls are positioned as potential bullies, this suggests that the underlying drive to control, manipulate, and stay on top is common to all girls, located deeply within girlhood. As the motivation behind girl bullying, this ruthless desire to stay on top becomes a key marker of gender

difference. The notion that women and girls share a destructive and deep-rooted urge to antagonize each other in the name of social prestige is echoed in Strategy #100 of *Mean Girls*, which asks the adult consumers of the text to find other women to join them in combating relational aggression. The text uses a quote from a famous comedian<sup>3</sup> for emphasis.

A famous comedian once said, 'Women could rule the world if they didn't hate each other so much.' When women are united through their acceptance of each other's gifts and talents, there is nothing that can't be accomplished (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 125).

Like the "Sisterhood Survey" discussed above, this passage draws upon feminist discourses of acceptance, affirmation, and solidarity but dispenses with the politics of feminism, placing the blame for women's historical subordination on their innate tendency to manipulate, control, and otherwise be hateful towards each other. This passage is reflective of the broad understandings of power that are mobilized in the texts I analyzed.

**Power as manipulation and control.** In *My Secret Bully*, *Mean Girls* and *Girl's World*, bullying behaviour is constructed as the result of power-seeking urges in girls; power, then is positioned as the dichotomous opposite of niceness and proper femininity. This mobilizes anxieties surrounding changing notions of girlhood and femininity, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. In these teacher resources, power is constructed as concrete and singular. It is defined by the manipulation of a social network, and it is connected with control, and meanness, in contrast with niceness, caring, and empathy. It is concrete and can be possessed, protected, gained, given away.

In an illustration in *Confessions*, the bully, Katie, is embodied as a vacuum cleaner with the model name “Power Vac 3000” (Ludwig, 2010, p. 23). Her bullying is motivated by the feeling of powerfulness, a feeling she enjoys so much that she “turned into a power sucking machine—sucking all the power right out of you and putting it into me.”

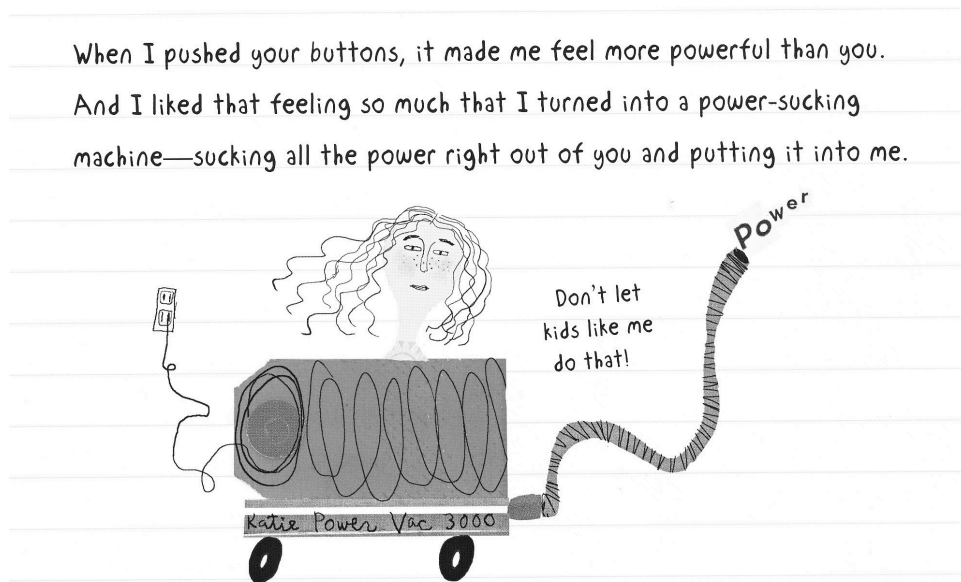


Figure 8. *Confessions* (Ludwig, 2010, p 23). Proper femininity requires a rejection of pleasurable feelings of powerfulness.

For Katie, choosing to be nice means abandoning the pleasurable feeling of powerfulness and finding pleasure instead in typically feminine traits such as kindness and caring. This configuration of power is echoed in *Mean Girls*, which cites “inappropriate feelings of power” (alongside homicidal ideation, teen pregnancy, and self-injury) in a list of “short and long term effects of relational aggression” (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 16). In this way, girls’ power is discursively produced as dangerous and damaging, a rejection of proper femininity. The list of “short and long term effects of relational aggression” (Randall & Bowen, p. 16) also includes “feelings of

powerlessness,” which speaks to the contradictory nature of the discourses about power through which girls’ subjectivities are produced.

**Contradictions: Empowerment discourses and power-hungry girls.** On one hand, proper femininity is constructed as a rejection of power-seeking behaviour, as in the example above where Katie abandons her “power-vac” ways, choosing to be nice, instead. In *Girl’s World*, power is constructed in opposition to girls’ essential nature. The text claims that girls resort to manipulation and controlling behaviour to mask insecurities and weaknesses, which suggests that insecurity and weakness are inherent aspects of girls’ identities, something that girls should embrace rather than cover up with cruel, power-seeking (masculine) behaviour.

The girl bullying/relational aggressive behavior appears to be motivated by underlying fear and insecurity. The aggressor may be insecure and worried about remaining “on top” so she uses manipulation and control of others to avoid having her own weaknesses exposed. (Senn, 2007, p. 8)

The underlying motivators for mean-girl behaviour—fear and insecurity—are tied up with girls’ natural vulnerability, and may represent a denial or deviance from proper femininity. In this passage bullying comes as a result of the denial of weakness and vulnerability. Here, power (operationalized as manipulation and control) threatens not only girls’ relationships, but their femininity as well.

In *Girl’s World*, the “girls’ world” is characterized as an extremely complex society that can nonetheless be understood by categorizing girls into eight “roles.”<sup>4</sup>

<b>THE ROLES WITHIN THE GIRLS' SOCIAL GROUP:</b>	The Queen The Sidekick The Wannabee The Gossiper The Floater The Direct Bully The Target The Bystander
--	---

(Senn, 2007, p. 25)

In this reductionist strategy, girls are assigned “identities” that are defined by power. “The ‘Queen’ is the one who has the power of the group and can resort to manipulation and control to keep the power,” (Senn, 2007, p. 25) and “the sidekick is the person who always supports the queen because that is where the power is.” The “wannabe” and the “gossiper” also have identities shaped by their status in terms of power. The “target” and the “bystander” are characterized by powerlessness—their identities are defined by fear, humiliation, and the “tempt[ation] to change to fit in.” Only the “floater’s” identity is not defined in relation to power, and this identity is the only one to be associated with any positive traits. “She does not seek power but shows respect and does not exclude other girls.” The floater seems to personify everything the “mean girl” isn’t—respectful, inclusive, and not interested in gaining or holding on to power. The ordering of phrases within this sentence presents respecting others and being inclusive as the exclusive opposites of “seeking power.” But the label “floater” has negative connotations in terms of the closeness and intimacy that the authors of *Girl’s World* insist is at the centre of girls’ gendered identity formation. It suggests a lack of social roots, a rejection of an identity formation process that is based in girls’ relational

approach to the world. The respectful floater, thus, rejects her feminine identity by refusing to engage with the dominant friendship discourses. The “floater” represents abnormal femininity/girlhood, and doesn’t fit in with the “girls’ world.” This constructs the respectful and inclusive girl as abnormal and the disrespectful mean girl as normal.

On the other hand, in these texts, girls are continually asked to empower themselves through lessons focused on self-affirmation, being true to oneself, and finding one’s authentic voice. Through this discourse, girls are effectively asked to reject the socially derived aspect of their identity formation that these texts insist is crucial to their feminine difference. In Strategy #38 in *Mean Girls*, titled “All the word’s a stage,” for example, girls are asked to list four “‘star’ qualities they discovered about themselves” over the course of the lesson (Randall and Bowen, 2007, p. 57). In *Girl’s World*, a lesson whose goal is to “build our confidence by affirming our abilities, capabilities, and values,” prompts the teacher to facilitate a discussion with girls about how “confidence provides us with power about who we are so we don’t resort to bully behavior to gain power” (Senn, 2007, p. 171). The lesson contains a reproducible list of “Positive Self-Talk Affirmations” for the girls to consult. I will discuss the implications of this self-empowerment approach to girl bullying in the following chapter; here, I will focus on the effect of contradictory discourses of empowerment and “niceness” that are mobilized in these texts.

In an analysis of the “girl power” children’s cartoon, *The Powerpuff Girls*, Hains (2009) suggests that the “girl power” heroines’ niceness can be seen as mitigating their empowerment, and argues that this represents a “capitulation to hegemonic patriarchal

ideals” (p. 101). Similarly, the discursive production of femininity in *Girl’s World*, *Mean Girls*, and *Confessions*, which requires a rejection of power-seeking behaviour in favour of typically feminine qualities such as niceness, empathy, and caring mitigates the empowerment discourse that is pervasive in these texts. By emphasizing traditionally feminine qualities, these texts engage with a nostalgic version of femininity, recalling an era of uncomplicated gender relations under the stabilizing framework of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). In doing so, they undermine the possibility of a disruption of traditional ways of thinking about gender and femininity.

The texts I analyzed use language and images to produce gender and femininity within a humanistic framework, reinforcing binary gender categories and engaging with contradictory discourses about femininity and power. In the next chapter, I will discuss how this framework for thinking about girls and gender facilitates the texts’ mobilization of neoliberal discourses of risk and personal responsibility.

### **Chapter Five: Choice and the Neoliberal Girl Subject**

The current neoliberal policy climate is increasingly characterized by “the implanting of market cultures across everyday life, the relentless pursuit of welfare reform, and the encouragement of forms of consumer citizenship which are beneficial only to those who are already privileged” (Duggan, 2003, as cited in McRobbie, 2009, p. 29). This cultural, political, and social shift has important implications in terms of educational policy as well as how gender is understood both within educational discourse and within public consciousness. Neoliberal beliefs, values, and policies are implicit in the teacher resource materials about girl bullying that I examined. In this chapter, I present an analysis of how these texts are engaged with discourses that pathologize and criminalize girlhood and facilitate the adoption of girlhood as a proxy concern for widespread social anxiety. Next, I consider how the parallel discourses of risk and responsibility that are mobilized within a neoliberal educational and social climate position girls as autonomous, choosing subjects and neglect the social, cultural, political, and discursive aspects of girls’ subjectivities. Following this, I examine how these discourses of “responsibilized autonomy” (Barron & Lacombe, 2010) are connected with neoliberal values of self-improvement and also with the role of psychology and related “psy” professions within educational discourse.

#### **The Dangerous World of Girls**

In this section, I return to the construct of the “girls’ world,” which is a central concept in the teacher resource text, *Girl’s World* (Senn, 2007). In all of the texts I analyzed, girls are presented as inhabiting a secret and dangerous world all of their own. *Girl’s World’s* introduction is written in an alarmist tone that is reminiscent of sensationalist journalism, and presents the “girls’ world” as a dangerous, incomprehensible place:

Don’t ignore it—don’t just say it’s what girls do... it has been taken to new lengths with cell phones—text messaging, internet—Iming [*sic*]. It is doing more damage than ever before... damage to the person’s develop [*sic*] of a worthwhile productive person... damage to a person who is getting reinforced for using hurtful ways to get what they want... damage to the adults they are becoming. We need to become more aware of the hidden ways that girls bully one another. (p. 5)

Here, the digital world of text messaging and instant messaging is confounded with the “girl’s world,” effectively positioning the “girl’s world” in a separate cultural realm, outside of adults’ sphere of comfort and control. The “girls’ world,” in these texts, is not bound by the same rules and norms as the adult world; rather, its inhabitants are subject to the cruel impulses of manipulative girls. The text uses a quote from an unspecified “majority” to mobilize commonsense discourses about the perilous nature of the “girls’ world”:

Is there a difference between the “girl’s world” and the “boy’s world”? The majority would respond emphatically “YES!” giving supporting statement such as, “With guys you know where you stand, but girls are secretive and manipulative; they target you where they know you’re

weakest. They are two faced and can destroy you from the inside. I feel a lot safer with guys.” (Senn, 2007, p. 108)

Through the use of an unspecified majority to legitimize the claim that the girl’s world is more dangerous than the boy’s world, the passage above creates an in-group/out-group dualism (Wodak, 2003). Consumers of this text are encouraged to align themselves with the in-group, which “empathetically” agrees that the girl’s world is a worse place to be than the boy’s world, and that the world of “guys” provides protection and safety. This casts women and girls as both treacherous *and* dependent, pathologizing femininity while normalizing masculinity. The notion of a separate and treacherous “girl’s world” produces a sense of urgency and anxiety, while working to entrench discursively produced gender binaries.

The sense of cultural alienation and loss of control is echoed in *Mean Girls* (Randal & Bowen, 2007), and is particularly evident in the section of the text dealing with cyber-bullying.

Internet use is tremendous and is increasing. Although many girls may use the internet for educational purposes and to link to resources, there are just as many who use the internet to bully others. The internet is “hot” for many reasons. It can be used anonymously, it can be accessed 24/7, and it reaches mass audiences. Girls use the internet as a part of their social lifeline.

This is the “wired” generation and girls are creative in their tactics to cyber-bully each other. They have their own cyber language and there are few limits to what girls will do to each other online. (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 9)

In these passages, girls' communication with each other can only be understood as dangerous; adding to the threat is the fact it takes place outside of the realm of adult surveillance. The passage begins by delineating "good" and "bad" uses of the Internet. "Good" use of the internet is limited here to educational applications; the only other possible application seems to be cyber bullying. The statement "Girls use the internet as a part of their social lifeline" is thus associated with the negative, non-educational uses of the internet; consequently, the concept of "girls' social lifeline" becomes associated with bullying, rather than any of the positive aspects of girls' social lives. Here, the texts reinforce gender binaries by ignoring the possibility that boys might also use technology as part of their social lifeline.

The next paragraph also contributes to the production of girls' online social lives as alien and pathologic. The reference to girls' "own cyber language" in this context suggests a kind of cultural contempt that is reminiscent of xenophobia. The text takes on the tone of a cultural field guide in the following pages. Because "cyber space is full of language that truly seems 'out of this world,'" the text provides an extensive translation guide for "abbreviations and symbols girls may use to communicate" (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 11). While girls' relational approach to the world and their preferred method of aggression are used throughout these texts to establish girls' difference (or deviance) from the norm, in this section, their language, a key marker of cultural difference, is used to emphasize deviance from the adult/masculine norm. This produces girls as Other, and, within the context of the "girls' world" (understood here to be treacherous terrain), works to pathologize the category "girl." Girls' communication

with each other—their language and their “social lifeline”—is represented as foreign, unintelligible, and dangerous.

The excerpt reproduced below, from an article appearing in the January—February, 2007 issue of *Scholastic Instructor*, also engages with discourses that pathologize and criminalize girls and girl bullying.

### **Do mean girls rule your school?**

Backstabbing and cruel jokes are all too common among middle-school girls and boys, say the experts behind The Ophelia Project, dedicated to stopping “relational aggression” in schools. Here’s their advice for reforming *Heathers*-esque tweens and teens. (Rosevear, 2007, p. 8)

Here, as above, girlhood is discursively produced as both pathologic and dangerous through the conflation of discourses of social crisis and girlhood. The title of the article raises alarm over adults’ loss of control over girlhood, creating a sense of apprehension which is echoed in the use of the term “tween.” Within broader cultural discourses, the category “tween” is the site of “public anxieties about female sexual behaviour” (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 204), and for concern about “lost childhoods” (Cook & Kaiser, p. 223). As discussed in Chapter three, in this context, the empowered/powerful girl becomes a threat to hegemonic understandings of girlhood as innocent and vulnerable. The mention of “*Heathers*-esque tweens and teens” in the last sentence of the excerpt is a reference to the 1988 film *Heathers*, considered one of the teen movie genre’s highpoints (Kaveney, 2006) and a cult classic. Its namesake characters, three high school girls named Heather, might be seen as the prototypical “mean girls.” Ultimately,

their wretched behaviour leads the not-so-mean protagonist to murder. With this reference, the text recalls “a very old and damaging construction of women [...] rooted in historic messages about girls’ and women’s subversive and even evil natures” (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008, p. 21). Essentialized notions of femininity (as discussed in Chapter three) are entangled with the sense of anxiety over the loss of girlhood as innocent and vulnerable through the criminalizing discourses mobilized in these resources.

This criminalizing discourse is reiterated elsewhere in the article, as well as in the other teacher resources, through the use of a lexicon of crime. Experts provide suggestions for “reforming” mean girls, and advise teachers to discuss the “players in the bullying game—the perpetrator, the victim, and the bystanders.” In another section, the text refers to the bully as “the perp.” In *Mean Girls*, phrases like “creative in their tactics” and “preying on their victims” (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 9) also mobilize a crime discourse. This vocabulary is reminiscent of television police procedurals and reinforces discursive understandings of girls’ mean behaviour as criminal or near criminal (Chesney-Lind and Irwin, 2008). This kind of discursive construction of girls and girls’ relationships with each other as pathologic or criminal serves to narrow how girls and their relationships with each other are conceived.

### **Girlhood as the Site of Unmanaged Risk**

I want to return now to the introduction of *Girl's World*, in which the authors describe life in the “girls’ world”: “In attempts to survive the girls’ world they [girls] can

resort to spreading rumors, gossips [*sic*], hurtful teasing, controlling, manipulating, betraying a friend and more” (Senn, p. 6). Here, as above, the “girls’ world” is understood as a treacherous place, where *survival* is at stake. Frightening statistics and facts in the texts confirm the risk inherent in girlhood, and reinforce the crime discourses elaborated above. In *Confessions* (Ludwig, 2010, p. 14), we learn that ninety percent of elementary students have been bullied and, cryptically, that “kids are, on average, the targets of bullying about once every three to six minutes from the start of kindergarten to the end of first grade.” The risk is especially salient for girls, since “Kids find emotional [girl] bullying (...) MORE HARMFUL than physical bullying!”<sup>5</sup> (Ludwig, p. 14). This intersects with the gendered bully discourses discussed in Chapter three, specifically the positioning of indirect (girl) bullying as abnormal vis-à-vis normative, physical (boy) bullying.

Being in the “girls’ world”—being a girl—is inherently risky. The facts and statistics presented in these texts describe the “girls’ world” as a site of unmanaged risk and a source for great concern due to its foreign-ness and its adroitness in eluding surveillance. Within this discourse of unmanaged risk, the ramifications of girl bullying stretch well beyond the temporal confines of the classroom. According to *Mean Girls*, the negative effects of girl bullying “can last a lifetime” (p. 16). These risks include depression, suicidal ideation, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, homicidal ideation, and death (Randall & Bowen). The authors of *Girl’s World* and *Confessions* both cite statistics about bullies’ increased risk of criminal behaviour in adulthood. In *Confessions*, we learn from Mrs. Petrowski, the school counselor, that “younger kids who bully, if they don’t get the help they need, turn into even meaner grown-ups,” and that

“eight-year-old kids who bully are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by age twenty-four” (Ludwig, p. 14). In *Girl’s World*, the statistics presented are even more ominous: “By age thirty, 25 percent of the adults who had been identified as bullies as children had a criminal record” (Senn, p. 17). These statistics, presented in *Girl’s World* as rationale for “addressing girl bullying from within the bully prevention program” are problematic for several reasons.<sup>6</sup> They are based on the results of studies published in the late 1980s<sup>7</sup>—almost a decade *before* Crick & Grotpeter’s (1995) research on indirect (relational) aggression and the ensuing acceptance of relational aggression and other types of indirect aggression as forms of bullying. In the context of bullying *as it is presented in these texts*, these statistics are incorrect and misleading. Moreover (and irrespective of their relevance or accuracy), by presenting bullying behaviour in isolation from other important contextual aspects of young peoples’ lives, these statistics separate young peoples’ engagements in bullying behaviour, that is to say, their actions in specific situations from their broader discursive circumstances. The texts invoke neoliberal discourses of individualism and autonomy to place the responsibility for managing the risks associated with girlhood with the individual girl (and in many cases, her parents). In the following section, I will argue that this reflects broad social anxieties within the context of a rapidly changing world.

### **Girlhood as a Proxy Concern**

A sense of loss surrounding changes in the material and discursive meanings of gender is manifested in texts such as the ones discussed here through concerns over

girls' powerfulness, their sophisticated use of communications technology, and their ability to evade adult surveillance. These concerns may "represent the excesses of the changed social, political, and economic status women have gained through their struggles for equality" (Barron & Lacombe, 2010, p. 288). In other words, what is lost is the dependent, innocent girl represented by the "sugar and spice and everything nice" femininity of the 1950s. This sense of loss is reflected in a series of strategies in *Mean Girls* (Randall & Bowen, 2007, p. 66-67), which evoke a sense of nostalgia for a femininity of past generations. These activities revolve around etiquette and being a good hostess, skills associated with traditional gender roles as well as with the cultural memory of a calmer, more stable era. Broad anxieties about changes in society are channeled into concerns about the changing meaning of girlhood, which is manifested as a longing for a previous generation's interpretation of femininity. This may be read as a reaction to postfeminist narrative of girls as the "new global winners" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 482) or as forewarning of the dangers of feminism gone too far in the context of the "successful girls" and "failing boys" (p. 481) discourses identified by Ringrose. Ringrose argues that the "successful girls" and "failing boys" discourses emerged as a result of girls' superior academic achievement and the ensuing claims that education has been feminized at boys' expense. These discourses contribute to widespread concern over the feminization of culture, or that girls may have "too much power in the world" (Taft, 2004, as cited in Ringrose, 2007, p. 481). Ringrose also connects the "successful girls" discourse to neoliberal discourses of choice and individual responsibility, to which I will return shortly.

The shift towards a business model of education requires of girls an adherence to an ethic of self-reliance and can be seen as related to the emergence of “Girl Power” (Gonick, 2006, p. 2) as a dominant (and perhaps normative) discourse for girls. As subjects in a neoliberal global economy, girls are said to be empowered to overcome adversity and to achieve whatever they put their minds to, however bleak their social and economic realities may be. They are encouraged not to let anything stand in the way of their success. Thus, girls’ failure to achieve their dreams (or rather, achieve career and financial success as it is defined in a globalized economy) can only be attributed to individual shortcomings or inadequate determination (Gonick, 2006). In this context, individualization expands into the spheres of work, home, and personal life (Gonick, 2006) as well as into educational discourse. Ringrose (2007) suggests that the prevalence of the “successful girl” discourse makes possible a move away from a “problem oriented discourse” (p. 484) that acknowledges the problems created by neoliberal policies, towards a “success-based discourse” (p. 484). This opens up the possibility of “responsibilized autonomy” (Barron & Lacombe, 2010) in the face of the economic and financial challenges and uncertainties of late modernity.

As social structures and institutions (such as the welfare state and education) recede, choice becomes obligatory, and social life is opened-out to decision making (Giddens, 1994). In the absence of institutionalized structures, individuals are responsible for creating their own scaffolding. McRobbie (2009) argues that this individualization takes place through social and cultural discourses, supported by artifacts such as self-help guides and makeover programmes on TV. As I show below,

the teacher resources I analyzed rely heavily on these discourses of self-improvement and individual choice to produce girls as rational, neoliberal subjects.

### **Choice and Responsibility**

Discourses of self-improvement and personal responsibility are evident in *Confessions* (Ludwig, 2010). After being sent to the principal's office because of her mean behaviour, Katie is referred to individual sessions with Mrs. Petrowski, her school's counselor. Through counseling, Katie learns about the different behaviours that constitute bullying, why kids like her bully, and what the targets of bullying can do to protect themselves against bullying. She records what she discovers in a diary, emphasizing her learning's self-reflexive quality, its role in her "chosen biography" (Beck, 1994, p. 15):

Mrs. Petrowski says there's really only ONE reason why people pick on others: It's because they're CHOOSING to be mean. It's as if they're putting on a bully hat, so that they can play the part of the bad guy who goes after the good guy—like in the movies. (Ludwig, p. 17)

This passage compares the bully/bullied dichotomy with formulaic good/evil narratives in film; however, it goes further by characterizing the bully's behaviour in terms of choice and responsibility. Within this discourse, making a choice is compulsory (Giddens, 1994), and young people have a responsibility to choose correctly (McRobbie, 2009). The emphasis on individual responsibility is dominant in educational and

popular youth discourses. Blackman and Walkerdine (2001) suggest “the following sets of resolutions to conflict that revolve around the individual’s self-determination—it’s down to you, keep on struggling, keep on trying, focus on yourself” (p. 55) are characteristic of these discourses. These cultural practices incite individuals to relate to themselves as if they are the person which discursive practices has constructed (Blackman & Walkerdine). Their self-knowledge is thus bound up in discursively constructed “cultural fantasies” of ideal, autonomous person-hood and with culturally engrained ideas about good and evil.

Within the dominant, psycho-educational discourse surrounding girl bullying, individual girls are positioned as unitary subjects who choose whether or not to be mean. This discursive position is dominant in the texts I analyzed. In *Girl’s World* (Senn, 2007) the authors explain their decision to use the phrase “bully behaviours” rather than the label “bully” to draw emphasis to the aggressor’s “choice to use hurtful or mean behaviors” (Senn, p. 7). The target of “bullying behavior” also has a choice: She can “choos[e] not to let the bully behavior affect her in a negative way” (Senn, p. 7). The quote, “Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent” (Senn, p. 30), credited to Eleanor Roosevelt, is included in a teacher information module titled “Help the **target** so they don’t become a **victim** of bullying,” as well as in a class lesson based around inspirational quotes. It emphasizes girls’ responsibility for managing their status within the bully-bystander-victim trichotomy and demands that girls exercise agency not only in the rational sphere, but also in the realm of emotions. This reflexivity is required by the neoliberal project of self-knowledge that produces girls as “psychological subjects”

(Gonick, 2006, p. 18), and situates girlhood within psy discourse, a position that I will address in more depth in the next section.

### **Risk Management: Girlhood and the Psy Professions**

In a political and social climate where the individual is responsible for tracking down and managing potential risks (Thornton, 2010), the idea of an entire “world” where control is elusive is cause for anxiety. Here, I want to return again to the introduction to *Girl's World*, in which a failure to manage the risks associated with life in the “girls’ world” results in the possibility (or perhaps likelihood) that individual girls will not grow up to be “worthwhile productive person[s]” (Senn, 2007, p. 5). Here, notions of worth and productivity are fused. In this context, a “worthwhile person” can be understood as a working, consuming, neoliberal subject who “embodies the success of the new meritocratic values” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 77) of the current educational and political climate. McRobbie argues that within the context of neoliberalism, young women’s identities are shaped by their (potential) qualifications and their occupational status. Their worth, as produced through this discourse of achievement and material success, is closely connected with their potential as working consumers; it is this that is at risk of being “damaged” in the “girl world,” and that girls (and their parents) have the responsibility for protecting.

The notion of risk can be understood as “a way of making intelligible and manageable a whole series of difficulties in our contemporary experience” (Rose, 1996 p. 13). Within the discourse of risk, the distinction between illness and health is erased,

because “all persons, even if ‘existentially healthy’ are ‘actually asymptotically ill’” (Thornton, 2010, p. 323 citing Rose, 2006). In terms of girl bullying, this notion can be used to explore the apprehension surrounding girls’ friendships. Even if a girl’s relationships with her friends are “healthy,” the fact that these relationships are so intimate creates an “asymptomatic” pathology within girls’ friendships. In this understanding, the category “girl” becomes a risk in itself, and girls’ relationships with each other become the site of suspicion and apprehension, requiring management by experts and specialists, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors.

All of the resources I analyzed draw heavily on developmental psychology in their rationales as well as in the strategies and lessons they suggest. This works to mobilize “psy discourses,” the wide-reaching material and discursive practices produced through psychological and psychiatric theory and practice, and their associated doctrines of self-knowledge and autonomy (Guilfoyle, 2001). Blackman and Walkerdine (2001) argue that in contemporary society, psy discourses are “embedded in and organize a range of social practices” (p. 103) which work to produce and regulate understandings of the self. Through peripheral public institutions such as schools, hospitals and the justice system, the “truths” of the psy professions, such as psychology and psychiatry, are iterated and normalized (Blackman & Walkerdine). It is against these “truths” of normalcy and social competence that girls’ behaviour is scrutinized; “violations of institutional and social norms [are] accorded a psychological meaning” (Rose, 1996). Psychology operates on a rational, autonomous subject, and the self-help practices it prescribes become “the very basis of a person’s self-forming activity” (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001, p. 104). Thus, the “truths” of psy discourses are

incorporated into individual subjectivities, and a failure to achieve autonomous selfhood is interpreted as the result of individual pathology.

Psy professionals (the practitioners of the sciences through which psy discourses are produced) play a central role in the legitimization of the texts I analyzed. In *Confessions*, it is a relationship with a school counselor that finally “cures” Katie’s bullying. A positive review from a “retired clinical psychologist” on the back cover of the book provides this work of fiction with legitimacy in an educational environment in which scientific discourse is privileged. On the covers of both *Mean Girls* and *Girl’s World*, the authors’ names are followed by professional designations indicating their expert status. In *Girls World*, a bulleted list outlining the lasting effects of girl bullying makes use of the positivist lexicon of developmental psychology. For example:

For students in grades three through six, relational aggression is a stronger predictor of future social maladjustment than physical aggression. (Senn, 2007, p. 9)

and

Relational aggression is connected to peer rejection, decreased acts of pro-social behaviour, and antisocial and borderline personality features in young adults (Senn, 2007, p. 9).

These examples are suggestive of the currency of psy discourses in mainstream educational approaches to girl bullying. Within this discourse, each individual girl becomes “a ‘case’” (Foucault, 1977, p. 191), and it is the school psychologist, counselor, or other psy professional who describes, judges, measures, and compares her with others. Ultimately, it is the individual girl “who has to be trained or corrected,

classified, normalized, excluded, etc” (Foucault, 1977, p. 191). Psycho-educational discourses surrounding gender and bullying are increasingly entangled with educational policy. In the next chapter, I will argue that this relationship threatens educational policy’s ability to serve those groups that are marginalized in dominant culture and limits the frameworks available for understanding girl bullying.

### **Chapter Six: Neoliberal Educational Policy and the Mean Girl**

In the previous sections I argued that the teacher resource materials I analyzed construct gender and femininity in a way that entrenches gender stereotypes and limits the ways that gendered subjectivities may be taken up by young people, and furthermore, that the texts serve as a technology of disciplinary power that regulates feminine subjectivity. I also argued that these texts operate discursively within a neoliberal policy environment to produce both girlhood as a site of unmanaged risk and girls as rational, autonomous subjects. In this final section, I broaden my focus to consider the discursive effects of these texts, and others like them, on educational policy. While none of the texts I analyzed are mandated for use in public schools, many school districts do require the implementation of anti-bullying curricula and, thus, the use of anti-bullying resources such as the texts I analyzed. The currency of bully discourses (Ringrose & Renold, 2010) in the popular media creates an environment in which the need for anti-bullying programming is impressed upon teachers and parents with a sense of urgency. Accordingly, the appetite for anti-bullying information, programs, curricula, and resources is great. The implementation of anti-bullying mandates combined with the sense of urgency in reactions to girl bullying demands a critical appraisal of the effects of dominant discourse surrounding girl bullying on education policy.

In this section, I explore the interconnectedness of policy and common sense.<sup>8</sup> First, I suggest that the construction of gender and identity in the texts I analyzed serves to foreclose the possibility of an expanded (or perhaps completely discarded) ontology of gender, both within educational discourse and within the broader social and cultural context. Secondly, I will look at how this narrowing of the imagination is linked with the neoliberal and humanistic concepts of the self that currently dominate educational discourse and policy. Following Ringrose and Renold (2010), I argue that girl bullying resources are located within a neoliberal educational climate, which is focused on individual autonomy and personal responsibility, and that this framework neglects the structural issues that marginalize girls. Finally, I will explore how a discourse of crisis surrounding the mean girl and girl bullying has resulted in a blurring of commercial and educational discourses. Using an example from US educational policy, I argue that this blurring of discourses threatens educational policy's ability to serve those groups that are marginalized in dominant culture and contributes to the disempowerment of classroom teachers, ultimately limiting the frameworks available for understanding girl bullying.

Throughout this section, I will draw upon the aspects of Foucault's (1976/1990; 1977; 1984) and Butler's (1990) theories that I outlined in Chapter three, as well as Gramsci's (1971) notion of common sense. Gramscian common sense is "literally thought that is common—common to a social group or common to society as a whole" (Jones & Jones, 2006, p. 54). It represents the incorporation of the multiplicity of discourse into everyday life, as such, it is "continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary

life” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324). Common sense, in this interpretation, is aligned with Foucauldian theories about power: “For both Foucault and Gramsci, power is produced and reproduced in the interstices of everyday life” (Holub, 1992, p. 29).

### **A Limited Ontology of Gender and Identity**

Policy and common sense are dialectically related: Common sense influences policy decisions, and policies can have a transformative effect on common sense (Smith, Jarvis, Heinecke, & Miller-Kahn, 2003). In this section, I examine how the interaction of educational policy and dominant discourses may place discursive limits on the subject positions available to girls, both materially and within the public imagination that is common sense. I argue that this works in two ways: It is manifested as a shrinking definition of what gender *is* and, related to this, as an increasing re-investment in traditional norms of femininity.

In the past several decades, academics and activists alike have worked to expand the public and political imagination in terms of the ways that gender can be conceived. In some cases, this has found its way into legislation enacted as policy—and certain aspects of this have entered into common sense. However, if we accept Butler’s (1990) suggestion that gender is a precarious fiction that must be continually produced and maintained through the reiteration of the regulative practices that constitute the heterosexual matrix, we can see how any moves to expand or subvert traditional understandings of gender will be met with resistance. As the normative hold of this chimera begins to slip, and as feminists’ and queer theorists’ arguments questioning the internal fixity of gender enter into common sense, a foundational aspect of patriarchal

and heterosexist society is disrupted. Changes in the way that gender is conceived destabilize traditional gender narratives and threaten the Symbolic authority, creating a sense of anxiety and fear. This may lead to a rejection of expanded definitions of gender, and a reinvestment in understandings of gender as a binary opposition with essential maleness opposed to essential femaleness. The destabilizing effect of “unintelligible gender” is identified by Butler (1990, p. 17): “Inasmuch as ‘identity’ is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of ‘the person’ is called into question by the cultural emergence of those ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined.” When the stability of gender is disrupted, so too is the humanistic notion of personhood. Thus, a shift away from phenomenologically rooted understandings of gender awakens previously unchallenged notions of identity and the self.

A reinvestment in humanistic, phenomenological, and biological understandings of identity can be understood as an insulating or self-preserving response to the threat of paradigmatic change. As I will show throughout this section, educational policy is heavily invested in humanistic ideas of the autonomous self. This investment is in conflict with a theoretical framework that understands identity as “an *effect* of discursive practices” (Butler, 1990, p. 18) and gender and sex as “regulatory fictions” (Butler, p. 33). Discursive practices that function to maintain the stability of the autonomous self and binary gender undermine political and rhetorical practices that signify a shift towards a less rigid understanding of gender in schools; for example, inclusiveness statements, pink t-shirt days, and non-traditional family lessons within

the curriculum. The effectiveness of these practices is undermined by the pervasiveness of regulatory discourses that reify a narrow definition of gender. According to Butler, “even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the ‘congealing’ is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means” (p. 33). I argue that gender-specific anti-bullying teaching materials can be identified as one of the social practices that relentlessly reinforce traditional understandings of gender. The teaching materials I analyzed are ontologically aligned with dominant educational discourse surrounding identity. In my analysis of teacher resources in Chapter four, I argued that these materials present gender as internally coherent, the link between female and femininity as natural and durable. The male/female binary is reinforced and gender, sex, and sexuality are bound up together in traditional ways. This has the effect of undermining attempts to incorporate expanded understandings of gender into educational practice and policy, and the continued marginalization of those whose gender identity is not “intelligible” within the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). The discursive effects of this narrowing conception of gender may be widespread, as it prevents the public imagination of common sense from considering how gender and identity might be conceived of outside of the regulatory framework of the heterosexual matrix.

### **Re-investment in Traditional Norms of Femininity**

In rejecting an expanded ontology of gender, these texts, along with the discourses within which they are situated, put forth a narrowly conceived representation of girlhood and femininity that represent a re-investment in traditional

notions of femininity. This position is connected with the texts' understanding of the meaning of gender and identity as described above. In these texts, this is evident in the physical representation of girls' bodies as well as in essentialized representations of feminine difference. These texts' narrowly circumscribed representations serve a regulatory function by informing common sense understandings of normative girlhood, as conceived within the context of a binary gender. They undermine attempts in educational policy-making to broaden or disrupt gender stereotypes and essentialized understandings of girlhood and femininity (and to operate outside of a humanistic paradigm), facilitating the continued hegemony of developmental approaches to policy-making in the area of gender and bullying.

By depicting girls' bodies in a narrow way, the texts produce "proper" girlhood as something that is achieved only by those who can fit in with the picture of girlhood presented. As I explained in Chapter four, the girls pictured are uniformly pretty, slender, white, and wearing unremarkable, but feminine, clothing, makeup, and jewelry. The proper or normal girl is presented as homogenous, so young people who do not or cannot cast their bodies in such a way are rendered outside the mold of the proper girl. This creates a situation where girls must be constantly self-reflexive, constantly re-making themselves in the image of the "proper" girl, in order to maintain an intelligible position within the rigid structure of binary gender. McRobbie (2009) argues that this self-reflexiveness is representative of "a new horizon of self-imposed feminine cultural norms" (p. 63), identifying the "feminine masquerade," as a conscientious investment in maintaining a feminine appearance as a mitigation or a buffer against the threat posed by the destabilization of traditional gender hierarchies that accompanied girls' new

positions in society. McRobbie suggests that the feminine masquerade “has reappeared as a highly self-conscious means by which young women are encouraged to collude with the re-stabilization of gender norms so as to undo the gains of feminism” (p. 64). The feminine masquerade, according to McRobbie, shores up “hegemonic masculinity by endorsing this public femininity which appears to undermine, or at least unsettle the new power accruing to women on the basis of their economic capacity” (p. 66). In an economic and educational culture where discourses surrounding girls’ success at the expense of boys’ threatens traditional gender hierarchies, the texts’ homogeneous depiction of girls styled in a way that reinforces normative femininity serves as a kind of reassurance. It can be seen as a nostalgic foothold in an apparently more stable time, when gender was understood to be fixed and internal, and girls and women looked and behaved in so-called traditional ways. This graphical representation contributes to a gender discourse that encourages girls to turn their attention to their bodies as the anchor for the intelligibility of their gender. Girls must then self-regulate in order to bring their bodies into line with traditional norms of femininity and into place within hegemonic understandings of binary gender. In this sense, the narrowly conceived embodiment of the proper girl, as presented in these texts, serves as a technology of disciplinary power that buttresses the artifice of binary gender.

Similarly, the texts’ focus on girls as relationally oriented enforces another feature of traditional understandings of femininity: a deep investment in relationships. As I explained in Chapter four, all of the texts I analyzed begin with the essentialist assumption that girls’ difference lies in their relational approach to the world. In the texts I analyzed, this assumption translates into regulatory practices: the lessons and

strategies aimed at encouraging girls to be sweet and considerate. The uncritical adoption of texts such as the ones I analyzed means that the regulatory discourses and practices they are associated with become incorporated into educational discourse and into common sense understandings of gender and femininity.

### **Girl Bullying and Policy in a Neoliberal Educational Climate**

Dominant discourses surrounding girl bullying and the “mean girl” are located within an educational climate, which is moving towards a neoliberal model of accountability and personal responsibility (Ringrose, 2006; 2007; McRobbie, 2009). First, I will explore this shift towards neoliberal values and beliefs in education. Then I will examine how this is connected with dominant discourses surrounding girl bullying, suggesting that dominant developmental psycho-educational discourses are linked with neoliberal beliefs and values by means of a humanist concept of the rational, autonomous self and the hegemony of scientific truth claims within developmental psycho-educational frameworks. Finally, I will argue that the rise of neoliberalism in educational policy-making and the hegemony of developmental psycho-educational frameworks for understanding girl bullying has led to a problematic blurring of commercial and educational discourses and to the disempowerment of classroom teachers.

The shift towards a neoliberal model of public education has occurred despite rhetorical shifts in curriculum design and educational policy that purport to address systemic inequalities (Smith et al., 2003). However, the incongruent embeddedness of progressive rhetoric within a business-oriented model of education may not be as

contradictory as it seems. For example, requirements that curriculum materials and textbooks be subjected to a bias-checking process are certainly worthwhile (see for example, Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2001). However, while policies such as these seem to acknowledge and attempt to address the systemic issues that affect marginalized students' access to equitable education, they may also serve as a kind of pedagogical rhetoric that reinforces public education's dubious promise of equality of opportunity. This discourse seems to hold that once certain barriers are removed (biased textbooks, for example) all students have an equally good chance of success, given that they *try hard enough*. This individualizing discourse, which is pervasive in policy as well as in common sense representations of public education, is intertwined with neo-liberal educational discourses.

Public education's deepening espousal of neoliberal values and beliefs (Ringrose, 2008) calls for a system organized around a business model of individual accountability, responsibility, and success, principles that have been accompanied by an emphasis on quantifiable student and school improvement. School boards' near-obsession with data is reflected in the current focus on measureable student outcomes and school improvement in terms of these outcomes. This discourse is reflected in the Halifax Regional School Board's motto. Appearing in large letters at the top of every section of its webpage is the, declaration: "Every student can learn. Every school can improve" (<http://www.hrsb.ns.ca/>). This motto is underpinned by a series of published "belief statements" such as: "Individuals are accountable for their decisions," and "Positive attitude is essential for personal success" (Halifax Regional School Board, 2008).<sup>9</sup> Statements such as these emphasize individual autonomy and responsibility,

and shape the discursive context in which individualizing narratives surrounding girl bullying are located.

The teacher resources about girl bullying that I analyzed are based in developmental psycho-educational discourses that emphasize individual responsibility and choice. These bully discourses are connected with individualizing neoliberal beliefs, frameworks that locate problems within the individual and separate them from the social. The effect of this is that, through these texts, girls' friendships and conflicts are decontextualized. What is inflated in the media as a public problem is confined to the private world of the individual girl (and possibly her parents, or her therapist) for resolution. This represents a political disengagement with the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts within which girls may position themselves. Ringrose (2008) argues that dominant discourses surrounding gender and bullying miss "how normative power structures discursively organize ideals of masculinity and femininity, and how (hetero) sexualization, class, cultures and ethnic identities (and other intersecting axes) structure and differentiate femininities and masculinities" (p. 512). Underlying material and discursive pressures and inequities are thus overlooked, and the girls who are subject to them are further marginalized.

Nevertheless, these discourses have attained hegemonic status within educational policy-making as well as within popular culture. I argue that this has occurred for several, interconnected reasons. As I mentioned briefly above, these discourses are related to humanistic notions of identity and autonomy of the self that are attractive in a neoliberal policy environment, which relies on the responsibility of

the rational, autonomous subject. Likewise, the developmental psychology framework for understanding girl bullying takes as its subject a rational, autonomous girl, a girl who can choose to be nice instead of “choosing to be mean (Ludwig, 2010, p. 17).

Secondly, psycho-educational discourses surrounding girl bullying are produced through scientific discourse. This is attractive in a neo-liberal policy environment, which operates under the guise of accountability and evidence-based practice, concepts borrowed from the corporate world. Emboldened by the glow of science, truth claims (Blackman & Walkerdine, 2001) about gender, girls, and bullying are easily accepted into common sense. This is evident in the texts I analyzed, all of which relied on figures drawn from positivistic studies about bullying to secure their arguments in the realm of common sense. Positivistic research into gender and bullying has been critiqued as essentializing and homogenizing; however, the relentless conflation of experimental or correlational research with truth and common sense is equally problematic (Blackman & Walkerdine).

Finally, I suggest that the hegemonic status of developmental psycho-educational frameworks for understanding girl bullying is the result of the blurring of educational and commercial discourses. I argue that this can be seen as: a) an effect of the influence of parenting manuals on teaching materials and anti-bullying programs; and b) an effect of the significantly profitable<sup>10</sup> education sector's (Google finance, 2011) investment in anti-bullying programs, developments that are linked by their relationship to the increasing currency of the “mean girl” and girl bullying discourses I described at the beginning of this thesis.

The “mean girl” has been framed by dominant discourse (academic, educational, and popular culture) as a crisis affecting girlhood. As I discussed in Chapter five, discourses of individual risk and personal responsibility have designated the family as one of the main sites for addressing girl bullying, as well as other social issues facing girls. Girls (and their parents) are now responsible for mitigating the risk inherent in girlhood, and for treating the individual pathologies that cast them as either “bully” or “victim.” Within this context of individual risk management and the apparent crisis in girlhood, the publication of popular books and programs about girls has become a “veritable cottage industry” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000/ 2010). This body of literature has inspired a booming “expert culture” surrounding girl bullying, and many of the texts have been spun off into programs, seminars, and curricula for schools (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz 2007). Parenting books and experts were frequently cited in the resources for teachers about girl bullying that I analyzed, and many of these parenting guides themselves are found on the shelves of teacher resource libraries. This blurring of genres is problematic because parenting manuals, by definition, serve a different function than teaching materials. They are written to be saleable to a specific audience: in this case, the parents of largely white, middle-class girls. In the interests of commerce, they address the concerns of their target audience, rather than focusing on the broad socio-cultural issues affecting girls. The influence of this literature on educational discourse contributes to the “uncritical incorporation” (Ringrose, 2008, p. 511) of psycho-educational approaches to gender and bullying into educational research and policy, at the expense of approaches that consider the “socio-cultural dimensions of bullying and aggression” (Ringrose, p. 511).

Discourses connected to girl bullying and the “mean girl” are also related to the K-12 education market—the corporate sector that designs, produces, and markets teaching materials to schools and school boards. The education market’s reach is diverse; however, it benefits universally from crises (perceived or real) in education. Naturally, this sector of the market is geared towards profitability. Consequently, the materials it produces and markets to schools and school boards do not necessarily reflect a wide range of research or possibilities for thinking about a particular crisis. Rather, the products designed for and marketed to teachers, schools, and school boards are designed to generate sales and profits. This means that less profitable ways of looking at problems may be neglected. In order to be profitable, companies must produce the kind of solutions to educational problems that can be packaged and sold.

As a result, programs and teaching materials about girl bullying (and bullying in general) are necessarily univocal: Because these programs must be applicable in any school district or classroom, they must take an approach to bullying that rejects its socio-cultural dimensions in favour of one rooted in universalizing understandings of girlhood and humanist notions of the autonomous self. Practical and pecuniary considerations demand a one-size-fits-all approach, even if this approach is not the most appropriate. In the case of girl bullying, developmental psycho-educational discourse corresponds with this one-size-fits-all approach.

Moreover, the influence of commercial interests on girl bullying discourses capitalizes on girl bullying as a crisis within education. Girl bullying is discursively produced as a crisis in need of immediate management. As mentioned in Chapter five,

this has created an “expert culture” surrounding girl bullying. When girl bullying is posited as the kind of crisis that can only be addressed with the help of experts—psy professionals and others cloaked in the veil of science—teachers and school staff lose access to this mode of subjectivity, creating a void that must be filled through the purchase of programs and resources about girl bullying.

The homogeneity of the existing body of literature on the topic of girl bullying is reflective of the disempowerment of teachers within the context of neoliberal educational policy. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, neoliberal values of competition and marketability are reflected in educational policy as a shift toward accountability, outcomes, and targets, values that are framed within a business model of education (McRobbie, 2009). This economic and social paradigm adopts a model of teaching that features “technical rationality” (Portelli & Hare, 2003, p. 2). Portelli and Hare claim that pre-service teacher education programmes continue to be characterized by “technicism” and “extreme pragmatism” (p. 3). Citing Giroux and McLaren, they suggest that this technicism is mandated by the state as a mechanism for the production of working, neoliberal subjects, and that it has led to “the deskilling and disempowering of teachers, discouragement of a critical view of schooling and an acceptance and reproduction of current practice (Portelli & Hare, p. 3). I suggest that the “vocationalism” and “extreme pragmatism” that Portelli and Hare problematize in their critique of teacher education programmes is pervasive in teachers’ professional lives, and that this is perpetuated through professional development workshops, trade magazines, and teacher resources. The emphasis on quick fixes and strategies is now a requirement, given the current accountability model of schooling. In disempowering

teachers from critically examining the discourses with which their students engage or refuse to engage, the artificial divide between public and private is further entrenched. In this climate, teachers' "confidence and love of ourselves as adults, elders, older persons with knowledge, has been stolen from us and is being sold back to us for the price of a parenting course [...] and experts to counsel our children" (Barkely, 1999). Thus, the issue of girl bullying is removed from the social contexts of the classroom, the cafeteria, and the playground and is shifted to the individualized and individualizing domains of psy professionals and parenting experts.

While the proliferation of parenting books about the crises of girlhood has been theorized (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2008), the burgeoning "anti-bullying" segment of the education market has remained unexplored. However, the incompatibility of commercial and educational discourses in general has been the subject of significant academic scrutiny (Bulkley & Burch, 2011; Granger, 2008; Smith et al., 2003). In the section that follows, I use examples from US educational policy to show how the blurring of commercial interests and educational aims limits the variety of discourses available through which educational issues can be understood, which ultimately results in policy frameworks and discursive practices within education that marginalize girls.

In an analysis of the commercial beneficiaries of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the US education policy that mandated high-stakes testing and punitive school-improvement measures, Granger (2011) suggests that commercial providers of educational goods and services profited from a "spectacle of fear" arising from the discourse surrounding America's failing schools. In the years leading up to the passing

of NCLB legislation, concerns about America's failing schools were replete in the political arena. These concerns were echoed in the popular media, and "failing schools" became dominant discourse in the press as well as in fictional representations of education in America. The emergence of this discourse coincided with the rise of the neoliberal conviction in the private sector's superior ability to address issues previously trusted to public institutions. It ensues then that the years following the implementation of No Child Left Behind saw a boom in the K-12 education market, which had previously been termed "sluggish" by Wall Street analysts (Bulkley & Burch, p. 240). Commercial products marketed to schools, boards, and parents responded to the discourse of crisis surrounding public schooling by providing products and services to assuage the consumer's fear. However, as Granger (2008) has commented, NCLB has not succeeded in improving marginalized students' access to high-quality public education.

Using the example of mandated reading programs, Smith et al. (2003) outline the process through which commercial interest create paradigmatic limits for understanding and acting upon problems in education. Their example deals with an established area of curriculum—reading instruction—and a well-worn debate about curriculum design: phonics-first vs. whole language. However, I suggest that parallels may be drawn between this example and the emergent field of anti-bullying education.

The phonics-first approach to reading instruction is based on neurological and physiological research surrounding how children process phonemes—the sounds that make up words. Proponents of this approach recommend standardized learning

materials, scripts for teachers, and repetition. In contrast, the whole-language approach focuses on comprehension and context-based cues. Teachers following this approach provide a variety of reading experiences and encourage children to use a range of cues when learning to read. These two approaches are not necessarily exclusive of each other; however, as investments into curriculum development and marketing were made, the two camps hardened against each other. Smith et al. (2003) argue that within the context of a discourse of educational crisis, the conflation of commercial and educational discourses resulted in the phonics first approach emerging as the winner of this debate. This led to the adoption of phonics-first curricula by several states and many school boards. This victory is attributed to the individualistic/humanist neurobiological framework of the phonics-first approach and its proponents' invocation of data-driven scientific truths throughout the debate, which Smith et al. argue were attractive in a neoliberal policy environment. Since the phonics-first approach requires the purchase of standardized teaching materials, the widespread acceptance of phonics-first led to rising profits in the education market, confirmed in a newsletter of the Education Industry investment specialists: "From an investment perspective, this crisis has created an enormous opportunity and powerful momentum for those companies with solutions to our educational problems" (Bracey, 2001, cited in Smith et al., p. 206).

This is problematic because by many accounts phonics-first is not the most effective method of reading instruction. Critics argue that it neglects the socio-cultural factors that affect reading ability, marginalizing poor and minority students, and that the results of correlational and experimental studies used to prove its effectiveness have been vastly overstated in policy reports and marketing campaigns (Smith et al.,

2003). Capitalizing on the discourse of panic surrounding failing schools and drawing upon the aura of authority of science, media reports influenced public opinion in pronouncing the superiority of the phonics-first approach. Viewed through the lens of this individualizing, neurobiological narrative, the only visible solution to America's literacy crisis was to mandate the purchase of expensive phonics-first curricula, even though a closer look shows that a balanced approach to literacy is more beneficial. Nevertheless, "the appearance of crisis had to be sustained so that the public would not resist privatization, commercialization, and a decline in values other than efficiency and productivity" (Smith et al., p. 207). The social factors contributing to low achievement in reading are ignored in this narrative: They are not solvable through a product available for purchase, and no profit can be made. Thus, the crisis becomes an individualized one, which obscures the social factors that contribute to illiteracy.

In this example, a proliferation of commercial educational products and services did not succeed in broadening the spectrum of possibilities for improving education for young Americans. Rather, it had the effect of limiting the frameworks available for thinking about and acting upon the issues that trouble the education system in the US. The "failing schools" discourse in the US generated healthy profits in the K-12 education market and problematic policies for the country's schools (Bulkley & Burch, 2011; Smith et al., 2003). Fueled by a discourse of crisis within girlhood, the nascent "anti-bullying" industry is set to accomplish the same dubious feat.

In many jurisdictions, schools are mandated to have an anti-bullying program in place. The K-12 education market has responded to this with a proliferation of anti-

bullying programs, curricula, expert seminars and resources. I argued in my analysis of teacher resources about girl bullying in Chapters four and five that these texts rely almost exclusively on a developmental psycho-educational approach to girl bullying, and that through this framework, they discursively produce girls as autonomous subjects within narrowly circumscribed norms of gender and femininity. I suggested that these resources are dialectically engaged with discourses that pathologize girlhood and marginalize girls who do not or cannot appropriate the subject position of the “proper girl” that is produced in the texts. Even though these texts and other texts and programs may actually reinforce the inequities they set out to address, they have been widely accepted and, importantly, purchased by teachers, schools, and school boards. I suggest that this is at least partly due to the fact that commercial interests and the “expert culture” surrounding girl bullying do not create space for divergent understandings of gender and bullying.

## **Conclusion**

In my analysis, I showed that teacher resource materials about girl bullying are the site of the kind of “beliefs, narratives, images and metaphors” that Davies (1989a, p. 232) argues constitute inequitable practices, despite not being easily recognized as such. Davies suggests that the constitutive and productive aspects of inequitable practice may be impossible to set aside because “the development of alternative discursive practices has not yet taken place” (p. 232). In the more than twenty years that have passed since Davies put forth this argument, gender, education, and girl

bullying have been the subject of theories that question the dominant discourses constituting inequitable practices. These are theories that have generated material effects: For example, the preface to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1999) outlines some of the ways that Butler's theories have influenced the world outside of academia. My analysis has shown that despite the availability of alternative discourses through which girl bullying can be understood, the texts I studied operate in a productive relationship with dominant educational and social discourses to limit both the gendered subjectivities available to young people and the ways that girlhood and gender may be imagined.

**References**

- Barkley, J. (1999). Reclaiming our children: Teachers as elders. In A. Neilson, (Ed.), *Daily meaning: Counternarratives of teacher's work*. (pp. 183-193). Mill Bay, BC: Bendall Books.
- Barron, C., & Lacombe, D. (2010). Moral panic and the nasty girl. In M. Rajiva and S. Batacharya (Eds.) *Reena Virk: Critical perspectives on a Canadian murder* (pp. 271-296). Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.
- Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2010). *Manifesta [10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition]: Young women, feminism, and the future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Original work published 2000).
- Bell, Crystal. (2011). Tamara Mowry: Sister, sister star opens up about wedding, Kim Kardashian and new show 'Tia and Tamara'. *Huffington Post*. Aug. 16, 2011. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/08/tamera-mowry-interview-tia-and-tamera\\_n\\_921231.html#s324835&title=Tamera Mowry](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/08/tamera-mowry-interview-tia-and-tamera_n_921231.html#s324835&title=Tamera Mowry)
- Beck, U. (1994). The reinvention of politics. In U. Beck, A. Giddens, & S. Lash, (Eds.), *Reflexive modernization: Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order* (pp 1-55). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bingham, J. (2009). Twin's sixth sense saves drowning sister. *The Telegraph*, March 23, 2009. Retrieved on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/5036835/Twins-sixth-sense-saves-drowning-sister.html>.

- Björkqvist, K. & Niemelä, P. (1992). New trends in the study of female aggression. In K. Björkqvist & P. Niemelä (Eds.), *Of mice and women: Aspects of female aggression* (pp 1-15). San Diego: Academic Press Limited.
- Blackman, L., & Walkerdine, V. (2001). *Mass hysteria: Critical psychology and media studies*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Bulkley, K., & P. Burch. (2011). The changing nature of private engagement in public education: For profit and nonprofit organizations and educational reform. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 86(3), p. 236-251.
- Burton, B. (2009). *Girls against girls*. San Francisco: Zest Books.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Butler, J. (2000). *Antigone's claim: Kinship between life and death*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Campbell, A. (1995). A few good men: Evolutionary psychology and female adolescent aggression. *Ethology & Sociobiology*, 16(2), 99-123.
- Campbell, A. (1999). Staying alive: Evolution, culture, and women's intrasexual aggression. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 22, 203 – 252.

Campbell, A. (2004). Female competition: Causes, constraints, content and contexts.

*Journal of Sex Research*, 4(1), 16-24.

Chesney-Lind, M. & Irwin, K. (2008). *Beyond bad girls: Gender, violence and hype*. New York: Routledge.

Cook, D. T., & Kaiser, S. (2004). Betwixt and be tween: Age ambiguity and the sexualization of the female consuming subject. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 4(2), 203-227.

Crick, N.R., & Grotpeter, J. K. (1995). Relational Aggression, Gender, and Social-Psychological Adjustment. *Child Development*, 66(4), 710-722.

Currie, D. H., Kelly, D. M., & Pomerantz, S. (2007). "The power to squash people": Understanding girls' "relational aggression." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28(1), 23-37.

Davies, B. (1989a) The discursive production of the male/female dualism in school settings. *Oxford Review of Education*, 15(3), 229-241.

Davies, B. (1989b). *Frogs, snails and feminist tales*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Davies, B. (2005). *The Fairy Who Wouldn't Fly: A story of subjection and agency*. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 5(2), 151-174.

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves.

Retrieved on November 28<sup>th</sup> from

<http://www.massey.ac.nz/~alock/position/position.htm>.

Dellasaga, C., & Nixon C. (2003). *Girl wars: 12 strategies that will end female bullying*. New York: Fireside.

Encisco, P. E. (1998). Good/bad girls read together: Pre-adolescent girls' co-authorship of feminine subject positions during a shared reading event. *English Education*, 30(1), 44-62.

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. van Dijk (Ed.) *Discourse as social interaction* (pp. 258-284). London: SAGE.

Field, J., Kolbert, J., Crothers, L., & Hughes, T. (2009). *Understanding girl bullying and what to do about it: Strategies to help heal the divide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1975).

Foucault, M. (1984). What is an author? (J.V. Harari, Trans.). In P. Rainbow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 101-119). New York: Pantheon (Original work published 1979).

Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: Volume I*. (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1976).

Fuss, D. (1992). Fashion and the homospectatorial look. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(4), 713-737.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Giddens, A. (1994). Living in a post-traditional society. In U. Beck, A. Giddens, & S. Lash, (Eds.), *Reflexive modernization: Politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order* (pp. 56-109). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Goleman, D. (1987). The bully: New research depicts a paranoid, life-long loser. *The New York Times*, April 7. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/07/science/the-bully-new-research-depicts-a-paranoid-lifelong-loser.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>
- Gonick, M. (2004). The mean girl crisis: Problematizing representations of girls' friendships. *Feminism and Psychology*, 14(3), 395-399.
- Gonick, M. (2006). Between "Girl Power" and "Reviving Ophelia": Constituting the neoliberal girl subject. *NWSA Journal*, 18 (2), 2-23.
- Google finance. (2011). The McGraw-Hill Companies. Retrieved on October, 11, 2011 from <http://www.google.com/finance?q=NYSE:MHP>.
- Google finance. (2011). Pearson PLC (ADR). Retrieved on October 11, 2011 from <http://www.google.com/finance?q=NYSE:PSO>.
- Government of Ontario. (2010). Growing success: assessment, evaluation and reporting in Ontario schools. Ontario: Ministry of Education, Ontario.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. (Hoare, Q. & Nowell Smith, J, Trans.). New York: International Publishers.
- Granger, D. A. (2008). No Child Left Behind and the spectacle of failing schools: The mythology of contemporary school reform. *Educational Studies*, 43, p. 206-228.

Gregory, K. & Vessey, J. (2004). Bibliotherapy: A strategy to help students with bullying. *Journal of School Nursing* 20(3), 127-133.

Guilfoyle, M. (2001). Problematizing psychotherapy: The discursive production of a bulimic. *Culture & Psychology*, 7(2), 151-179.

Hains, R. (2009). Power feminism, mediated: Girl power and the commercial politics of change. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 32(1), 89-113.

Halifax Regional School Board. (2008). *General Fund Business Plan & Budget Proposal*.  
Halifax, N.S: Halifax Regional School Board.

Hey, V. (1997). *The company she keeps: An ethnography of girls' friendships*.  
Buckingham: Open University Press.

Holub, R. (1992). *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and postmodernism*. London:  
Routledge.

Jäger, S. (2003). Discourse and knowledge: Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 32-62). London: SAGE Ltd.

Jones, P., & Jones, S. (2006). *Antonio Gramsci*. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.

Kaveney, R. (2006). *Teen dreams: Reading teen film from Heathers to Veronica Mars*.  
London: I.B. Tauris.

- Kehily, M., Mac An Ghail, M., Epstein, D., & Redman, P. (2002). Private girls and public worlds: Producing femininities in the primary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 23(2), 167-177.
- Kinney, G. (2007). *Diary of a wimpy kid*. New York: Amulet Books.
- Kirkus Review (2010). *Confessions of a Former Bully* (review). July 1, 2010.
- Ludwig, T. (2004). *My Secret Bully*. Berkely: Tricycle press.
- Ludwig, T. (2010). *Confessions of a Former Bully*. Berkely: Tricycle press.
- Maine Project Against Bullying. (2000). Executive Summary. Retrieved on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from <http://lincoln.midcoast.com/~wps/against/execsummary.html>.
- McLoughlin, L. (2002). The construction of female sexuality in the "sex special": Transgression or containment in magazines' information on sexuality for girls? *Gender & Language* 2(2), 171-195.
- McRobbie, A. (2003). Mothers and fathers, who needs them? *Feminist Review*, 75, 129-136.
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change*. London: SAGE.
- Merritt, S. (2008). Who you callin' sexist, honey? *The Obsever* Jan 13, 2008. Retrieved on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/jan/13/theatre>.

- Mitchell, J. (1982) Introduction I. In J. Mitchell & J. Rose, *Feminine sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (J. Rose, Trans.) (pp 1-26). London: MacMillan Press.
- Nayak, A., & Kehily, M. (2006). Gender undone: Subversion, regulation and embodiment in the work of Judith Butler. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27(4), 459 – 472.
- Nova Scotia Department of Education. (2001). *Bias Evaluation Instrument*. Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia Department of Education.
- Owens, L., Slee, P., & Shute, R. (2000). “It hurts a hell of a lot...”: The effects of indirect aggression on teenage girls. *School Psychology International*, 21(4), 359 – 376.
- Parker, I. (1997). Discourse analysis and psychoanalysis. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 36, 473-495
- Parker, I. (2005). Lacanian discourse analysis in psychology: Seven theoretical elements. *Theory & Psychology* 15, 163-182.
- Pattee, A. (2009). When in doubt, choose ‘B’. *Feminist Media Studies*, 9 (3), 193-207.
- Petterle, D. (Producer). (2009). *The Secret life of twins*. [Television documentary]. London: BBC. Retrieved on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y\\_jS-PYSLoQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_jS-PYSLoQ)
- Randall, K. & Bowen, A. (2007). *Mean girls: 101 ½ creative strategies and activities for working with Relational aggression*. Chapin, SC: YouthLight.

- Ringrose, J. (2006). A new universal mean girl: Examining the discursive construction and social regulation of a new feminine pathology. *Feminism & Psychology, 16*(4), 405-423.
- Ringrose, J. (2007). Successful girls? Complicating post-feminist, neoliberal discourses of educational achievement and gender equality. *Gender and Education, 19*(4), p. 471-489.
- Ringrose, J., & Renold, E. (2010). Normative cruelties and gender deviants: The performative effects of bully discourses for girls and boys in school. *British Educational Research Journal, 36*(4), 573-596.
- Rogers, R. (2004). *Critical discourse analysis in education*. New York: Routledge.
- Rogers, R., Malancharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Diane Hui, D., & O'Garro Joseph, G. (2005). Critical discourse analysis in education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research, 75*, 365 – 417.
- Rose, N. (2006). Psychiatry as a political science: Advanced liberalism and the administration of risk. *History of the Human Sciences, 9*(2), 1-23.
- Rosevear, J. (2007). Do mean girls rule your school? Bullying tips from the experts behind the Ophelia Project. *Scholastic Instructor, January/February, 2007*, p. 8.
- Senn, D. (2007). *Bullying in the Girl's World*. Chapin, SC: YouthLight.
- Salih, S. (2002). *Judith Butler*. London: Routledge.

Scholastic. (2011). About Scholastic. Retrieved on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from

<http://www.scholastic.com/aboutscholastic/consumerprofessionalmagazines.htm>

Schulze, J. (2010). Battle bullying with books. *The children's book review*, January 25, 2010.

Simmons, R. (2002). *Odd girl out: The hidden culture of aggression in girls*. New York: Harcourt.

Smith, M.L., Jarvis, P., Heinecke, W., & Miller-Kahn, L. (2003). *Political spectacle and the fate of American schools*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Sparks, S.D. (2011). Researchers look for ways to curb “mean girls” and gossip. *Education Week*, 30(19), 8.

Tang-Martinez, Z. (1997). The curious courtship of sociobiology and feminism: A case of irreconcilable differences. In P. A. Gowaty (Ed.), *Feminism and evolutionary biology: boundaries, intersections, and frontiers* (pp. 116-150). New York: Chapman & Hall.

Thornton, D. J. (2010). Race, risk and pathology in psychiatric culture: Disease awareness campaigns as government rhetoric. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 27(4), 311-335.

tvtropes.com (2011). Twin telepathy. *tvtropes.com*.

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TwinTelepathy>

- Vaillancourt, T. (2005). Indirect aggression among humans: Social construct or evolutionary adaptation? In R. Tremblay, W. Hartup, & J. Archer (Eds.), *Developmental origins of aggression* (pp. 158-177). New York: Guilford.
- van Dijk, T. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse and Society* 4(2), 249-283.
- Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Willet, R. (2006). Poofy dresses and big guns: A post-structuralist analysis of gendered positioning through talk amongst friends. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 27(4), 441-455.
- Wiseman, R. (2002). *Queen bees and wannabes: Helping your daughter survive cliques, gossip, boyfriends and other realities of adolescence*. New York: Crown.
- Wodak, R. (2003). The discourse historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63-93). London: SAGE Ltd.
- Wooffitt, R. (2005). *Conversation analysis and discourse analysis*. London: SAGE.



## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup>My use of speech marks around the term “mean girl” distinguishes this as a concept or category produced by the scholars, journalists, writers, and policy-makers who investigate and report on it, as opposed to a reference to actual girls who are mean. From here on, I do not use speech marks, however, the term “mean girl” will refer to the concept and not individual girls.

<sup>2</sup>“Fear” and “Insecurity” seem to be in contradiction with “Power” and “Control” in this introductory sentence. Fear and insecurity suggest weakness and vulnerability, while control and power suggest ruthlessness and a rejection of feminine fragility. Based on the many suggestions throughout *Girl's World* that girls behaviour is motivated by their fear of losing their place in a social hierarchy, it seems as if the “Fear” and “Insecurity” here are in reference to maintaining control and power in social situations, and not one of the many other causes for fear or insecurity (for example, domestic violence, poverty, sexual harassment) that might affect girls.

<sup>3</sup> The famous comedian here is Chris Rock, who has been criticized for featuring misogynist themes in his stand-up routine (Merritt, 2008). The quote included in the *Mean Girls* text has been modified from the original: “Women would rule the world - if only they'd stop bitchin' about each other.”

<sup>4</sup> The author cites the “MEAN GIRLS professional seminar provided by Developmental Resources, Inc” (the parent company of YouthLight, *Girl's World's* publisher); however, many of these “roles” are embedded within girl bullying discourses, thanks to parenting books that raise the alarm about the risks inherent in girls' relationships, such as *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, by Rosalind Wiseman and *The bully, the bullied and the bystander*, by parenting “guru” Barabara Coloroso.

<sup>5</sup> While this text does not expressly define emotional or relational aggression as girl bullying, the characters, images and text imply this.

<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere in the *Girl's World* text, the authors insist that *all* girls will end up in each role in the bullying trichotomy, including the role of the bully. In the logical leap required by these “statistics,” this means that 25% of thirty-year old women will end up with a criminal record!

<sup>7</sup> The statistics come from research by Olweus (1978) and Eron (1987). In *Confessions*, the source cited is the Maine Project Against Bullying. The statistic cited can be found (un-sourced and un-dated) on the main page of the website, as well in the introduction to the Executive Summary. *Girls' World* credits this statistic to a 1996 parenting guide, *Bullies and Victims*, by SuEllen Fried and Paula Fried. This parenting guide cites to a

---

1987 article in the New York Times as a source for these figures, which indirectly cites Eron's 1987 study.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout, mentions of common sense will refer to the Gramscian sense of the phrase, which diverges from the standard English meaning. For Gramsci, common sense refers to the thoughts and beliefs of the people, regardless of whether those thoughts and beliefs constitute "good sense" (Jones & Jones, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Tellingly, these statements appear not on the Halifax Regional School Board's web site home page, nor on the About Us section of the web site, as expected. Rather, they appear in the Board's business plan and budget proposal, which is, in itself, evidence of the currency of commercial and business discourse within educational policy making.

<sup>10</sup> The sector's giants, the McGraw-Hill group and Pearson have market capitalizations of \$13 billion and \$14 billion respectively. For 2010, McGraw Hill's net profit margin was 13.81% and Pearson's was 9.25% (Google finance, 2011).