Deconstructing a Discourse: Broadening Understandings of Teenage Girls'
"Resistance"

Chelsey Tredenick, Master of Arts

Child and Youth Studies

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Faculty of Social Sciences, Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

© October, 2009

Table of Contents	v.
Acknowledgements	<i>(i)</i>
Abstract	(ii)
Chapter One: Boys Don't Cry	1-21
Chapter Two: Girls, Girls	22-38
Chapter Three: One Thing Leads to Another	39-50
Chapter Four: We're Not Going to Take it	51-74
Chapter Five: I Still Haven't Found What I am Looking For	75-81
Figure 1.1	78
Figure 1.2	79
References	82-87

前

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the people that supported me through this process, I appreciate all your continuous encouragement. Shauna Pomerantz, you have guided and supported me in the completion of this thesis. You allowed me to truly place my interests, voice, and passion into this work. Your support as a mentor and a friend is something I cherish and appreciate, Thank you. Hans Skott-Myhre, you allowed me to begin seeing the world in a completely different way. I want to thank you for opening my eyes and supporting my transition from one line of thought to another. Our conversations and your guidance helped structure my epistemological views and this thesis. Kathy Skott-Myhre, thank you for your participation and guidance in this process.

To my family who has supported me and stood by me until this time, Thank you! To my mom, you are an inspiration to me, and your faith in me is amazing, all your support has allowed me to be where I am today. To my step-father, Don, you have been there for me since your marriage to my mom. Thank you for the time you have spent investing in my life, from conversations to reading my thesis each time I needed your opinion.

Finally, to all of the professors I have met on my way. My interaction with each of you has in some way influenced me and in turn, this thesis. Your ability to inspire new thought and questions into the minds of eager students is truly an amazing experience, Thank you!

#### **Abstract**

Popular culture has a strong influence on youth, and the creation of meanings associated with youth. Representations within popular culture, specifically film, branch beyond entertainment and become discourses that construct how we perceive our world. Youth resistance is commonly represented in films geared towards the teenage generation. Yet, the discourse of resistance has positioned females as non-resistors. This thesis addresses representations of teenage girl resistance within popular culture due to the strong influence film has on teenage girls today. This thesis will specifically examine three films directed at North American teenage girls: *Thirteen, Ghost World* and *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*. Through a feminist poststructural lens utilizing discourse analysis, this thesis will examine teenage girl resistance as it is represented in the aforementioned films. This thesis repositions teenage girl resistance as a multi-dimensional concept, allowing for resistance to branch beyond the traditional meaning associated with it.

0

# Chapter 1: Boys Don't Cry...

I'm allowed!! . . . But you still broke my foot!

I chose to research the term "resistance" in the hopes of learning more about how it is utilized in North American society. As I dug into the meaning of the term, I was left with mixed feelings about what it meant to actually be resistant. I had found some quotations, asked people questions in passing, and read what I could about the term to gain a better idea of what our society felt resistance was; but I also had my own personal experiences with resistance to aid in identifying an understanding. As a young girl I felt that I was resistant; I felt that my behaviour commonly reflected the notion that I was trying to act out against things. I wanted to play on the boys' basketball team in grade nine, so I pushed until I was allowed. I wanted to wear a low cut shirt in high school, so I pushed until I was allowed. I wanted to cut my hair short and dye it black, so I pushed until I was allowed. If I were reading this about another young woman, the first thing I would say about such experiences is, "Wow, what an accomplishment! She really stood up for what she believed in; she should be proud of herself." But the funny thing is that as I look back on these situations I am not proud. I am instead overwhelmed with feelings of shame and confusion at my decisions to "defy authority" and be resistant. In short, I feel like I should have resisted my desire to be resistant. Why did I engage in these behaviours? Why do I feel bad about it now? So, the question I pose to myself at the beginning of this thesis on girls' resistance is, "Why am I resistant to my resistance?"

One simple explanation is that each scenario I listed was met with some sort of negative consequence. The boys were extremely rough with me during my basketball games, resulting in a broken foot. The boys gave me degrading attention when I wore a

low cut shirt, resulting in broken pride. The boys disliked my short black hair, resulting in a broken heart. As a young girl each of these circumstances affected me, making me question my behaviour and doubt its powerfulness, and its point. However, as a student in university, I feel that the explanation as to why we feel the way we do about certain things is rooted in society's understandings of concepts and language. Perhaps the construction of the term "resistance" was influencing how others understood my behaviour, and how I had come to understand my own behaviour.

In this thesis I will examine how resistance has been constructed in North American society and how this discourse is taken up within popular culture. In addressing common understandings and beliefs about resistance, I will also identify how and where "resistance" creates boundaries for girls. When I was resisting as a teenage girl, boys received my actions negatively. Each time I behaved in this manner, each time I "resisted," it was deemed inappropriate. But I came to see that the understandings associated with resistance position resistant girls in a negative light. I will utilize this onedimensional understanding of the term resistance to address negative representations of females within popular culture. Although I plan on deconstructing this conceptualization of resistance, it is important to recognize how influential the understandings and beliefs associated with this term are. I feel that resistance is complex, and that a broader understanding of the concept generates a more powerful view of teen girls' resistance. Therefore, I utilize a multidimensional understanding of the term resistance to identify powerful representations of teen girls resisting in popular culture. Given that I had adopted such a skewed view of my own behaviour, I feel it is important to address why this was happening. I have chosen to address representations of teenage girl resistance

within popular culture because of the strong influence popular culture has on teenagers today and the powerful role popular culture has played in the construction of the discourse on resistance.

The Year of the Teenage Girl

Popular culture influences the identity of youth more so than any other outside influence, except perhaps the family unit (Nixon, Atkinson, & Beavis, 2006). Interestingly enough, Males (1999) states that almost nothing that the media says about young people is true. And yet—true or not—the creation of moral panic by the media can definitely influence peoples' perceptions of teenage behaviour, thus playing a role in the creation of meaning (O'Brien and Szeman, 2004). The media plays a large role in both the representation of youth and the assumptions that accompany youths' behaviour. As Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (1995) points out, media is part of the lives of most western teenagers. Teenagers listen to music on average four hours per day; they watch television for an average of two hours per day; and teenagers watch more movies than any other age group within society (Arnett, 1995). In addition, females, more so than males, will look to the media to aid in defining and explaining their world (Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kliewer, and Kilmartin, 2001). Peggy Orenstein (1996), in her New York Times article "The Movies Discover the Teen Age Girl", refers to 1996 as the year of the teen girl. She discusses the vast amount of popular culture, such as movies and music, which is aimed directly at young females. What is especially interesting is that she discusses the concept of the "new type of girl," the girl whose experience does not solely revolve around boys, but branches off into adventures between girlfriends, decision-making, and independence. This trend has only taken off in the 1990s and 2000s. The arrival of the Spice Girls, the

popular term "girl power" as a commodity, and the growing female presence within film has opened up a whole new realm of what it is to be a girl in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Driscoll, 1999).

However, it is important to recognize, as Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) do, that representations of girlhood are not always positive. They note that girls are not given the opportunity to create alternate understandings resulting from "girl power" within films. In turn, there is no opportunity for girls to begin creating change within their own lives. Girl power can be an unrealistic position for many girls, as it commonly ignores girls who are not middle-class, girls who are not heterosexual, and girls who are not white (Taft, 2004). The girl power concept that is presented within popular culture focuses on individual change, lacking any reference to the social or political influences affecting girls' circumstances that were once so crucial to the women's liberation movement and feminism more generally. Representations within popular culture are "muting" young girls and constructing unfair scenarios to be consumed by adults about what it is girls are doing "these days" (Kelly and Pomerantz, 2009; Taft, 2004). The concept of feminism has been lost within popular teen girl films and replaced with girl power. Feminism seems to be a forgotten term within the girl power scene. However, although the idea of girl power as the new form of female resistance is limiting and not ideal, it does provide a means whereby girls can bring gender to the forefront. I feel that girl power is important, as it may be one of the few exposures girls get to feminism within popular culture. Girl power cannot, therefore, be excluded in my examination of representations of girls' resistance within popular culture.

Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) point out that it would be nice to see popular culture

give girls "tools" to begin examining not just their individual circumstances but the larger picture. Although feminism may be "effectively silenced" by cinematic representations of girls, it is very much alive (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009). But popular cultural representations of girls' resistance have limited the understanding our society holds about girls' behaviours. As a result, what is seen within film becomes the "Truth" about what is happening with the everyday girl. As Jessica Taft (2004) points out, representations of girl power within popular culture see feminism as "softer, sexier, [and] less active than feminism" (p. 71). Girl power is seen as the more acceptable way to express resistance than the "outdated" collective political rebellion of second wave feminism. Yet the idea that the girl can "have it all" projected by girl power has failed to address common issues such as "class, race, gender, and sexuality" and naturalized "girl" as heterosexual, middle class and white (Taft, 2004, p 74).

If the concept of girl power continues to negate feminism, girls will begin to accept their positions within society and stop any resistant behaviour that may be contributing to their "equality" (Taft, 2004; Kelly and Pomerantz, 2009). Feminism is a part of everyday girls' lives. Although it may be articulated differently, there is evidence that girls are responding collectively to outside forces influencing their lives and examining their positions within their worlds. Examples of girls participating in skater culture to taking up space in predetermined "boy" places demonstrate that girls are actively responding to social and political oppressions that are affecting them (Pomerantz, Currie, and Kelly, 2004; Skelton, 2000). Therefore, I am calling girls' everyday resistance to these dominant discourses a form of feminism. When we are discussing resistance within teenage girls' lives, feminism and resistance cannot be

ø

separated.

I feel that examining both negative and powerful representations of resistance in relation to teen girls will demonstrate the complexity of the concept "resistance." Popular culture plays a crucial role in the lives of young females but girl power may limit the way resistance is understood. Therefore, by examining resistance among teenage girls without considering the larger role feminism plays within resistance continues to limit our understandings of the term. In Chapter Two, in the section *I Am Girl Hear Me Roar!!*, I will further discuss the origins of girl power and where it stands today. There are many negative connotations attached to the behaviours that young girls exhibit, influencing the representation of resistance within popular culture. Therefore I feel it is important to examine resistant behaviour through both lenses; the powerful and the negative representations. In so doing, my goal is to break down the traditional understanding of resistance in order to allow for a broader range of comprehension about what this concept can mean to and for young females.

Resistance: It is what I convince you it is!

As I looked around, searching for an understanding of resistance, I was drawn back to what I had been taught growing up concerning language: If you need to understand a word look it up in the dictionary. The term resistance is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as, "The act or instance of resisting, to stand firm, to oppose, refuse to accept or comply, the act or power of resisting, opposing, or withstanding." Resistance is understood through this common concept—that of opposition, being against something, and one thing "resisting" another. This understanding of resistance is relatively one-dimensional and static. There is little room for varying views on what

à

resistance is and what it can mean, limiting it to only the action *against* something. In addition, much of the language used to define what resistance is can be seen as negative, such as the words "opposing," "refusal," and "withstanding". These words generate the idea of an aggressive, intended act or behaviour that is not positive. Investigating where these common assumptions about the meaning of resistance come from, and why there is a negative connotation attached to the term, will allow me to demonstrate how the beliefs associated with the concept can influence the understandings people have of resistance.

Modernist definitions of resistance revolve around power and subjectivity, where the dominant group holds power, and the subordinate group may, in turn, attempt to resist and seize power. Within Marxist theory, the binary of oppressor/oppressed is a crucial ingredient to resistant behaviour (Raby, 2005). Karl Marx (1973) describes the construction of society and class stratification based on the production of economic goods. Therefore, the production of economic goods determines the differences in people's wealth, power and social class. Marx felt that class position strongly influenced behaviour, and the class an individual was born into would regulate their interests and actions. The views or interests held by an individual in relation to his/her class could either reproduce or undermine the authority of the dominant class (Rummel, 1977). According to Marx, there is a strong connection between class position and resistance. Individuals who were not members of the dominant class could resist the ruling class, working towards seizing power. Power is thus understood in a hierarchical fashion, where those at the top hold the most power, and as it streams down through society, those individuals at the bottom, the Proletariat, have no power. Resistance is a direct result of power relations, acted out when people without power try to take power from those who

are in power.

In explaining the basis of the state, Marx (1973) states:

As long as the oppressed class . . . is not ripe for its self-liberation, so long will it, in its majority, recognize the existing order of society as the only possible one. . . citizens are graded on a property basis, whereby it is directly admitted that the state is an organization for the protection of the possessing class against the non possessing class. (p. 20-21)

Resistance is thus the result of subjugation. It is a direct result of the desire to attain power from those individuals who hold the power. Marx believed that because individuals in the dominant class owned the means of production, they utilized institutions within society, such as schools, churches, and government to uphold their power positions (Marx, 1976). Through these institutions they constructed beliefs within society that supported their positions of power and dominance, and reinforced class stratification.

These constructed beliefs that convince individuals that their "lower class" positions are "good" for them are ideologies (Hebdige, 1979). In relation to the power struggle, Marx believed that the Proletariat could counter the dominant ideologies of the ruling class, and formulate counter ideologies, which he deemed "revolutionary" (Marx, 1993). This understanding of resistance and revolution reflects modernist ideas of what the concept "resistance" means. There is a tendency within modernist thinking to identify resistance as arising from a sense of Humanism (inherent rage at subjugation) or through reaction to experience (position of class) (Raby, 2005).

As I had previously pointed out, traditional understandings of resistance revolve

around the act of being against something, to oppose, a refusal to comply whereby individual's behaviour is reflected in the conscious striving to resist and reclaim power. The notion of power discussed above greatly influenced peoples understandings of why individuals resist. Resistance is the result of certain circumstances: the binary between the oppressed and the oppressor, and the drive to claim power from those in power. This understanding of resistance limits the comprehension of the concept, as it is limited to subordinate classes in a hierarchal power structure as described by Marx. This one-dimensional view of resistance has influenced research on youth, particularly in the earlier studies within the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Resistance was commonly understood as the behaviour of people in subordinate classes resisting the middle-class norms of dominant society.

The study of resistance has been the primary focus within subcultural studies (Haenfler, 2004). Many common academic understandings of resistance derive from the CCCS definition of youth resistance. This definition focuses on youth's symbolic resistance to hegemony and dominant societal norms. Hegemony is the naturalizing of beliefs and behaviours by a dominant class onto a subordinate class (Hebdige, 1979). Antonio Gramsci elaborated on Marx's theories of ideology by explaining that capitalism controlled the population beyond the means of economic advantage. People who held dominant positions convinced others that their own values and beliefs were the most beneficial for all, and became naturalized as common sense (Althusser, 1971). As hegemony succeeds, representation and meaning of concepts reflect the needs and desires of the dominant class. In turn, as these needs and desires become a "natural" part of society, people conform to and behave according to these prescribed norms. Youth

involvement within subculture was a means of escaping conformity and resisting against the oppression of dominant societal norms (Hebdige, 1979).

For Boys, Done by Boys!

Language signifies discourses that carry unspoken assumptions. These assumptions can be more readily understood as common sense beliefs that reflect, influence, and permeate understandings in our society (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). The discourse of resistance has guided our understanding of the concept. In addition to the understanding that resistance is an act against "things," and that it is generated by traditional notions of hierarchical power, the discourse of resistance has also constructed resistance as a male behaviour. Traditional understandings and studies of resistance have focused on male behaviour, excluding girls and women as active resistors. Within classic research on resistance, females were seen as sexual objects that accompanied males (McRobbie, 1991). Females were not seen as participants in resistant behaviour within subculture. Young males participate in subculture as a means of resisting prescribed behaviours that were felt as oppressive (Hall, 1975; Hebdige, 1979). Within these subcultures, young males were attempting to resist the "powers" from above, or those who were placed at the top of the chain of power.

Resistance was commonly portrayed and understood as a male behaviour, as there was little to no discussion about girls within early subcultural studies. Gender relations were portrayed through a chauvinistic, patriarchal lens, where male behaviour towards females was aggressive and macho (McRobbie, 1991). Resistance was for boys, done by boys, and was commonly viewed as behaviour "against something," more often than not against hegemonic domination. In turn this created a discourse surrounding what

resistance was; the concept accompanied truths or beliefs about who could be resistant (in this case males). In Chapter two, I will give address the lack of research done on females within subcultural studies in relation to resistance in the section, *Where Are The Girls?*Within that section, I will give an overview of the missing research on girls within the popular writings of such authors as Hall (1975) and Hebdige (1979), among others.

As I am addressing the powerful and negative representations of girls' resistance in popular culture, it is crucial to adopt feminist theory in my analysis. Investigating where feminism now lies in relation to understandings of girlhood will help me exemplify how the discourse of resistance has created negative and powerful representations of resistance within popular culture. As I touched on earlier, within popular culture, girl power has become the new face of teenage girl resistance, and feminism seems to have been lost. However, the social action of feminism cannot be separated from resistance. Although feminism shifts from generation to generation, it is still present in the lives of girls, particularly in their resistant behaviour. Understanding the development of feminism as it moved from second to third wave, and the influence of girl power on feminism, will allow us to understand how important feminism is in relation to resistance.

## Readopting the F-word

Where does the concept of feminism lie within girls' understandings of their position within society? Primarily, I feel that the second wave feminist movement that greatly influenced the rights and benefits that I was born into was a taken-for-granted assumption on my behalf. As Baumgardner and Richards (2000) state, "For anyone born after the early 1960s, the presence of feminism in our lives is taken for granted. For our

ø

generation feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it—it's simply in the water" (p. 17). I did not commonly question what I believed was "traditional" women's rights. It did not even cross my mind that I may have perhaps not had these rights twenty, even ten years prior to my teen years. The concept of "women's rights" was already present for me: it was there when I played sports or excelled in mathematics or science. As I look back now, I realize that these engagements were resistant behaviours on my part as a female. However, at the time, what I thought was resistant was my stereotypically male behaviour, such as initiating the first dance with a boy or asking a boy out on a date. My resistant behaviour was viewed as not only resistant but as negative, and unfeminine. Why has the term "feminism" been lost in relation to girls' resistance? Have the negative connotations associated with both resistance and feminism influenced how girls understand their behaviours? How I understood my behaviour? And has girls' studies now come to represent resistance as powerful?

Traditionally, the term "resistance" has been equated with males. British cultural studies theorists famous for their examination of subcultures and resistance excluded gender from their analysis. The resistance through style in such subcultures as mods, teds, punks, and skinheads was portrayed to be male dominated, and females were given little space. The concept of youth in post-war Britain was equated both with males and as a metaphor for social change (Hall, 1975). Even if females had been resisting at this time, the spaces and places where they were resisting were not the focus of study. Thus, girls' studies originated from the lack of regard for issues of gender within youth studies (Harris, 2004). Female researchers began addressing the gaps within the study of youth. Michelle Fine examines spaces and places that girls used to be self-expressive and

autonomous. In addition, female psychologists such as Gilligan, Brown, and McEwen-Taylor, addressed the concept that traditional developmental psychology missed the fact that girls lose their resistant voices when they begin to mould to the dominant femininities set forth for them by society (Harris, 2004). These are only a few examples of some of the female researchers who have begun to take notice of what girls are doing and where girls were resisting within North American society. Girls' studies has taken on a whole world of its own, and research into girls' resistant behaviour has grown and continues to grow today. Male youth, the traditional metaphor for social change and resistance, is being replaced by a new model of girlhood. As McRobbie (2004) points out, young women have filled the space as the metaphor for social change; they are now the resistant ones.

Traditionally young women were positioned unequally to men. Girls were supposed to be heterosexual, chaste, submissive, attentive to their looks, family oriented, professionally unambitious, and compliant. If reaching adulthood encompassed the beginnings of autonomy and self-determination, it was clear that this did not apply to females. Historically, female maturity consisted of dependence and identity with others; there was to be no independence or self-focus (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). In the 1970s, feminist research began focusing on the ways in which young girls were being prepped for subordinate roles as they matured (Currie, Kelly, Pomerantz, 2009). As young women moved into adulthood it was common to address them with terminology that equated their lack of status within society, such as "girl." Second wave feminism's strong insistence on examining language demonstrated the demeaning ways words were used to continue to subdue girls and women (Aapola, et al., 2005). Second wave

feminists fought for equality between males and females. Male roles within society were glorified (Harris, 2004) and women's engagement with these roles as equals was a positive step for females. This wave of feminism made many great advancements; however it also "inadvertently muted girls" (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004, p.65).

Second wave feminism did not address femininity. The preoccupation with equality surfaced as a preoccupation to be just like men, where female things continued to be devalued. "The ascent of the 'girl' as a strong and distinct feminist identity is probably one of the best examples of what differentiates third wave feminists from second wave feminists" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004, p. 63). Third wave feminism encompasses a range of expressions about femininity (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004) and what it means to be a girl. Third wave feminism has commonly taken a stance against second wave, whereby girls from this generation have a means to enter into feminism, articulating their understandings of what feminism is in generational terms (Roger, 2000). The collective, unified goals of sisterhood that were so strong in second wave feminism have been replaced with individual understandings and definitions of feminism.

Individual understandings and personal writings about what it means to be a feminist are a way for young women to reclaim the "F-word" (Roger, 2000, p. 84).

The concept "to be a feminist" had taken on a restrictive and negative connotation, whereby young women felt confined to the traditional "right way" of being feminist. The new redefining of feminism has been critiqued by some to be apolitical, and defined so loosely it has become almost meaningless. If third wave feminism is a "feminist free-for-all" as described by authors such as Dicker and Piepmeier (2003), one would believe that there are no political, unifying goals or causes that aimed to put a stop

弱

to racism, classicism, and sexism. However, I think it is important to recognize that this new form of feminism, as Roger (2000) points out, does not necessarily negate political issues but falls in line with the individualistic ways of society. If we plan on renegotiating the importance of femininity within society, all the while still having equality between men and women, we must re-examine what feminism is thought to be, and not limit what it is or what it can do. The lack of political unity within third wave feminism does not mean that female resistance is no longer alive. The lack of sisterhood does not mean that the resistant behaviours of females have stopped, but is instead a demonstration of the additional types of resistance young females are expressing in their involvement in our society. This concept is key if we plan on renegotiating the concept of resistance. If females are choosing to express feminism in new ways, it follows that comprehending their modes of resistance in a new light, independent of traditional concepts of power relations and male focus, will be beneficial in formulating new ideas about what being resistant means.

What has changed for teenage girls now is that the "traditional" form of "resistance," or the fight to engage in traditional male roles, is now accompanied by the "new resistance," or the fight to continue to engage in traditional male roles while also emphasizing femininity. Third wave feminism has brought about a new type of resistance, one that would not have surfaced without second wave feminism.

As girls are striving for more power and receiving respect in their peer groups for expressions of resistance, others are still condemning them. Primarily, the girls looking for power are stunted by authority figures where ideologies of subordination are still strong. Girls are labelled by authority figures as "real bitches," "bad influences," and

ø

"little cows" (Aapola, et al., 2005, p. 38). Their resistance to traditional gender stereotypes is viewed as negative, not empowering, and this view influences the perception about what girl power means. Aapola, et al. (2005) discuss the idea that girl power is encountering a "backlash." Girls are being repositioned between binaries of what it is to be a good girl and a bad girl. Girl power is becoming viewed as socially problematic. By comprehending how third wave feminism is received within society, we are able to identify the ongoing negative connotations associated with girl power and resistance. And by understanding the discourse of resistance and how it affects perceptions of girls' behaviours, a multidimensional understanding of what it means to be a resistant girl becomes possible.

Removing the Rose Coloured Discourse

Henry Giroux (cited in Raby, 2005) states that, "it is important to recognize that... not all oppositional behaviour is a clear cut response to dominance" (p.157). More recent understandings of language and discourse generate a fluid and multidimensional approach to the concept of resistance. Postmodernism deconstructs theories supported by modernist thought (Burke, 2000). Postmodern thought argues against the "Truth" of things; it examines the creation of bodies of knowledge, whereby understandings that are commonly accepted as true are seen as constructions or discourses that shape our understanding of the world (Bertens, 1995). Postmodernity challenges the humanist phenomenon through which man's use of proper reason could produce "truth and knowledge." Postmodernity re-examines the formations of truth, and challenges the bodies of knowledge that govern thought and behaviour, such as the truths surrounding gendered behaviour (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 478).

There is an understanding within postmodernity that truth and knowledge are created through discourse. Scott (cited in St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485) states that, "discourse is not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs". Discourse situates our understandings within a set of truths and beliefs, whereby thinking outside of those beliefs feels unnatural. The discourse of resistance situates the concept as a behaviour that requires the binary between domination and subjugation, and that it is a behaviour commonly demonstrated by males. These "truths" structure the way we comprehend resistance, particularly in relation to girls. By identifying the body of knowledge that surrounds resistance, I will critique the discourse and challenge its exclusion of teenage girls.

The goal of poststructuralism, a philosophical and literary movement rooted in postmodern thinking, is to examine language and comprehend the discourses that surround the way we understand words, meanings, and behaviour (St. Pierre, 2000). Weedon (1987) discusses the importance of recognizing that discourses created through language are more than merely ways of comprehending; they influence our conscious and unconscious thought; they penetrate our abilities to think through power relations. As a "discourse becomes 'normal' and 'natural' it is difficult to think and act outside it" (St. Pierre, 2000, p.485). As the beliefs associated with the discourse become taken for granted, we cease to question them.

Yet, discourses can be penetrated. Although discourse constructs realities that influence and manage our thoughts, behaviours, and actions, Foucault's theories on discourse demonstrate that resistance to discourses of domination can occur (St. Pierre, 2000). The discourse of resistance has perpetuated certain taken-for-granted assumptions

살

about what it means to resist and who it is that commonly resists. As I have previously discussed, resistance is traditionally defined as being the product of a binary between oppressors and oppressed. This assumption about resistance allows us to believe that these circumstances must be present for an individual to resist. Resistance is also constructed as a male behaviour, therefore it seems that females should not be engaging in forms of resistant behaviour (Hebdige, 1979; Hall, 1975). Males who were engaging in the punk movement were slam dancing and beating up the preppy boys (Hall, 1975). Both of these behaviours were forms of resistance against dominant societal norms, and both of these behaviours were actions that females did not and should not engage in. Females were supposed to be proper, chaste, gentle, and dependent; therefore it would make sense to preclude females from investigations of resistance. These "truths" structure the discourse of resistance. Once this body of knowledge that constructs the concept resistance is identified and the truths verbalized, we are able to begin rejecting them (St. Pierre, 2000).

As I begin to identify how resistance is constructed, I must acknowledge what influences the discourse of resistance. As I have previously pointed out, resistance has been portrayed as an act "of negation that nullifies or counteracts an infringement of rights" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 489). Individuals who are subjugated are fighting against those who have power in order to regain some power back. As St. Pierre notes, these concepts of power and resistance have allowed individuals in subordinate positions, such as women, to fight against those individuals privileged within society to reclaim power. This discourse on resistance has allowed many people who are in oppressed situations to take a stand against the modernist notions of power and begin advocating for their rights.

This type of interpretation and the behaviour it produced has been very beneficial for women, especially during the second wave feminist movement. However, this notion of power reiterates specifically the discourse of resistance, it allows for the concepts of "what" resistance is to be produced as a behaviour defined by fighting against power for power.

Poststructural understandings of resistance are grounded in Foucault's theories of power, whereby the binary of oppressed/oppressor limits the possibility of resistance to specific class and gender positions. Power is not something that an individual possesses; it is never in any one individual's hand. It circulates and functions as a web. Individuals are always undergoing and exercising power through a "net like organization" (Foucault, 1980). Power is continuously being interchanged as individuals interact within society, others, and themselves. It is never in the possession of one individual but is circulating from person to person. Power does not function as a hierarchical structure whereby those at the top possess power and those at the bottom would like it, but is interwoven between all relations. Power is commonly observed at its points of terminus (Skott-Myhre, 2008), such as the power of the institution, or more specifically the power one individual exerts over another. However, as Foucault (1978) notes, individuals are not points of application for power, they are the vehicles of power, as each interaction initiates an interchange of power through relations. Power derives from innumerable points, and exists in all forms of human behaviour.

By using Foucault's concept of power, I can demonstrate the complexity of resistance. Resistance is not an action solely signaled by attempts to reclaim power; resistance is "present everywhere in the power network" (Foucault, 1978, p. 95) and has a

multiplicity of points. By understanding Foucault's notions of power relations I am able to break down some of the traditional notions about what it means to resist and who can be resistant. If resistance is done only by the truly oppressed, this conceptualization limits who we feel can be resistant. Within second wave feminism, the concept of power and resistance to patriarchy was a crucial component in women's ability to stand up and demand rights. Foucault (1978) describes the necessity of resistance: if there was "no possibility for resistance there would be no power relations at all" (p. 292). The primary concept that will be utilized in my analysis of teen girls' resistance within popular culture is that power is everywhere, thus resistance is everywhere. The complexities of female subjugation, and the varying levels of female oppression are trivialized when we categorize resistance as a behaviour only resulting from a powerless woman against a dominant man. The concept of power and resistance will be interwoven throughout the remainder of this thesis, as power and resistance go hand in hand and cannot be separated (Skott-Myhre, 2008).

#### Where We Are Headed

Based on the ideas that power exist everywhere, that feminism has taken on new meaning, and that the traditional conceptualization of resistance is static and one-dimensional, opens up the pathway allowing for a different understanding of resistance. Incorporating feminist theories with poststructuralist thought, specifically the examination of discourse and power, will encompass my theoretical framework. Feminist poststructuralism focuses on theories of language that inhabit, deconstruct, and examine existing discourses of gender. Using these theories, feminist poststructuralism is able to help me explain the influence of power on specific discourses, and resistance to these

discourses (Weedon, 1989). As I examine resistance through a feminist poststructural lens, I am able to identify that much of the literature on resistance is historically and socially specific, that girls' mediation of their bodies and behaviours is commonly dominated under discourses that negatively position young girls (Dicks et al., 1994).

Throughout Chapter Two, I will address how girls have been excluded from traditional research on resistance, address how the girl power phenomenon came about, and investigate powerful representations of girl resistance.

ô

# Chapter 2: Girls, Girls, Girls...

Where Are The Girls?

Within the common discussions surrounding subculture and resistance there are gaps relating specifically to gender and the inclusion of females within subcultural groups. Studies of subculture derived from such authors as Hebdige, and Hall, who are some of the most influential names within Cultural Studies. The Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, CCCS, initiated the discipline "Cultural Studies" in the 1960s, where the founding fathers, such as Hoggart and Williams, felt it necessary to examine the cultures of everyday people versus that of the elite class. There was a focus on different aspects of class, specifically in relation to resistance, and a focus on struggle for cultural domination (O'Brien & Szerman, 2004).

In post war Britain, "youth" were equated with social change as a metaphor for what was happening within that period. The concept of youth culture "was signified as a social problem by the moral guardians of the society, something we ought to do something about" (Hall, 1975, p. 3). The behaviours of youth within subcultures were alien to dominant culture, and youth were described in the tabloids as freaks, animals, and unnatural (Hebdige, 1979). Subcultures were said to be going against the naturalness of society, making the behaviours of subcultures "deviant" (Hebdige, 1979). Common assumptions about young peoples' resistant behaviour, such as mods, punks, and rockers, were regarded as resistance to the dominant class (Hebdige, 1979; Raby, 2005).

Hall (1975) describes the concepts of ideology through "maps of meaning" where meaning is traced and re-traced along lines that were placed by the dominant discourses about what society is or should be perceived to be. The discourse of resistance constructs

ideas and beliefs about who and why people engage in the behaviour of resistance. As the dominant class continually reinforces these beliefs, the understandings constructed about resistance become naturalized, and the meaning of resistance is fixed as common sense.

As a result, language practices, codes of conduct, and laws reflect the needs and interests of the dominant class.

Resistance goes against ideology. It moves against the grain, against the naturalness of the ideologies of society. The act of resistance is thus thought to be deviant, moving to a "false nature, [a] violation of the social order" (Hebdige 1979, p.19). Youth engaging in subcultures, resisting through behaviour, style, and music, posed a threat to the rest of society. The resistance to ideology within subculture manifested itself in many forms. Hebdige (1979) describes the challenge through style, where resistance was shown at the level of appearance: "humble objects can be appropriated by subordinate groups and made to carry secret meaning which express a formal resistance to the order which guarantees their continual subordination" (p. 18). Objects worn by youth involved in subculture took on new meanings that were specifically *not* those created by the dominant class. The reappropriation of common objects went against the "commonsense" understandings of what those objects were, thus moving against the desires and goals of dominant society. The act of reappropriation continued to shape the discourse of resistance as negative.

In addition to the negative view society had of resistance based on male subcultural displays of style, "resistance" as a topic of study was focused on young men. There has been much research on male youth in relation to class culture, subculture, school, work, community, and law, with a lack of research in relation to the female

gender (McRobbie, 1991). Although there was a focus on "youth" in subcultural studies, traditional subcultural researchers were unable to disconnect *youth* from *male*; male simply stood for youth and vice versa (McRobbie, 1991). The research done by Hall, Hebdige, Willis, and others, exemplifies these "commonsense" beliefs about the invisibility of young women in subcultural research.

There was a failure to recognize the small bits of female influence that did permeate the research on male subculture. McRobbie (1991) makes it a point to address Willis' lack of recognition concerning the sexual power, domination and degrading language used to describe women in his book *Learning to Labour* (1977). There is no exploration of the boys' relationships to the opposite gender, not as girlfriends, or as mothers. This again reflects the "norm," where boys are placed as most important, and relationships with girls are not important enough to be addressed or have significance in the research. Investigations into the behaviours and activities of subcultures focused on males and their place within these groups.

Stuart Hall's research into subcultural activities in post-war Britain is one of the most influential and highly referenced works in relation to subculture. Yet, it does not address the issues of gender within its work. *Resistance Through Rituals* (RTR) (1975), a compilation of works by authors in the field of youth subcultures, discusses the issues of power, class, culture and resistant behaviour. Hall (1975) examines what sparked the formation or developments of youth subcultures. He discusses the relationships between youth subcultures and the work, leisure, and class of those individuals participating in them. Hall (1975) describes youth engagement in subculture as a strategy for finding a place due to the barriers put up by middle-class society and parent culture. Working-class

Ó

subcultures were a focus for Hall, as he examined how they negotiated their work, class, and leisure activities in post war Britain during a time where many saw youth was a metaphor for social change. Hall found that working class youth, primarily boys, utilized subculture as a means to negotiate their collective existence. Engagement in these subcultures for young men became a way for them to "live through" the problematic of belonging to a subordinate class. Young males in subcultures attributed certain spaces, behaviours, and styles to a group, involving ritualized actions in order to create a subculture. Intangible objects, such as slang and common music interests, along with areas or spaces for leisure time were an important factor in the cohesion of the subculture. Hall (1975) writes about youth subculture as being outside the conformities of social institutions, such as family, work, home and school.

Although Hall (1975) had much meaningful information to contribute around subculture, his research did focus on males, excluding females from the subcultural scene. Hall himself recognizes what he calls his "gender blindness" (Hall 1975, p. xvi) in his work in *RTR*. Focusing solely on boys and the spaces that boys took up for subcultural activities led Hall to miss the theoretical importance of the hidden, private, and disregarded spaces girls may have inhabited, and the aspect of gender that females would have attributed to the research.

Stuart Hall was not the only author who lacked recognition of girls in subculture. Dick Hebdige (1979) is very popular for his writing on style within Cultural Studies. Hebdige notes that resistance to the dominant class is expressed at the superficial level of appearance. Appropriation of objects was used to infuse objects with new meaning. For example, white-collar clothing was worn as casual dress, and these were ways to fight the

i i

contradictions that working-class youth felt about their placement in society. Hebdige examined teddy boys', mods', rastas', and punks' usage of everyday objects as social exercises to gain control of their subordinate positions within society. While the examination of style and its influence on subcultures is useful, there is no specific examination of girls' involvement. The recurring involvement of the opposite gender within the examinations of different subcultures always seems to lead back to women and violence. For example, the teddy boys' chauvinistic and violent behaviour seems to be the recurring stance for female involvement in most of the accounts of girl recognition (Hebdige, 1979). As McRobbie (1991) states in relation to Hebdige's work, "our portrayal of girls' culture will remain one sided and youth culture will continue to 'mean' in uncritically masculine terms" (p. 18).

Subcultural research has generated many invaluable pieces of work that help in understanding and addressing youth resistance. However, the lack of research which addresses female involvement in subculture or resistance has constructed the belief that resistance is a male behaviour. Female resistance was viewed as unimportant and not influential. Resistance was equated with male youth. Therefore, as we examine traditional research on subculture and resistance it is clear how the beliefs around resistance have been constructed. CCCS research supports the discourse of resistance whereby it is seen as a predominately male behaviour. However, this understanding has been challenged by female academics, specifically in the last twenty years, who recognize the missing pieces in relation to female participation.

#### Backed Into a Corner!

McRobbie (1975) discusses the lack of information written about girls and subculture in her popular book Feminism and youth culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen. Girls seem to be "invisible" in the classic discussions of subculture by such authors as Hebdige and Hall. Girls are only acknowledged in terms of sexual attractiveness, with no comment on the girls' understandings, perceptions, or feelings about their "role" within the subcultural world. There are many different ideas concerning why females are not included in the research about subculture. Are girls not present within subculture? Are the relationships between a male researcher and his male respondents too "natural" to include girls? Does the behaviour put forth by males in relation to their female counterparts become too much of a joke to be taken seriously? Willis (cited in McRobbie, 1991) states: "What seemed to unite [unattached girls to motor-bike boys] was a common desire for an attachment to a male and a common inability to attract a man to a long term relationship. They tended to be scruffier and less attractive than the attached girls" (p. 1). Willis addresses females in superficial terms, and only locates them in relation to attachment to boys. He describe girls' responses to his questions as: "unforthcoming, unwilling to talk, and they retreat, in giggles, into the background." When the girls "retreat" into the background, does this mean girls are not influential within youth subculture? And does it mean they are only sexual beings within these subcultures? Females will not experience subculture in the exact way that males do, however diminishing their involvement to sexual attachments to males is an overgeneralization of where girls lie within youth subculture. The lack of information about young girls creates an invisibleness of where girls are; it appeared they were not

ø

present within subculture.

McRobbie and Garber (2000) point out that within images of the teddy boy, girls are involved and can be seen dancing with teddy boys. This is not the only subculture where girls are seen hanging around males; others include punks, skinheads, and especially mods. Therefore females were present within subculture; however, they were not addressed. So the questions might be asked: Do we re-investigate females' subculture? Do we leave the classic research of "male" subculture? What is the next step in including females in the research? McRobbie (1980) states that re-examining the classics of subculture critically, looking at questions about girls, is crucial to feminism in relation to subculture.

Girls' experiences of cultural practices are continuously viewed as negative, such as the examination of teenagers who hang around the malls, or girls hanging around the disco (McRobbie, 1991; Pomerantz, 2008). Girls who were "hanging" around were viewed as unfeminine or promiscuous. It was perceived that girls were going to get themselves into trouble if they were hanging out at places other than the "safe" spaces of the home or the school. Girls' participation in forms of resistance such as appropriating space or engaging in particular style was regarded as unimportant.

Style was viewed in two different ways according to gender. The second wave of teddy boys was viewed as a continuously influential style within Britain (Hebdige, 1979), while female style was viewed as conformity. Female style echoed the stars, or echoed boys' style in subculture; it was not viewed as "resistant" in its own right. Girls were looked upon as "media sheep," not as leaders.

The concept that female style was viewed as having no impact on situations,

õ

society, and identification, placed female style in a negative light and as non-resistant (Pomerantz, 2008). Aspects of girlhood are equated with fashion and consumerism, and females' engagement in consumerism was originally thought to be a "clueless" act where consuming fashion was part of the "naturalness" of being feminine (Driscoll, 1999). The ideological undertones that influenced young females to consume were propagated through magazines, media, and the "commonsense" belief that young females' consumption of style was a means of "pleasure" and nothing more (Pomerantz, 2008). There was no consideration that females' engagement in style was just as meaningful as boys' engagement in style as a form of resistance. Shopping was something women "did," not something that they were conscious about. The discourse of femininity stripped girls of the opportunity to be recognized as active participatants in forms of resistance.

Marketers acknowledged the "potential" of teenage girls' consumerism and fed the idea that girls and fashion went hand in hand in constructing girls' sense of "who they actually are," making fashion a reflection of identity (Schrum, 2004). Specific sections of stores and advertisements were specifically focused on different age groups of the female population. As teenage girl consumerism took off, the term "teen" or "teenager" became equated solely with girls (Schrum, 2004).

Girlhood was represented as consumerist teens who hung around malls buying clothes to help formulate an identity, where male subcultures, such as teddys, mods, and punks, were seen to utilize clothing to display forms of resistance within working-class culture. Females were understood as consumers of fashion set forth by the market, where conformity to what was placed in magazines and media drove their "clueless" decisions about what they should be wearing. The hangout spot of teenage girls was the mall,

ø

which was thought to replicate the male subculture hang out of the streets (Lewis, 1989). The consumption of clothing was a means of attracting boys. Understanding why a girl purchased a new top, or skirt boiled down to wanting to better oneself to attract boys.

Females are present in subcultures only when sex is discussed. Male subculture, such as the second wave teddy boy movement, saw behaviour within this subculture as the epitome of the masculine model of behaviour, where sexism, chauvinism, and violence against women was apparent (Hebdige, 1979). The girls were only discussed as a reflection of male behaviour, where they were regarded as a commodity that could be owned and used by males (Carter, 1984).

Female identity revolved around the concept that to be "good" women, "good" housewives, and "good" mothers was reflected in their abilities and desires to consume (Freidan, 1963). The concept that female consumption makes girls "better," in a society that places importance on stereotypical ideas about being feminine, continues to subjugate women as a reflection of the male-driven concepts of what women should be. The identities of women are perceived as structured around these concepts or ideologies of capitalism that in turn reflect identities built on conformity and stereotypical female behaviour. However, within male subculture, the behaviour of punks, mods and teddys, for example, reflected resistance to capitalism and class, where their behaviour reflected identities outside the ideologies of society (Hebdige, 1979). Boys' involvement in unconventional forms of style was viewed as young men fighting for spaces as working-class men, while style that stands outside of conventional femininity is viewed as a sign of psychological distress or a reflection of girls' problems (Pomerantz, 2008). There was no recognition of what style, and the engagement in style, may mean for teenage girls

ò

outside the "naturalness" or "clueless" consumption of style by girls. Females were not allowed to be part of subculture, not allowed to be resistant, and their self-expression was regarded as a reaction to the desire to be feminine.

There were large gaps and misconceptions in the literature on teenage girls' involvement in subculture and more specifically in resistant behaviour. From examining the research of Hall, Hebdige and Willis, we come to conclude that there is no female involvement in subculture. Traditional notions of space that females occupied restricted them to malls, where expression through style was meaningless and not considered significant, unlike boys' engagement in style. In response to these assumptions, girls' studies, a discipline geared towards addressing girls' experiences from a feminist perspective, resulted (Harris, 2004).

#### I Am Girl Hear Me Roar!

Where are the female resistors? Are they powerful? Are they positive? Are they even present? Third wave feminists in the field of girls' studies have been working to change how "the girl" and girlhood have been constructed. The word "girl" is an important concept being used to help achieve political objectives that will help break down the ideological understandings that define "girl" as one specific thing (Harris, 2004).

Third wave feminism has strong groundings beyond what has been articulated in the academic realm where everyday young women engaged in the movement, that of the Riot Grrrl.

In the 1990s we see the beginnings of the power of the "girl". Young women unhappy and angry with their circumstances, unable to truly adopt what was perceived to

ō

be traditional feminist thought, began articulating their annoyance. The terminology of "girl" that was seen in the second wave feminism as a lack of status was reclaimed, and "girl" was used as a form of resistance against adult patriarchy, and adult standards. Riot Grrrl allowed the term "girl" to have a positive twist, where expression of fashion, attitude, and language was a way to show that girls are resisting the devaluing of femininity and still engaging in the "birth right" roles allowed to them by the previous movement (Aapola, et al., 2005). The girl power movement brought about by Riot Grrrl offers a powerful position for young women, where they can reject traditional views of femininity, and instead have self-determination and inner strength (Aapola, et al., 2005). Riot Grrrls' wanted women to see themselves as more than just traditional, "clueless" consumers or objects of male sexual attention.

The Riot Grrrl movement was a response to the sexism, violence, and chauvinism within punk culture, where girls were not allowed to participate. The Riot Grrrl movement utilized clothing, music, and language to address feminist issues. Girl day, August 1991, marks the beginning of the Riot Grrrl movement, and sparked National Conventions that focused on issues that females were facing, such as violence, self esteem and racism. The Riot Grrrl movement, or "grrrlpower", as it became known, spread throughout North America as women began uniting their political agendas through media (Aapola, et al., 2005). The Riot Grrrl movement inspired young females both in the punk scene and within mainstream society to "express resistance against restrictive expectations of girlhood, feminism, and traditional gender roles" (Schilt & Zobl, 2008, p. 171). In addition to conventions, meetings, and workshops, Riot Grrrls used zines, or Internet magazines, to express opinions about a number of issues relating to females in

order to spread grrrlpower to girls.

The Riot Grrrl movement was an opportunity for girls to begin engaging in resistance in a collective way. Riot Grrrl was founded on third wave feminist ideals, and was a subcultural movement (Fritzsche, 2004). Girls were able to express resistance to circumstances in their lives that restricted them. The Riot Grrrl movement is a powerful demonstration of resistance, and counters the discourse of resistance that positions it as both negative and male dominated. Females were participating actively in resistance and could not be "muted" or ignored. The Riot Grrrl movement held a social and political agenda that resonated to feminism (Aapola, et al., 2005). Girls were expressing their desires, goals and femininity in a positive way, through forms of resistance.

The Riot Grrrl movement was non-hierarchical in nature and allowed members to actively organize their local chapters (Harris, 2008). The Riot Grrrl movement renegotiated the discourse of resistance in two significant ways. Primarily, it demonstrated the ability for females to engage in resistance and it broke down the barriers of resistance as a male dominated behaviour. In addition, it worked outside of the traditional concepts of power. The discourse of resistance places emphasis on power relations, and dominant power as a key component to resistant behaviour. However, the Riot Grrrl movement functioned outside of the hierarchical power structure, whereby girls were engaging in an environment without organized power positions. The Riot Grrrl movement afforded many young females the opportunity to begin engaging in resistant forms of behaviour that empowered them to change traditional expectations of not only feminine discourse, but also the discourse of resistance.

In the wake of the Riot Grrrl movement came many new female focused groups,

ä

one very popular one being the Spice Girls. With the arrival of the Spice Girls, the girl power phenomenon became a commodity, something that could be sold to teenage girls as a product. There is much mixed emotion among researchers and writers concerning the mainstream "girl power" phenomenon (Fritzsche, 2004). While some feel that the popularity of girl power within popular culture has brought a new venue of knowledge that positions females in a powerful way, others feel that the commodification of girl power has killed feminism and misses the true concept of what girl power means (Aapola, et al., 2005). However, there must be a balance between the "positive" and "negative" implications that the popularity of girl power has brought about. As Driscoll (1999) points out, girl power should not be regarded as either feminist or not. Driscoll notes that although the concepts of girl power may not be as politically grounded as those of the Riot Grrrl movement, the girl power talked about by the Spice Girls may be creating dialogue about what it is to think feminist and shift relations within girls' lives from traditional notions of femininity to empowered ones. Both of these discussions of girl power are important when regarding female resistance. Although both the Spice Girls' girl power and Riot Grrrl's grrrlpower stem from different circumstances they both hold opportunities for resistance among young girls and women.

The discourse of resistance has traditionally limited our ability to allow varying views of what resistance is. Yet I believe that each type of resistance should be accepted as a form of resistance that has meaning and value. Considering both girl power and grrrl power as forms of resistance broadens our understanding of the concept. By incorporating both forms of girl resistance-girl power and grrrl power- into our understandings, we are able to break down the notions supported by the discourse of

ő

resistance. By accepting additional understandings of what resistance is, we are able to broaden our views of who can be resistant and why they can be resistant. If we accept girl power and grrrl power as forms of resistance carried out by girls, it no longer allows only boys to be resistant. If we accept girl power and grrrl power as forms of resistance as powerful and positive expressions by girls, it breaks down the negative connotations attached to resistance. Although incorporating both these types of resistance into our understanding of the term is useful, we cannot limit our views of girlhood resistance to only large girl movements or popular conceptions of girl power.

As Pomerantz, Currie and Kelly (2004) point out in their article on Sk8ter girls, two dominant bodies of research focusing on girlhood came about in the 1990s: at risk girls and girls who "have it all" (p. 538). Although this brought much attention to girlhood, teen girls engaging in behaviours outside of the two aforementioned situations, may be ignored. Girls who engage in everyday behaviours are changing and resisting traditional beliefs about girlhood (Pomerantz, et al., 2004). Limiting our research on girlhood has resulted in missing pieces of girlhood resistance. Research on girls who are "at risk" positions girls as in trouble. Girls at risk are perceived to be confronting situations that they are unable to handle and thus are, in turn, having large impacts on their self-esteem. Within these understandings, we see girls in the traditional notion of powerless players within their lives. Just as Pomerantz (2008) points out, this construction strips girls of the right to engage in meaningful behaviour, where girls are seen to be: "Powerless to understand what is going on, powerless to think for themselves, powerless to take action in the hegemonic sphere of popular culture, and powerless to push the boundaries of acceptable femininity" (p. 36).

ø

At the other extreme, research on girls who "have it all" offers displays of powerful "chicks" who are independent and positive. This other side to research on girlhood focuses on the powerful and positive aspects of girls who are engaging in subculture movements, such as Riot Grrrl. Yet, although incorporating collective movements where girls are displaying powerful forms of resistance is important, it may cause us to be limiting our understanding of girlhood resistance. If we limit our understandings of resistance to collective subcultural movements, we are including only those girls involved in the movements, and missing other girls' resistant behaviours. The discourse of resistance limits our understanding of resistance through gender and power relations. We need to broaden our understanding to include the everyday girl's resistant behaviour.

Although both of these discourses on girlhood and resistance have generated an increased focus on girls, there is a lack of information about "everyday" girls (Pomerantz et al., 2004). Pomerantz et al. (2004) researched a group of girls, coined the Park Gang, to understand their involvement in skater culture. The girls within this study were participating in skater culture, including skateboarding, style, and hanging out in the leisure spaces associated with the sport. Traditionally, the concept of "skater" applied to males engaging in skateboarding activity; however the females within this study also felt that they derserved this title as well. The girls within the study negotiated their positions within the skate park, dealing with issues of rejection both from boy skaters and from girls who "watched" skater boys (Pomerantz et al., 2004; Currie, Kelly, Pomerantz, 2008). The girls resisted the traditional views of who a skateboarder could be (male), and also resisted common assumptions male skaters had about their reasons for participating

ò

in skate culture. Boys accused the girls of being present only to flirt and get boyfriends; as a result the skater girls left the space (skate park) where the boys were to prove that they were serious about their desire to skateboard. This is a demonstration of girlhood resistance that is not happening within a main subcultural group, such as the Riot Grrrl movement, or a desire to attain girl power such as the Spice Girl phenomenon. This is a demonstration of everyday girls engaging in resistant behaviour to fulfill a position within their culture that they feel they belong to, regardless of outside beliefs. This is an example of the "everyday" girl resisting feminine stereotypes. This resistance was positive for the girls of the Park Gang, as they felt they were fighting for a rightful space within skater culture. The girls also felt a feeling of accomplishment, as they resisted the stereotypes and began to be accepted by the boys in the skate culture.

The skater girls are not the only example of everyday girls' resistant behaviour. Examples of girlhood resistance can be seen in many circumstances. Skelton (2000) examine girls' usage of street space as a leisure area. Within the town of Rhonda (South Wales), the streets were traditionally places where males hung out. However, Skelton (2000) investigate girls' usage of this space, in the face of resistance both from boys and from their parents. The girls' resistance to the boys, and the adults' attempts to regain the "streets" was met with resistance from the girls. The girls felt that "that's how it is," implying they felt they had every right to be out on the streets (p. 90). The girls were resisting common assumptions about femininity that strongly suggested that girls should not be hanging out on the streets. In addition, the streets had been "claimed" by the males. Therefore, the girls also had to also negotiate their space on the streets with the boys just as the skater girls had to negotiate their space as skaters within the male

ö

dominated space of the skate park. Again, these girls were not members of a subcultural movement, nor were they performing girl power by blaring Spice Girls tunes. However they were engaging in resistant behaviours that worked outside of the discourse of resistance. The girls were standing up for the right to be equal; if boys were allowed on the streets, they too should be allowed. The girls resisted the feminine stereotypes that were inhibiting them from occupying this space. They felt a sense of empowerment by continuing to stay in the "taboo" area of the streets.

As the above examples show, when addressing girls' resistance it is important to recognize all forms of resistance. Abandoning the static discourse of resistance will allow a multidimensional understanding of the concept, not one that limits behaviour to gender, to class position, or to specific subcultural movements. By adopting a fluid understanding of the concept, we will be able to recognize acts of resistance that are outside the parameters of traditional truths that surround it. Grrrl power and girl power resistance is important and will be included within the analysis of powerful representations of girlhood resistance within popular culture. However, recognizing additional forms of powerful representations of girlhood resistance within popular culture, the "everyday" girl's representation of resistance, will also be addressed.

In chapter three, I will utilize discourse analysis to examine three popular culture films: *Thirteen, The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*, and *Ghost World*. I will identify both positive and negative representations of teenage girl resistance within these three films.

ø

## Chapter 3: One Thing Leads to Another...

I'm going to the movies...I'm gonna learn values!

Within popular culture, representations of youth culture construct social reality (O'Brien and Szeman, 2004). American entertainment is thought by some to have replaced traditional institutions, such as schools and churches, as the makers of values (Grieson, cited in O'Brien and Szeman, 2004). Discourses created through popular cultural venues, such as films about youth, have helped to create commonsense knowledge that affects our understandings of our social realities.

As Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) address, representations within popular culture, specifically film, branch beyond entertainment, and instead become discourses created through "language, statements, ideas and meanings" (p. 3). These discourses then construct a body of knowledge that influences the ways in which we comprehend our social reality. Representations of youth culture are constructed through a combination of discourses that shape how we view teenagers. These representations are discourses that permeate our conscious and unconscious thoughts, creating bodies of knowledge about what we understand teens to do, say, and be.

Driscoll (2002) notes that "youth resistance is a readily available facet of popular culture [and] entertainment industries are a privileged outlet for discourses on teen behaviour" (p. 207). Film is an influential mode of representing and producing youth culture. The "teen" film or "flick" first made an appearance in the 1940s, and rose in popularity in the 1960s and 1980s. Teen films are also now part and parcel of the commodification of girl power (Driscoll, 2002; Orenstein, 1996). Film production over the last few decades has targeted teen girls as an audience for a number of reasons. Girls

are understood to be large consumers, are repeat moviegoers, and advertise movies via word of mouth to other teen girls (Tally, 2005). The teen film is now regarded as the girl film whereby ideas of adolescent transformation and commodification are key components to the plot. Characteristics of the common teen movie heroine attempt to reflect what teens girls are thought to want or experience.

Teen films represent teenagers as being on the brink of opportunity or threat (Driscoll, 2002). On the one hand, films position teens as young people going through change and experience, moving into "adulthood" as they realize their mistakes or learn life lessons. On the other hand there is the representation of teens as a threat to themselves and society. This representation of teens as a threat is geared to the male gender. Their opposition and involvement in subculture define boys, while girls are defined more by their conformity (Driscoll, 2002). Carmen Luke (1998) points out that,

Cultural industries have a long history of male cultural production of feminine stereotypes and misrepresentations which conceptualize women primarily either as objects of male adornment, pursuit, and domination, or as mindless domestic drudges, brain dead bimbos or saintly super moms.

This representation legitimates historically situated and male authored regimes of truth. (p.19)

Traditional films have cast females as the conformist, the consumer, and the passive character. However, within the last two decades an increase in the desire for empowered female characters is reflected in the girl power phenomenon within popular culture, a trend that has been strongly influenced by the Spice Girls.

The girl power phenomenon influenced the number of strong female characters

ø

seen in films directed towards teenage girls. Hollywood has chosen to represent the stars of teen girl films as empowered based on their perception of what it is girls are looking for. Chris McGurk, vice chairperson of MGM states, "the studios have found that there is a very strong market for movies that feature young women in roles that are empowering" (cited in Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2005, p. 316). Critics note that tween girl audiences are looking for strong female leads in the films directed at their generation. However, there is a question whether the representation of females within teen films is powerful. There is clear argument as to whether or not any feminist messages are being generated from girls in these films. As Tally (2005) states, "much of what passes for empowerment is in reality the freedom for these young women to use their feminine skills and purchasing power to attain their goals" (p. 318). We are not seeing girls represented as holding feminist ideals, with strong desires to resist traditional stereotypically female positions. As Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) note, there is very little feminist discourse within popular film. Since popular culture has seemed to replace other traditional places of attaining knowledge, such as the school and the family, it is unfortunate that girls are not exposed to feminist ideals and resistance.

Given that the power of mainstream mass media allows messages to be circulated in a way that is stimulating to the watcher, something that classroom material may at times lack, it is important that popular cultural texts, such as film require thorough investigation (Marshall and Sensoy, 2009). If media is a form of teaching that instructs us on how to engage in our society and has a large influence on the representation of women (McRobbie, 1997), then it is crucial that we examine how film represents teenage girls' resistance.

Representations of girls within film, although appearing to be powerful, are missing the collective values that feminists sought. Females are still being represented as stereotypically feminine, such as the lead female character in *Shrek 2*, who was "kicking butt" to secure her place with her husband, or the conclusion that "girl-on-girl" crime in the movie *Mean Girls* can be solved solely by being nicer to your girlfriends. Such representations trivialize what resistance and feminism mean. Representations of teenage girls in popular films have failed to recognize the feminist forms of resistance that are present in teenage girls' lives. As St. Pierre (2000) notes, recognizing the discourses that structure our understandings and behaviours to be one thing or another is the first step in breaking down these static and one-dimensional ways of comprehending. By negating the limits that the discourse of resistance places on the behaviour of resistance, I will identify a broader, more multidimensional understanding of the concept and highlight a much more extensive display of feminism and resistance within teenage girl films.

#### Discourse as Premise to Method

To examine how resistance has been represented in popular culture in relation to teenage girls, it is important to remember that, through a feminist poststructural lens, we will be continuously lost in the "play" of discourse (St. Pierre, 2000). One of the main influences on feminist poststructuralism is Michel Foucault, who examines meaning, language, and social power in order to address the effect discourse has on institutions in society (Weedon, 1987). Discourse is by its very nature not something that should be defined; however, representation and meaning associated with language create knowledge that governs behaviour, and is referred to as discourse (St. Pierre, 2000).

Feminist poststructuralism is not concerned with what the meaning of discourse

is, but more so with where discourse may be found. How is it produced? And how does it influence behaviour (St. Pierre, 2000)? Although discourse works to produce social realities that control and influence individuals, it can still be contested. Specifically, feminist poststructuralism identifies discourses, exposes power relations, and identifies ways that these understandings can be changed (Weedon, 1987). There are myriad discourses that circulate throughout society, from the school to the family to media, and as each discourse intersects it creates meaning and representation that govern our understandings and behaviours within our social world. In this thesis, I will utilize feminist poststructuralism to unearth and challenge the understandings associated with the discourse of resistance.

Feminist post-structuralism uses the theories of Foucault to examine discursive formations and how the understandings and meanings associated with something are naturalized to create social reality (Kelly and Pomerantz, 2009). Discourses create bodies of knowledge, or discursive formations, that situate our understandings within its borders. Thus, the methodology of discourse analysis will allow me to identify these discourses and open up the confined understandings of resistance associated with them.

Discourse analysis is strongly influenced by poststructuralism and feminism.

Gavey (1997) suggest that feminist poststructuralism has observed that within Western society the dominant representations of reality and truth are patriarchal. Feminist examination of female realities is different than males or those produced by males, thus challenging the idea of one truth or one reality (Gavey, 1997). Gavey (1997) states, "from a post-structualist perspective, knowledge is considered to be socially constructed…knowledge is understood to be not neutral-it is closely associated with

power. Those who have the power and regulate what counts as truth are able to maintain their access to material advantages and power" (p. 52). Representation and meaning are created by those in power. Understandings of resistance are rooted in patriarchal truth. Women's realities are different than men's; therefore it is key to challenge patriarchal discourses in order to create alternate understandings.

#### Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis allows us to focus on how the social world is constructed and maintained. Within discourse analysis, the question posed by researchers changes from "how does this work?" to "what does this mean?" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Yates, Taylor & Wetherell (2001) describe discourse analysis "as the study of talk and texts" (p.4). This method of investigation allows for the study of meaning, representations that constitute social behaviour, and language. It allows the researcher to examine how language creates meaning in the world, and how this meaning influences knowledge and behaviour (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Yates et al. (2001) state, "discourse analysis emerges from profound changes in conceptualizations of communication, culture language use and function, and the relationship between representation and reality" (p. 4). Utilizing discourse analysis provides a way of analyzing how representation in language creates meaning or bodies of knowledge that influence individual's understandings of their social world (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). As a methodology, discourse analysis does not only utilize a set of techniques for the investigation of language, but also includes a set of assumptions about language. Discourse analysis as a methodology encompasses both reflexive and interpretive tools. Although qualitative techniques are utilized in analysis, discourse analysis questions how meanings associated with language are

created, reinforced, and maintained (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Within the past thirty years, discourse analysis has become much more popular as a research tool. The ideas surrounding language have evolved and are now considered much more than a "reflection of reality." Instead, language is seen to construct meaning, creating social realities (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is strongly influenced by Foucault's work due to his focus on the effects of discourse and relationships between power and knowledge. Foucault's work recognizes the privileged and constraining effects that discourses could have. Specifically, CDA "focuses on the dynamics of power, knowledge and ideology that surround discursive processes" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 46). CDA looks at the implications discourses may have for such things as status and power (Roberts, 2001).

Utilizing CDA, I will examine three popular films to identify representations of teenage girls' resistance. I will identify the representations of resistance present in the films and identify how these representations limit our understanding. By identifying the discourse of resistance I will be able to identify its limitations and generate a more multidimensional understanding of teenage girl resistance within popular culture.

To call myself a feminist poststructuralist and to approach my thesis through a feminist poststructural lens felt right to me. Feminist poststructuralism allows me to identify understandings and re-evaluate truths, realities, and meanings. Feminist post structuralism examines discursive formations and their implications for females. As I noted in chapter one, my understanding of resistance as a female did not make sense. My experience did not jibe with how the term was typically used I feel that this disconnection was due to the restraints placed around the term "resistance." This in turn influenced how

I felt about my surroundings, boys and men, and authority figures, among other things. I think it is safe to assume that other girls may also have had the same experience with the term "resistance" as me. Girls experience contradictions between their understandings and beliefs, and their social realities (see Pomerantz, 2008). Therefore, I felt that utilizing feminist poststructuralism as a means of addressing representations of resistance in girlhood was fitting. It allows me to identify discourses created by individuals in powerful positions and deconstruct them, opening the doorway for alternate understandings.

Film represents meanings, understandings, beliefs and truths. The discourse of resistance is recognized in tween girl films, where expectations of who can be resistant are gendered (Driscoll, 2002). In addition, other discursive formations are perpetuated within the film industry, perhaps setting up contradictory understandings for girls.

Poststructural feminism allows me to identify discourses present within films in popular culture. By utilizing discourse analysis I am able to pin point one-dimensional, contradictory discourses and generate a more multidimensional representation of resistance in girlhood.

#### The Analytical Process

I have chosen three films that are geared toward the teenage girl. Two of the films I chose were blockbuster hits, the other, *Ghost World*, was very popular after its release. A large population of girls saw each of these three films. Although I do not assume that these three films influenced girls, as I did not ask them, there is the possibility that these cinematic representations may influence how girls construct their social realities. The three films I chose to analyze were: *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants, Ghost World*,

and Thirteen.

Thirteen (2003) follows the activities of a 13-year-old girl who discovers sex, drugs, and crime with her new best friend. The film gives a very detailed description of the behaviours of the girls, and recounts many arguments and confrontations the central character, Tracy, has with her mother. The movie is a good example of young female acts of resistance, and I am using this film to represent the negative views it can create concerning young female resistant behaviour. The movie, although under certain circumstances may have realistic situations, creates fear and negative views concerning girls' behaviour.

The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants (2005) is a story of four best girlfriends who decide to share a pair of jeans that fits each of them as they spend a summer apart experiencing different adventures. The film gives a different perspective on young female resistance. Each of the girls experiences something new as they are apart, and each of them is forced to examine and cope with the decisions that they had made. This film does not create fear, and the film may be a bit Disney-ish; however, it does give examples of resistance in a much more positive light.

Ghost World (2001) focuses on two social outsiders, who, after graduating high school, play a mean prank on a middle-aged geek. This film, again, shows a different perspective on girlhood resistance. The film is a balance between *Thirteen* and *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*. I feel it demonstrates a greater risk in relation to resistance than *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*, but a less destructive form of resistance than the characters in *Thirteen*.

To understand what is being represented in each of these three films, I watched

them each eight times. There was a sequence of investigation that I utilized in my analysis. Primarily, I watched each film initially without taking notes. Once each film was over, I documented my feelings about each movie and how resistance was portrayed. How did I feel about the film? What emotion stood out in me? Could I relate to this form of resistance? Next, I re-watched each film 6 times, pulling all types of quotes from the films surrounding different circumstances the characters were in. I tried not to limit the inclusion of quotes to my own personal understanding of resistance, but included all behaviours. I did not want to restrict what resistance could be based on my own belief of the term. Once I had written down all the quotes from each film, I chose a theme that stood out to me in one of the films, *Thirteen*. This film had a recurring theme relating to style. I utilized a green highlighter to highlight any quote or situation that reflected style. Once I had completed the film Thirteen I moved onto Ghost World, and next The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants. I used the green highlighter to highlight any behaviour or situation that was related to style. After completing this, I found that there was a common theme among all three films in relation to girlhood and style. I grouped these quotes together under the main theme Style and examined how style in each film could be related to resistance. I examined common discourses surrounding style and girlhood and the truths and beliefs associated with these discourses. I analyzed how these discourses on style position young girls as they engage in dress and resistance. This became one of the main themes in my analysis in Chapter 4.

The next large theme that jumped out at me came from the film *Ghost World*. In this circumstance, the theme did not catch my interest based on any continuous reoccurrence of the idea, such as style in *Thirteen*, but caught my attention because of the

negative feelings associated with sexual behaviour that arose as I continued to watch the film. I utilized a blue highlighter to highlight quotes or situations that revolved around sexual behaviour in the film *Ghost World*. Once I had completed this film, I moved onto *Thirteen* and *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*, highlighting any reference of behaviour associated with sexual behaviour. I grouped these quotes under the main theme of *Sexual Behaviour* and examined how sexual behaviour could be related to resistance. Discourses on resistance traditionally place females as non-resistors, and associate the resistant sexual behaviour of females as a means of gaining male attention (see Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977). I utilize the discourses on sexual behaviour and resistance to demonstrate how females are positioned and represented in relation to this behaviour. This also became one of the main themes in my analysis.

The most important theme that arose from my analysis was that of the overall portrayal of resistance. As I looked over my notes, I realized that most of my quotes had been highlighted, and it made me ponder back to the original feelings that I had had about each film. As I looked at what I had collected, a theme of the representation of resistance began to show through. Each of my initial thoughts about the films represented different feelings about what these films were saying in relation to young girls. As I looked through my quotes I found varying levels, types, and both positive and negative associations with resistance. I looked at each film independently and examined the quotes to see if I was able to generate an overall feel for resistance from each. In this section of my analysis quotes were not grouped under one theme, but the movies themselves were grouped under the theme I called representation of resistance. Each film represented resistance in a different way. I examined discourses associated with the representation of

girls' behaviour, specifically the discourse of resistance, the discourse of feminism, and the discourse of girl power. Each of these discourses influenced how girls' resistance is portrayed and understood. This theme was the largest of the three themes that arose from my analysis. It generated the concept of the continuum of resistance, where I demonstrate where resistance is and where it can go (found in Chapter 4).

In the next chapter, I analyze the three aforementioned films in relation to the three main themes I have just discussed.

# Chapter Four: We're Not Going to Take it...

The discourse of resistance has constructed our understanding of the concept whereby the behaviours of resistance deemed appropriate become natural, such as resistance to power, or males as resistors. Behaviours that exist outside of these boundaries, such as resistance not presupposed by subjugation or female resistors, are considered to be unnatural and are met with opposition. The complexity of the behaviour of resistance is lost in the traditional understandings as it coincides with traditional Marxist understandings of power. Foucault's theories of power relations open up the door for a more inclusive and complex understanding of the discourse of resistance.

The films I have chosen to analyze occupy both the discourse of resistance and a new multidimensional understanding of resistance that takes place outside the boundaries of what resistance has traditionally been understood to represent. Understanding resistance in a new light, independent of the discourse of resistance, is key and beneficial to formulating new ideas about what it means to be resistant. In the films that I analyze, resistance can be seen on a continuum. Understandings of resistance can range from traditional notions described above to the idea of feminism as resistance. These three films demonstrate varying positions on the continuum, beginning with the traditional understandings of resistance and displaying additional forms of resistant behaviour, including feminism as resistance. This continuum of resistance provides a broader, multidimensional understanding of resistance that has been previously ignored in lieu of the traditional understanding.

Within the three films that I chose to examine, I will highlight three main themes: the representation of resistance generally, resisting through style, and resisting traditional

ú

feminine behaviour in relation to boys. Each of the themes manifests itself in different forms, and each film allows us to witness a different type of resistance along the continuum. The first theme is the representation of resistance generally. Within each of the three films, we see the representation of resistance exhibited differently. Each representation is important to recognize as each has a role in creating an understanding of what resistance is seen to be and what it potentially can be in relation to girls. The next theme, resisting through style, arose from the three films in relation to the characters' choice of clothing. Each film-gives a perspective on how young female dress can be seen as both resistant and conformist. The final theme is resisting traditional feminine behaviour in relation to boys. Each film demonstrates a different type of resistance in relation to girls' behaviour towards boys and demonstrates varying types of resistance. I will discuss each theme independently in relation to each of the three films and then compare the three films under each theme.

#### The Representation of Resistance

The first theme that arose from my analysis of *Thirteen*, *Ghost World*, and *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* is the representation of resistance generally. Each film represents resistance in a particular light, having both negative and powerful understandings of what it means to be a resistant teenage girl through the eyes of popular culture. Although manifesting itself in different ways in the films, this theme clearly present in each movie.

Good Girls Gone Bad. The film Thirteen (2003), written by Catherine Hardwick and Nikki Reed, depicts the downward spiral of a teenage girl named Tracy. The film's opening scene shows two young girls, Tracy and her friend Evie, wearing plenty of

makeup and provocative clothing, "huffing" from an aerosol can. As the two girls begin to get high they lose sensation of their bodies, and cannot feel pain. The two girls begin hitting each other in the face:

Tracy: "Hit me! I'm serious, I can't feel anything [laughing]. Hit me!"

[As Evie hits Tracey, she laughs]

Tracy: "Again, do it harder!"

Evie hits Tracey again:

Tracy: [Laughing] "I can't feel anything, this is so awesome!"

[The camera turns to Evie as she takes a huff from the aerosol can]

Evie: "I hear this little wop wop in my head"

Tracy: "That's your brain cells popping!"

[Both girls begin laughing quite hard, and the scene continues in this manner, exchanging blows to the face.]

This scene in the film *Thirteen* was designed to shock and scare both young people and adults. The opening scene in this film represents two young females who are engaging in drug use and resisting traditional feminine behaviours. Both girls become loud and uninhibited after they have huffed from the can and the girls become violent. The girls are displaying opposing behaviours of what many people would like to think young teenage girls are doing. They are first and foremost engaging in illicit drug use, therefore "resisting" the law, in addition to their parents and guardian's wishes. Also, they are engaging in physical violence with each other, which strongly contradicts the stereotypical ideal of the female, who is passive and non-aggressive.

This conflict is supported as the scene switches to a date four months prior to the

huffing scene. As the scene begins to change so too does the background music that accompanies it. The opening scene has loud, upbeat, rocker music. As the scene changes to a "happier" time, the background music follows suit and is much more passive and calming. In addition to the background music as a tool to create mood and opinion, the physical appearance of a four-month younger Tracy is also very different. Within this new scene she is walking her dog with a very innocent looking friend, prancing towards her mother:

Tracy: "Mom [happy, high pitched voice] it's 7:45, let's go, let's go!"

[The family, Tracy, her mother Mel, and brother Mason, all jump into the car and head off for the first day of school.]

Once they arrive at school all of the students focus is on one character, Evie.

Evie's clothing is provocative and mature, and she has a number of piercings. As the movie continues on, Tracy and Evie develop a friendship that is based on drugs, alcohol, disobedience, and sex. In one particular scene, Tracy and Evie go to the park. As they make their way, Evie stops to chat with a group of boys:

Evie: "Hey guys, wanna buy some shit?"

[Evie sells drugs to a number of teenage boys and the two girls spend the evening getting high and running around the park.]

Evie: "The itsy bitsy spider dropped acid at the park"

The scene looms uneasy, as the girls have lost a sense of control over their minds and bodies. They are outnumbered by boys, who attempt to caress and kiss them. The scene sets up the feeling of being unsafe and dangerous, further perpetuating the negativity of the girls' behaviour. They are bad girls who are "asking for it."

The film continues as the girls stay on their destructive path, using more drugs, hooking up with more boys, and increasingly wearing more revealing clothing. Tracy spirals into an extremely negative place where she is self-mutilating or "cutting" and continuously distancing herself and her mother. As the drug and alcohol use continues to escalate the relationship between Tracy and her mother, Mel, becomes increasingly frail. Tracy and her mother are communicating primarily by fighting. During a family movie night, Tracy and Evie sneak out and proceed to get high. A fight ensues between Tracy and her brother, Mason. When Mel tries to break it up, she and Tracy begin arguing over her eating habits:

Tracy: [Screaming] "Fine I hate your nasty store brand food anyway!"

Mel: [Screaming] "Great! So I can stop doing 12 hair cuts a day trying to pay for all this shit!"

The end of the movie results in Mel separating her daughter from Evie and also discovering drugs, stolen clothes, and money among other things in Tracy's room. The film ends by implying that Tracy and her mother will work on rebuilding their relationship and Tracy's life.

This film attempted to portray that things can go too far with children if, as a parent, you are not aware and active in their lives. The film was utilized as a scare tactic for parents to ensure that their teenage daughters did not end up like Tracy and Evie. Within this movie, resistance is represented as risky and destructive. Resistance is portrayed as bad, unbecoming to girls, and dangerous. The negative connotations attached to the discourse of resistance are supported within this film. The film depicts one of the more common representations of girls: the "at risk" girl (see Pomerantz, et al.,

2004).

Research on traditional forms of resistance within subcultures, such as punks or teddy boys, showed resistance to be negative and violent at times, involving drug use and physical aggression (see Hebdige, 1979). This film has utilized those understandings of resistance and displaced them instead in the lives of teenage girls. The film does not demonstrate varying understandings of what resistance is, it merely sums up the resistant behaviour of two teenage girls as extremely destructive and scary.

Popular culture has such a large influence on young women's understandings of their own world. Representations within popular culture are "muting" girls and creating misunderstood ideas about what it is that girls are doing. This film does not depict the circumstances of all teenage girls; it does however clearly position resistance as negative and something to be sure your teenage girl does not participate in.

Films, such as *Thirteen*, that continue to represent resistance among females as destructive and negative silence other behaviours of resistance that may be beneficial and productive for girlhood. Representation of resistance within girlhood as negative allows for both girls who are watching these cinematic representations and their parents to paint all forms of resistant behaviour with the same brush. Few things that the media represents about young people are true, yet the media influences peoples' perceptions of behaviour. In turn, these perceptions can create moral panic. In addition, females are more likely to look at media as an aid in identifying and exploring their world than males (see Males, 1999; O'Brien and Szeman, 2004; Pole-Lynch, 2001). If blockbuster movies such as *Thirteen* perpetuate such a negative message about what girls are doing and that resistance manifests itself as scary, dangerous, and destructive behaviour then the

powerful aspects of different forms of resistance are effectively silenced.

The discourse of resistance, defined as opposing and a refusal to comply or accept, is perpetuated within this film. All of the negative connotations associated with the term "resistance" are brought to the fore in *Thirteen*. The discourse of resistance structures our understandings of the term and the film itself supports the common sense beliefs associated with it. Because film influences young women's perceptions, the discourse of resistance seen within cinematic representations of girlhood may further perpetuate the static, one-dimensional understandings of resistance. In turn it may limit girls understandings of what it could potentially mean to be powerful through different forms of resistance.

Screw you and You! The film Ghost World (2001), written by Daniel Clowes, is about two young women after they graduate from high school. The film depicts the two girls experiences the summer after they receive their graduation diplomas. Near the beginning of the film, as we are introduced to the two main characters, Enid and Rebecca, we witness them sitting unhappily in their graduation gowns. From the very beginning we are shown the dislike Enid and Rebecca have for their peers and the school:

Enid: "God, what a bunch of retards!"

Both girls are clearly eccentric and separate themselves from the other peers in their class. This is demonstrated quite early in the film as a conversation between Enid, Rebecca, and a classmate about their plans for after they graduate:

Classmate: "Where are you going to college?"

Enid: "We're not."

Rebecca: "We made other plans"

Classmate: "I should have guessed you two would do something different"

The girls' attitudes and style of dress separate them from the remainder of their peers.

They clearly enjoy being different and find that the "losers" or "weirdos" of the world are the people with whom they can most easily connect:

Enid: "...those [weirdos] are our people"

The type of resistance that is being demonstrated within the film *Ghost World* is one that reflects Third Wave Feminist ideals, or more simply put, it showcases the individualistic resistor. Resistance is not necessarily a collective movement or representative of collective unity, but a personal choice or behaviour that separates the resistor from the conformist. The discourse of girl power within popular culture focuses on individual change, where there is little reference to social or political influences (Aapola et al., 2005), such as within this film. The girls' resistance lacks any true political or social agenda. The discourse of girl power limits how-resistance can be experienced in the lives of teen girls. In addition, the discourse of girl power loses second wave feminist concepts and ideals (see Kelly and Pomerantz, 2009; Taft, 2009).

Although it is useful to bring gender to the forefront, the idea of girl power as the new form of resistance is limiting.

Throughout the film the girls are commonly drawn to individuals who reside on the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable within society. They resist individuals who fall under capitalist influence:

Enid: "If he's so weird, why is he wearing Nikes?"

And individuals who are more eccentric than the average Joe:

Enid: "Check out these people, I think they're Satanists"

Rebecca: "What do you do if you're a Satanist?"

Enid: "Sacrifice virgins and stuff"

The girls are resistant to not only the conformity of their peers and society, but also to the more general stereotypes of femininity:

Enid: "Sometimes I think I'm going crazy from sexual frustration"

Rebecca: "Oh and you haven't heard of the miracle of masturbation?"

The girls stand outside of the discourse of resistance and also the discourse of femininity. However, it is important to note their resistance is not represented as overtly dangerous, scandalous or destructive. The eccentric behaviour of the two main characters is not represented as a threat or something to be cautious about. The type of resistance is different but is not negative and scary, such as the behaviour of the girls in the film *Thirteen*.

This understanding of resistance is one that could be potentially beneficial for young women who are watching this cinematic representation of resistance. This understanding branches beyond the discourse of resistance and incorporates third wave feminist ideals and acceptance of young females who choose to participate in cultures that are outside of the traditional notions of femininity.

Resistance as Feminism. The film, The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants (2005), based on the novel by Ann Brashares, chronicles the experiences of four 17-year-old girls as they begin their summer vacations apart from each other. The main characters in the film, Lena, Bridget, Carmen, and Tibby are best friends, separating from each other for the entire summer. The opening scene sets up the premise of the film as "unity through sexuality", as the narrator (Carmen) depicts just how the four girls came to be:

Carmen: "Our mothers met at a prenatal aerobics class, they really didn't have anything in common, except their due dates"

The opening lines of the film create a unity between the girls that is a result of the fact that their mothers were all able to give birth and had the same due dates. This connection between unity and femaleness is one that continues throughout the whole film, Carmen continues explaining the relationship the four girls have to each other:

Carmen: "We were there for each other to understand the things no one else could. Together we formed one single complete person"

As the scene continues the girls are window-shopping and enter an old thrift store.

Bridget picks up a pair of jeans and asks Tibby to try them on. One after another, each girl tries on the jeans, and they magically fit each of them perfectly, regardless of the differences in their body size:

Bridget: "Come on Lena, I'm like three inches taller than you!"

The girls decide to utilize the jeans as a vehicle for communication as they go their separate ways for the summer:

Carmen: "Proposing that we share them equally and that this summer they travel among us and they'll link us in hearts and spirit even though we are far apart from each other."

Lena: "Pants equal love..."

Bridget: "Love your sisters and love yourself"

Lena: "To the pants..."

Bridget: "and the summer...

Carmen: "and the rest of our lives..."

Tibby: ""together and apart."

The language in the film strongly relates to a second wave feminist form of empowerment, specifically the use of the word "sisters" or "sisterhood." The unity of the four girls is accomplished through the one thing they have in common: their gender. They are not similar in style of dress, they are not all the same nationality, they are not all the same body size, however they are all female and this unites them.

As they venture out into the world for their vacations they are confronted with a number of circumstances. Each girl depends on her "sisters" to help her make sense and deal with the situations at hand. As each girl experiences something new and challenging she is left wondering and processing the emotions that accompanied it.

Initially each girl experiences something negative when wearing the pants, making her conclude that the "magic" of the pants was not working:

Lena: "Dear Tibby, I think we may have been very, very wrong about the pants!

The one time I wore them I almost drowned and got plucked out of the water by some guy onto a fishing boat who made me touch a live fish. It was disgusting!"

Tibby: "I'm sad to report that nothing of consequences happened to me while I was wearing the pants. I spilled a Sprite and Duncan, my rat faced manager, accused me of receipt with-holding".

Carmen: "Babe it's me, it's Carmen, I'm coming home. Everything got screwed up and I snapped and I don't care. I'm just fed up and I can't be here."

ò

Bridget: "It happened just the way I imagined it always would, so why do I feel this way, Lena? How can something that is supposed to make you feel so complete end up leaving you so empty?

The pants were supposed to be magical, and as the summer goes on and the girls depend on each other to help them understand the situations they encounter, they discover that the pants symbolize the unity and strength that existed among them; the pants were never magical, only metaphorical. Feminism is the collective response that the girls were taking to outside forces influencing their lives. Feminism is their collective resistance to situations where they must formulate new understandings of their world in order for them to fit and function in their social reality. Feminism and resistance go hand in hand. The film *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* is a wonderful representation of how collective unity among a group of "sisters" represents girlhood resistance:

Carmen: "It would be easier to say that the pants changed everything that summer. But...the real magic of the pants was bearing witness to all this and in somehow holding us together"

Bridget: "To us, who we were and who we are and who we'll be..."

Tibby: "To the pants..."

Lena: "And the sisterhood"

The resistance was the coming together of the four girls and the processing that they undertook in relation to the issues they were facing as young women. This type of resistance branches well beyond the discourse of resistance. This understanding allows us to view resistance as a productive happening, whereby young women are actively

participating and benefiting from it. The negative connotations of resistance as an act against something or as a struggle for power are unimportant when we examine feminism as resistance. These young women were not acting out; they were unifying as females and collectively conquering situations that posed struggles in their lives. Recently within popular culture, there has been an increase in representing the "new" girl, where behaviour does not solely revolve around boys but includes adventures between girlfriends and independence (Orenstein, 1996). This new girl allows for a powerful form of resistance among young women, without the continuous comparison to male resistors. This opportunity allows young females to place importance on the relationships they share with their friends, and resistance can be associated with female behaviour.

Each of these films offered different representations of resistance. However, each of these representations only helps in developing a more multidimensional understanding of the concept. *Thirteen* gives a very negative representation and may mislead people who see the film into categorizing resistance as one particular thing. *Ghost World* allows us to branch out beyond the negative representation and offers a more forward, overt type of individualistic resistance. Finally, *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants* allows us to fully incorporate the ideas of feminism back into the lives of young females. By associating resistance and feminism we are able to open the concept up and allow resistance to move beyond its traditional, male-dominated view to include females as resistors.

### Style as Resistance

The next theme that arose in all three films was clothing. Within each of the films there are instances of resistance specifically in relation to choice of clothing. Each film

represents a different perspective and circumstance of girls' engagement with clothing, or resistant engagement with clothing.

Who Let Her Out of the Cabbage Patch? In the film Thirteen there is a focus on the transition of clothing from age appropriate to provocative. In the initial scenes of the film, Tracy is preparing to get into the car for her first day of high school. Before she jumps in the back seat her mother stops her and readjusts her panties that were peeking over the top of her jeans:

Mel: "Let me fix this before someone gives you the wedgie from hell"

The displacement of Tracy's panties was purposefully placed in this context so as to

demonstrate the innocence that both Tracy experienced with her clothing and that which
her mother perceived her clothing to represent. Tracy's choice of clothing was child-like
and unrevealing.

Once Tracy arrives at high school, other girls, particularly those that are perceived to be popular, pick on Tracy for her clothing:

Popular Girl: "Nice Socks" [snicker]

Popular Girl: "Who let her out of the cabbage patch?"

Tracy becomes very upset as these comments stimulate her to become more conscious of her choice in clothing. As the movie proceeds, Tracy begins hanging with Evie, a very provocative dresser, and begins to imitate her style. Her clothing goes from child-like to revealing. What is particularly interesting about the resistance Tracy has to her older style of dress is that the change could be considered a clueless act of conformity. Tracy's change in style is portrayed within the film as an "unfortunate" act of resistance, as she begins wearing low cut jeans exposing her thong, and shirts that expose her midriff.

However, female style was traditionally thought to be conforming, a clueless act of young girls following the "stars" or following others within their circle of friends (see Driscoll, 1999; Pomerantz, 2008). This film perpetuates these traditional views of females as media sheep who look upon others for guidance for their choices. Regardless of whether or not the experience of change in clothing for Tracy was a form of resistance, the film represents her choice as that of a follower.

The film *Thirteen* shows viewers that allowing girls to engage in resistant forms of dress will turn them into "sluts," the label applied to Tracy by Mason (Tracy's brother). All the while, this one example of resistant style is perpetuated as a clueless choice brought on by the desire to be popular and liked by boys. The representation of resistance in relation to clothing within this film gives a negative and unhealthy perspective to what it can potentially mean for young women to express themselves through style. Style that stands outside of conventional, "nice-girl" femininity is viewed as a sign of psychological distress of girl problems (see Pipher, 1994). Acknowledging that this understanding of resistance is not the only way that young girls are able to engage in resistant forms of style is one positive step in broadening our understanding of what the term resistance can mean.

Who Are You Supposed to be, Cyndi Lauper? In Ghost World, both of the main characters, Enid and Rebecca, dress in clothing that branches outside that of traditional femininity. Throughout the film both girls can be seen wearing mini skirts and combat boots, or 1960s style dresses, with eccentric patterns and shoes. It is clear that this style of dress is a choice for the girls, as Rebecca comments on the fact that they should change their attire as they begin searching for apartments to rent:

Rebecca: "So I was thinking when we try to look for apartments we need to convince these people we are totally rich yuppies"

Enid: "What are you talking about?"

Rebecca: "You know, that's who people want to rent to. So all we have to do is buy semi expensive outfits and act like it's no big deal"

The statements by Rebecca demonstrate that the girls are aware that their style of dress is resistant to the dominant dress styles of society. Although they acknowledge their resistant style of dress, and the fact that it may have negative repercussions for them in their quest for an apartment, it does not deter them from continuing to dress in their chosen fashion.

Enid, who is annoyed at Rebecca's lack of resistance in relation to the "yuppie" style change request, goes home that night and dies her hair green. She gets a first hand experience of individuals who not only dislike but do not "get" her style of clothing on a particularly punk influenced day as she ventures out in her new attire and hair color:

Boy Clerk: "Look who's talking little miss bad ass!"

Boy Clerk 2: "Yeah, nice outfit! Who are you supposed to be Cyndi Lauper?"

Enid: "No dufus!"

Boy Clerk 3: "Oh No! Didn't they tell you? Punk rock is over!"

No one can appreciate or understand Enid's re-enactment of what she calls 1970s original punk style. She is singled out by her resistant style of dress, and the boys in the store make her feel as if her resistant behaviour through style is stupid and conformist. This resonates strongly with the discourse of resistance in that boys were the primary resistors. Enid is made to feel like her resistant style of dress is unimportant and meaningless.

However, Enid's style continues to be resistant and eccentric throughout the rest of the film and is not deterred. Enid and Rebecca's resistant style of dress is a prime example of how resistance can be represented as positive and productive. Third wave feminism includes femininity as a valued part of who women are (Heywood & Drake, 1997). The combination of combat boots and mini skirts that both Enid and Rebecca wear combines both a male and female signifier that traditionally could not fit together (see Baumgardner and Richards, 2005). Young females who are watching this film will be able to see representations of resistance through style that are not provocative or sexual, but representations that are strong and powerful.

I Don't Wear Jeans, or Bikinis, or Mini Skirts. In the film The Sisterhood of The Travelling Pants there is resistance that is a positive example of a transition between child-like clothing to more mature clothing without the negative representation. Lena is heading to Greece for the summer to see her grandparents. She is very self-conscious and always covers up her body. When Carmen approaches her with a bikini, she reacts strongly:

Carmen: "Lena look at this, oh my God they're perfect"

Lena: "I can't wear a bikini"

Once Lena arrives in Greece she meets a young man who inspires her to begin opening up her heart and mind. As this begins to happen she matures, and becomes more comfortable with her body. She struggled with the perception that wearing clothing that was not covering most of her body would mean that she was unfeminine and provocative. During her time in Greece she begins to resist this stereotypical feminine ideal of female clothing and begins dressing in a classy, more mature fashion. Once she gets off the plane

68

back to the United States her friends react in awe:

Carmen: "OH"

Tibby: "MY"

Bridget: "OH MY GOD!!"

Carmen and Tibby: "Lena look at you!!"

The girls are shocked with Lena's transformation from a shy young girl to a beautiful confident young woman. This representation, although not drastic or eccentric, is still a representation of resistance. Lena could become empowered by her new-found identity and with this she resisted the traditional feminine stereotypes about clothing (see Freidan, 1963). Lena was demonstrating resistance through feminism; she was resisting a circumstance that no longer fit within her world. As she renegotiated her surroundings she chose to adopt a new style of dress that better accommodated her new reality. As young women watch this type of resistance and development that accompanies it, they associate it with a sense of power.

Each of these three examples demonstrates a range of resistance in relation to style and girlhood. By examining each circumstance, we are able to appreciate the subtlest types of resistance, such as that demonstrated by Lena, to the outright resistance of Enid. Within the film *Thirteen* we again witness a negative representation that, if not explored and addressed, could create boundaries for the understanding of what it means for young girls to be resistant.

Resistance in Relation to Boys

The discourse of resistance has represented females as non-resistors. In addition to this, female resistance can commonly be seen as a result of the desire to attain or keep a boy. This type of resistance strips power away from girls and can be seen within each of these three films.

Sexuality as a Means. In the film Thirteen, Tracy begins engaging in sexual acts with boys along with her friend Evie. They are continuously depicted in situations with boys that allude to rape and unsafe circumstances. The film utilizes their resistant behaviour as a way to demonstrate that it is dangerous and frightening for young females. In one scene, Evie and Tracy are home alone and invite boys over. They begin to become more and more sexually advanced as they mimic each other's sexual moves. Once the boys leave, the girls discuss the night:

Evie: "Were you surprised?"

Tracy: "No, I just didn't think it would taste so bad!"

The girls in this film are engaging in sexual behaviour as a means of gaining attention from boys. They utilize their bodies and sexual actions as a way of attracting boys to them. This in turn creates the idea to other boys in school that they are willing to do sexual favours for all of them. This representation of teenage girl resistance is another effort at scaring adults and young girls into staying safe and clean. Although there may be circumstances where it is necessary for this type of moral panic to take place, large blockbuster films such as *Thirteen* create a representation about what resistance means for young girls. This in turn limits understanding of the term and can inhibit growth through other forms of resistance if it is stunted due to the creation of meaning through films such as this one.

Something You Can't Have Makes You Want It More. In the film The Sisterhood of The Travelling Pants, Bridget is attracted to her soccer coach who is a university student. The

ò

rules are clear; coaches are "off limits" however Bridget finds him to be more appealing precisely because of this:

Soccer Peer: "Don't even think about it, it's against the rules to have flings with the coaches!"

As Bridget discovers that it is against the rules, she flaunts herself to the soccer coach, making sure he notices her. As her time at the camp continues, she aggressively pursues the coach, resisting the rules of the camp. In the end she succeeds in winning him over and they share a "special time" on the beach together. Although Bridget's actions of resistance appear to appeal to her at the time, in the long run she feels empty:

Bridget: "It happened just the way I imagined it always would, so why do I feel this way Lena? How can something that is supposed to make you feel so complete, end up leaving you so empty?

The positive aspect of this act of resistance is that Bridget turns back to her friends, and the unity of sisterhood. The powerful message that is represented in this circumstance is that Bridget is able to forgive herself and come to terms with her choices by gaining support from the collective group. This instance allows other young women who are watching this popular film to also see that an act of resistance that may have "back fired" is only another hurdle to cross. It places a positive spin on the concept of feminism, something that commonly seems to be missing in cinematic representations of girlhood resistance.

Seymour the Loser! In the film Ghost World, Enid ends up playing a trick on an older gentleman who the main characters deem to be pathetic:

Enid: "Oh my God. It's him. He's Insane!"

After she plays her trick of setting the older gentleman up on a imaginary date, Enid begins to become friends with the gentleman, Seymour. As time passes she grows fond of him and his quirky ways:

Enid: "I don't know, I kind of like him. He's the exact opposite of everything I really hate."

As the movie continues, Enid begins to feel isolated and alone. Her best friend Rebecca gets a full time job and she is feeling left behind and excluded. As these feelings grow, she goes to Seymour's house late one evening:

Enid: "I mean you like me, right Seymour? We're good friends right?"

As the night transpires Enid and Seymour begin drinking and end up sleeping together.

Enid was resisting what others had perceived Seymour to be, a loser. She was resisting the isolation that she felt she had been placed in, by connecting with Seymour, one of the few people she felt understood and liked her.

This act of resistance was another negative representation. Enid was only engaging in a sexual act with Seymour because she felt bad for herself and thought that it may make her feel better. The resistance in association with a man places the man at the top, here the act of being with Seymour would in turn make her feel better about herself. This is a negative representation of resistance as it perpetuates the discourse on resistance that females only participate in forms of resistance as a result of male influence. Young females who are watching this movie may in turn adopt these understandings and repeat a non-powerful type of resistance in hopes that it will be beneficial. On the other hand, it is clear that Enid does not feel better after her encounter with Seymour, therefore the movie may be used as a warning tool for females to utilize experiences from film as a teaching

tool for their own personal experiences.

In both *Ghost World* and *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*, there is a negative representation in relation to resistance and boys. However, within both films there is the opportunity for a powerful perspective to be taken from each film. As for *Thirteen*, there is little to no positive seen. Tracy's behaviours are represented as destructive and dangerous.

The discourse of resistance positions women as the oppressed. The power relations between the dominant and subordinate create an environment fit for resistance (Marx, 1973; Haenfler, 2004). All of the films position female characters as "oppressed" in addressing their relationships or sexual encounters with boys. Each act of resistance discussed above is followed with negativity in the films. Each act of resistance leaves the female characters with implied feelings of "powerlessness." The discourse positions resistance as a behaviour brought upon by power struggles and also as a male behaviour. These ideas are evident in these films when we see examples of resistance associated with boys.

The discourse and the examples from these films constructs an understanding of what it means not only to be a powerless girl in a sexual relationship with a male, but also a limited understanding of what resistance means for girls as it transpires with boys. If the understandings generated in pop culture create these types of power inequities in relation to resistance, the concept may continue to be looked upon in only one way. Broadening our understandings, however, could open up a whole new venue of possibilities for teenage girls to potentially adopt through representations in film. Utilizing theories of power that do not generate a hierarchical view and see power as ever fluctuating between

people through circumstance and interaction could broaden our view of where and why girls may be resistant (see Foucault, 1978, 1980).

#### Conclusion

Resistance cannot be summed up as just one thing. The one-dimensional understanding of resistance restricts both our understanding of the concept and the behaviours that are associated with it. My analysis of these three films shows that resistance takes a number of forms. My goal is to demonstrate the range and multidimensional aspects that the term resistance has. One of the main ideas that I would like to express in this analysis is the realization that representations within popular culture exist along a range of understanding. A multidimensional view of resistance is the most effective way to see the concept, allowing a wide variety of understandings and influences to transpire.

Within these examples of female resistance in popular culture there is evidence that girls are able to respond to influences that are affecting their lives. Just as examples of everyday girls are seen within skater girl culture or the Riot Girl movement, females are participating in resistant behaviour. Given that popular culture has such a large influence on young women it is important that cinematic representations of females allow girls to feel that they too have the opportunity to change the way they understand the world.

By utilizing these cinematic representations of resistance, I am able to demonstrate a number of different behaviours that can all be understood as resistance. Each different representation broadens our understanding of how resistance can be enacted by girls. These three films represent a continuum of resistance that ranges from the negative representation we see in the film *Thirteen*, to a different feminist form of

resistance demonstrated in both *Ghost World* and *The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*. Expanding our understanding of resistance beyond the traditional discourse of resistance allows us to see girls' behaviour as meaningful and powerful, rather than misguided and out of control.

# Chapter 5: I Still Haven't Found What I am Looking For...

The discourse of resistance has limited what counts as resistant behaviour, thereby excluding the actions and experiences of girls. If we identify the contradictions that arise within the discourse of resistance, we are able to break down the commonsense beliefs associated with it and formulate new understandings of who can resist and what resistance can mean (see St. Pierre, 2000). I feel that the examples in the films explored in my analysis demonstrate forms of resistance that are not all classified as traditional resistance. This allows me to show how broad the continuum of resistance can be.

Once the discourse is broken down, we can view the concept of resistance as fluid and multi-dimensional. Understanding is not restricted to one thing, but flows between varying views. As power relations move between people, as they interact and formulate understandings, so does resistance. Each interchange of power, each action or behaviour that addresses a circumstance in an individual's world can be understood as resistance. The two concepts are connected and are best understood together as they work among and between people (see Foucault, 1978, 1980; Skott-Myhre, 2008).

The goal of this thesis is not to define resistance, but to broaden how it is understood, particularly in relation to girls. Recognizing that resistance can range from perceptions of negative behaviour to powerful behaviour may open up doorways for breaking down discourses associated with girlhood. Deconstructing the discourse of resistance as it relates to girlhood opens the path for additional discourses to be disputed and reconstructed, such as the discourse of feminism or femininity. This may allow girls to formulate new, alternate understandings of theirs worlds.

The films that I utilized in my analysis were able to demonstrate a range of

understanding in relation to resistance and girlhood. The range that exists within these films is demonstrated in figure 1.1 and figure 1.2 in the continuum of resistance in relation to teenage girls. Figure 1.1 begins with the *Traditional representation of* resistance. Traditional discourse of resistance in relation to girls represents the modern views associated with the concept. This understanding is one-dimensional and limits the meaning of the term. The discourse of resistance traditionally represents boys and does not include females as resistors (see Hebdige, 1979; Hall, 1975). The second stage of the continuum, Girl resistance and traditional notions of resistance, associates the behaviour of resistance among females as a tactic in relation to boys. This representation positions female resistance as a "means" of interaction with boys. Resistance for females is not seen as a powerful behaviour, but as a way for girls to "be" with boys (see Willis, 1977). Therefore, resistant behaviour is not recognized independently of males. The third stage of the continuum, *Individual Resistance*, represents resistant behaviours of females, independent of both the discourse of resistance and males. Females' resistant behaviour is understood as a means of powerful decisions and thoughts. The concepts of girl power and third wave feminism are key to this section of the continuum. Girls' resistant behaviour is understood as the behaviour of the "new girl," one whose choices are based on feminist ideals. The first continuum, figure 1.1, ends after the Feminist resistance stage and is marked with a line and the word "limit." This word represents the ability of the association of language and meaning to limit our capacity to understand concepts. The understanding of the concept resistance is limited by what we understand it to be. Figure 1.2, however, demonstrates that the continuum of resistance does not need to be limited, but can continue, without restriction.

There is a range beyond that of feminism that has no point of terminus (see figure 1.2). This form of resistance is ever existent among the power relations that flow between people. This final view of resistance on the continuum cannot always be identified or pointed out, but exists as we interact and function in our surroundings. This idea represents feminist poststructuralist ideas whereby language and discourse can be broken down allowing new understandings to be created. These new understandings can be seen as continuous, not limited, represented by the arrow that allows the continuum to continue.

By allowing such a range of understanding, we allow behaviours outside of the discourse of resistance to take on meaning. These behaviours may be powerful and important for girls. If these behaviours are not recognized, these experiences may continue to be unacknowledged; this will restrict girls' abilities to not only engage but also formulate new understandings around their experiences (see Kelly and Pomerantz, 2009). I feel that this continuum is a useful demonstration of how broad a concept can be. I hope that utilizing this continuous understanding of the term can allow for resistant behaviour amongst girls to be considered powerful. As I have addressed, my own understandings of resistance as a young person were contradictory to what I was experiencing, and these inconsistencies affected me. The broader understandings that I have discussed opens up a realm that allows me to accept my behaviours as powerful. I would hope that this understanding would allow others to feel the same.

By allowing such a range of understanding, we allow behaviours outside of the discourse of resistance to take on meaning. These behaviours may be powerful and important for girls. If these behaviours are not recognized, these experiences may

## Resistance in Girlhood

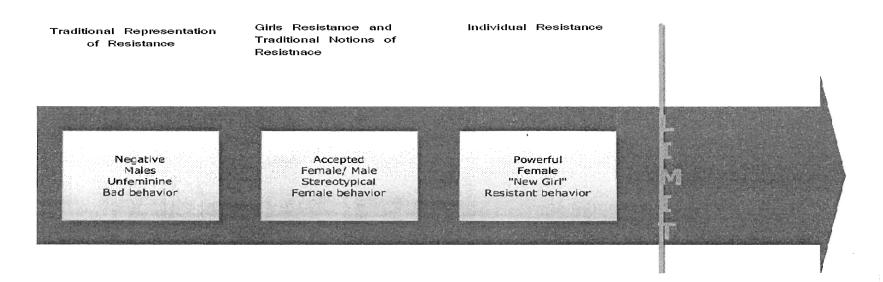


figure 1.1 The Continuum of Resistance This figure demonstrates where the behavior of resistance can lie in relation to understanding resistance in girlhood. The understanding of resistance is limited

## Resistance in Girlhood

Traditional Notions of Resistance

Girls Resistance and Traditional -Notions of Resistance

Individual Resistance

Resistance

Negative Males Unfeminine Bad behavior

Accepted Female/ Male Stereotypical Female behavior Powerful Female \*New Sirf\* Resistant behavior

Positive -lumba Continuous

10

figure 1.2 The Continuum of Resistance- A New Understanding This figure demonstrates that the understancing of the ibenavior of resistance can branch further than what has been discussed in my enalysis.

The understanding of resistance is not limited, I feel it can move beyond feminism and be present everywhere.

continue to be unacknowledged; this will restrict girls' abilities to not only engage but also formulate new understandings around their experiences (see Kelly and Pomerantz, 2009).

I feel that this continuum is a useful demonstration of how broad a concept can be. I hope that utilizing this continuous understanding of the term can allow for resistant behaviour amongst girls to be considered powerful. As I have addressed, my own understandings of resistance as a young person were contradictory to what I was experiencing, and these inconsistencies affected me. The broader understandings that I have discussed opens up a realm that allows me to accept my behaviours as powerful. I would hope that this understanding would allow others to feel the same.

One important issue that should be addressed within this thesis is that the analysis of these films and the conclusions drawn from them are my own opinions. I did not speak with girls to understand what they considered resistance to be. Because of this it is important to remember that my conclusions cannot be projected onto females. There is no evidence that teenage girls would perceive resistance in the same way as I have.

However, my goal was not to create a definition or understanding of resistance per se, but to open up the one-dimensional, static view of resistance and allow it to be more fluid.

My goal is to allow a range of understanding that is not limited so that girls are able to potentially accept their behaviours as important and powerful. I hope that, by demonstrating this multi-dimensional understanding of resistance, girls would be better able to formulate understandings in their social realities that are not contradictory.

I hope this analysis has opened up the concept of resistance and demonstrated how a static, one-dimensional term can be restrictive, while a fluid multidimensional understanding can be beneficial and important when talking about girlhood. Continuously broadening our understanding of the world around us is key to broadening our understanding of ourselves. As we challenge dominant discourses, we will be able to relate to, respond to, and educate the girls in future generations in a constructive, ambitious way that opens the door for change.

### References

- Aapola, S., Gonick, M., & Harris, A. (2005). Young femininity: Girlhood, power and social change. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Arnett, J. J. (1995). Adolescents' use of media for self-realization. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 24(5), 519-533.
- Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2004). Feminism and femininity: Or how we learned to stop worrying and love the thong. In A. Harris (Ed.) *All about the girl: Culture, power and identity.* New York: Routledge.
- Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2000). *Manifesta: Young women, feminism, and the future*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Bertens, H. (1995). The idea of the postmodern: A history. London, England: Routledge.
- Carter, E. (1984). Alice in consumer wonderland. In A. McRobbie & M. Nava (Eds.)

  Gender and generation. London: Macmillan.
- Chilt, K. & Zobl, E. (2008) Connecting the dots: Riot rrrrls, ladyfests, and the International Grrrl Zinc Network. In Harris, A. (Ed.). (2008). Next wave cultures: Feminism, subcultures, activism. New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Currie, D. H., Kelly, D. M., Pomerantz, S. (2009). *Girl power: Girls reinventing girlhood*. New York: Peterlang Publishing, Inc.
- Dirks, N., Eley, G., & Ortner, S. (Eds.) (1994). Culture/power/history: A reader in

- contemporary social theory. Princeton. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Driscoll, C. (2002). *Girls: Feminine adolescence in popular culture & cultural theory*.

  New York: Columbia University Press.
- Driscoll, C. (1999). Girl culture, revenge and global capitalism: Cybergirls, riot girls, spice girls. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14(29), 11-28.
- Evans, J. (1995). Feminist theory today: An introduction to second-wave feminism.

  London, England: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Foucault, M. (1978). The history of sexuality. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). In C. Gordon (Ed.) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*, 1972-1977. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994). A geneaology of dependency: Tracing a key word of the U.S. welfare state. *Signs*, 19(2), 309-336.
- Friedan, B. (1963). The feminine mystique. New York: Norton.
- Fritzsche, B. (2004). Spicy strategies: Pop feminist and other empowerments in girl Culture (p. 155-162). In A. Harris (Ed.) *All about the girl: Culture, power and identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gavey, N. (1997). Feminist poststructuralism and discourse analysis. InW. Gergen & S. Davis (Eds.) (1997). Toward a new psychology of gender. New York: Routledge.
- Haenfler, R. (2004). Rethinking subcultural resistance. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 33(4), 406-436.
- Hall, S., & Jefferson, T. (Eds.) (1975). Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain. Birmingham: CCCS/London: Hutchinson.

- Harris, A. (Ed.). (2008). *Next wave cultures: Feminism, subcultures, activism*. New York: Routledge.
- Harris, A. (Ed.). (2004). *All about the girl: Culture, power and identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). Subculture: The meaning of style. New York: Routledge.
- Kelly, D.M., & Pomerantz, S. (2009). Mean, wild, and alienated: Girls and the state of feminism in popular culture. *Girlhood Studies*, 2(1), 1-19.
- Lewis, L.A. (1989). Consumer girl culture: How music video appeals to girls. In M. E. Brown (Ed.) *Television and women's culture: The politics of the popular*. Sydney: Currency Press.
- Luke, C. (1998). Pedagogy and Authority: Lessons from feminist and cultural studies, postmodernism and feminist pedagogy. In D. Buckingham (Ed.) *Teaching* popular culture: Beyond radical pedagogy. London: UCL Press.
- Males, M.A. (1999). Framing youth: Ten myths about the next generation. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press.
- Marshall, E., & Sensoy, O. (2009). The same old hocus pocus: Pedagogies of gender and sexuality in Shrek 2. *Discourse*, 30(2), 151-164.
- Marx, K. (1973). Karl Marx on society and social change. Chicago: University of Chicago press.
- Marx, K. (1976). In M. C. Howard & J. E. King (Eds.) *The economics of Marx: Selected readings of exposition and criticism.* Harmondsworth, NY: Penguin.
- Marx, K. (1993). Critique of the Gotha Program. In M. Fisk (Ed.) *Justice*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

- McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255-264.
- McRobbie, A. (2000). Feminism and youth culture. New York: Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (1997). Second-hand dress and the role of the ragmarket. In K. Gelder & S. Thornton (Eds.) *The subculture reader*. New York: Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (1991). Feminism and youth culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen.

  Cambridge, Mass: Unwin Hyman, Inc.
- McRobbie, A. & Garber, J. (2000). Girls and subcultures. In A. McRobbie (Ed.)

  Feminism and youth culture. New York: Routledge.
- Mitchell, C., & Reid-Walsh, J. (Eds.) (2005) Seven going on seventeen: Tween studies in the culture of girlhood. New York: Peter Lang.
- Nixon, H., Atkinson, S., & Beavis, C. (2006). New media pathways: Navigating the links between home, school and the workplace. In Leo Tan Wee Hin and R. Subramaniam (Eds.) *Handbook of research on literacy in technology at the K-12 level*. Hershey, USA: Idea Group Publishing.
- O'Brien, S., & Szeman, I. (2004). *Popular culture: A user's guide*. Scarborough, On: Nelson.
- Orenstein, P. (1996, August 11). The movies discover the teenage girl. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/11/movies/the-moviesdiscoverthe-teen-age-girl.html?pagewanted=3">http://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/11/movies/the-moviesdiscoverthe-teen-age-girl.html?pagewanted=3</a>
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Pipher, M. (1994). Reviving Ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls.

- New York: Grosset/Putnam.
- Polce-Lynch, M., Myers, B. J., Kliewer, W., & Kilmartin, C. (2001). Adolescent self-esteem and gender: Exploring relations to sexual harassment, body image, media influence, and emotional expression. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 30(2), 225 245.
- Pomerantz, S., Currie, D.H., & Kelly, D.M. (2004). Sk8ter girls: Skateboarders, girlhood, and feminism in motion. *Women's Studies International Forum, 27* (5-6), 547-557.
- Pomerantz, S. (2008). *Girls, style, and school identities: Dressing the part.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Raby, R. (2005). What is resistance? *Journal of youth studies*, 8 (2), 151-171.
- Roger, R. (Ed.) (2000). An introduction to critical discourse in education. Mahwah, NY:

  Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Rummel, R.J. (1977). *Understanding conflict and war: Conflict in perspective*. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications.
- Schrum, K. (2004). Some wore bobby sox: The emergence of the teenage girls' culture 1920-1945. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Skelton, T. (2000). 'Nothing to do, nowhere to go?' Teenage girls and 'public' space in the Rhonda Valleys South Wales. In S. Holloway & G. Valentine (Eds.)

  Children's Geographies: Playing, living, learning. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Skott-Myhre, H. (2008). Youth and subculture as creative force: Creating new spaces for radical youth work. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). Poststructural feminism in education: An overview. Qualitative

- *Studies in Education, 13(5), 477-515.*
- Taft, J. (2004). Girl power politics: Pop-culture barriers and organizational resistance. InA. Harris (Ed.) All about the girl: Culture, power and identity. New York:Routledge.
- Tally, P. (2005). Re-imagining girlhood: Hollywood and the tween girl film market. In
  B. Mitchell & J. Reid-Walsh (Eds.) Seven going on seventeen: Tween studies in the culture of girlhood. New York: Peter Lang.
- Weedon, C. (1987). Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Willis, P. (1977). Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs. Farnborough, England: Saxon House.
- Yates, S., Taylor, S., & Wetherell, M. (2001). *Discourse as data*. London: Sage Publications.