Smart Girls: A Deconstructive Discourse Analysis of Smartness

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Abstract

This project is a deconstructive discourse analysis of smart girlhood. From a feminist poststructural framework, with a focus on discourse and performative identity, I scrutinize three dominant discourses of smartness that are prevalent and academic and popular press. These constructions frame smart girls as being either Losers, Have-It-All Girls, or Imposters. By conducting semi-structured group interviews with six self-identified smart girls, I explore the question of how smart girls perform their smart girl identities in their current sociocultural context. After analyzing the data from the group interviews, I outline five themes that seem to be prevalent in the stories told by the smart girls in this thesis. Finally, I discuss how the performative identities of the smart girls in my thesis appear to be much more complex, multiple and rhizomatic than the discourses under review allow.

Smart Girls

I was—or am—a smart girl. In this thesis, I explore smart girls' identities in the school, not just because I have personal experience as a smart girl, but also because the topic is sorely under-researched or outright ignored in our current "can-do," "girl power" culture. Growing up, I knew I was smart based on my grades, and the way that teachers, family, and friends saw me: I have always enjoyed school and I have always worked hard. I took pride in being a smart girl, yet I also tried to conceal my academic success from my peers. I often downplayed my achievements and made light of the importance I placed on my grades. Outside of the classroom, I adopted attitudes that would cover up my achievements such as smoking, swearing, and focusing on friendships and boys. These experiences shifted dramatically when I began high school. I attended a private school where high achievement was acceptable and encouraged. Therefore, I found it easy to embrace my achievements. I was highly involved in many extracurricular activities; I was popular, smart, and I seemed to have it all together. However, I constantly struggled to maintain that image. Although I no longer felt it necessary to disguise my intelligence, I found it necessary to maintain a perfect image for my friends, teachers, and family. As I look back on my experiences, I often speculate whether or not experiences similar to my own are familiar to other smart girls. Engaging with academic literature revolving around smart girls has presented me with an opportunity to compare the findings of past research to my own experiences and to question the way that smart girls are portrayed in academic and popular press. For these reasons--both personal and academic--I felt compelled to focus on smart girls in this thesis.

Further, after focusing my interest on girlhood studies, I have come to realize that there is not an abundance of research that specifically examines the lives of smart girls, and that which does focus on smart girls depicts them in a very rigid manner. The constructions of smart girls that are evident in the literature are very stereotypical and fashion the lives of smart girls as stable, concrete, and stiff, without the possibility for variation. In my research, I have found that there are three overarching depictions that are used when discussing smart girls. Smart girls who take pride in their achievements are depicted as being peer-nominated "Losers" who have no appreciation for friendships and fashion. On the other hand, smart girls are also sometimes portrayed as being powerful social actors who have the capacity to be everything and have everything. These girls are displayed in a post-feminist light and are seen as the beneficiaries of girl power. Lastly, a third discourse is evident in which smart girls are sometimes depicted as imposters who feel that it is necessary to downplay and conceal their achievements in order to win the favor of their peers and, specifically, of boys. Each of these constructions will be explored in much greater detail throughout chapter two.

This thesis is a critical discourse analysis of smartness in relation to girls. The purpose of my study is to examine dominant discourses of girlhood and to explore how and if they connect and relate to girls who identify themselves as smart. From a feminist poststructural perspective, with a focus on discourse and performative identity, I examine constructions of smartness that are present in both academic literature and the popular press, and explore how smart girls understand and negotiate smartness in their everyday lives. It is my goal to deconstruct the discourses under examination and, rather than reify them, to argue that they do not reflect the lived experience of smart girls, but are academic and popular constructions that attempt to

categorize young women into rigid compartments. While I do not aim to explain the phenomenon of smartness, or to claim truths about the lives of these girls, I do wish to open a flow of communication that will present girls with the opportunity to discuss issues they face in their lives and to explore how their lives are influenced by their smart girl identities.

This is an important topic to study, not only because there is a lack of literature on the topic, but also because it is important for the field of girls' studies to recognize that the experiences of smart girls are important and useful to discuss. In my previous fieldwork with smart girls during my undergraduate career, I found that some girls indicated that teachers did not give them the attention they felt they deserved because it appeared as though they were "doing just fine." They said that teachers were more prone to help students who were seen as falling behind because they assumed that smart girls could solve their own problems without assistance. Further, the girls in the current study expressed trials they have faced with teachers who were not willing to challenge them in the classroom. The girls stated that while some of their teachers have offered to give them extra work upon completion of their normal class work, they do not want "extra work" but rather, they want "different work" (Izzy and Stephanie). Therefore, although it may sometimes be the case that smart girls are more equipped to work through issues unassisted, the girls I spoke with felt that they have suffered at times as a result of these types of misunderstandings. In comparison, I speculate that the lack of literature on the topic may also stem from a similar assumption. If smart girls are seen as being "just fine," without the need for help, attention, or different modes of learning, then perhaps there will be little interest in studying them. However, I argue that smart girls are worthy of study in their own right, not solely because I assume they are in need of help, but also because they have important

stories to tell about what it means to be smart in the current educational system. Although smart girls may, at times, be equipped to negotiate their challenges and difficulties without assistance, this does not mean they are any less deserving of attention than other students. Therefore, my thesis seeks to crack open the rigid narratives on smart girls to show that they are important and that they fully deserve attention, help, and resources both in the classroom and in society as a whole.

Research Question

In an effort to narrow the focus of this thesis, I have formulated a specific research question to be examined in my study: How do self-identified smart girls perform their smart girl identities? Using Judith Butler's concept of performativity and a reconceptualization of the term identity, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter, I will examine how girls engage in smart girl performances in their daily lives. By conducting semi-structured group interviews with six self-identified smart girls between the ages of nine and thirteen, I explore how they understand smartness and how they perform their smart girl identities. Further, through deep analysis of the group interview transcripts, I have attempted to deconstruct the dominant discourses of smartness by examining how the smart girls in my study reflected, resisted and contradicted these discourses.

The Smart Girls

Although a much more detailed description of the participants in my study will be presented in chapter three, I feel it is important to introduce them here, at the beginning of my thesis, as they are the backbone of this entire project. There were six participants in this study, all of whom identified themselves as being smart girls. When formulating this project, I wrestled a

great deal with how to define smartness in order to recruit participants. In the end, I opted to avoid an objective definition of smartness, thus leaving the power to define what terms are required to be a smart girl in the hands of girls themselves. This way, any girl who viewed herself as smart was eligible to participate in my study. This posed some minor challenges as some girls asked "how smart do I have to be?" but overall, I found that the girls who deemed themselves to be smart girls were quite confident in this identification.

I conducted two separate focus groups, both with groups of girls who knew each other on a very personal level. The first group I conducted was made up of three girls who were in the eighth grade at the time of the focus group. The girls in this group were Izzy, Stephanie, and Katelyn[1]. They were all close friends, attended the same school and were in the same class. Izzy and Katelyn had attended the same school and been in the same class for a number of years, and Stephanie had just come to their school a few years prior, after being homeschooled for the beginning years of her education. Stephanie and Katelyn were neighbours and as such, knew each other before Stephanie enrolled in their school. The second focus group included Kalista and Karly, two sixth grade students who were best friends and Ashley, Karly's younger sister who was in grade four. Like the first group, all three of these girls attended the same school. They had all attended this school for their entire educational career. Kalista and Karly were in the same class and obviously, Ashley was in a different class. The girls in this group indicated spending a great deal of time together both during and outside of school hours as they were involved in many of the same extracurricular activities and spent time together socially.

My Identity

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[1] All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms chosen by the girls themselves which are used to protect the identities of the participants.

I chose to conduct this research because I have a certain affinity with the smart girl. I am standing on the sidelines rooting for her and encouraging her to succeed! Because of my personal connections with the subject, I understand the great relationship that my own smart girl identity has with this research. It is essential for me to recognize this relationship because my identity is strongly influential in how I approached this research and perhaps even in how the participants responded to me. Because I am a young, female, white, smart girl researcher, it was important for me to take caution when undertaking such research. I had to constantly remind myself that the purpose of this project was not to answer my own questions about my history as a smart girl, nor was it to make assumptions and draw conclusions that are in keeping with what I hoped or expected to see in the data. While it was certainly not my goal to become an *invisible* researcher, it was my goal to be a *conscious* researcher, a goal that can only be achieved through continuous reflection and contemplation.

Due to the fact that I was once, not so long ago, a young girl who dealt with the issues I am studying, I found it imperative to constantly reassess my motives and reflect on the usefulness of my work throughout the course of the project, to ensure that my research is not just *about* smart girls but also *for* smart girls (Strega, 2005). Although my connection with the participants may have been beneficial to the research, as I was able to relate to and connect with the girls in the study, it was also limiting at times, as I occasionally found myself imposing my previous beliefs about the subject on the girls in the study. It was important that I constantly reconsidered my research in order to avoid being driven by ulterior motives and personal hang-ups. It was necessary for me to ensure that I did not base the research too heavily on my past experiences and that I did not attempt to impart those experiences onto the girls in my study. I

constantly reminded myself that this research was meant to be an exploration into the ever changing, contradictory lives of six unique girls rather than a quest to discover certainties about their lives, or about my life for that matter.

Theoretical Framework

As highlighted previously, my study sought to explore the ways in which girls negotiate smartness in their lives. The research question was investigated via a feminist poststructural lens. In the following pages, I discuss various theories and draw connections to my current project. In order to do so I will highlight the main tenets of both poststructuralism and feminism in an effort to conceptualize how the two meld together into one theory that lends itself to this project. I begin by discussing poststructuralism, discourse, power, and knowledge. I will then address feminist theory and introduce the concepts of performativity and identity. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of how feminist poststructural theory, particularly that of performative identity, frames the current project.

Poststructuralism. Poststructuralism involves "the relation between language, subjectivity, social organization and power" (Weedon, 1987, p. 12). From this perspective language is much less stable than traditional perspectives present it as being. Eagleton (1983) uses the metaphor of a sprawling web that is constantly interchanging and circulating to describe language. Like Derrida (1982), he claims that meaning is never identical with itself but that it is actually a reflection of itself. The metaphor of text as a sprawling web clearly demonstrates how poststructural conceptualizations of language are complex, plural and open-ended (Eagleton, 1983). Poststructuralism, as its name implies, comes after structuralism. In structuralism, language is seen as a chain of signs. In this chain, each sign is comprised of a signifier, which is

the sound or written image, and the signified, which is the meaning (Weedon, 1987). Whereas language is seen as unproblematic in structuralism, poststructuralism divides the signifier from the signified and claims that language does not directly yield reality and that the connections between signifier and signified are arbitrary, not necessary natural (Eagleton, 1983; Weedon, 1987). In other words, poststructuralism asserts that words hold meaning simply because we give them meaning, not because the meaning is inherently embedded within the word. As stated by Eagleton (1983), within poststructuralism there is a "belief that reality is constructed by discourse rather than reflected by it" (pp. 143-144). Clearly, discourse is a key concept in poststructural research.

Discourse. "Discourses organize how we think, what we know and how we speak about the world around us" (Raby, 2002, p. 430). My understanding of discourse is strongly informed by the work of Foucault (1978). Discourses are said to be dominant ways of speaking about things and ideas that are formed when power, language, and meaning come together (Pomerantz, 2008). Weedon (1987) speaks to the issue of discourse by suggesting that language becomes a site of political struggle when multiple, contradicting discourses come together to create different ways of giving meaning to the world and to organize social power. Finally, Pomerantz (2008) suggests that discourses have an impact on identities as they "solidify socially constructed categories" and play a role in the way we conceive of ourselves, others, and the social world (p. 13). When certain discourses become privileged over others, they begin to "claim the status of truth" and attempt to impart knowledge about what a certain event, person or situation is or means (Raby, 2002, p. 430).

The concept of discourse is clearly relevant when examining how dominant conceptions of girlhood, and more specifically, smartness, shape what comes to be known as the truth about smart girls. These conceptions, or discourses, have an impact on how smart girls are seen because although not a direct depiction of reality, they present a way of giving meaning and solidifying the social category of smartness. A further theorization of discourse in relation to the current study is provided in chapter two when I introduce the discourses of smartness that will be reviewed in this thesis.

Power and knowledge. Following Foucault (1978), it is not possible to speak of discourse without also speaking of power. It has been said that there is a "complex of power and knowledge" that cannot be escaped (Deleuze, 1986, p. 75). In fact, from Foucault, there is no purpose in entertaining the thought of escaping from this complex, or strata, because there is nothing that is outside of it to be reached (Deleuze, 1986). Skott-Myhre (2008) explains this as a plane of force that has "no ideal outside" (p. 16) and Foucault (1978) states that there is "no exteriority" (p. 98). In other words, no one is outside of power but everyone is involved in the production and distribution of power (Skott-Myhre, 2008).

It is necessary to understand that this discussion of power does not reflect a hierarchical or top-down form of power. To be sure, Foucault (1978) states that, "we must not look for who has the power ... and who is deprived of it" (p. 99). Further, Skott-Myhre (2008) states that "power is not the province of one person or another but manifests itself in all aspects of human endeavor" (p. 141). From this perspective, power is viewed as a relation between forces rather than as a form (Deleuze, 1986). In writing about Foucauldian views of power, Deleuze (1986) states that power "passes through the hands of the mastered no less than through the hands of the

masters" (p. 71). Power relations do not begin at one point and end at another but move in multiple directions simultaneously and are produced constantly (Deleuze, 1986; Foucault, 1978). As a useful metaphor, Skott-Myhre (2008) relates power to electricity. Like electricity, power cannot be located as an object at any given spot, at any given time, however, it is constantly present and at work. While you can only see electricity at its points of resistance, these are certainly not the only points where it is productive. Similarly, power cannot be located in any particular person or group at any particular time and is not transmitted solely from one individual to another but is constantly being produced and reproduced in each moment (Skott-Myhre, 2008).

In his review of Foucault, Deleuze (1986) suggests that when speaking of power, we should not ask what power is and where it comes from. Rather, the question that should be examined is: "How is power practiced"? (p. 71). Therefore, when speaking of power, we do not speak of who holds the power and who is subjected to the power because all forces have the power both to affect and to be affected (Deleuze, 1986). Power shoots out in all directions, at all times. Deleuze (1986) suggests that institutions seem as though they maintain the highest degree of power because they have "the capacity to integrate power-relations, by constituting various forms of knowledge which actualize, modify and redistribute these relations" (p. 77). It is because of this constituting effect that institutions become political and come to be seen as maintaining the highest degree of power. It is not because institutions actually hold the highest degree of power, but because they redistribute power and knowledge that they come to be seen as powerful.

In terms of knowledge, Foucault (1980) focuses on the insurrection of subjugated knowledges. He describes subjugated knowledges as "the historical contents that have been buried and disguised" (p. 81). He suggests that there are "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate" (p. 82) and claims that there should be an attempt to "emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection" (p. 85). He suggests that truth and meaning are constantly produced and reproduced through discourse. Therefore, power and knowledge work together perpetually to create an immanent and locked loop of what comes to be known as truth, giving birth to discourse (Foucault, 1980).

Further, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that language holds a capacity to order and control the world. They claim that the world is made up of order-words which serve to shape and control subjects. Order-words are "not a particular category of explicit statements, but the relation of every word or every statement to implicit presuppositions, in other words, to speech acts that are, and can only be, accomplished in the statement. Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a 'social obligation'" (p. 79). They suggest that these order-words tell us how to be, think and behave and that they "order the world" (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 34). However, despite this capacity to order, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) introduce the concept of lines of flight. Skott-Myhre (2008) describes lines of flight as "escape routes from the structuring effect of dominant social forms" (p.11) that provide an opportunity to "contest the dominant modes of subjectivity" (p. 12). The idea of utilizing lines of flight as an escape route from dominant discourses will be discussed more fully in a subsequent section.

Power is necessary to explore in this study as I view smart girls as subjects who both *have* and are subjected *to* power. As explained by Raby (2005), "power is productive, flowing through the language we use, how we come to understand ourselves, practices of governance, the organization of time and space, and so forth" (p. 161). Therefore, girls can be seen as producing power through their language in order to generate understandings of themselves and their social spaces while at the same time, they are also being subjected to power. Power circulates through girls. Following Foucault, the question, then, should not be whether or not girls have power or are powerful. Instead, the question becomes "how is power practiced in the lives of smart girls?" Further, to connect the concept of subjugated knowledge, I would argue that the smart girls in my study present different ways of being smart and different understandings of smartness that are not deemed important or given credit in past writing on smartness. Therefore, it is between this convergence of power and the knowledge of what it means to be smart that discourses, or truths, about smartness are created.

Further, in relation to the discussion of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), order-words tell girls how to be girls, how to be feminine, how to be smart, how to be achievers and so on. Simply by ascribing to any of these identity categories, there is what comes to be an automatic understanding of what the subject can or cannot do, be, say, act, think, wear, and so on. Therefore, "smart" can be scrutinized as an order-word because it tells girls what they can and cannot do. For example, in the discourse of "the Loser", which will be fully flushed out in chapter two, it is suggested that if a girl is smart and openly acknowledges this intelligence, popularity is out of the question for her. Therefore, in this sense, the word smart orders young

women to behave in a very specific way. However, lines of flight present girls with a way to "be," or exist, some way other than what the dominant perspective ascribes them to be.

Feminism. Although the feminist perspective is varied and encompasses numerous 'types' of feminism, it is important to recognize the overarching characteristics of feminism in terms of how they relate to feminist based research. Feminism began in the 1850s and 1860s, with what has come to be known as first-wave feminism (LeGates, 2001). This movement focused on issues of male-dominated education, professional careers, women's economic and legal dependence as well as many other campaigns with the goal of achieving the right for women to "define their own capabilities and goals" (LeGates, 2001, p. 197). First-wave feminism progressed through the late 19th century and into the 20th century, waning shortly after World War I, when women achieved the right to vote (LeGates, 2001). While this is where the roots of feminism are seen, the second wave of feminism, or the Women's Liberation Movement, which came to fruition in the 1960s, is seen as more powerful (Weedon, 1987). It was through this movement that women began to question what it means to be a woman, how femininity and sexuality have historically been defined by men and how these concepts can be shifted and redefined by women themselves (Weedon, 1987). In other words, the feminists involved in this movement began to question the order-words that had been ascribed to them in the past. Some scholars would suggest that feminist thought has shifted toward a third-wave in which intersectionality, hybridity, fluidity, difference, and postmodern play are thought to be important. Heywood and Drake (1997) suggest that third-wave feminism can be viewed through "multiple subject positions" (p. 7) where multiplicity of identities is said to be the "lived messiness characteristic of the third wave" (Heywood & Drake, 2007, p. 7). Further, "third-wave

discourses of contradictory subjects and feminisms complicate generational and wave metaphors that construct feminism as a linear and progressive history" (Eisenhauer, 2004, p. 84). It is this view of feminism that I explore as poststructural feminism that taken up in my thesis.

Through feminism, many dominant perspectives of gender, sexuality, class and race are called into question. Weedon (1987) defines feminism as a "politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society" (p. 1). The feminist perspective often challenges dominant assumptions that gender differences are biologically based and supposes that these differences are, actually, socially constructed through power relations between men and women (Weedon, 1987). As well, feminism challenges the assumption that gender is a primary defining factor for all woman by recognizing "the diversity of women's experiences and how these are shaped not only by their gender, but also by their racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual preference, age, and economic background which is crucial in guarding against a unidimensional view of the category *woman*" (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 17). Feminism seeks to deconstruct power struggles that exist within the male-oriented perspective in order to seek social change (Weedon, 1987). Feminism focuses on the inequalities that become apparent within the discourses that are embedded in dominant ways of knowing in society. As described by Weedon (1987),

> ...a feminist perspective results from the conflict and contradictions between dominant institutionalized definitions of women's nature and social role, inherent in the contemporary sexual division of labour, the structure of the family, access to work and politics, medicine, social welfare, religion, and the media and our experience of these institutions in the context of the dominant liberal discourse of the free and self-determining individual (p. 5).

Feminist research seeks not only to explore the lives of women, but also to improve the lives of women by challenging hierarchical modes of creating and distributing knowledge

(Hesse-Biber et al., 2004; Seibold, 2000). Primarily, feminist research is that which is based on, by, and for women (Stacey, 1988). Seibold (2000) outlined a checklist that is commonly found in feminist research that includes criteria such as women studying women's experiences, interaction between participant and researcher, the word feminism to be used in the report, the use of non-sexist language, and so on. However, in her work she criticizes the appropriateness of depending on such a checklist because it implies that there is a singular, rigid technique for conducting feminist research. Instead, she attempts to broaden the classification by outlining three major goals that should be addressed within feminist research. These goals are: examining women's experiences, attempting to see the world from the perspective of a certain woman or group of women and being a critical activist in the attempt to improve the situation of a group of women or persons (Seibold, 2000). Although these goals may not be suitable in every situation as they preclude the possibility of feminist research studying anyone other than women, they provide a basic framework on which to rest. Others have also supported Seibold's (2000) notion that there cannot be a single mold to follow when conducting feminist research but that the focus should be on the major goals of the theory (DeVault, 1999; Oakley, 1988; Stacey, 1988).

As an extension of this discussion, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2008) combine the notions of feminist research with ideas from childhood studies and introduce the concept of a "girl method" which refers to doing research surrounding girl culture, as I am doing in the current thesis. In this sense, they discuss components and goals that are similar to those of feminist research but are focused specifically towards girlhood. For example, the "girl method" involves working with, for, and about girls, taking into account the identity of the researcher, including girls as participants, and examining the cultural contexts that the girls are located in (Mitchell &

Reid-Walsh, 2008). They argue that by studying girls solely under a feminist lens, we are

assuming that women of all ages exist together in a monolithic, unproblematic category. As a

result, it is necessary to make the distinction between feminist research and the "girl method" so

as to highlight important differences between young girls and older women. By doing so, we

come to an understanding that girls are worthy of study in their own right, as a category that

resides within, yet in a way, distinct from, women. Therefore, I find it necessary to point out

these nuances and to highlight that while my research can be considered feminist poststructural,

the focus remains on the "girl method".

Feminist poststructuralism. There are many ways in which feminism and

poststructuralism join together to become a cohesive theory (Eagleton, 1983). St. Pierre (2000)

suggests that the "relationship between the two bodies of thought and practice is not inimical but

invigorating and fruitful" (p. 477). Further, she states that feminists use poststructural theories to

show how language operates to produce damaging structures to the world. As I discussed

previously, poststructuralism calls into question the assumption that language is a mirror image

of reality. This question is one that is monumental to feminism as it questions and challenges

dominant ways of knowing and posits that there is no singular, absolute way to describe the

experiences of a social subject (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987).

When speaking of the connection between poststructural and feminist theories, Eagleton

(1983) suggests that feminism does not simply revolve around working towards equality and

power for women but calls into question all issues of power and status in the world. Further, St.

Pierre (2000) suggests that it is "the play and possibility for deconstruction and reconstruction"

of identity that is interesting for poststructural feminism (p. 505). She states that "it is difficult to

produce enough names to match all the different things there are in the world, so often we are forced to group things/ideas/people that are similar but significantly different into the same category" (p. 480), but that poststructural feminists believe that people are made up of intersections of all of these categories and they should be explored uniquely. Therefore, the two theories meld together in a way that tackles binary oppositions, language structures, and power relations (Eagleton, 1983; St. Pierre, 2000).

Performativity. One of the overarching concepts of feminist poststructuralism is that of performativity, a term coined by Judith Butler. Butler (1990; 1993) discusses sex and gender as being constructed and constituted through power. She argues that both sex and gender are constructed because there is no understanding of sex before an understanding of gender (Butler, 1990). Further, she suggests that gender is performed. Although this performance is not theatrical or even deliberate, she suggests that we perform ourselves differently in different contexts and that we perform our genders according to what is considered normal, as the construction of gender revolves around the exclusion of that which is abject or Other (Butler, 1990). In other words, performativity is not an act of waking up and choosing who or what we want to be on any given day. Rather, performativity is an act that must be conceptualized by four aspects, as highlighted by Butler. First, performativity is conceptualized in relation to regulatory norms. Second, it does not assume a choosing or voluntary subject. Third, it is defined by heterosexual norms that are appropriated by the subject. Fourth, these norms are defined in opposition to those who are deemed abject or Other (Butler, 1993, p. 15). She claims that these performative acts create gender itself; that they cohere over time and space to constitute the "real" of gender, but that there is no "doer behind the deed" (Butler, 1990; Hood-Williams &

Harrison, 1998). While these performances generate what comes to be seen as feminine or masculine, individual subjects do not deliberately create these norms *a priori*.

Performativity takes place by way of citation and reiteration (Butler, 1993). Citation involves making reference to something that already exists. In terms of gendered identities, these citations usually involve making reference to aspects of compulsory heterosexuality and gendered norms. Reiteration refers to the repetition of something that has been said or done before. Therefore, gendered identity performances take place when individuals constantly reiterate these citations. As an example, clothing can be seen as a gendered citation. When an individual reiterates these gendered citations by wearing particular types of clothing that signify a particular gender, they are engaging in the citation and reiteration of performativity. As stated by Hood-Williams and Harrison (1998), "the key characteristic of gender as a fabricated performance is that this performance is *repeated*" (p. 76). Butler (1993) also suggests that performativity works in much the same way as discourse in terms of how it produces and reinforces identities. She suggests that discourse produces the effects that it names by creating something at the same time that it describes or discusses it. This idea is evidenced in the following quote:

> To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body (Butler, 1993, p. 10).

Therefore, when we speak of gender, or any other identity category, we are creating it and describing it simultaneously. Specifically, Butler (1993) states, that "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act", but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (p. 2). She suggests that when

subjects act their gender they are both producing and reinforcing identities at the same time. Further, Pomerantz (2008) discusses performativity as being a way in which subjects are multiple. That is, they are "both enabled and constrained by discourse at the same time" (p. 14). She states that discourses position subjects within specific cultural, historical and social roles, which are binding yet they also "open up a possibility of reiteration, or a refusal to repeat the behaviours that give such social roles stability" (p. 14). In addition, Skott-Myhre (2008) suggests that discourses contain the possibility for resistance by means of performing alternate or subjected discourses. Therefore based on these explanations by Pomerantz (2008) and Skott-Myhre (2008), we can conclude that subjects who perform their gendered identities both use and are used by dominant discourses.

Butler is keen to address the implications of power that exist for subjects who are engaging in gendered identity performances. She suggests that while identities are performed, they are performed within a matrix of power (Butler, 1990). While identities can be performed in multiple and diverse ways, there are only so many possibilities for the performances that can be engaged in by any particular individual. This concept is formative to my study of smart girls as it highlights the necessity of examining the ways in which young women engage in citing and reiterating gendered identities, specifically smart girl identities, within matrices of power. As has been alluded to previously, Butler (1993) suggests that there is a doubleness to power and that individuals are not simply created by it but are born both constituted and enacted. While individuals are created by power they also become subjects who speak because of power's constituting effects. Therefore, there is the possibility for subjects to move within the matrix of power and to perform their identities, in this case, their smart identities, in unique ways.

While this is not to suggest that girls have an unending array of possibilities, or that any girl can be anything she wants to be, it does suggest that there is a point at which a smart girl becomes a subject capable of "taking up available discourses and cultural practices and a subject that, at the same time, is subjected, forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 502). Although girls exist within the matrix of power and can never be examined as external to power, it is possible for them to perform their identities in unique ways by engaging in reiterative and citational negotiations and extending matrices of power.

    Identity. When discussing how smart girls perform their smart identities, it is useful, and necessary I believe, to provide a discussion of the term identity. This is a necessity because the term identity is a term that is traditionally discussed within humanistic discourse. However, Hall (1996) discusses the concept of identity from a poststructural perspective and suggests that the term is still useful to those who are interested in poststructural thought. Pomerantz (2008) reinstates the value of exploring the term identity by stating that "the word is not yet obsolete, offering a valuable way to theorize the relationship between self, other, and society" (p. 12). Both Hall (1996) and Pomerantz (2008) highlight that this term is incredibly tangled up with humanistic conceptions and as such, must be reconceptualized. Therefore, they claim that the term identity should be viewed *under erasure* because although the term is no longer useful in its original form, it can still be talked about in new, deconstructed and reconstructed ways (Hall, 1996; Pomerantz, 2008). By placing terms *under erasure* we think of them as "no longer operating within the paradigm in which they were originally generated" (Hall, 1996; p. 1). This deconstruction takes the term identity out of the humanistic paradigm for

which it was first established and into a poststructural paradigm in a new and highly reconstructed way.

Hall (1996) suggests that resignifying the word identity should be thought of as a way to think about the subject in a new fashion and that the process of placing the term *under erasure* "is in the attempt to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices" (p. 2). He claims that while humanistic schools of thought tend to refer to identity as an identification of commonality, a poststructural approach views identity as a flexible, ongoing and incomplete process. In other words, while traditional perspectives view identity as an individual's sense of belonging to a certain group, idea or value system, "the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed, always in process" (p. 2). A humanistic conceptualization of identity assumes a stable, core self. Alternately, the reconceptualization of identity "does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change; the bit of the self which remains always-ready, the same, identical across time" (p. 3). The poststructural conceptualization of identity assumes an ever-partial, always incomplete self that is "contingently forming and reforming in relation to others, social structures, and our own multiple and contradictory subject positioning" (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 12). In this understanding, identities are produced within discourse as discourse defines both the self and society (Pomerantz, 2008). Therefore, discursive identities are subject to the specific cultural and historical discursive frameworks in which they exist (Hall, 1996).

Hall (1996) suggests that identities are all produced within difference. Following Derrida and Butler, he indicates that identities are produced "in relation to the Other, in relation to what

is not" (p. 4.). Therefore, in this sense, identities are made possible through their capacity to exclude that which is abject and Other. Similar to Butler (1993), Hall (1996) claims that there is a doubleness to identity. He discusses this doubleness as an intersection of identity by stating that identities are "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (p. 6). In this doubleness, identity involves the point of *"suture,* between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'" (Hall, 1996, pp. 5-6). In other words, identity occurs at the intersecting point where discourses shape us to be certain types of social subjects while also producing subjects who are capable of speaking. Pomerantz (2008) suggests that the fluidity by which discourse and subjectivity are joined together, or sutured, is the fluidity that is performative. Further, Skott-Myhre (2008) refers to the self as "fractured and discontinuous lines of improvisational performance" (p. 16) and suggests that we must "move away from descriptions of static space towards a more dynamic description of identity as an event of performance that takes place in an empty space" (p. 23). It is through this poststructural reconceptualization of identity that I speak of girls performing their smart girl identities.

Skott-Myhre (2008) explains that rather than viewing identity from the either/or perspective that is so often depicted in modernist thinking, we should traverse to a discussion of identity as multiple. Following Deleuze and Guattari (1987) he suggests that identities should be viewed as rhizomatic. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) claim that much of our thinking is premised on a sense of linearity with beginnings and endings, rather than multiplicities of thought. By

utilizing the metaphor of a rhizome to augment their arguments, they suggest ideas are formed within planes of consistency where there are multiplicities that connect to one another via lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). By viewing smart girls' identities as rhizomes, I am suggesting that they are multiple, complex and do not have a start nor a finish. Further, the gendered identity performances that girls engage in can be viewed as the plateaus that are discussed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as being "in the middle, not at the beginning or the end" (p. 21). They define a plateau as "any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 22). Therefore, smart girl's identity performances are plateaus that do not stand on their own but are connected to each other and do not have a beginning or an end. When these plateaus are combined, they form a rhizome. How girls act upon these plateaus, their negotiations of them, are the lines of flight that sometimes produce connections between each rhizome, while at times also producing stability and structure –which, together, form their ever changing identities. To emphasize this suggestion, Skott-Myhre (2008) states "these lines tangle and cross in different and mutating combinations of found and unfound identity, constantly opening shifting sites of new identity performance" (p. 24). Therefore, there is the possibility for girls to act and be a variety of ways through performative identities that are contained "in the specific lines of flight that were rhizomatically produced" (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 25). Yet, it is important to remember, as has been discussed previously, that these performances exist and are contained within, not outside of, power. Bettie (2003) states "discourses, or public meaning systems, are the material for identity formation. We deploy these discourses to construct our identities but from a limited range of options. Consequently, some identities are readily made possible while others are not" (p. 54). Therefore, I utilize these ideas from Deleuze and Guattari

(1987) to suggest that it is possible for smart girls to perform their identities as plateaus through lines of flight by engaging in negotiations that draw connections between rhizomes and extend planes of consistency or matrices of power (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Performativity involves how smart girls perform their smart identities and how dominant discourses of smartness play into these performances. Again, it is necessary to remember that these performances are not by choice. You do not choose how to perform from day to day. It is not a matter of deciding what you want to be that day. Rather, performativity is contained within discourse. A subject performs through discourse, order-words, and truth regimes. Therefore, in this project, all three discourses being discussed can be seen as performances. For example, in the Have-It-All discourse, being a smart, popular, pretty girl is a performance. For the Imposters, denying smartness is a performance. And for the Losers, if you are smart, popularity is out of the question. In a sense, performativity reflects the role a subject is forced to play.

However, on the other hand, performativity recognizes that there are cracks in discourse. Therefore, this project will also explore how lines of flight make it possible for smart girls to perform their smart identities in ways that are unique and distinct from dominant regimes of truth. The purpose of theorizing performativity in this study is to examine how smart girls cite and reiterate smart girl norms but also utilize lines of flight to perform their smart identities in complex and nuanced ways that are outside of, and perhaps even contradictory to these discourses.

To conclude the discussion of performative identity, I must address one final thought in regards to the humanistic conception of identity versus a poststructural conception of identity. With respect to Hall's (1996) suggestion that identity is a suturing whereby social subjects feel

attached to a temporal sense of self, Bettie (2003) and Pomerantz (2008) suggest that while speaking of identity poststructurally - as a fluid and contextual concept - it is important that we do not disregard the humanistic meaning that many social subjects may glean from the term identity. Pomerantz (2008) speaks to this doubleness in the following quote:

> While discourse speaks us into subjecthood—naming and classifying us as particular kinds of people who lead particular kinds of (sanctioned, disparaged, privileged, oppressed) lives—it simultaneously offers us attachment to the social world through the subject positions or social roles that we occupy as a result of our discursive constitution. These attachments grant us stability and a sense of coherence that feels "real" and permanent, but are actually a contextual and temporal sense of self that shifts over time and space (p. 13).

In other words, social actors often understand and explain themselves in essentialist ways when discussing their attachments to particular discourses. Therefore, I can use poststructuralism to theorize my project and my understanding of identity all I want, but I cannot make the girls in my study think and speak in poststructural ways, and I also cannot undermine the fact that they sometimes spoke of themselves as having a real, stable self (Bettie, 2003; Pomerantz, 2008) by saying things such as "I know what I want to be" (Katelyn) or "I want to be a chef or a teacher" (Ashley). In these examples, the girls speak with a sense of clarity and confidence that indicates a unified sense of self. As suggested by both Bettie (2003) and Pomerantz (2008) the purpose of highlighting this doubleness is not to reassert a modernist subject but to emphasize that there is value in recognizing the understanding of identity that is held by everyday social actors and that discussing both the fluidity and fixity of girls' talk is important.

Feminist poststructuralism and smart girls. Each of these theories brings something to the current project to formulate an overall framework for the entire thesis and to provide a basis from which to approach my research question. Although performative identity is my overarching analytical concept, each of the theories provides a stepping stone upon which the framework is

constructed. To look at this project like a puzzle, each theory is a necessary piece, without which the puzzle would not be complete. To begin, I discussed discourse to demonstrate how meaning and truths are constructed in society. Then, I addressed power and knowledge to explain that discourse does not exist outside of power but that knowledge and power join together to create dominant discourses. Next, I discussed order-words to demonstrate how discourses serve to order the world and social subjects within it in relation to smart girls. After discussing each of these theories, I moved to a discussion of feminism where I highlighted the main tenets of the theory and introduced the concept of the "girl method" before making connections to poststructuralism by discussing performativity and identity. While discussing performative identity, I highlighted how power and discourse serve to shape the identities that social subjects have available to them, while lines of flight also leave room for fluctuation and movement within, throughout, and beyond discourse.

Rather than searching for definitive answers about what it means for girls to be smart in the current sociocultural context, I am seeking to understand how and if dominant discourses serve to shape the understandings of young women through the stories they tell and the ways that they perform their smart girl identities. I am seeking to explore identity as rhizomatic, complex and unending while also giving recognition to the ways in which girls sometimes speak of their identities as a fixed part of who they are. I am seeking to glimpse into the world of young women who exist in a unique social position and to gain a perception of the knowledge they have available to them surrounding their girlhood, all the while recognizing that this glimpse and understanding can only ever be partial and is constantly mediated by my own discursive identity (Fine, 1994). I am not attempting to determine what smart girls think, do or say. Instead, I am

attempting to explore the lives of social beings - each of whom comes to the topic in unique and ultimately contradictory ways - while constantly taking into consideration feminist poststructural perspectives, specifically that of performative identity.

Literature Review

It has been suggested that childhood is a socially constructed concept that shifts and changes throughout different social, historical, and cultural contexts (James & James, 2001). To extend this argument, I suggest that girlhood is also socially constructed. That is, rather than viewing girlhood as a fixed age-specific category that is mandated by biological and physical changes, I view girlhood as a social category that fluctuates and is guided by discourses of normal and abnormal girlhood (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005). To this end, I will begin by highlighting the concept of girlhood as a field of study. Next, I will provide a brief discussion of how girls exist in school, after which I will outline three prevalent discourses of girlhood, specifically relating to smart girlhood, in our current historical, cultural, and social context.

Girlhood Studies

Throughout the 1990s there was a surge in discussion about the lives of girls as an area of critical inquiry. It is argued that research done on girls prior to the millennium focused mainly on developing an understanding of women rather than girls themselves (Kearney, 2009). Since that point, however, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of academic work focusing on the lives of girls in their own right (Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009; Kearney, 2009). Kearney (2009) argues that this surge in talk about girls results from a collision between academics and popular culture. Primarily, she states that as gender studies and feminist scholars became more influential in the academy, they felt that the absence of research on girls was unacceptable. Secondly, she suggests that the surge is also related to the increasing amount of attention paid to girls by the fashion, beauty, and media industries since the early 1990s (Kearney, 2009).

Amidst this academic and popular culture driven collision of "girl talk," a number of discourses have emerged which construct girls as ideal, less than ideal, deviant, and in trouble, among other constructions (Currie et al., 2009). Harris (2004) argues that the extent to which girls are seen as succeeding or failing is contingent upon the way we come to understand what it means to be a girl. As such, discourses serve to structure girls' lives in extremely complex and multifaceted ways (Aapola et al., 2005) because, it has been argued, "growing up 'right'" is a highly managed process for girls" (Harris, 2004, 15). Therefore, dominant discourses of girlhood shape common conceptions of what girls are and should be while also influencing how girls negotiate their femaleness (Driscoll, 2002).

For example, some notable discourses of girlhood are mean girls, sexually aggressive girls, girl as tough, girls as rebellious, and girls as in trouble and in need of protection, among others (Currie et al., 2009).The purpose of the current study is to explore how girls negotiate smartness in relation to the discourses around them. Specifically, the focus will be on three dominant discourses of smart girls and how they both perceive themselves and are perceived in the school: the Loser, the Have-it-all, and the Imposter. In this chapter, I will analyze these constructions in order to unearth the assumptions that they make about smart girls.

Girls in School

There are numerous constructions of girlhood that are currently circulating in both the academic and the public press. However, as my interests weigh heavily on smartness, it is necessary to engage in a discussion of how girls occupy the school space because smartness relates strongly to academics as will be evidenced throughout my entire thesis. Although research focusing solely on the experiences of smart girls is limited, there is a large body of

literature that explores the avenues through which girls, in general, engage in identity negotiation in the school. The school is seen as a crucial site for identity construction in the lives of girls, primarily because they spend a significant amount of time in this setting. Further, this space has been identified as a site of major social change (Gonick, 2005). A significant aspect of the school is that it is a place of social interaction where children and youth meet and develop friendships (Konopka, 1983). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the impact that this social setting has on the lives of girls, in particular in relation to how they engage in performative identity, in this case their smart girl identity performances. The notion of school as a social space sets the importance of studying the relationship between performative identity and smartness. Often, the school is seen as a place to foster academic growth, yet the extent to which it assists in social development and identity construction remains largely unacknowledged. Therefore, it is important to note that this project does not reside solely within the academic realm of smartness. While smartness is most certainly school and academic based, I am also interested in how smartness influences and is influenced by the social life of the girls under examination.

An unsettling notion that has been discussed within the literature revolves around how girls are perceived in the school setting. Although people believe that teachers like girls better, there are findings that suggest otherwise (Ornstein, 1994). Renold and Allan (2006) found that girls' achievements are often attributed to hard work but not to natural ability. Further, they face daily attacks in the classroom, both by teachers and peers, in terms of their achievements in relation to their femininity, particularly in classrooms where girls are achieving higher than boys (Renold & Allan, 2006). In other words, girls are assumed to achieve well academically because they work hard. The idea that they achieve well because they have the capacity to be smart is

disregarded. This notion is degrading to women as it implies that females cannot achieve as well, or better, than males unless they exert a tremendous amount of effort. As a result of these perceptions, girls may have difficulty in determining how to position themselves as smart and confident within the classroom (Renold, 2001). Although girls often achieve higher grades than boys throughout primary school, some suggest that they begin to fall behind in academic performance in high school (Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003; Kerr, 1994).

A Return to Discourse

Once again, in this research, my understanding of discourse is strongly informed by the work of Foucault (1978). For the purpose of definition, discourse "consists of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes" (Weedon, 1987, p. 35). That is, discourses represent the way that language, power, and meaning are combined to form particular ways of talking about things (Pomerantz, 2008). Foucault states that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (1978, p. 100). As such, the discourses available to girls, for example, shape their knowledge of what it means to be a girl as the discourses join together to create a "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1984, p. 74).

Macleod (2002) suggests that "the statements in a discourse cluster around culturally available understandings of what constitutes a topic" (p. 5). Further, Currie et al. (2009) state that "girlhood today is signified through a number of competing, often contradictory, discourses" (p. 9). Therefore, in this study, I will be exploring culturally available understandings of what constitutes smartness. In general, it appears that there are three broad categories of smart girls in the literature. There are girls who embrace their smartness in the school but by doing so, either choose or are forced to sacrifice a number of other seemingly desirable categories of femininity

and popularity in the process. These girls are constructed as friendless and fashionless: they are the Losers. Second, there are girls who embrace their smartness as a part of their identity in the school and who find it unproblematic to be smart, pretty, popular, and athletic all at once. These girls are constructed as lacking nothing: they are the Have-it-all girls. Finally, there are girls who are smart and successful but do not openly recognize those aspects as a part of their identity in the school. These girls are peer nominated as smart but downplay their own achivements; they are the Imposters.

Although these subgroups are most prevalent in the literature, I am not suggesting that they are fixed categories in which smart girls exist. I do not assume that every smart girl is destined to parallel completely with one of these groups. Rather, they comprise a general framework of the profile of a smart girl as presented in both academic and popular literature. As well, I must note that the titles I have chosen to describe these girls are in no way meant to label, judge, or stigmatize those who may appear to identify with a certain group. Instead, these labels have been chosen because I feel that they most accurately capture the descriptions that are presented in the literature. The labels allow us to generate a picture of how smart girls are depicted in literature. Therefore, I am not attempting to cast girls into these categories but rather I wish to explore smartness in relation to the suggestions in that have been made within prior research in the field.

The Losers. Girls who embrace smartness as a part of their overall identity are often depicted as those who have deviated from or rejected dominant forms of peer culture or femininity (Renold, 2001). These deviations and rejections are often not by their own choice but a result of the way they are perceived by those around them. These girls are most often

considered unpopular and are rejected and stigmatized by their peers (Orenstein, 1994). Thus, they are the Losers. Again, let me clarify that this term was not chosen because I deem these girls to be social misfits but because this is how they are represented in the literature and in popular culture. The discourse of the Loser is not as readily theorized as the other two categories, but it is highly utilized in popular culture. Therefore, I well begin by discussing the academic theorization of this discourse and then move to discussing an example of how this discourse is evidenced in popular culture.

Often, Losers display drastic differences when compared to their peers with respect to their academic lives (Renold & Allan, 2006). They are proud of their high achievements, which automatically pegs them as potential victims for stigmatization from their peers (Orenstein, 1994; Renold & Allan, 2006). These girls openly and proudly identify themselves as smart and do not feel the need to ignore that label or disregard their achievements (Renold, 2001). A term that has been given to girls who seem to fit this bill is "square" (see Renold, 2001). This type of girl is so labeled because she has a "perceived obsession with mind over body" (Renold, 2001, p. 578). This category describes girls who enjoy academic success and are not afraid to describe themselves as "confident knower" (Renold, 2001, p. 578). An important characteristic of these girls is that they stray from dominant perspectives of what it means to be a girl, thus making them not only smart, but also a peer nominated loser. Generally, they are not interested in fashion, boys or cliques (Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006). In many cases, it is not necessarily that these girls do not want friends or that they are rejecting the notion of friendship. Rather, they often express that there is an absence of girls in their school setting that fit the sketch of the type of friend they would like to develop a relationship with.

In Renold and Allan's (2006) study on school achievement and constructions of femininity, one participant, Nyla, demonstrated this. In fact, Nyla described the type of girl whom she would consider to be the perfect friend for her. The description she gave was essentially a description of herself (Renold & Allan, 2006). Nyla's peers described her as brainy and clever, but also as a loser (Renold & Allan, 2006). She worked hard, was always on task and asked for more work upon completion of her assignments. She displayed a very competitive disposition and was not afraid to admit that she desired and was proud to be the best in the class. It is interesting to note that the only positive reinforcements she received in terms of her achievements seemed to come from her parents and at official school assemblies, where she received awards. As well, it is intriguing to note that in class, she never asked for help nor did she offer assistance to peers who were struggling with tasks in which she was proficient (Renold & Allan, 2006). Since Losers often reject popular peer culture within the school, they are victimized and teased by their peers for being different (Renold, 2001). For example, terms such as "square head" (Renold, 2001), "school girl" (Orenstein, 1994) and "swot" (Smith, 2007) are some of those which have been used to describe girls who are smart. These derogatory terms are most readily applied to those girls who position themselves as smart in the classroom, as is evident in the above discussion.

Tally (2008) suggests that examining films, and I argue, television programming, made for and about girls is useful for studying girl culture. Therefore, it is valuable to explore popular culture, as well as academic writing, when examining discourses of girlhood. The Loser discourse is one that is often played out in popular culture. For example, the longstanding cartoon, *The Simpsons*, depicts the lives of a dysfunctional American family (IMDB, 2009). In

this show, Lisa Simpson is an 8 year old girl who is represented as responsible, genius and the teacher's pet (IMDB, 2009). In the show, she is constructed as a Loser who is distinct from her peers in that she is constantly concerned with her school work rather than her social life. She thrives on receiving high marks and engages in activities that many of her classmates do not engage in, such as jazz music and reading. In numerous episodes, Lisa is distraught upon receiving a "low grade" which usually is in the form of an A rather than an A+. Further, Lisa's identity as a smart girl is often ridiculed by her father, her brother, and her peers. Although Lisa Simpson is the character I chose to highlight in this chapter, there are numerous other depictions of the Loser seen in the television and film industry, such as Hermione Granger from Harry Potter and Velma from Scooby Doo. The girls in my thesis provided some examples of where they have seen this construction evident in media depictions of smart girls, as well. Izzy stated that "if smartness is portrayed in a movie, they're like geeky, like glasses, braces" but that "it's not real life".

The Have-It-All Girls. There is an alternate depiction of young women that has gained popularity in very recent years. This discourse frames girls as bold, confident, and ready to take on the world. Harris (2004) suggests that while there are still concerns about self-esteem and risk, young women are now being constructed as more confident and resilient than they have been in the past. Although there are numerous titles by which this category is discussed[2], I will refer to them as the Have-It-All Girls. Bettis and Roe (2008) claim that in the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a shift from the discourse of girl as victim to girl as sassy and confident.

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[2] For example, Alpha Girls (Kindlon, 2006), Gamma Girls (Meadows & Carmichael, 2002), Amazing Girls (Rimer, 2007), and Can-do Girls (Harris, 2004) to name a few.

Under this discourse girls are constructed as agents of choice who demonstrate high levels of ambition (Aapola et al., 2005; Tally, 2008).

This discourse is prefaced by the notion of girl power, which has been readily depicted both in the media and in academic work (Aapola et al., 2005; Bettis & Roe, 2008; Currie et al., 2009; Kindlon, 2006; Tally, 2008). Girl power is a philosophy of empowerment that became extremely popular in the 90s, first by way of Riot Grrrl punk bands and then later by the Spice Girls (Bettis et al., 2005; Gonick, 2006; Pomerantz, 2008). As the idea of girl power gained prevalence in the media, it quickly became commercialized as a marketable commodity that focused a great deal on active consumerism (Gonick, 2006; Pomerantz, 2008). The notion of girl power has a strong impact on the discourse under review as it "presents itself through the ideological construction of the empowered girl - a girl who is sassy, sexy, and strong" (Pomerantz, 2008, p. 46). Further, girl power is often constructed as a type of freedom whereby girls are able to do and be anything they want without having to worry about obstacles standing in their way (Pomerantz, 2008). As will be evidenced through the following section, the discourse of the Have-It-All girl strongly emulates these ideas.

Kindlon (2006) pioneered this type of smart girl in his book *Alpha Girls*. He claims that his project set out to challenge the dominant discourses that revolve around girls in the current generation. Kindlon (2006) does not accept the assumption that girls in school are destined to experience plummeting self-esteem and decreases in academic achievement. His project was born because he was "convinced that the new American girl was fundamentally different from her sisters of previous generations" (Kindlon, 2006, p. xiv). In order to explore these thoughts, he

conducted interviews in a wide variety of schools and sought to meet talented, high-achieving girls who were leaders in their schools and communities.

He found that girls he interviewed did not fit the mold of low self-esteem and disempowerment that was set out for them. They were confident, clever, vibrant, and empowered (Kindlon, 2006). These girls carried themselves with a *"bring it on* confidence" (Kindlon, 2006, p. 6, emphasis his) and felt that they could achieve anything. Although upper class backgrounds were over-represented in the sample, he claims that girls from all types of backgrounds express "emancipated" confidence (Kindlon, 2006, p. xvii). They do not feel that they are being shortchanged because of their gender or that they are underprivileged in the classroom (Kindlon, 2006). He claims that young women feel as though they are a person first and a woman second and calls them "daughters of the revolution" (Kindlon, 2006, p. 7). He considers these young women to be members of the first generation who are reaping the full benefits of feminist movements that were spearheaded by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and teachers (Kindlon, 2006).

Kindlon's work espouses a notion of postfeminism, which is often discussed in relation to girl power (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). This term – "postfeminism" – has been used to describe the current generation of young girls who do not openly subscribe to any form of feminism and who are, supposedly, letting feminism down because they are not carrying on the traditions of the women's movement (Pomerantz, Currie & Kelly, 2004). Within this postfeminist discussion, there is the idea that girls undermine and take for granted the gains of the women's movement (McRobbie, 2004; Tally, 2008). In fact, McRobbie (2004) goes so far as to claim that postfeminism is an "undoing of feminism" (p. 255). Postfeminism is also a term

used to describe the younger generation of women who openly dislike feminism and claim that they are past feminism or that they no longer need it. Heywood and Drake (1997) warn against viewing postfeminism and third-wave feminism as one and the same. They state that the term "postfeminist characterizes a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second-wave" (Heywood & Drake, 1997, p. 1). This framework depoliticizes feminism and views girls as facing only individual struggles, as Kindlon (2004) suggests, rather than gender-based inequalities (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009). Although Pomerantz et al. (2004) challenge the notion that this sort of postfeminist framework adequately describes girls, Kindlon's (2004) work suggests that girls do not need feminism because they are already fully reaping the benefits of the women's movement through the activism of their mothers and grandmothers.

As a further example of this discourse, Harris (2004) provides a discussion of the Have-It-All girls. Primarily, she suggests that this discourse constructs young women as being highly committed to careers and making a way for themselves to succeed, being highly involved in consumer lifestyle, and delaying or foregoing motherhood (Harris, 2004). These young women are said to be outspoken, sassy, individualized, and self-directed and they are not afraid to take power over their own lives (Harris, 2004). Similar to Harris (2004), Currie et al. (2009) also discuss this discourse and suggest that young women are framed as being in pursuit of perfection. They suggest that this discourse describes young women who are emotionally healthy, not mean, and "destined for top-notch universities" (p. 41). Both Harris (2004) and Currie et al. (2009) present this discourse in a critical fashion, rather than presenting it as being the truth about girls, as seen in Kindlon's (2006) work.

There is also evidence of this discourse being circulated in non-academic writing. Pikul (2005) wrote an article entitled, "The Girls are All Right," in which she interviewed a journalist who studied her own daughter and her friends, which led to her conclusion that it is the norm for girls to be just fine when growing up. Further, in an article written for *Newsweek Magazine*, Meadows and Carmichael (2002) write about the Gamma Girls, who "can be emotionally healthy, socially secure, independent-minded and just plain nice" (p. 1). They claim that these girls experience high levels of parental involvement in their lives and that they are "equipped to shrug off the social pressure to experiment" (p. 3). Meadows and Carmichael (2002) claim that these girls are mature decision makers who actively and consciously consider the pros and cons of issues such as sexual activity, alcohol, and drug use.

Rimer (2007) discusses the Amazing Girls who do everything well. She suggests that there are "girls by the dozen who are high achieving, ambitious and confident (if not immune to the usual adolescent insecurities and meltdowns)" (p. 1). Similar to Kindlon (2006), she claims that these young women have "grown up learning they can do anything a boy can do, which is anything they want to do" (p. 1). However, Rimer (2007) also highlights the problematic nature of this construction as she discusses the high level of competition that is involved with being a Have-It-All girl. She suggests that the amazing nature of these young women is downplayed when compared to the amazing nature of young women across America, who are all applying to the same colleges. Therefore, she suggests that this discourse is problematic because girls are receiving multiple, contradictory messages. She suggests that girls are being told to do everything and yet at the same time, be themselves, have fun, and to not work too hard. As well, she claims that girls are receiving the message that although it may be cool to be smart, it is not

enough. That is, girls must also be pretty, thin, and popular, which coincides with Currie et al.'s (2009) depiction of this discourse of girlhood being constructed as a pursuit of perfection.

This discourse is evident in discussions of school and classroom negotiations as it frames girls as being ideal citizens who are climbing the social ladder in an educational system that has been feminized (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Kindlon (2006) argues that Alpha Girls do not feel disadvantaged in the classroom but are eager to learn and ready to take on the world. Meadows and Carmichael (2002) claim that the Gamma Girls are the first to raise their hands and provide answers and that they are leaders in the classrooms "without being a geek about it" (p. 4).

Although the Have-It-Alls are encouraging and promising because they give hope that girls, and the perceptions of them, are changing, there are critical perspectives that should be highlighted. Primarily, I take challenge with Kindlon's work because I feel that he disregarded self-reflexivity concerning his subject positioning in his research. He is a male researcher conducting research on female teenagers and it is possible that his existence as an older, male, academic researcher could have impacted the degree to which the participants would be open and willing to discuss personal issues with him. Although being an outsider may not be inherently problematic because we are all multiply positioned, the problem lies in the absence of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. As Fine (1999) and Parker (2005) suggest, it is necessary to work the hyphen and be reflexive of power imbalances when conducting qualitative research. This is something I do not feel Kindlon did in his research. It is questionable as to whether or not girls would be open to revealing details about their lives to an individual in such a strong position of power as a white, male, academic and this question was not taken to task in his work.

Currie et al. (2009) suggest that this discourse has been discussed in both a positive, "girls are doing okay" manner as well as a concerning "girls are taking over the world" manner. Some suggest that this discourse fails to consider structural barriers that may exist in the lives of many young women. As stated previously, many of the modes of achievement considered important in this discourse stem from a middle-class perspective (Currie et al., 2009). Additionally, Correa (2008) suggests that the construction of the "ideal" girl tends to represent experiences of the typical girl, which is often viewed through a lens of whiteness. Further, the discourse of the Have-It-All is based on the notion of neo-liberal meritocracy which suggests that anyone who works hard enough can achieve anything (Harris, 2004; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Currie et al. (2009) state that "in the current neoliberal social and economic order, young women are being constructed to signal freedom, personal choice and self improvement" (p. 42) and that "girls must strive for perfection without appearing to work too hard, and they must still be pretty and thin" (p. 41). Lastly, Kindlon's suggestion that girls are no longer hindered as a result of their gender has been argued. Currie et al. (2009) state that this discourse provides little attention to "persistent gender and other inequalities" (p. 42).

The Imposters. Being smart does not seem to be an easy task for many girls. In fact, being considered the smartest, or cleverest, girl is a label that is rarely desired by teenage girls (Renold & Allan, 2006). The literature introduces a third construction of smartness, which is the most visible, and perhaps oldest construction of girls in the smart girl literature. These girls are constructed as working hard to hide high achievement while still ensuring that the desired goals and expectations are reached.

This discourse, which will be referred to as the Imposter discourse, claims that some girls do not openly acknowledge their smartness, but rather commonly deny achievements (Kerr, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006; Smith, 2007). Although coined a number of years ago, The Imposter Phenomenon, as described by Kerr (1994), provides a basis for this construction. She suggests that women who deny their abilities despite numerous successes and achievements often feel that they have fooled their peers into thinking that they are not smart (Kerr, 1994). However, as seen in Renold (2001) and Renold and Allan (2006), many of these young women are still identified by their peers as being smart girls. Additionally, Kerr (1994) discusses The Horner Effect, which is the name given to a psychologically based phenomenon whereby women who achieve much lower scores on individual academic tasks when they compete against men compared to when they compete against other women are described. In her book, Kerr (1994) suggests that these women have a fear of succeeding, especially in the presence of men, which implies an inherent weakness of women. Conversely, it is possible that women are not actually afraid to succeed but that their efforts are disregarded when they are in the presence of men as was discussed in Renold (2001). These theories were prevalent throughout the 1970s and 1980s, although the effects were discussed less as the decades progressed (Kerr, 1994). Although The Horner Effect is a dated theory, I felt it was necessary to examine as it demonstrates where the discourse of the Imposter may have stemmed from.

Another description of smart girls that is embedded in the Imposter discourse is the Gilligan dynamic, as described by Kindlon (2006). He outlines this dynamic based on his understanding of the work of Carol Gilligan, a Harvard Psychologist, who has written a great

deal about girls in the school. Gilligan argues that females have great concerns about their responsibilities in relationships and that they struggle to remain responsive both to themselves and to others (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). She states that during teenagehood, girls face a,

> ...loss of voice, a struggle to authorize or take seriously their own experience – to listen to their own voices in conversation and respond to their feelings and thoughts – increased confusion, sometimes defensiveness as well as evidence for the replacement of real with inauthentic or idealized relationships (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 6).

She argues that girls act differently in order to be accepted and that they create an image of themselves that fits with what other people desire of them (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). They are afraid to take any sort of action that might disrupt that carefully constructed image (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). In sum, this theory rests upon the premise that teenage girls lack the power to be confident, assertive, and active in the construction of their identities.

Kindlon (2006) describes Gilligan's suggestions by saying that girls begin to "compromise their authenticity" during the teenage years and deny their abilities in order to put the needs of others before their own (p. 77). Similarly, Pipher (1994) suggests that American culture pressures young women so much that they are forced to put aside their "authentic selves" and split themselves into a number of smaller "true" and "false" selves that no longer strive for what the individual desires but looks to what must be done to please others. At this point, girls renounce their "true selves" in an attempt to maintain relationships with people they care about (Kindlon, 2006). For Gilligan (1990), girls are greatly concerned with care and responsibility in relationships. They struggle with the challenge of staying connected to themselves while also wanting to stay connected with friends and fit in at school. Therefore, "Gilligan feels that adolescent girls choose to minimize the risk of rejection by masking their true selves" (Kindlon,

2006, p. 77). They deny their knowledge by failing to raise their hand in response to a question they know the answer to or act as though they do not know the answer. These girls tell people they do "all right" in school when they are, in fact, achieving a straight A-average. The Gilligan theory would argue that girls engage in these actions because they fear that their success may hinder someone else or that their intelligence may cause conflict between themselves and their peers.

Although she is seen as the grandmother of the "self-esteem gap" genre, and this perspective has been readily accepted and employed, there are many critiques to be made of Gilligan's work. Her arguments rest on the idea that identity is fixed and that it is possible to conceal one's true self. However, from a feminist poststructural perspective, one cannot claim this to be true because it is assumed that there is no true self, but that each individual is constructed in relation to her current social context, time, and place. As discussed in chapter one, identity is viewed as an unending, multiple process rather than a stable entity. As well, suggesting that real, authentic relationships are replaced by inauthentic relationships implies that there is a certain type of relationship that is true or right. The suggestion that one can define what stands as authentic or inauthentic for another individual, and that a certain style of relationship or friendship should be viewed as more or less appropriate than any other style can be challenged because this perspective does not allow for flexibility and volatility within relationships and friendships. However, the literature suggests that other researchers have noted similar patterns to those she saw being employed by teenage girls (e.g. Kerr, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006; Smith, 2007) and therefore, an examination of this discourse is warranted.

This discourse has been discussed tremendously in terms of girls and academics. It has been suggested that girls of all ability levels attempt to deny or hide their achievements (Renold & Allan, 2006). Specifically, smart girls are said to experience a variety of "pleasures, desires, pains and anxieties" (Renold & Allan, 2006, p. 458) while attempting to accommodate both smartness and femininity. In many cases it is evident that peer groups influence the choices a girl makes in respect to her smartness – specifically in regard to denying smartness (Gonick, 2003; Gonick, 2005; Kerr, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006; Smith, 2007). Girls express the desire to be "just another girl" (Renold & Allan, 2006, p. 462), but the smartness label makes this goal seemingly impossible because it creates a level of difference between a girl and her peers (Renold & Allan, 2006). As well, for many girls, preserving a positive social image seems to be more crucial than maintaining high academic standards (Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006; Smith, 2007).

Oftentimes, being smart induces a number of social risks for girls. Although most students claim it is acceptable for girls to be smart (Orenstein, 1994), they are often teased, stigmatized and name-called behind their backs by many of their peers, especially if they are a self-declared smart girl, as was mentioned in the section discussing the Losers. As well, Gonick (2003) claims that girls who want to secure a heterosexual relationship may have to undermine their intelligence in the presence of boys. Therefore, many girls express their desire to downplay their achievements in order to avoid this type of stigmatization and maintain certain social expectations (Smith, 2007).

There are a few interesting characteristics that have been documented in the literature that feed into this construction of smartness. Many girls will not raise their hand to answer questions,

even if they are confident that they know the answer, or willingly participate in activities that involve individual competition (Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006). These characteristics are enunciated further when girls are in the presence of their male counterparts (Gonick, 2003; Renold, 2001). Further, many of these girls outwardly downplay their achievements when they receive praise from teachers, peers, and researchers (Renold & Allan, 2006). For example, they may say, "Oh, it's no big deal" or "I didn't do that well" when they are praised for their success. They often give "I don't know" answers, rather than confidently expressing their opinions or their knowledge (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Further, girls sometimes utilize an "up speak" approach where they complete each statement with inflection, making it a question rather than a statement, so as to avoid boldly asserting their opinions. These examples appear to align with the Imposter phenomenon and the Gilligan dynamic that have been discussed and, in turn, impact the prevalence of this discourse.

These patterns of "Impostering" are most readily depicted when girls are outside of their normal peer group because when girls are associating with their inner circle of friends, smartness seems to be more easily accepted (Smith, 2007). Another interesting point to notice is that although these girls do not want to be seen as *too* smart for fear of what would accompany such a label, most still want to succeed academically. I consider this to be a pivotal point in the literature. It is clear that girls still care about being smart and place great importance on their academics. If this were not the case, this research would be highly irrelevant. Many girls claim that they desire to be smart, but not *too* smart (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Renold, 2001). They want to do well in school but not so well that they will stand out (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). In Renold (2001), a variety of girls wanted to get good grades, which were usually defined as

achieving As, as long as they did not receive the highest score in the class. This suggests that girls do not actually fear success, but that they fear the potential social implications of success (Renold, 2001). Acceptance and normality are themes that are highly visible amongst the girls presented in previous literature as desires to be accepted and dismay at standing out amongst their classmates are cited numerous times.

Amidst the Alpha Girls, Kindlon (2006) found a few girls who fit the description of the Imposter. Specifically, one girl he interviewed gave many "I don't know" type answers. She claimed to achieve average grades and perform at an average level in volleyball when, in fact, she achieved straight As and was described by her peers as the star player on her team. However, Kindlon (2006) claims that her denials had less to do with being an Imposter than they did with her personal attributes. He claimed that this girl was not "introspective" and simply did not attend much thought to her accomplishments (Kindlon, 2006, p. 109). His argument can be criticized because he is attaching meaning to her words and actions according to the beliefs he holds and the assumptions he is trying to demonstrate in his book. Because he was attempting to find confident high-achieving girls, he was unwilling to accept that some girls may not fit the model he had formed. Although all researchers must undertake the task of interpreting and making meaning of the words of their participants, I found this interpretation if Kindlon's to be particularly suspect because of the lack of reflexivity that I spoke to previously. Clearly, there is no way to objectively assess an individual's thoughts or attitudes which reinstates the importance, particularly in qualitative research, of engaging in continuous reflection and reassessment of motives.

The above review provides a justification for the current study. It is evident that discourses of girlhood, particularly those relating to smartness, are highly visible in both academic and popular press. Therefore, it is necessary to explore these discourses deconstructively in order to critique them, question the hold they maintain in the lives of smart girls, and generate new ways of thinking about smartness. The following chapter will highlight the methodological details of the current study.

Methodology

My thesis is a qualitative study that focuses on young girls who identify themselves as smart. Qualitative researchers seek to "understand the meanings of social events for those who are involved in them" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 2-3). Therefore, I decided to conduct a qualitative study as I am interested in hearing the stories told by smart girls and gaining a rich and deep understanding of the social experiences and events they face in their daily lives. I believe that young people have many interesting things to say about their lives and it is my goal to hear some of those things in relation to smartness. Further, as I have suggested throughout the first two chapters of this thesis, I suspect that the experiences of smart girls to be more complex, multiple, and diverse than the academic constructions that portray them as Loser, Have-It-All Girls, and Imposters allow. As such, by exploring the lives of smart girls qualitatively, I hope to convey this complexity. In this chapter, I will discuss the methods used to collect data for this thesis, recruitment and sampling, transcription and analysis, and finally, ethical dilemmas and other intriguing issues that emerged as I conducted this study.

Focus Groups/Group Interviews

In order to achieve my goals for this thesis, I decided to conduct two group interviews with small groups of smart girls. Focus groups, or group interviews[3], are a useful methodology when doing research with young people as they provide "access to forms of data that are not readily available using individual interviews or participant observation" (Pugsley, 1996, p. 118) because responses are often formulated based on comments made by other members of the group (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1999). It was my hope, as previous researchers have

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[3] For the purpose of this study, the terms focus groups and group interviews will be used interchangeably, as suggested by Eder and Fingerson (2003).

indicated, that conducting focus groups would enhance "the depth of the conversation due to stimulation of thoughts from what other group members have said" (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1999, p. 280). Eder and Fingerson (2003) argue that while some researchers suggest that ethnographies and observations are ideal for research concerning young people, there is also a place for interviewing. They claim that this method of data collection is useful in order to present a space where young people can "give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives" (p. 33). When doing research with young people, the researcher is not only seen as having power because of the researcher/researched role but also because of the difference in age. Eder and Fingerson (2003) suggest that by interviewing young people in groups, rather than individually, the adult researcher's power can be minimized as the interview context may feel more natural for the youths, they may feel more relaxed with their peers, and they may experienced a heightened level of comfort knowing that they outnumber the adults.

For the current study, I conducted two group interviews, with three participants in each. The groups were comprised of girls who were friends with each other, and in one case, two participants were sisters. In addition to the benefits of interviewing young people in groups, Raby (2008) states that conducting focus groups with girls who are familiar with each other provides the advantage of observing and analyzing how girls exist within their peer groups. Further, this type of interviewing may reflect how girls exist in their natural settings more fully (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). To make a point about the level of familiarity between participants in each group, Kitzinger (1994) suggests that by working with individuals who are familiar with each other the researcher is able to explore how participants may talk about certain phenomena

"within the various and overlapping groupings within which they actually operate" (p. 105).

Therefore, by seeking participants who were friends with each other, an easy flow of

communication about topics that may be most easily discussed in the presence of friends was

available. Alternately, however, Raby (2008) also states that this familiarity can lead to an

imbalance in focus group participation as some participants may dominate over others, which

was an issue I faced in both groups. In the first group, I found that Izzy and Katelyn were the

dominant speakers and Stephanie sometimes had trouble jumping into the conversation.

Similarly, in the second group, Kalista and Karly were much more talkative than Ashley. In both

cases, I tried to provide ample opportunities for the less assertive girls to find a space to talk,

either by specifically asking them for their opinions or by asking the other girls to give them a

chance to finish their thoughts when they were speaking.

The group interviews both lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. The

discussions began with a series of general questions about their school life before moving

towards more specific discussions of smartness. This general to specific format is said to be the

optimal format for an interview as it presents participants with an opportunity to ease their way

into the discussion and gain a sense of comfort speaking in the group before being asked to

discuss the issues that are at the main focus of the interview (Esterberg, 2002). A flexible focus

group schedule is located at the end of this thesis as *Appendix A*. The interview schedule focuses

mainly on general questions pertaining to being smart. I steered away from targeting questions

that specifically focused on asking them about the discourses under review because I did not

want to work under the assumption that they would be familiar with, or have experience with,

these discourses. Therefore, by arranging the discussion around general questions about

smartness, rather than specific questions about the discourses, there was a possibility for open discussion that was not overly narrow in focus. Had I included questions that focused specifically on the discourses discussed in chapter two, I would have been resting on the assumption that the girls in my study were, in fact, aware of these discourses, which may have forced the participants to think in ways about issues that were not meaningful to their lives. It was my hope that by utilizing a broader framework for the interviews that any experience they had with and around these discourses would become evident. As well, I attempted to frame many of the questions in a way that gave girls the opportunity to discuss experiences that they themselves have had as well as experiences that they have seen amidst their peers. By framing questions in this way, I hope that I gave the girls space to feel comfortable by not forcing them to discuss situations they have been in that may have been uncomfortable to talk about. For example, rather than asking if they had ever been teased for being a smart girl, I asked them if they could remember any specific times when they saw a girl being teased for being smart. In this way, they were able to discuss times where they were teased, as some girls did, or discuss times where they saw another girl being teased. I felt that by presenting the option to be distanced from the questions may have heightened the level of comfort they felt in disclosing personal information in this specific group setting.

It is important to note that while this schedule was used as a loose guideline for the structure of the focus groups, the girls were encouraged to bring forth other issues or areas of discussion that were prevalent in their lives and they took full advantage of that opportunity as many of the issues discussed were ones that I had not included in the original interview guide. Eder and Fingerson (2003) emphasize that group interviews with children should include very

open-ended questions so that the young people have the opportunity to "bring in the topics and modes of discourse that are familiar to them" (p. 36). Further, these types of questions provide more flexibility for the girls to build on the answers of other groups members (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). It is my hope that the structure of my interview guide and the structure of my interviewing achieved these goals.

In the first group, there were some questions in the schedule that I did not get to[4], because the girls spent a great deal of time discussing alternate issues. Further, at times, I felt that some of the questions had already been answered through previous discussion. In the second group, I stuck more closely to the interview guide, but I also asked probing questions based on some of the issues and topics that the girls brought forth. Further, by the end of the second group, I was aware that the girls, especially Ashley, were starting to feel tired, so I attempted to conclude the interview as quickly as possible.

When the focus group discussion had concluded, participants were given a copy of a Participant Information Form to complete (*Appendix B*). The purpose of this form was to increase the opportunities for participants to be actively engaged as co-researchers on this project. On this form, they were asked to include information such as their name, age, and grade, parent/guardian's highest level of education and job, and ethnicity. They were also given the opportunity to select a pseudonym to be used in the written portion of this study. All of the girls were extremely excited about this option. Further, the information form asked them if they would like the opportunity to review the transcript and if they would like to receive a summary of the

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[4] For example, in this group interview, there was no explicit discussion of group work in the classroom. The girls spoke to their feelings surrounding group work at different times during the focus group and therefore, I felt as though it was unnecessary to ask this question.

project upon completion. All of the girls in the first group asked to review the transcript, and,
aside from Izzy, they also asked to review a written summary of the project. In the second group,
Kalista and Karly asked to review the transcript and all three girls asked for a written summary
of the project. Lastly, the participant information form provided a space for the girls to add any
further comments or ideas. In this section, many of the girls wrote comments about how much
they enjoyed the experience of being involved in my study, but none of them wrote any further
comments pertaining to their experiences with smartness. Although there could be some question
as to whether or not the girls who talked less in the groups may have done so due to feeling a
sense of dissent or contradiction with what was being said, using this tactic suggests that this was
not the case as they would have had an opportunity to express differing opinions to me privately.

Each smart girl was presented with a $10 gift card upon completion of the interview.
Before the interview, the girls were asked if they would rather receive a gift card from the local
shopping centre or a coffee shop. All participants asked for a gift card from the local shopping
mall. Although there is some debate as to the appropriateness of presenting participants with a
monetary gift for participation (Hill, 2005), Eder and Fingerson (2003) suggest that "by giving
something in return for receiving this information, researchers can reduce the potential power
inequality" (p. 37). It is my hope that this compensation served as a symbol of my gratitude for
the girls' willingness to participate in my study and that it helped them realize that they were the
most important component of my thesis.

Recruitment and Participant Selection

Recruitment. Participants for my study were recruited using a snowballing method. I
began the recruitment process by casually discussing my project with friends, family members,

colleagues and acquaintances, many of whom I knew had contact with young girls. From these discussions, I came into contact with two girls who considered themselves smart and who expressed interest in the project. After discussing the project with these girls, I asked them if they had any friends who were also smart girls who would be interested and could possibly participate in a group interview with them. I presented them with information packages for themselves and their friends. Included was a brochure which detailed the study and provided my contact information, participant and parental consent forms and a list of support services that would be have been useful in the unlikely event that any participants experienced negative consequences as a result of participating in my study. These materials are included as *Appendix C*. From there, I asked the girls to call or e-mail me with further questions or to express their interest in participating. Both of these girls had two friends who decided to participate in the study with them. Therefore, there was one participant in each group whom I had familiarity with prior to the study and the remaining participants were friends that were brought along, who I did not know in advance.

Although two of the participants were recruited through personal contacts, neither of them are girls with whom I have a close personal relationship. In fact, in both cases, I know the mothers of the girls on a casual level through mutual contacts. I felt that this mode of recruitment would be ideal for my study due to the age of the participants. As my participants came from a relatively young age bracket, I felt that it would be most feasible to recruit participants who have some type of familiarity with me. I was sensitive to the fact that the parents of the girls would need to provide consent and that they may have had reservations about allowing their daughters to participate in a study with a person they were not familiar with. This familiarity may have

provided a sense of comfort for the parents and guardians who were allowing their daughters to participate in an interview with me. As well, the same thing was the case in terms of the friends that these girls recruited on my behalf. Although I had no familiarity with them, or their parents/guardians, I felt confident knowing that the parents who did have familiarity with me might help assure the other parents that the experience was one with which they could be comfortable.

Once the participants for each focus group were secured, I began the process of arranging a date, time, and meeting place for the interviews. I had intended to conduct the interviews in the home of the participants whom I had familiarity with beforehand. I asked the parent to be home at the time of the interview but to remain out of earshot so that the girls would feel a sense of privacy. One of the moms could not accommodate me in her home because of extensive renovations they were undergoing. In this case, I made the suggestion of conducting the group in the home of the other two participants, who were siblings. However, the mother with whom I was making arrangements felt as though this option would not be feasible and asked if the interview could take place in my home. Therefore, this focus group was conducted in my own home, at the request of the mothers of the participants in this group. The other group was conducted according to my original plan, in the home of one of the participants, with the mother present. These locations provided the participants, and their parents, with a sense of confidence, security and safety, as well as convenience. By conducting the interviews in a home setting, I think it constructed a sense of comfort and it eliminated potential transportation issues that could have arisen had I conducted the interviews in an alternate, less accessible location. Again, I felt

that this decision was beneficial as it put both the girls and the parents, especially those who had no familiarity with me, at ease.

The girls were reminded to bring the completed consent forms to the focus group and were contacted again one or two days prior to the arranged meeting time to remind them of the scheduled focus group (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1999). I had no difficulty with this aspect, as all of the girls arrived at the interviews with all of the forms completed and signed.

Participant selection. The participants in my study were comprised of six girls between the ages of 9 to 13, grades 4 to 8. Each of the participants were enrolled in a public school in the Niagara Region. I chose to select girls from a middle-childhood age range because I felt as though they would have very interesting things to say about smartness and provide a refreshing perspective for my study. Broughton and Fairbanks (2003), Renold (2001), Renold and Allan (2006) all studied young to middle-childhood aged girls while Harris and Kindlon (2006) focused more pointedly on teenagers and postsecondary students. Therefore, in the literature I have reviewed, there is justification for studying a variety of age groups when discussing smartness. However, the fresh perspective that I was seeking to gain was based upon my past research experience.

While completing my undergraduate thesis I focused on young women who were in their first year of an undergraduate degree. Similarly, during my time as a research assistant on a pilot smart girls project, I was involved in focus groups with girls who were in high school. Without minimizing the importance of the stories they told, I felt as though many of their comments stemmed solely from the value they placed on gaining entry into post-secondary education. I recognize that this is a very important aspect in the lives of young women, particularly for smart

girls, but I also wanted to attempt to obtain data about smartness that did not revolve around such a strong focus on gaining entry to university. In my previous field experience, older girls often attributed their hard work and achievements to ensuring they achieved the required grades to be accepted to their desired university programs. While many middle or elementary school girls may value university as a future goal, or have ideas about what will be required to meet these goals, I felt that this age group may not have as narrow of a focus on post secondary education. In a study where the focus was meant to be on post secondary educational goals, a higher age bracket would be appropriate, but I felt, for the purposes of my study, that utilizing a younger age group would present a unique and more diverse perspective on the topic. Further, this decision presented me with an opportunity to engage with a different age group than what I have done in the past, which may provide me with a deeper, more rich understanding of smartness as an identity category for girls.

Meet the smart girls. As mentioned in the introductory chapter of my thesis, the first group was comprised of three girls who were in the same grade 8 class at a public school in the Niagara region. The focus group was conducted at Izzy's house and two of her closest friends, Stephanie and Katelyn, joined her. On the participant information sheet, when asked to fill out their ethnicity, the girls in this group all identified themselves as "Canadian", with the exception of Stephanie, who indicted that she was "Canadian/American" because her mother was from the United States. Based on the information provided to me regarding the level of parental education and their parent's careers, all of the girls appear to be middle class. All participants stated that their parents had either attended university or a professional college of some sort. When I arrived at the house, the girls were running around playing with Izzy's younger siblings.

When they realized I had arrived, they gathered themselves in the living room and organized their consent forms to give to me. The girls were all dressed in very stylish clothes and, with the exception of Stephanie, were wearing make up. Izzy had shoulder length brown hair that was pulled back in a ponytail and was wearing jeans and a casual sweater. Stephanie had short, curly blond hair, wore glasses and was wearing jeans and a long sleeved tee shirt. Lastly, Katelyn, the tallest girl in the group, had long blond hair that appeared to have been straightened and was wearing jeans and a sweater. The girls in this group were very talkative and eager to have their thoughts heard. Stephanie was the quietest of the bunch, and it seemed as though she had the most difficulty carving her way into the conversation. From past experience facilitating focus groups, I was aware of this, and tried to generate a space for her to express her thoughts as often as possible. Oftentimes this meant specifically asking her if she had anything to add to a discussion, or steering the conversation back to something she had said previously.

The second group, which took place in my own home, included Kalista, her best friend Karly, and Karly's younger sister, Ashley. Kalista and Karly were both 11 years old and in grade 6 and Ashley was 9 years old, in grade 4. These girls also lived and attended school in the Niagara region, but in a very different area of the region. Again, all three girls in this group identified "Canadian" as their ethnicity. As in the first group, based on the information provided by the girls regarding their parent's educational backgrounds and careers, it appears as though they were all middle class. In this group, while all of the girls were eager to discuss and participate, they were much more reserved and subdued than the previous group. This may have been impacted by the fact that they were coming into my home, an unfamiliar place, rather than being in a familiar place as the first group had been. The girls in this group appeared quite

different than the girls in the first group. Both Karly and Ashley were wearing athletic clothes while Kalista was wearing jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. Although Karly and Kalista were the same age, Karly was much taller than Kalista, which made her appear to be older. In this group, the discussion was very turn oriented, where each girl said what she wanted to say, and then the next girl would speak. There were times when the discussion became more conversational in nature, mostly in terms of Karly and Kalista engaging in back and forth dialogue, but for the most part, each girl spoke, while the rest of us listened, and so on. Ashley was by far the most reserved participant in this group, and in the entire study, perhaps because of her younger age. Despite this, however, she still had a plethora of insightful and interesting comments to add to the discussion.

The fact that all of the girls in this study were white, middle class, and located within the same geographical region limits the strength of my thesis. It would have been beneficial to include a more diverse sample of smart girls in this thesis. However, as a result of the snowballing method of recruitment that I utilized, this was the sample that was made available to me. Future research would benefit from including participants with more diverse backgrounds in terms of race, class, and geographical location. The implications of the sample included in my thesis will be discussed further in the final chapter of my thesis.

Transcription and Analysis

The overall mode of analysis for my thesis was deconstructive discourse analysis. Although this is not a definitive method, it can be seen as examining the importance of language in terms of how it constrains and structures understandings of the social world (Elliot, 1996; Macleod, 2002). Discourse analysis rests heavily on Foucauldian and Derridian theories as it

takes into perspective why certain discourses are made possible rather than others as well as deconstructing commonly held perceptions of what is true or real (Macleod, 2002). Foucault brings the themes of power and knowledge to the discussion and outlines how they produce domination (Best, 1994) while Derrida "attempts to discover the opposite or trace within a meaning of a single term" (Macleod, 2002, p. 20). In this mode of analysis, a researcher positions herself in relation to the text and explores "what relations of power are operating and how these produce, regulate and normalize the subject" (Macleod, 2002, p. 28). Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that the goal of discourse analysis should be to disrupt orderliness and denaturalize ideologies. He explains orderliness as being the feeling that things are as they should be and that denaturalization is the process of "showing how social structures determine properties of a discourse and how discourse in turn determines social structures" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 28).

Further, discourse analysis is an "interrogation of texts" that attempts "to take apart and expose the underlying meanings, biases and preconceptions that structure the way a text conceptualizes its relation to what it describes" (Denzin, 1994, p. 185). In the case of this thesis, the group interview transcripts and the available literature on the discourses of smartness serve as the text to be interrogated. Therefore, by considering this mode of analysis it is my goal to denaturalize the orderliness of girlhood by examining how relations of power simultaneously produce, regulate and normalize smart girls and deconstructing the notion that these discourses of girlhood are unproblematic. Foucault (1978) presents a challenge to stray from the notion of viewing discourses as binary to one another by stating, "we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant

discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies" (p. 100). As such, it is necessary to deconstruct the dichotomy that exists between these discourses in academic writing. Again, to refer to Foucault and Derrida, it is necessary to deconstruct the discourses that shape and implement what is seen as truth in the lives of young women (Derrida, 1982; Foucault, 1984). It is my hope that engaging in this type of discourse analysis will provide an opening to explore alternate possible meanings of what it means to be a girl, specifically a smart girl, in our current historical, political and cultural context.

In the interest of providing a detailed account of how I analyzed the data and generated the themes to discuss in the next chapter of my thesis, the following few paragraphs will highlight these specificities. The focus groups were tape recorded for future transcription and I attempted to take brief field notes during the discussions. Field notes involve briefly noting who is saying what and also making note of gestures, facial expression and other non-verbal interaction that is taking place throughout the focus group in order to assist in later transcription (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1999; Pugsley, 1996). Although I was able to take some notes, I found myself engaging in the discussion to a point where it was difficult to continuously make notes. Having an assistant present at each of the interviews may have been helpful in order to have someone assigned to taking notes, however it would have also meant that there would have been more adult researchers present, which may have made the situation seem intimidating for the girls. Therefore, I decided it was best to be the only researcher present at the focus groups. Therefore, I made an effort to take detailed notes immediately following the interviews and to complete transcription within the next day or two following so that I had a clear and fresh

recollection of the discussions and could include information that was not evident through the audio. Once I had completed transcribing the interviews, I sent copies of the transcripts to those participants who had requested them - Stephanie, Izzy, Katelyn, Kalista, and Karly - via e-mail. I received replies from all of the girls within the following weeks indicating that they had reviewed the transcripts and had no additions or changes to make regarding their comments made during interview.

As previous researchers have done, I published the exact language used by participants in my research when reproducing conversations from the focus groups onto transcripts and into this thesis (see Bettis, Jordan & Montgomery, 2005; Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003; Gonick, 2003; Gonick, 2005; Pugsley, 1996; Renold, 2001, for example). I made this decision to ensure that the language was not transformed into "adult-academic" language, but rather, remained directly in the language of the girls. Therefore, although the "umms", "ahhs" and "likes" may seem tedious at times, it was a conscious decision to ensure that the pages of this report speak the direct words of the girls. To reiterate the importance of this decision, Eder and Fingerson (2003) state that "it is important to represent youth in their own terms in data analysis and presentation" (p. 48). Further, I have attempted to make my use of direct quotations from the girls very liberal throughout my thesis, particularly in chapter four, so that they are being represented in their own terms as much as possible (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Publishing exact transcriptions and using direct quotations very liberally increases the opportunity for the participants' voices to be heard and ensures that my research is not just *about* them but also *for* them (Strega, 2005). While it is not possible to completely diminish the power differential that exists between adult researcher and child researched it is my hope that by consciously considering these issues, I involved the

girls as much as possible in the research and ensured that the research experience was beneficial

for them and that, in the end, they were not presented and viewed as the Other in this publication

(Eder & Fingerson, 2003; Fine, 1999).

Following transcription and review by participants, I began to analyze the transcripts

myself in order to code them into prevalent themes and subthemes which were related to the

research question and which achieved the task of discourse analysis. Coding is a common form

of analysis in qualitative research and it involves organizing data into categories based on

themes, topics or other similarities (Neuman, 2006). As a researcher engaging in this process, I

allowed myself to be guided by the research questions and ask critical questions as I read through

the data (Neuman, 2006). Specifically, I chose to use open coding, in which I read through the

data, located themes and assigned codes to these themes in order to organize them (Neuman,

2006). By doing so, I made an effort to constantly be reflexive in my work to ensure that I was

not adapting the data to suit my project but that I was allowing the transcripts to speak for

themselves in order to tell the story of the participants. The goal of open coding is to allow

themes to come to the surface from deep inside the data (Neuman, 2006). Through the process of

analysis, I have tried to avoid reducing the girls to fit particular categories or moulds but rather,

to allow their voices to be heard and to organize their discussions into relevant themes.

Themes. There were five themes found amidst the data that will be unpacked more fully

in the discussion chapter. These themes were: 1. "Like, am I only smart?" wherein I discuss how

the girls did not want to be known only as smart girls. 2. "I only want to do it out of my own

will" where I examine how the girls felt it was necessary and important to be a smart girl for

yourself, and not for anyone else. 3. "I know they're just joking around because they would

never really call me a geek". In this theme, I will explore the stereotypes of smartness that were discussed throughout the focus groups and examine how the girls both resisted and embraced these constructions. 4. "When everyone just asks you questions, you don't want to be like mean and tell them to go away". Here, I will move to examining how the girls negotiated smartness and their relationships with their friends and classmates. 5. "You have to set a goal and work hard to achieve it." This theme focuses on a discussion of how these girls felt that smartness would have an impact on their lives in the future and their lives outside of the academic realm.

Ethical Dilemmas and Other Intriguing Issues

To conclude this chapter, I feel that there is a call to address ethical issues that are inherent within this project, and within any qualitative research, especially that which pertains to young people. Hill (2005) suggests that there needs to be a "reappraisal of appropriate ways of carrying out research with children" (p. 61). He suggests that until very recently, research with children has taken place under a positivist lens with a strong focus on developmentalism. Recently, a debate has begun about how different children really are from adults, and thus, the way research is conducted with young people is under scrutiny.

In this section, I will begin by discussing the formal ethical implications of my research and then move to a discussion of other, less straightforward, issues that are embedded in my thesis. Primarily, ethical approval for this research was secured from the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. Once this approval was secured, I began recruitment and data collection. There was a brochure, an information letter, an informed consent form, a parental consent form and a list of appropriate support services for girls that was compiled in an envelope and distributed to potential participants.

In addition to the standard consent forms, I included a Group Confidentiality Form *(Appendix D)* as participation in this methodology does not ensure anonymity. The purpose of this form was to ensure that all participants understood the necessity and importance of ensuring that all conversations from the group interviews remained confidential. I felt that this aspect was crucial, especially because the participants in each group were friends with each other. The presentation of this form allowed a discussion of confidentiality, secrets and openness to ensue. During this section of the group interviews, I explained that when I talked or wrote about the interviews, I would use their chosen pseudonyms to describe them so no one else would know what they said. I also emphasized the importance of keeping everything private so that they would not feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. Although I have no control over whether or not the girls do keep the information confidential, I felt that it was important to have this discussion. I was made aware of one of the girls, Stephanie, holding this agreement very seriously as she contacted me a few weeks following the interview, after she had reviewed the transcript, and informed me that it had taken her some time to get a chance to read the transcript, because her brothers were always in the computer room, and she wanted to wait until she was alone so that no one would have the chance to read any of the data. Evidently, she also felt as though it was important to uphold this level of trust and confidentiality.

Along with ensuring that all consent forms were signed before the group interviews began, I also discussed issues of informed consent, voluntary participation and voluntary withdrawal at the beginning of each focus group and in the information letter. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any point and if they did so, their data would be destroyed and they would face absolutely no consequences, other than that they would not

receive the compensation. None of the participants chose to withdraw from the study. The girls were assured that all data would remain confidential, only to be seen by myself and my supervisor, and would be held in a locked cabinet at Brock University until the completion of the study, at which time it transcripts would be shredded and computer files would be destroyed.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, when conducting research from a feminist poststructural perspective, especially when using the "girl method", one must always consider the power relations that are present between the researcher and the researched (Fine, 1994). It is imperative to ensure that the research is as much *for* those being studied as it is *about* them (Strega, 2005). When exploring qualitative research, Fine (1994) claims that researchers have reproduced the "Other" by failing to recognize that it is not only whom we speak about, but also how and why we speak about them that is important. In a researcher/researched relationship Fine (1994) argues that many researchers ignore the power hyphen that exists, acting as though it is non-existent and proceeding to cast the label of "Other" on their participants. Researchers are encouraged to "work the hyphen" by positioning themselves in the research and by listening to participants. Therefore, in this research it is absolutely necessary to work with subjugated individuals by inviting them to be involved in the research while ensuring that they are not being oppressed further (Fine, 1994). As my research involved individuals from at least two subjugated groups, females and youth, it was crucial for me to "work the hyphen" and avoid Othering the girls. I attempted to do so by conversing with participants about many aspects of the research, presenting opportunities for them to be involved in the research by generating topics of discussion within the focus groups as well as by allowing participants the option of reviewing the transcripts.

There is also a call for researchers to engage in reflexivity in their work (Macleod, 2002; Parker, 2005). Parker (2005) discusses reflexivity as "a way of attending to the institutional location of historical and personal aspects of the research relationship" (p. 25). That is to say, a researcher must locate herself within the research in order to highlight the assumptions being made (Macleod, 2002). Above and beyond the call to work the hyphen and be reflexive, Eder and Fingerson (2003) suggest that when conducting research with young people, specifically that which involves interviewing, it is crucial to address the power differential between the adult researcher and the child participant in many different ways. Therefore, it is my goal that by positioning myself as a white, female, smart girl researcher and constantly reflecting on my own assumptions and biases throughout the process that I was able to engage in reflexivity and further minimize the power hyphen that exists between myself as an adult researcher and the girls, as child participants.

Discussion

"Being smart is really cool" - Karly

Before I begin discussing how the smart girls in my study performed their smart girl identities, I will briefly highlight some of the comments they made that addressed what it meant to them to be smart girls. The purpose in doing so is to answer the ever ambiguous question of what is a smart girl, anyway? This discussion will also set the stage for an exploration of the themes that were prevalent in the data.

For the girls in my study, being a smart girl was about working hard and taking pride in working hard (Stephanie). Also, the girls discussed how being smart girls set them apart and made them distinct from others. For example, Stephanie stated,

> ...people think of me as smart because...I'm one who participates well in class, too. Like, if when, like, the teacher's talking or if, they ask a question, I'm one who really listens well and puts up my hand and stuff. And, um, so do these girls here, too.

They talked about being students who wanted challenges in the classroom and who sometimes wished to have different, more advanced, work than their classmates (Izzy). Overall, the girls in my study gave the impression that being a smart girl was an aspect of their identity that they cherished and considered to be positive. To summarize, Karly said that "being smart is really cool because people look up to you and you feel really special."

The Themes

As highlighted in the previous chapter, there were five themes that became prevalent to me as I analyzed the focus group transcripts. In the following pages, I will highlight these themes and examine how they demonstrate the way that the girls in my study performed their smart girl identities both by enacting and being enacted by discourse and by using lines of flight to perform

smartness in unique and sometimes contradictory ways. First, I will discuss how the girls did not want to be known only as smart girls. Next, I will examine how the girls felt it was necessary and important to be a smart girl for yourself, and not for anyone else. Third, I will explore the stereotypes of smartness that were discussed throughout the focus groups and examine how the girls both resisted and embraced these constructions. Next, I will move to examining how the girls negotiated smartness and their relationships with their friends and classmates. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of how these girls felt that smartness would have an impact on their lives in the future and their lives outside of the academic realm. All of these themes work together to outline a representation of the girls in this study in terms of how they performed their smart girl identities. It is important to keep in mind that the perspective I am presenting is just one of the many representations that could be portrayed and that it is highly mediated by my own identity.

"Like, am I *only* smart?" – Katelyn. In this section I will discuss how the girls in my study explored smartness as being an integral part of their identities; yet at the same time, not the only part. Although this section contains less data than some of the other sections, I felt that it was an important way to begin discussing the themes that emerged from the data as it provides a framework upon which to view the identities of the smart girls in my study as complex, layered, and rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

The girls in the first group interview especially discussed the idea that smartness was not the end all be all of their identities. These girls enjoyed being known as smart but also desired to be known for other things as well. In essence, it appeared as though these girls did not want smartness to define them completely. When discussing how and why they identified themselves

as smart girls, Stephanie said, "It's like, you don't really want to identify yourself as only a smart person". Further, Izzy stated, "It makes me feel good but it's like, if people are always saying, I mean, you're smart, you're smart, it gets to be like, you know, annoying , or like it bothers us…It's like, I have more characteristics than being smart." She concluded this thought by stating, "I don't want to just be known as like the smart kid".

As another example, when the group interview had been concluded and the girls were filling out the Participant Information Sheet, Stephanie pointed out that her e-mail address contained the words "social butterfly". This email moniker, she stated, proved that she did not only want to be known as a smart girl but had other aspects of her identity that were worth mentioning as well. These examples suggest that smart girls feel that their identities are layered and complex and involve much more than simply being a just smart girl. They also indicate, as discussed by Rimer (2007) that perhaps being known as "smart" is not enough. It seems as though smartness is not an entirely cool or great identification or else they likely would not feel the need to add these qualifications to their discussions. Rich and layered identities were also discussed by the girls in both focus groups as they talked about themselves as athletes, friends, siblings, coaches, leaders in the classroom, and members of religious organizations. These examples highlight how the identity of a smart girl is rich, layered and complex, without a beginning or an end but rather, a constant negotiation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

"I only want to do it out of my own will" – Stephanie. In this section I will discuss how smartness was seen as an aspect of identity belonging solely to the individual. For example, the girls discussed the importance of being smart, trying hard, and achieving their goals because they wanted to do so. The desire to achieve was presented as a personal choice that could be

encouraged by others but could not be driven by anyone other than the smart girl herself. There was a strong sense of individualism and neoliberal thought within their discussions, suggesting that the girls themselves held the sole responsibility for achieving their desired goals. In this theme, they discussed both setting personal goals for themselves while also giving examples of classmates who they felt had not internalized this personal desire to be a smart girl. Further, the girls talked about this aspect of their identity being something that they took immense pride in. The following short conversation exemplifies this theme quite well:

> Izzy: And [a smart girl] like, knows like, really how to work. And like, has an idea like what to do like in the future because like...
>
> Katelyn: Where they want to go.
>
> Stephanie: Their career, yeah...
>
> Izzy: And they know that they want to be successful.

In this quote, we see how the girls attributed their desire to be smart to something of their own choosing. Katelyn suggested that smart girls know where they want to go and Izzy claimed that smart girls know they want to be successful. In the second group interview, Ashley revisited the suggestion that a smart girl's desire to achieve stems from wanting to be successful. She claimed that, "it [being smart] means a lot to me because then I'll be better in college and university and high school". Further, Karly talked about the feelings she experienced when she received a good grade on a test or assignment. She stated, "...it really makes you feel good because you know that you've earned that mark and that to do that, you have to like work really hard. It makes you feel really good cause you did that." Kalista also discussed the importance she placed on achieving her goals by saying: "what you need to do, is you need to take it and take the question apart and do it correctly because sometimes people feel a bit mad because they don't get As but

it's cause they rush through everything. And so I think that me and Karly, we take our time, we do it correctly." In all of these examples, the girls indicated that being smart, working hard, and high achieving was a result of their own determination, hard work, and goal setting. Therefore, smartness was seen as something they did for and by themselves.

In both groups, the girls used words such as determination, pride, and dedication to describe themselves as smart girls. Yet, at the same time, they were not satisfied to remain at the level they were currently at. They were also committed to improving themselves and continuously progressing forward. Kalista discussed an experience she had in which a teacher encouraged her to continue improving. She stated:

> Cause our teacher always says, like even if we get As, or A+s or something like that, he always says, there's always room for improvement, you know? He says, there's never a time when you can, you don't stop improving. You always improve on your work. And, actually, at parent teacher interviews, he was saying how, like I got a G, which means good, in class participation. And he's like, you know, I know you know the answers, just, like now for me volunteering you, how about you maybe volunteer yourself a bit more. So, that's where I'm trying to improve on this term or whatever.

Here we see that even when Kalista was achieving goals she had set for herself, which were well above average, she was still constantly seeking ways to improve and as such, continued to build her identity as a smart girl.

The girls in the first group interview went on to discuss some girls who are viewed as smart girls but do not seem to have internalized this desire to be smart and explained how this may be detrimental to their future as a smart girl. The following conversation, in which they were discussing a fellow classmate, highlights this concern:

> Izzy: Like, she is smart, but it's like, her mom makes her like, I don't know. Like, I wouldn't want to be forced, either.

Stephanie: Yeah. I only want to do it out of my own will. Cause, like, I don't know, like how you're ever going to learn, like, if you're mind's not set to it.

Lindsay: Mhmm.

Izzy: And then maybe once she's out of her own house, like, her mom's, like, like her mom can't make her anymore, she might not try as hard and then she'll do worse than she would have done other wise.

The concern highlighted within this dialogue emphasizes the importance of smartness being something that a smart girl should care about on her own terms, rather than because of the pressures or expectations placed upon her by a parent or other external source.

The last major concern that was addressed by the smart girls in this study regarding the theme of working hard for themselves was that classmates often would want the smarts girls to help them with their school work. They discussed this as a problem because they thought that these people would not learn for themselves, thus hindering their progress in the end. They suggested that there is a need for other girls to learn the material for themselves, so that it will remain with them over time. The following dialogue emphasizes this:

Izzy: Like I know this one girl, she's always like, "is this right?" Like asking me, like in math and I don't mind, like, like, telling her whether or not she did it right but I don't…

Stephanie: But she should know for herself, sort of.

Izzy: Telling her if the answer is right. Or she'll be like, "what's the answer to …" and I'll be like, I can't tell you the answer. And she'll be all mad.

Katelyn: She has to learn how to do it herself.

Izzy: Mhmm. Cause it's like homework, so it's like, in math, we're never marked on our math homework, almost never, like unless she, unless our teacher tells us, but it's like, it's still annoying because …

Stephanie: She still has to do the work behind it.

Izzy: The point of the homework every night is to actually learn, cause…

Lindsay: So if you just tell her the answer the whole time, you know she's not going to be able to do well?

Izzy: Mhmm. And then it's my fault, that she did wrong, like that she…

Stephanie: And like, it won't stick in her head, cause, she, or he or she just wants to get it down as fast as they can and do something else for themselves, so.

Finally, Ashley discussed a difficult encounter that she faced in class in this regard. She suggested that because her friends knew that she was a smart girl, she was often seen as someone who could be of assistance to her classmates. Although she wanted to be helpful to her peers, she found this challenging because she felt that her own hard work might be compromised by others who simply wanted to get the work done without necessarily learning anything. She stated,

> … people in class know that I'm smart, a smart girl, and they always come sit near me cause they want to figure out the answer. Like, the way I did it. So, me and my partner usually have to put up math books on the outside and finish up our work like that [indicates using a textbook as a privacy shelter].

Something that each of these examples have in common is that they espouse a sense of conflict for the girls. Occuring all at once is the idea that smartness should be internalized by the individual, that learning would be hindered if one did not internalize this desire, and that there is a sense of pride and ownership over one's work that should not be taken advantage of. Yet at the same time, the girls also sometimes expressed a desire to be resourceful and helpful to their peers, although they did sometimes decide not to, as seen in the Ashley's quote above. This conflict does not suggest a confusion or contradiction within the girls but rather, suggests a complexity of emotion whereby an individual can exist in multiple ways simultaneously.

"I know they're just joking around because they would never really call me a geek"

– Ashley. In the group interviews, the girls often discussed stereotypes of smartness. Mainly, they discussed the stereotype of the geek – one who wears glasses and is a freak - which reinforced the discourse of the Loser. However, what was interesting was that the girls seemed to resist and criticize this stereotype while at the same time reinforcing and embracing it. This demonstrates the complexity of identity that is explored from the poststructural perspective as the girls performed a variety of layers of smartness. When asked what comes to mind when thinking about the term smart girl, Izzy said,

> I personally, like, I think of someone who's all, like, you know, like, when it first comes to mind, it's like someone who's like considered like a geek or something, or like someone who's exceptionally crazy smart, I think who always has the answers...

While discussing how smart girls are sometimes represented as geeky, there was a point where Stephanie pushed her glasses up on her nose and made a snorting noise, which came across as a humorous way to indicate how this performance of smartness is reiterated. Further, Karly, Kalista and Ashley claimed that "geek" was a stereotype often associated with smartness but were very critical of this construction. Karly suggested that "…some people think that smart means like, some people I think, think that you're like geeky or something like that." Kalista followed this statement by stating, "if you're smart, it doesn't mean you're like a geek…anybody can be smart and be nice at the same time. And, it's not like you have to be a geek." I find it very interesting that Kalista contrasted the concepts of geek and smart with the concept of nice in this quote. This unique pairing of terms suggests that there may be girls who are both smart and geeky, and therefore, not nice.

To further this discussion of niceness in relation to the stereotype of the geek, Izzy mentioned another stereotype that is sometimes associated with smart girls that may reflect the type of girl that Kalista was referring to above. She claimed that "sometimes, other people tie it [being a smart girl] in with stereotypes as well. Like, all of these girls might be snobbish like they want to like boast about, um, how great they are at knowing stuff". In this quote, Izzy described a stereotype of smartness that does not assume smart girls to be geeky losers but assumes them to be snobbish girls who have big egos about their smartness. She also stated that stereotypes about smartness were "annoying."

Interestingly, there was a moment during the focus group with Izzy, Katelyn and Stephanie where they seemed to reinforce this stereotype that they were first critical of. When discussing their ideas for future occupations, Stephanie suggested that one possibility would be to become a librarian. Following this comment, a conversation ensued regarding the stereotypes of librarians.

> Stephanie: Well, I used to want to be a librarian, but you know, like, it doesn't like pay as well. And yeah. The glasses. I went out as a librarian for Halloween one time.

> Katelyn: Remember, you have to move your glasses like that.

> [Laughter]

> [Stephanie pushes her glasses up on the bridge of her nose].

> Stephanie: So, um. I actually think I would want to be an interior designer or a landscaper.

Here we see that the girls are reinforcing the very stereotype that they were critical of previously. And again, we see Stephanie citing a visual representation of this stereotype, using her glasses as a prop. The contradictory enmeshment within the stereotype of the loser that the girls presented

seems to suggest that they are both bothered by it and rejecting a profession because of it while at the same time being interpellated or pushed towards it. That is, they appear to dislike the way that this stereotype is placed on smart girls but at the same time, they find a way to mock or make fun of it as a way of disengaging themselves from their own experiences with it.

Lastly, the girls presented the idea that these stereotypes exist in the world, but not in their world. The notion that these stereotypes were not evident on a local level was emanated strongly by the girls. Although they discussed the geek as being a stereotype of smart girls, they all claimed that they did not believe in this stereotype, or that it was not present in their schools. When asked to expand on her ideas about the stereotypes of smartness Izzy claimed "Well, that's not what I personally think. But that's what, you know, a lot of people think. Especially at first". Also, when Karly talked about smartness sometimes being associated with "the geek" she was quick to point out that "I know nobody in like our school or anything thinks that but I think some people do and that's kind of bad because like some people aren't like that." Further, both Karly and Ashley mentioned times when classmates and friends had placed the label of "geek" on them but claimed that their friends were only joking and that they would never actually call them a geek if they were being honest. Karly said,

> I personally have been called like a geek before, but like, it's just like by my friends and like, they're just joking around and everything like that. But, on TV, like, I've never like seen the movie like Mean Girls or anything like that, but, I've heard about it and uh, one of my friends said like it's about this geek that's like seriously smart and like, she does really well in school and everything. And, that's probably one of the things that I've seen in it. I saw on this movie that my sister was watching, she was doing really well in school and everybody started laughing at her, cause she was the only one, I don't really get that because I don't know why, if they're all failing and she's getting like perfect on the test, but I've seen that only in movies and stuff like that. But, like if I'm called a geek, I know that my friends are just like kidding about that and everything like that.

It is interesting that she comes back to the idea that her friends are only joking when calling her a geek at the end of this quote. Similarly, Ashley said, "I have been called a geek before but I know that my friends, by my friends, but I know they're just joking around because they would never really call me a geek."

Through these stories, we see that the stereotype of the geek was familiar and available to the smart girls in this study, yet it remains somewhat unclear as to where and how this stereotype exists. They gave some examples of media representations of this stereotype, yet claimed that any time this stereotype had been placed on them, it was only as a joke, because their friends would never really call them a geek. Again, it seems as though the girls are constantly negotiating ways to make sense of this stereotype that exists somewhere, in some fashion, in their lives without allowing it to become a part of how they represent themselves as smart girls. As discussed previously, the girls in the first focus group turned the stereotype of the geek on its head by poking fun at it while in this case, the girls distanced themselves from the stereotype by claiming that it is only used in friendly, joking situations rather than in situations that accurately and honestly describe them as smart girls. In both cases, it appears as though the girls may have been rationalizing this stereotype in interesting ways so as to ensure that they did not take it too personally. By discussing, resisting and critiquing the construction of the Loser, the girls are both citing and reiterating norms of smartness while at the same time using lines of flight to resist them or develop new ways of performing and thinking about smartness (Butler, 1993; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Further, these examples indicate a circumstance at which the girls are discussing an order-word of smartness (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), which is the notion of the geek, while at

the same time navigating it in a way that conjures very unique and interesting understandings of what it means to be a smart girl.

"When everyone just asks you questions, you don't want to be like mean and tell them to go away" – Katelyn. Another theme that was prevalent within the data was how smart girls negotiate their smartness and their relationships with their peers, particularly within the classroom. In this section, three sub-themes emerged. First, the girls in the second group interview discussed problems they had faced when they encountered peers who were jealous of their grades. Second, they discussed feeling conflicted between expressing pride in their grades and not wanting to rub it in people's faces, which demonstrates that they had a deep level of care for other's feelings. Lastly, the girls felt a sense of conflict between wanting to help their friends and not wanting to do all the work for them, which relates back to the second theme in which I explored the idea that girls felt it was important to be smart for your own benefit. Again, I do not point out the conflicts and contradictions within and between the girls' stories to indicate that I think the girls were facing some type of identity confusion but rather, to point out the possibility of being and feeling many different ways at once.

Karly discussed an issue that she had faced with a friend in a prior year at which time she felt that her friendship with this girl was damaged due to the fact that Karly was receiving much higher grades than the other girl. She described the incident as follows:

> Karly: Um, last year I had an incident with a friend, um, and we're still friends and everything like that but I think it wrecked our friendship a little bit because um, Kalista and I both were her friend but then, I, we both think that she kind of got a bit jealous.

> Kalista: Mhmm.

Karly: So it kind of wrecked our friendship. Not really wrecked it, but kind of damaged it a bit. Because they get jealous, cause they get like really frustrated because they can't like get like, they just don't get it or something like that. But, I think that's a downside of it, because they don't really, like they'll get jealous and then they'll like start talking behind your back or whatever, like that. But, you just have to kind of like talk to them, and say, I can help you with this and I'll do this to help you or whatever. So, yeah.

Kalista: Yeah, um, yeah and she got really jealous and I think she just wanted to take her anger out on us cause we were getting As, right?

Karly: Mhmm.

Kalista: But I think she didn't have to do that. All she said to do was maybe say, oh would you like some help, or would you like me to help, blah, would you like to help me with this? Or something like that.

Similarly, Ashley discussed an experience she had where she felt as though her peers were expressing jealousy towards her because of her good grades. In this case, she described a time when she was in grade two where there were some boys who were mean to her, calling her "dumb and a dork" at recess. She felt as though this ridicule stemmed from an issue of jealousy because they knew that she was a smart girl.

The second aspect of concern addressed in terms of negotiating smartness and peer relationships came from a conflict the girls felt between expressing pride in their achivements and not wanting to hurt the feelings of their fellow classmates. Izzy provided the first example of this when she said:

...people go around just like sharing their marks with everybody and then like I say my marks and I'm like, ooh, I shouldn't have said that because like, people, like, who got a little lower than me, sometimes, like if they're not doing the best. Uh, yeah. It's kind of hard though, too, cause, like peer pressure, like you sort of want to. Just like, to show that you're smart, like that.

In addition, Ashley, Karly and Kalista discussed this issue extensively as being a challenge for them in the classroom. Kalista brought up an interesting concept which she termed "bouncing

around." This term was how she referred to the reaction that she and Karly sometimes had in

private when they both performed well on a test or an assignment.

> Kalista: Um, well, me and Karly, we kind of like, we don't really, it's kind of like, we bounce around when we get an A, but we only do it to each other, because we know some people didn't get that A, so, but really, you don't really feel bad bouncing it to each other cause we usually both got an A. But we don't want to like, bounce it to our other, like get real excited to our other friends, kind of if they ask me, I'll just say, oh I got an A, but you don't wanna be like, 'Oh my gosh! I got an A.' Like that, cause, um, they might feel a little bad and, if they don't, like, if they didn't get an A.

> Karly: We usually do [compare our grades] to our friends but like if we know it was difficult, if it was a really difficult test and we found it difficult, then we know that maybe some of our other friends that are maybe like just average, like students and everything like that, we don't really, well, most of the time because all of us are pretty good students, like our whole friend group thingy, we're usually good students, so yeah, we'll usually, we don't really, Kalista and I don't really tell our mark to people unless they come and ask. Cause we don't really want to say I got an A what did you get and they got a C or something like that. Cause we don't want to hurt their feelings. So we usually just wait, unless they ask us, or like, if it's one of our really good friends that we know that might not have done so well, because like, our friend, she's not like the smartest person in the world but she's like the nicest person ever and she doesn't usually, like do, like great, so, like we'll share it with her and she'll be like oh I got this, and we'll be like, well next time you can like do something like this, or whatever, to help her out.

> Kalista: Yeah, and, yeah, our, yeah me and Karly usually share our grades. Cause like for our report cards, he was like don't share your grades with anybody, but we kind of shared our grades cause we knew we'd probably get about even, or whatever. And, um, and, yeah, our friend, she usually might get like a C or something but we always like congratulate her and we're like oh my gosh, you did so well on this test. And, um, we ask her like where'd she go wrong so we can maybe like help her out the next test, so that way she might bump it up to a B or a B+, something like that.

Ashley's feelings about this subject were similar to those expressed by Kalista and Karly,

although she did not have as much to say about how she negotiated it.

> Ashley: Um, when I get a high mark on my test I usually keep it to myself and I really am excited if I get a high mark because that shows me that I know a lot

about that subject … Lots of the people will go around and telling each other, even if they're not their friends. And then all the other people will go home and feel bad, and everything.

When asked if being smart is a cool thing, Kalista's answer reflected her desire to ensure that she does not hurt people's feelings. She said, "Yeah, I think so, but again, you don't want to rub it in people's faces. Like, I'm kind of glad it's just us cause if there was somebody here who wasn't smart, it would be a little, you know, mean or whatever."

Lastly, the girls expressed concern in terms of how to juggle the conflict between wanting to assist their friends with their school work and not wanting to do all the work or be taken advantage of. In the first focus group, the girls told me that their classmates would often approach them for help when they were working independently in the classroom because they knew that they were smart girls and would likely have the answers to the questions they were working on. The following dialogue highlights the conflict they felt when dealing with these situations:

> Katelyn: And sometimes when everyone just asks you questions, you, you don't want to be like mean and tell them to go away or like…
>
> Stephanie: Yeah.
>
> Katelyn: Find someone else. But, sometimes it can get, like, a little overwhelming.
>
> Stephanie: It's like, I want to do my work!
>
> Katelyn: Or just like, relax or something.
>
> Stephanie: Yeah, it's like…
>
> Izzy: I know. I want to do my work, get it over with and then, like, read or do something else. Rather than always asking the questions. Like, there's kind of an expectation of you from the rest of the class.
>
> Katelyn: Yeah.

Stephanie: Something like that.

Izzy: It's like, I don't want to be, mean or something and say no but, like.

Stephanie: Well, I would help. But, um, for me, as well, like, um, I'm, um, I would say that, um, like, for some people, um, I know that if I help them with every question, like oh, can I copy off of you? Then, like, they sort of don't learn anything.

Katelyn: Right.

Stephanie: And it's just, like, we're expected to do it sometimes, like, to share our answers, like.

Here we see that the girls in the discussion faced a challenge as they wanted to be resourceful and helpful to their classmates but they did not want to allow them to copy and they sometimes just wanted to take some time to have a break and relax. Also, it was interesting that Stephanie indicated that they were expected to share their answers. It was not clear who expected this, whether it be other students or teachers, yet she felt as though there was some kind of responsibility on her to be an assistant to her peers. This dialogue reflects a similarity to the discussion of how the smart girls in the study felt towards peers who were not learning material for themselves. Again, the idea was addressed that in order to be a smart girl, one must internalize their knowledge and work hard to achieve their own goals. In this case, this point was made by Stephanie who claimed that if she were to tell the answers to her classmates, they would not learn it for themselves.

In addition, the girls from the second group interview also discussed the conflicts they faced when positioning themselves as helpers in the classroom. All three girls said that they enjoyed being looked up to as a leader, and a helper in the classroom. For example, Karly said, "I find it very flattering because I like being a leader and helping people out and stuff like that."

However, they also pointed out that this negotiation can be complicated when it comes down to classmates wanting them to give them the answers or do the work for them. The example that Ashley gave when discussing her feelings about group work in the classroom highlights this complexity. As discussed previously, Ashley suggested that people would come and sit near her during group work, in an attempt to copy her answer, which led her and her partner to use their textbooks as a wall to keep their work private. There is extreme complexity evident in the examples that have been described in this section. Once again, it is demonstrative of the idea that being a smart girl is not a simple, straightforward way to be but that it is a complex process that takes constant negotiation and reconciliation as they juggle between being kind and helpful and doing what they need to do to get ahead and achieve their goals.

   "You have to set a goal and work hard to reach it" – Katelyn. Lastly, a theme that emerged from the data was that of how the girls felt that their smartness would be an important aspect of their identities in the future. In this theme, they talked about the plans they had for achieving their goals and how smartness could help them in their daily life, outside of school. The majority of this discussion stemmed around ideas for future education and future careers. In the first group interview, all three girls had ideas about what types of careers they would like to have in their future. They also all seemed to have put some thought into the steps that would need to be taken to get there. For example, Izzy said she would like to be an interior designer. She also said that she knew a woman who was an interior designer so she had thought about the possibility of talking with this woman to get advice and gain experience about the job. Further, Katelyn's dream was to own a pet shop. She said that in order to do so she would have to set financial goals for herself and gain experience in this area by volunteering at animal shelters. In

this group, Izzy suggested that the most important thing when considering future goals is to know what is required for to achieve them. She stated, "…you can easily be almost whatever you want as long as you know what you need for that."

In the second group interview, the girls also had ideas about the jobs they would like to obtain in the future but their goals were more education oriented. While discussions of university were limited in the first group interview, the girls in the second group talked about going to university quite extensively. As an example, Kalista mentioned that she had sat down with her mom the week before and asked her questions about applying and getting accepted into university. She was curious to know what grades you had to achieve to gain entrance into university and was already thinking about and planning for that stage in her life. Further, she discussed studying French as something that was necessary for her in her future. She said,

> I'm good at French but I'm not the best at French, like, French isn't my great subject. But, I'm really trying, really hard in French, cause I know that French is going to impact my job in later years, like a long time from here. But, uh, yeah, I know that if I want to get a good job, French is going to help. Cause, some good jobs, you know, you need to know French and English.

Evidently, she felt that pursuing studies in French would be beneficial to her future. She also inferred that being a smart girl was influential in her decision making process in terms of choosing to work hard at French, even though she was not as good at it as she was at some other subjects. This suggestion makes smartness become complex in a different kind of way as it suggests that smartness as a performative identity category can be complicated or experienced differently depending on the context or subject matter. From Kalista's example of not being "the best" at French, the question of whether or not a girl is still a smart girl if she struggles with a certain subject arises.

A statement made by Karly clearly outlines the extent to which these girls were thoughtful about their educational futures:

> I think if you're like, do well in school and everything, in elementary school and high school and everything, I think like in university, it will really help you because you like tried hard and everything and like maybe like in high school you'll get like, scholarships or whatever, to like whatever. And, I think it really does influence your future, because like, you might get like noticed more and everything like that. Because when you're smart in elementary school, you usually just like get influenced and encouraged to like move on and do better and everything like that. And then in university you're all ready and everything and that, that happened from your elementary school.

The girls in both groups suggested that being smart would be beneficial to their futures as it gives one the capability to set achievable goals which would result in being "better in college and university" (Ashley) and getting the "jobs you want" (Katelyn). Here we see an area where the girls viewed their identities as being fixed and solid, as they discussed where they want to go and what they want to be with an authority that reflects their individuality.

Additionally, Katelyn discussed smartness as being an important way for young women to negotiate their place in the world and take a stand for themselves. In the following quote she highlights this idea:

> I do think you have to be smart outside of school because if, like, for girls, there's like guys trying to take advantage of you, and you have to know how to like stand your ground, type thing. You can't just be like, give in to everything. You have to know that like drugs and smoking and all that are going to be pressured and you have to know that you have to make a decision.

Here, she described smartness as being a tool for responsible decision making that might come in handy when dealing with pressures that girls face in their lives and how smartness may benefit the girls in the future, outside of the realm of academics and careers. Kalista also talked about smartness being a benefit to her life, outside of academics and career choices.

> ...you have to be able to like plan everything out and so like thinking before hand
> will kind of help you and being organized and everything like that, to always,
> like, be able to juggle everything.

Overall, the girls in this thesis felt that smartness was an integral part of their identity

both presently and for the future, as well as inside and outside of the academic realm.

Have-it-alls, Losers and Imposters?

As can be seen through this analysis, the girls' stories reflect a great deal of fluctuation

throughout and between the discourses that were fleshed out in chapter two. While these

academic constructions of smartness leave little, or no, room for fluctuation and variation the

girls in this thesis demonstrated that the lived experience of smartness involves movement

through and between the discourses. The girls each spoke of stories that would seem to align

them with the discourses that were reviewed in chapter two. The extent to which they are

involved in academics, athletics, leadership programs and so on frames them as Have-It-All girls

and also fits with the idea of wanting to be defined as more than just smart. Yet at the same time,

the girls discussed times at which they withheld discussing their grades with their classmates so

that they would not make others feel bad. The action of withholding discussion is congruent with

some of the actions taken by the Imposters, while the reason for doing so is described differently

by these girls in comparison to the way that withholding grades is theorized in the literature (see

Renold & Allan, 2006). Finally, as the girls discussed common stereotypes about smartness, they

pointed to instances when they heard smart girls being referred to as a geek or were labeled as a

geek themselves, which indicates the construction of the Loser, but distanced themselves from

this construction by claiming that it did not take place at their school or that it was a harmless

joke when someone called them a geek. Therefore, through these examples, it is evident that

smart girls negotiate and perform their smart identities in unique ways that are both held within

and outside of dominant discourse as they cite and reiterate smartness in their daily lives.

Conclusion

Limitations

As a research project unfolds, the researcher undoubtedly will discover things that she wishes she had done differently that may have improved the outcome of the study. This is certainly the case for my experience while completing this thesis. As I draw the project to a close, there are a few limitations to be addressed. As I discussed in the methodology section, having a larger, more diverse sample of smart girls in this thesis may have provided an opportunity to gain richer data on the subject. There was very little diversity amongst the smart girls; they were all white, identified themselves as Canadian and/or American, seemed to be middle class, and resided within the same geographical location. However, I was presented with a sample that was convenient and easily accessible and I feel as thought I made do with that sample as best as I could despite the fact that it was fairly homogenous.

In the section where I discussed how the girls felt that being smart was something they attributed to themselves, and their own hard work, their ideas were strongly premised on a sense of individualistic neoliberalism (Harris, 2004). It is possible that this theme would have differed immensely had this thesis included a more diverse sample. Correa (2008) suggests that the construction of the "ideal" girl tends to represent experiences of the typical girl, which is often viewed through a lens of whiteness. Further, Currie et al. (2009) claim that almost always "overachieving girls are middle to upper class, usually white, and destined for top-notch universities" (p. 41). That being said, young women who do not relate to experiences of a middle-class white girl are often viewed as the Other and feel as though they cannot relate to this sense of shared girlhood (Correa, 2008). Clearly, the suggestion that it is easy and non

problematic to attain the identity of a smart girl disregards the structural barriers that many young women may face (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). Perhaps it is the case that the girls in my thesis have had limited experiences with these types of structural barriers as they all appeared to come from a background of privilege. It is not safe for me to assume that the attitude of individualism would have changed with a more heterogeneous sample, but it is possible that if my sample had included working class girls or racial minorities, there may have been more attention paid to barriers and challenges that are faced when positioning oneself as smart. Therefore, although more diversity would have been beneficial, there were still many incredible and insightful stories that were discussed by the girls who were included in the thesis.

Further, meeting with each group only once may be considered a drawback to my study. If I had taken the opportunity to meet with each group of girls on more than one occasion, it may have given me the opportunity to gain a deeper sense of rapport with the girls. As well, if I had met with them subsequently, they may have had an opportunity to reflect their smartness between the meeting times, which may have presented them with an opportunity to bring to mind other interesting issues that were not addressed in the first group interview. Although, due to time restraints and other limitations, it was not feasible to meet with the groups on multiple occasions, I feel that by giving the girls an opportunity to fill out the information sheet which included a space to write other comments that were not said, review the transcript, and send back any further comments they may have had regarding the focus group, I was able to negotiate this issue. Although meeting with the girls more than once would have been ideal, these other steps taken presented an opportunity for the girls to think about and be insightful about their experiences following the group interview.

Lastly, as I completed the research process, I began to realize that including a mixture of group interviews and individual interviews may have been more beneficial for this thesis than relying solely on a group interviewing method. Although I am pleased with my decision to conduct group interviews as it hopefully allowed the possibility for the girls to feel more comfortable and 'in charge' by outnumbering me as an adult (Eder & Fingerson, 2003), I feel that conducting individual interviews with the girls following the group interview may have given me an opportunity to glean data that was unavailable in a group setting. If I had taken the opportunity to conduct individual interviews with the girls after the group interview, perhaps I may have been able to uncover some additional issues or stories that were not told in the group setting. As both Eder and Fingerson (2003) and Raby (2008) suggest, conducting group interviews with participants who are friends which each other can sometimes lead to power imbalances as one or more members of the group dominates over the others. Therefore, by also including individual interviews, it is my speculation that I may have been able to draw out opinions and thoughts that were different from those that were expressed in the group setting as the girls would have had more privacy and may not have had to deal with these power imbalances quite so much. This speculation is based on a claim made by Eder and Fingerson (2003) in their article on interviewing children and adolescents. They describe a prior study conducted by Fingerson in which she spent time researching young girls. In this study, she found that many girls expressed opinions in individual interviews but changed these opinions in a focus group setting to more closely match the other opinions that were being stated (Fingerson, 1999 as cited in Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Including a combination of both group and individual interviews may have been the most advantageous as it could have achieved the benefits of each

technique – reducing the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched in the group setting and reducing the power imbalance between the participants in the individual setting.

Future Research

There are a number of areas that future research exploring the lives of smart girls would benefit from exploring. One emerging area of research regarding smart girls revolves around how they are studied in comparison to their male counterparts. This strand of research is often referred to as the "what about the boys debate" or the "boy turn" (Weaver-Hightower, 2003, p. 472). This argument suggests that most educational research has focused on girls and it is only within the last decade or so that the focus has shifted towards boys (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). This shift took place because it was felt as though boys were being disregarded in the educational system and all of the focus remained on girls (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). It has been suggested that this shift in thinking highlights the notion that gender equity in education "is not a deficiency in girls but rather is caused by problematic masculinities and femininities" (Weaver-Hightower, 2003, p. 490). Therefore, as this quote suggests, perhaps it is not as important to focus on who is getting more attention, who needs more attention, or who has the most problems in education, but rather, how both boys and girls exist in the current educational system with respect to other relevant intersections like class and race and what can be done to support them both. As highlighted by both Eagleton (1983) and St. Pierre (2000) feminist poststructuralism is not focused solely on relations of power between men and women, but on all issues of power and status in society and as such, focusing on gendered smart girl and boy identities in education would be beneficial. Although gender issues were not thoroughly discussed in this project, there

was some talk of the differences and similarities between smart girls and smart boys in the interviews. Therefore, it would be interesting and pivotal to examine gender constructs and to explore how smart girls view, and relate to, smart boys. As well, it may be interesting to explore how peers, parents and teachers perceive and act towards smart boys in order to examine whether or not there are any differences in that regard.

Additionally, exploring smartness in relation to other discourses of girlhood would be an interesting avenue of research. As mentioned in chapter two, some other notable discourses of girlhood are the mean girl, the sexually aggressive girl, the tough girl, the rebellious girl, and the troubled, in need of protection girl (Currie et al., 2009). There are certainly other discourses of girlhood that are present in academic writing and the media but these are some of the most popularized and easily recognizable ones. Although these discourses do not have as obvious of a connection to smartness as the discourses reviewed in this thesis did, it would be interesting to explore if and how these alternate discourses are evidenced in the lives of smart girls. There was some brief discussion of the mean girl discourse during my discussion with the second group as they made mention of the movie "Mean Girls" and also discussed how some smart girls are snobby and act as though they are better than their peers. Based on this observation, it would be useful for future researchers to explore how the mean girl discourse is enacted in the identity performances of smart girls, if at all. Lastly, as I have mentioned, there was a strong sense of individualism presented by the girls in my thesis. Future researchers would do well to explore this notion of individualism and neoliberalism in order to examine the question of if and how smart girls espouse feminist, or post-feminist, thinking in their lives.

Final Thoughts

Through the focus group discussions a sense of complexity, multiplicity and flexibility was evident in the stories told by the smart girls. As suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), rhizomatic thinking involves the understanding that meaning can be generated from multiple entry points and that rather than viewing individual meaning as dichotomous and unified, it should be viewed as multiplicities. The rigid construction of the discourses under review restricts this multiplicity and attempts to position young women as being either a Loser, a Have-It-All girl, or an Imposter. However, as some others who have critiqued discourses of girlhood have found, the smart girl performances relayed by the young women in this thesis demonstrate much more complexity and multiplicity than the academic and popular constructions of smartness allow (Aapola et al., 2005; Bettis & Roe, 2008; Harris, 2004).

The relevance of my thesis is two-fold. Primarily, this research contributes greatly to the current Girlhood Studies literature as it further outlines the importance of deconstructing the representations of the discourses that appear to be extremely prevalent when discussing the lives of girls, and in this case, smart girls. This is the case not only for the discourses that I selected to review in my thesis, but for all discourses of smartness and of girlhood. Again, to refer to Foucault and Derrida, it is necessary to deconstruct the discourses that shape and implement what is seen as truth in the lives of young women (Derrida, 1976, 1982; Foucault, 1984). Therefore, by examining how smart girls perform their smart girl identities, we can begin to question the discourses surrounding them that shape what comes to be known as truth about their lives. Secondly, my thesis provides an opening to find cracks in discourse while exploring alternate possible meanings of what it means to perform a girl identity, specifically a smart girl identity, in our current historical, political, and cultural context.

Appendix A - Focus Group Schedule

General School Questions

1. Describe a typical day in your life/at school.
    a. Who do you live with?
    b. What do you do for fun?
    c. Who are your friends?
    d. Do you like school? Why?
    e. What subjects do you like best/worst?

2. Can you describe your school to me?
    a. The groups? Were there any cliques?
    b. The races?
    c. The classes?

3. Describe your friendship group.
    a. Do you have one?
    b. If you don't have one, how do you handle that? What did you do to compensate?
    c. Are you a part of a specific group? (popular, unpopular, geeks?)

4. Which parts of school do you enjoy and not enjoy?
    a. Are you involved with any extracurricular activities, sports or clubs?

General Smart Question to Shift the Focus

5. What do you think of when you hear the term "smart girl"?
    a. Are there any labels or stereotypes that are commonly associated with being a smart girl in high school?
    b. Tell me about a time when these stereotypes were placed on you, or another smart girl?
    c. Do people ever call smart girls names?

Personal Smart Questions

6. How do you think others perceive you at school?
    a. Do other people know you are smart?

7. Why do you identify yourself as a smart girl?

8.   What does it mean to you to be a smart girl?

9.   Do other people think of you as smart?
   a. Who? Why do they think this about you?

10.   Do you like being thought of as smart?
   a. If yes, what does it bring to your life?
   b. If no, how has it complicated your life?

11.   Does being a smart girl affect your social life?
   a. Do you have lots of friends?
   b. Are your friends smart girls and boys also?

12.   Does being smart ever interfere with your other commitments?
   a. Do you ever have to miss a social/extra curricular event because you are too busy with school?
   b. Are you able to juggle a lot of activities?

13.   How important are your grades to you?
   a. How do you feel when you receive a high mark on a test or assignment?
   b. How do you feel when you receive a low mark?
   c. What are your personal standards or expectations for the marks wanted to receive?
   Do you talk about your grades/school work with your friends? How do you feel about these discussions?

14.   How do you feel about group work at school?

Back to Smart Girl Questions in a General Sense

15.   What do you think about other smart girls at your school?
   a. Are you all the same?
   b. Are there different "types" of smart girls?

16.   Is it acceptable to be a smart girl at your school?
   a. Is it acceptable for all girls? (pretty girls, geeks, unpopular girls, girls of different races?) Is it cool to be smart?

17.   Is it important for girls to be smart? Why or why not?

18.   Are there differences between smart girls and smart boys?
    a. Are there different pressures on boys to be smart?
    b. What about girls?
    c. Is it acceptable for boys to be smart at your school?
          i. All boys? Certain boys, from certain groups?

19.   Did you ever see a girl being teased for being smart?
    a. By a boy?
    b. By another girl?
    c. By a teacher?
    d. Who were these girls? How did they handle being teased?
    e. Were you ever teased?

20.   Do you think parents think it is important for their daughters to be smart?
    a. Do they have certain expectations?
    b. Are they supportive?
    c. Do girls feel pressured by their parents?

21.   How do teachers treat smart girls?
    a. Do teachers make smart girls feel comfortable?
    b. As a smart girl, are you happy with your teachers?
    c. Can you tell me about a time where a teacher encouraged you/discouraged you or another smart girl?
    d. What is "class time" like for a smart girl?
          i. Do you participate? Do you often volunteer to answer questions? Do other students look to you for help?

Concluding Questions – Smartness as an Identity

22.   Do you see any examples of smart girls in popular culture?
    a. In movies?
    b. TV?
    c. Celebrities or characters?
    d. What do you think about the way that smart girls are represented in popular culture?

23.   Does smartness mean anything to other areas of your life, or just school?

24. How do you think your future will be influenced by your identity as a smart girl?

25. Is there anything else we forgot to talk about?

Appendix B - Focus Group Participant Information Form

Please take a moment to fill out the following questions.

1. Name: _____

2. Age: _____

3. Grade:_____

4. Parent(s)/Guardian's Highest Level of Education:

   _____

5. Parent(s)/Guardian's Occupation:

   _____

6. Ethnicity: _____

7. Please choose a name for yourself to be used in written reports that will be generated based on this study:

   _____

8. Would you like to review the transcript of this focus group? Yes _____   No _____

9. Would you like to receive a summary of the project upon completion? Yes_____   No ___

10. If you answered "yes" to Question 8 and/or 9 please include provide your e-mail address or mailing address:

    _____

11. Are there any comments or ideas you want to add to today's discussion?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

Thank you!

Appendix C – Participant Information Materials

Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

Hello,

I am a student in the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University. I am asking you to be in a research study about smart girls. Research is a way to understand ideas and learn new things. In my research, I want to learn about what it means to girls to be smart. I am asking girls who are between grades six to eleven who call themselves "Smart Girls" to be in the research. This topic is important to study because there is not very much research about "Smart Girls". The research that is available makes "Smart Girls" appear to exist in very specific categories, such as geeks, impostors and have-it-all girls, and does not leave room for girls to have unique identities.

If you choose to be in the research, there will be a small group discussion, called a focus group, with you, two or three of your friends and myself. In this group we will talk about smartness in your school. When the discussion is finished, you will receive a $10 gift card to either the Pen Centre or Starbucks.

Being in research is your choice. You can say yes or no. Being in this study will not harm you in any way but if you find yourself being embarrassed, upset or uncomfortable during or after the focus group, you can find a list of people you can talk to attached to this letter. Also, if there is anything you do not want to talk about in the focus group, you do not have to. You can choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You can also stop being in the study at any time, if you change your mind. If you decide you don't want to be in the study anymore, just tell me. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not receive a $10 gift card.

I will be writing reports about this research and when I do I will use a code name so no one will know that it is about you. Since we are having a group discussion, I cannot promise that other participants will not talk about the focus group to other people after it is done. However, it is very important that you do not tell anybody else who is in the focus group with you or what they say. Before we start the focus group, we will talk about this and we will all sign a group confidentiality form to agree that what is said in the focus group will stay there. What you say at the focus group will be tape recorded so I can type it out later, onto a transcript, to use in a written report about the study. Also, I will probably talk about the findings of this research at conferences. The tapes and transcripts will be destroyed when I am done my research.

I want you to know that my research has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at Brock University, which means they have given me permission to do this research and they know that it is safe. The final decision about your participation in this research is between you and your parents. If you wish to stop being in the research at

anytime, please inform me of your decision by e-mailing me, calling me, or telling me at the focus group. You can also contact the Research Ethics Office at Brock University if you have any concerns. You can e-mail them at reb@brocku.ca or call them at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035.

Thank you for reading this letter and helping me with my project. Please read and sign the attached consent form and bring it with you, along with a signed copy of the parental consent form to the focus group.

Thank you,

Lindsay Cramp
Brock University
Child and Youth Studies
lk05qy@brocku.ca
905-562-3056

Dr. Shauna Pomerantz
Brock University
Child and Youth Studies
shauna.pomerantz@brocku.ca
(905) 688-5550 ext. 5371

<u>Consent of Participant</u>

I have read the letter about research being conducted by Lindsay Cramp of the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University under the supervision of Dr. Shauna Pomerantz.

I had a chance to ask questions about the research and got the answers I needed. I know I can ask questions at any time. I want to be in the research study. I know that I can change my mind at any time and stop being in the research study. I know that if I change my mind I will not get a $10 gift card. I know that my comments will be tape-recorded for future use in the study.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Office at Brock University (REB File #09-041). I know that if I have any comments or concerns about the study, I may contact the Research Ethics Office at reb@brocku.ca or 905-688-5550 ext. 3035.

I understand the research study. I had a chance to ask questions. I know I can ask questions any time. I want to be in the research study.

_____

Print Name

_____

Signature of Participant

_____

Dated at St Catharines, Ontario

Parental Information and Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a Master's student in the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University working under the supervision of Dr. Shauna Pomerantz. I am researching how girls who consider themselves to be smart girls experience and understand this smartness in their everyday lives. This topic is important to the field of Child and Youth Studies because there is not a great deal of research about "Smart Girls" and the limited research that does exist portrays "Smart Girls" in very rigid terms. Rather than leaving room for flexibility and uniqueness of identities, the literature portrays smart girls as being either geeks, impostors and have-it-all girls. It is my aim to challenge these constructions and examine the extent to which depictions of smartness in both pop culture and academic writing reflect the lived experiences of smart girls.

Your daughter has expressed interest in participating in this study. Participation will involve a 90 minute focus group with your daughter and a group of her friends. In this focus group we will discuss how smartness impacts the lives of young women today. In appreciation of your daughter's time given to this session she will be given a $10 gift card to the Pen Centre or Starbucks upon completion of the focus group. The discussion will be facilitated by myself, Lindsay Cramp from the Child and Youth studies department at Brock University. The discussion will be conducted in the home of one of the participants whom the researcher has familiarity with. Please be assured that your daughter will be in the care of a responsible adult during the time that the focus group is being conducted. Further, if the focus group is being conducted in your home, please be advised that I will ask you to be in the home, yet out of earshot, at the time of the meeting.

Participation in this session is entirely voluntary and involves input to and discussion of the issues associated with the study. There are no anticipated risks to your daughter's participation in this session. However, in the event that she experiences any discomfort, you will find a list of support resources included in this package. She may decline answering any questions she does not wish to answer and may decline contributing to the session in other ways. Your daughter may choose to withdraw from the study at any point in time by informing the researcher of her desire to do so. If your daughter chooses to withdraw, she will not receive a $10 gift certificate in compensation.

All information she provides will be considered confidential by the researcher and her name will not be identified with the input she gives to this session. However, due to the nature of the focus group, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed because the researcher cannot control potential discloser by other participants. Therefore, I will ask your daughter to keep in confidence information that identifies or could potentially identify a participant and/or her comments. All participants and researchers will be required to sign a group confidentiality form and the importance of confidentiality will be discussed with all participants at the outset of the focus group. The focus group data cannot be considered anonymous because of the group nature

of the study. Any information collected using audio-taping, video recording, or interview cannot be considered anonymous because I will be able to link the data to specific participants. Please note that this refers to the anonymity of the data itself and not the reporting of results. In other words, although I will know specifically what your daughter says during the focus group, her identity will remain hidden in all written or verbal reports.

The focus group will be tape recorded for future transcription. The information collected from this session will be destroyed upon completion of the study. It is my intention to publish the data in the form of a written thesis. Further, it is likely that the data will be disseminated orally at academic conferences.

If you have any questions about your daughter's participation in this session, please feel free to contact either the primary researcher or the faculty supervisor. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at Brock University. However, the final decision about participation is between your daughter and yourself. Should you have comments or concerns resulting from your daughter's participation in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at Brock University.

Thank you for your assistance with this project. Please sign the attached parental consent form and send it with your daughter to the scheduled focus group.

Yours sincerely,

Lindsay Cramp
Brock University
Child and Youth Studies
lk05qv@brocku.ca
905-562-3056

Dr. Shauna Pomerantz
Brock University
Child and Youth Studies
shauna.pomerantz@brocku.ca
(905) 688-5550 ext. 5371

Parental Consent

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Lindsay Cramp of the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted. I am aware that my daughter may withdraw from the study at any point by advising the researchers of this decision. I am aware that if my daughter withdraws from the study that she will not receive a $10.00 gift certificate. I am aware that my daughter is being asked to participant in a 90 minute focus group that will be tape-recorded for future transcription.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Office at Brock University (REB File #09-041). I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my daughter's participation in this study, I may contact the Research Ethics Office at reb@brocku.ca or 905-688-5550 ext. 3035.

With full knowledge of the details of the focus group phase of this study, I give permission for my daughter to participate.

_____

Print Name

_____

Signature of Parent/Guardian

_____

Dated at St Catharines, Ontario

Support Resources

If you feel any discomfort, embarrassment, stress or worry as a result of being in this study there are resources available to help you.

Kids Help Phone
www.kidshelpphone.ca
1-800-688-6868

Social Services in the Niagara Region
http://www.informationniagara.com/helping_individuals.htm

Teen Central
http://www.teencentral.net/

The Fort
www.thefortgrimsby.ca
(905) 309-3678
25 Adelaide St
Grimsby, ON L3M 3C8

Niagara Health System – Children's Clinic
www.niagarahealth.on.ca
(905) 378-4647 ext. 46573
142 Queenston St
St Catharines, ON L2R 7C6

(905) 378-4647 ext 53803/53804
5546 Portage Rd
Niagara Falls, ON

The Raft
www.theraft.ca
905-984-4365
17 Centre St
St Catharines, ON L2R 3A6

Appendix D - Group Confidentiality Form

I understand that participation in this focus group requires group confidentiality. I realize that it is important for all participants and researchers to feel comfortable sharing their views without worrying that other people might find out. Therefore, my signature below ensures that I will keep all that is said in the focus group private and that I will not share anything said by other participants to people outside the focus group.

Participants:

Print name: _____   Signature: _____

Print name: _____   Signature: _____

Print name: _____   Signature: _____

Researcher:

Print name: _____   Signature: _____

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