

Running Header: IMPACT OF SOCIOCULTURAL EXPECTATIONS ON YOUNG
WOMEN

**Exploring the Impact of Sociocultural Expectations on Young Women's
Negotiations of Normative Femininities**

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Abstract

The current sociocultural climate is increasingly characterised by postfeminist and neoliberal sentiment, which presents a complex and contradictory context for young women who are constructing their identities in this social terrain. Adopting a theoretical orientation of social constructionism and drawing on feminist poststructuralist theories, the current research aimed to contribute to knowledge concerning how young women 'do' gender and negotiate contemporary normative femininities. Specifically, how school-aged young women understand, interpret and perform sociocultural informed normative femininities was examined; including, how young women understand and position themselves in relation to broader issues of sexism and feminism. Additionally, this study sought to examine the ways in which the school environment and young women's friends and peers inform their perceptions and performances of successful girlhood. The current ethnographic study was conducted in an all-girls Catholic non-government secondary school in Melbourne, Victoria. Participants included eleven young women and three teachers from this school. Multiple qualitative data collection methods were employed, including individual semi-structured interviews with young women and teachers, a focus group with young women, fieldwork and archival data. Data collected was analysed thematically and the findings were varied and complex. The extent to which this all-girls school environment was a safe or unsafe space (often simultaneously) for participants to develop their understandings of feminism and normative femininities was explored. Thus, it was found that this educational setting presented young women with many barriers as well as opportunities to challenge notions concerning customary schoolgirl femininities. Importantly, the young women in the current study were found to be in a state of hyper-vigilance with regards to their ability to manage

and negotiate the numerous contradictions inherent in postfeminist and neoliberal representations of girlhood. In summary, young women's negotiations of normative femininities were found to be primarily formed around wanting to do well in school, paired with the pressure of satisfying appearance related norms. It was established that through judgemental looking and talking, female peers were influential in informing participants' performances of normative femininities. That is, it was evident in the current study that young women were often subjected to mistreatment by other female peers based on their gendered performances. Furthermore, the young women in the current research demonstrated varied levels of awareness regarding the different forms of sexism they and other young women experience; and expressed multiple and varied relationships to feminism. Overall, young women in the current research were found to be active in their diverse, fluid and complex negotiations of normative femininities; however, at times were unsatisfied with the avenues available to 'do' girlhood.

Student Declaration

“I, Linda Chiodo, declare that the PhD thesis entitled Exploring the Impact of Sociocultural Expectations on Young Women’s Negotiations of Normative Femininities is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

Signature: _____



Date: 26/06/2018

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

This thesis broadly examines the ways in which school-aged young women understand and negotiate normative femininities, including within the immediate settings of their school and peer groups. In recent times, young women, their behaviour and wellbeing has garnered significant attention within the contexts of research, public policy and popular culture (Baker, 2010a; Gonick, 2006, Gonick, Renold, Ringrose, & Weems, 2009; Harris, 2004a; McRobbie, 2007a; Pomerantz, 2009; Ringrose, 2013). It has been asserted, that although the visibility of young women has resulted in more diversity with regards to how young women are represented and understood, it is also necessary not to overlook the influence this has had on the “changing constructions of girlhood” (Gonick, 2006, p. 1). As stipulated by Pomerantz (2009), instead of increasing the flexibility of young women to engage in diverse forms of femininity, and ways of ‘doing’ gender “this proliferation of discourses has limited possibilities for girls, trapping them within polar states that regulate what they can say and do. These polarities condemn or condone, pathologize or normalize, ignore or glamorize girls” (p. 149). Therefore, research and debates concerning young women have often worked to characterise young women into one of two positions – ‘at risk’ and in a state of low self-esteem and crisis, or as resilient, independent and empowered (Bishop, 2012; Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2006; Dobson, 2014; Gonick, 2006; Harris, 2004a; S. Jackson, Vares, & Gill, 2013; Pomerantz, 2009).

However, the current qualitative research attempts to operate outside these binary subject positions. Drawing from a feminist poststructuralist framework (Gavey, 1997; A. Jones, 1993; Weedon, 1997), the current study aims to highlight the diverse narratives, contradictions and tensions present in young women’s

contemporary experiences of girlhood (Griffin, 2004; Pomerantz, 2009). This theoretical approach provides an opportunity to consider young women as active (rather than passive or submissive) in the construction of their subjectivity, whilst recognising the persistent challenges inherent in a patriarchal sociocultural landscape (Gavey, 1997; A. Jones, 1993). Hence, instead of presenting an essentialised picture regarding young women's performances of normative femininities, a more nuanced perspective is offered with a focus on the subject positions accessible to young women and the cultural, social and political context in which such negotiations are located (Gonick, 2006; Griffin, 2004; Harris, 2004a; A. Jones, 1993; Ringrose, 2013).

With regards to this context, it has been widely asserted that postfeminist and neoliberal discourses and ideologies are central characteristics of the contemporary sociocultural terrain, in which young women are maturing (Baker, 2008, 2010b; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Dobson, 2014; Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2008a; Gill & Scharff, 2011; S. Jackson et al., 2013; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009, Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Pomerantz, Raby, & Stefanik, 2013; Ringrose, 2013; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Although in many ways a contested concept, postfeminism, or this 'postfeminist sensibility' refers to the intense surveillance (including self-surveillance) imposed on young women, together with the notion that gender inequality is a redundant issue in contemporary times (Gill, 2007a; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2009). In addition to this postfeminist sentiment, neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology, which prioritises individualism and holds individuals as accountable for their own choices, successes, failures and overall wellbeing (W. Brown, 2003; Budgeon, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014). Collectively, these postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies present a very complex, and at times, paradoxical everyday context and social climate for young women (and women

across age groups). These ideologies characterise young women as the “ideal, new subject of neoliberal times” (C. E. Charles, 2010a, p. 36), who as a result of feminist wins are considered to be autonomous, and have the ability to pursue opportunities without restrictions including those pertaining to systemic gender inequality (Baker, 2010a; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a).

However, despite such postfeminist rhetoric perpetuating the idea that gender equality has been achieved, young women (and women) continue to be subjected to sexism and various inequalities (C. S. Brown & Leaper, 2010; Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Sills et al., 2016; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Furthermore, as indicated by Gonick (2006) and others (Pomerantz, 2009), the increased visibility of young women has not necessarily provided them with the opportunity to examine diverse subject positions and ways of ‘doing’ gender. Therefore, this multifaceted sociocultural climate complicates young women’s experiences of girlhood and encourages them to look inwards to the self to find cause for disappointments and barriers to success (Baker, 2008, 2010b; Griffin, 2004; McRobbie, 2007a). Griffin (2004) goes as far as to say that in modern times “contemporary girlhood appears to be an impossible project” (p. 42).

The aims of the current research are multifaceted. The current qualitative study broadly aims to explore young women’s understandings and negotiations of normative femininities. This also encompasses the ways in which young women position themselves in relation to discourses concerning gender inequality (sexism) and feminism within a postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural landscape. It is understood that a young woman’s values concerning gender inequality and the way in which she relates to discourses of gender, and contemporary gender relations (and movements such as feminism), will have consequences for her sense of self (Ahmed,

2017; Hercus, 1999, 2005; Manago, Brown, & Leaper, 2009). Furthermore, educational settings have been nominated as a primary site in which young women foster their subjectivities (Allan & Charles, 2014; Davison & Frank, 2006; Paechter, 2006a; Reay, 2010; Reynolds & Bamford, 2016; Walkerdine, 1990; Youdell, 2005, 2006). Peers and other female friends are considered fundamental in informing and monitoring acceptable gender performances for young women (Davison & Frank, 2006; Paechter, 2006b; Renold, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011). For this reason, the school and peer environment in which the young women in the current research were involved warrants consideration. This study was conducted within an all-girls non-government Catholic secondary school in Melbourne, Victoria. The current study's research questions included: 1) how do young women interpret and perform sociocultural informed normative femininities; 2) how do young women negotiate normative femininities within their immediate contexts such as school, peer groups and interpersonal relationships); and 3) what are the consequences of sociocultural informed normative femininities for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women?

Defining 'Young Women' and 'Girlhood'

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that throughout this thesis reference is made to 'young women' as a collective. However, it is understood that 'young women' are far from a homogenous group. Rather these shared experiences as young women are complicated by the intersections of other important identity positions, including one's class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and ability (M. Brown, 2011; Griffin, 2004; Harris, 2004a; Scharff, 2012). Therefore, being a young woman is considered to be "individually and collectively produced and reproduced, always shifting, neither static nor linear" (M. Brown, 2011, p. 109). Although the current research does not adopt an intersectional lens, it is acknowledged that these

identity categories and the intersecting privileges and barriers, which accompany them, will impact a young woman's experience of femininity and access to various versions of idealised girlhood. Thus, in line with social constructionist (and feminist poststructuralist) traditions, no single understanding of normative femininities or version of girlhood is considered possible or sought in the current research. Rather girlhood is conceptualised as fluid and in continued state of negotiation at the individual and collective level (Griffin, 2004; Harris, 2004a; Taft, 2011).

Researcher Positioning

I came to conduct the current research after completing a Master of Applied Psychology (Community Psychology), during which my research focused on young women, bullying and the complex dynamics of their friendship groups. Building on the perspectives of Ringrose (2006, 2008a) and others (L. M. Brown, 2003, L. M. Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007; Ringrose & Renold, 2010), I came to further recognise that the issue of peer violence and the exclusion practices which young women often participate in is far from an essentialised issue (Olweus, 1993), or a developmental phase (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Maccoby, 2004). Instead, this research signified the foundational role sociocultural factors have on young women's negative as well as positive peer relationships.

As result of this previous qualitative inquiry, I was interested in further exploring the ways in which young women negotiate their identities and develop their sense of self in a postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural context. This social climate prioritises discourses praising the achievement of gender equality (Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2008; McRobbie, 2009); whilst girls and women across the lifespan still experience the impacts of misogyny and a plethora of inequalities both in West and non-Western contexts (e.g., unrealistic and hetero-normative beauty ideals, high rates

of sexual assault and domestic violence, gender pay gap and limited representation of women in leadership). Thus, I have considerable interest in how young women with the additional pressures (and at times powerlessness) that seemingly accompany adolescence develop their understanding of what it means to be a young woman and their place in broader contemporary gender relations.

Engaging with such research has also induced my own reflections on how I managed such confictions whilst 'doing' girlhood during secondary school. I came to learn about feminism and identify as feminist during my undergraduate degree. During adolescence I was not privy to feminism and the associated critical vocabulary. My secondary school years were spent in an all-girls non-government Catholic secondary school in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria. Gender inequality was not overtly addressed at this school. Rather, we were exposed to celebratory messages that we could be all we wanted without any consideration of the systemic and structural barriers presented to us outside our classrooms and school gates.

Thus, the context of my secondary school is in many ways similar to the current research setting. However, it could be asserted that experiences of schooling (both at an academic and social level) and the contemporary climate in which young women are developing their subjectivity have shifted (and potentially remained consistent in some ways). In recent times feminism has re-entered the public discourse in a number of ways. Many celebrities (both male and female) have come out in support of feminism, social media campaigns highlighting issues such as everyday sexism and public debate regarding the gender pay gap are evident. Simultaneously backlash discourses, campaigns (e.g., #idontneedfeminism), and commentary that strengthen negative stereotypes of feminists, and question the

validity of continued gender inequality are pervasive. Therefore, whether this debate is positive or negative it could be suggested that feminism has become more visible and young women are able to form a position in relation to their relationship to such ideologies.

Consequently, I come to this current research with much respect for young women and the intricacies in the sociocultural context in which they are maturing. It is my premise that we need to hear directly from young women regarding what it is like 'doing' girl in today's society. What do they feel are their biggest advantages as well as challenges? Keeping in mind their developmental stage and the fluidity of their subjectivity, what young women say is important. It is vital not only so that we can create schools and other safe settings for them to question and challenge (as well as potentially willingly practice) hegemonic femininities, but also their views will continue to impact the trajectory which gender inequality takes and the collective role of feminism.

Thesis Overview

In this first chapter, the current topic of study was introduced and the broad aims and research questions that frame this research outlined. I have also made mention of the epistemological and theoretical frameworks adopted in the current research. An effort was also made to position myself in relation to this research and how I came to be interested in young women's subjectivity development in contemporary times.

In the following two chapters I outline and critique the previous research and literature pertaining to young women's (and women's) subjectivity development and challenges inherent in the hegemonic notions of femininity. As gender identity is central to how an individual understands and experiences their sense of self, the first

of these chapters (Chapter 2) primarily focuses on key approaches to adolescent identity development. Three theorisations of or moments in identity (or subjectivity) development are considered including the traditional theories of Erik Erikson (1959, 1968), feminist developmental frameworks, and postmodern theories. The role the school context plays as a crucial site in which young women construct and perform their gendered subjectivities is also considered.

Chapter three begins with defining and examining the postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural climate in which young women are developing their subjectivities. Two prominent discourses - 'girl power' and personal choice and empowerment – are critically examined, including the ways in which they work to strengthen postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies. The consequences of young women being positioned as the ideal neoliberal subject are considered. Attention is given to understandings of young women as academically successful and continuing expectations concerning emphasised femininity and gendered beauty ideals, which together shape contemporary girlhood and contribute to the postfeminist agenda. Proceeding this, approaches to feminist identity development and research regarding young women's engagement and disengagement with feminism, and their experiences and responses to sexism is reviewed. This chapter concludes with further outlining the rationale for the current inquiry and research questions.

Chapter four, details the research methodology and data collection methods adopted in the current research. This chapter commences by outlining the social constructionist orientation and feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework employed in the current study. The ethnographic research design used in the current study is discussed, as is the process undertaken to recruit a participating school. This

primary research setting - St. Cera's Ladies College¹ - is discussed and details concerning the recruitment of participants are offered. The multiple sources of data collected, including individual interviews, focus group data, field notes and archival information is also considered. The chapter closes with a brief discussion regarding the value of qualitative research as well as a review of the thematic data analysis procedure utilised in the current research.

Chapters five, six and seven – convey the findings of the current qualitative study. As schools have been identified as a site in which young women perform and mediate their gendered subjectivities (Allan & Charles, 2014; C. Jackson et al., 2010; Reay, 2010; Reynolds & Bamford, 2016), chapter five considers the norms and discourses young women are exposed to at St. Cera's Ladies College with regards to normative femininity and successful girlhood. Using the safe space concept (Mansfield, 2014; The Roestone Collective, 2014), the opportunities, challenges and limitations St. Cera's Ladies College as an educational setting presents for young women is contemplated. No definite conclusion is made regarding whether this school is in fact a safe space for their female students. However, using data gathered from teacher and student interviews, as well as field notes, the intricacies in this setting, including aspects which contribute positively to young women's development and areas which require improvement are demonstrated.

Chapter six considers the ways in which young women in the current study negotiate normative femininities, understand their experiences of contemporary girlhood, and the implications for their psychosocial wellbeing. Attention is given to their complex and contested engagement with their academic identities and the ways in which the young women mediate appearance-related discourses and gendered

¹ Pseudonym

beauty ideals (including the continued focus on the thin ideal). A significant focus in this chapter is the ways in which the two discursive positions or narratives of the smart and heterosexually attractive young woman collude to highlight the subjectivity position of the 'supergirl' (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007). Finally, the part in which judgemental looking and talking between female peers plays in young women's subjectivity development, including the risks inherent in transgressing normative notions of femininity or ways of 'doing' gender is observed.

Chapter seven examines participants' insights and reflections regarding contemporary gender relations, and persistent forms of sexism and inequality young women (and women) continue to be subjected to in modern times. The multiple ways in which young women talk about sexism and to what extent and in what manner sexism is present in their experiences as young women is examined. Their perceptions of feminism including their negotiations or rejection of feminist identity positions are also contemplated.

In the final discussion and conclusion chapter (Chapter 8), I review and draw connections between the three findings chapters and provide further interpretation regarding young women's understandings of normative femininities. The complexities in their understandings of contemporary girlhood are considered in light of the current postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural terrain. Thus, with consideration of the aims and current research questions, key findings and contributions to knowledge are further deliberated. Importantly, limitations in the current research and areas for further research are identified.

Chapter 2: Young Women and Gender Identity Development

Gender denotes an important social category, which significantly informs an individual's social location and how they experience the world (Clarke & Braun, 2009; Connell, 2009). Gender as an identity marker influences how an individual understands and constructs their sense of self (Clarke & Braun, 2009; Connell, 2009). It is asserted that understandings of gender and normative expectations concerning what it means to be a girl (or woman), or a boy (or man) are central in identity development (Abrams, 2002; M. Brown, 2011; Heilman, 1998; Letendre & Rozas, 2015). The notion or construct of identity has been highly theorised and discussed from within psychology, as well as related disciplines (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Wetherell, 2010). Irrespective of this theorisation and discussion, identity remains a relatively undefined and abstract concept, generating debate regarding how it should be conceptualised and best examined (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001; Wetherell, 2010).

This attention to identity and identity development has primarily been in relation to young people and the developmental stage of adolescence (Heilman, 1998; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Tolman, 1994; Wetherell, 2010). In other words, despite identity development continuing beyond adolescence, this life-stage is often characterised as a period in which young people are obligated to consider overarching questions concerning their sense of self. Therefore, adolescence is considered a time in which an individual's identity (including their gender identity) becomes more apparent and salient (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, 1998).

More specifically, it has been argued that young men and women experience diverse trajectories to identity development with unique challenges predominantly for young women (Abrams, 2002; Heilman, 1998; Lytle, Bakken, & Romig, 1997).

Young women are presented with specific challenges due to persistent patriarchal contexts in which they are developing their sense of self (Abrams, 2002; M. Brown, 2011; Heilman, 1998; Letendre & Rozas, 2015). As outlined by Abrams (2002), irrespective of:

variations in young women's life experiences, all adolescent females mature in a society that privileges men over women in the labor market and in cultural life, places an extraordinary amount of pressure on girls to strive towards 'feminine' ideals, has high rates of violence against women and girls, and presents young women with contradictory sexual messages. (p. 48)

Therefore, contrary to some traditional developmental theories, the notion that young women's developmental trajectories play out irrespective of this onerous context has been challenged and opposed (M. Brown, 2011).

Consequently, before considering how the contemporary sociocultural context and broader gender relations inform the ways in which young women experience normative notions of femininity, a consideration of the various approaches to identity development (particularly in adolescence) is warranted. Hence, the purpose of the current chapter is to provide an overview of the key theories and movements in the theorisation of identity. Prior to outlining postmodern notions of identity, which are overall given more prominence in the current research, early theorist Erik Erikson's notions of identity as well as the work of feminist developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan are briefly reviewed. The role of the school context as one of the primary sites in which young people develop and enact their identity is considered.

Early Identity Theories: Erik Erikson

Regarding traditional theories of identity development, Erik Erikson (1959, 1968) has been widely recognised for bringing notions of identity development to the

forefront (Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2015; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001; Wetherell, 2010). Erikson's (1959) approach to identity is essentially an eight-staged model, which extends across the lifespan from infancy to the latest stages of adulthood. Thus, despite the psychoanalytical routes of Erikson's (1959, 1968) theories, he diverges from such ideas by not limiting identity development to the early stages of childhood. According to Slater (2003), Erikson importantly acknowledges the role of culture and avoids "reductionistic analyses and rigid rules of interpretation...and is more concerned with psychological health than with illness" (p. 53). For Erikson (1959) a healthy individual is understood to be one who "*actively masters his environment, shows a certain unity of personality, and is able to perceive the world and himself correctly*" (p. 53 [original emphasis]).

With reference to Erikson's (1959) model, the first stage beginning in the earliest period of infancy is basic trust versus basic mistrust. This stage is followed by: autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and industry versus inferiority stages. During adolescence individuals are perceived to be in the stage of identity versus identity diffusion. Whilst adulthood (early to late) is characterised by the three sequential stages of intimacy and distantiation versus self-absorption, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair and disgust (Erikson, 1959). Although Erikson's (1959) staged theory of identity development persists across an individual's lifetime, the discourse around adolescence being a primary time for identity development stems from his foundational notions (Abrams, 2002; Bergh & Erling, 2005; Rattansi & Pheonix, 2005). This adolescent stage of development is considered imperative as it informs the ways in which young people will address potential challenges to identity during adulthood (Erikson, 1959, 1968).

However, notwithstanding the contributions of Erikson (1959, 1968), his staged theory of identity development has been highly critiqued. Predominantly, the applicability of Erikson's theories to female identity development has been widely questioned (Abrams, 2002; Gilligan, 1982, 2011; Heilman, 1998; Hoffman, 2006; Lytle et al., 1997; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). Of specific concern is that Erikson's theories perpetuate the idea that a successful identity is achieved via autonomy and individualism, which has been nominated as more aligned with male rather than female identity development (Abrams, 2002; Gilligan, 1982, 2011; Heilman, 1998). Unlike their male counterparts, young women are understood to develop their identities relationally, thus their connections to others are imperative. In adolescence friendships have been nominated as particularly important for the identity development of young women (Heilman, 1998; Maccoby, 1998; Rose & Rudolph, 2006; Underwood, 2007). From an early age, girls are socialised to be sensitive to the needs and wellbeing of others, and as a result, establish a sense of self, which is to some extent defined by their connection and relationship to others (Abrams, 2002; Letendre, 2007). Therefore, this is valuing of autonomy versus connections to others is problematic.

Similarly, concerns have been raised with the contention that adolescence is a time to find one 'sense of self' relatively free from constraint (L. M. Brown, 2003; L. M. Brown et al., 2007; Heilman, 1998; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Ringrose, 2013; Tolman, 1994). Instead, during this developmental period, young women are found to face increasing stress and demands, which for some young women significantly restricts their opportunities and freedom (Griffin, 2004; Heilman, 1998). With the entrance into adolescence "many girls lose an ability to speak about what they know,

see, feel, and experience...as they come under cultural pressure to be ‘nice girls’ and ultimately ‘good women’” (Tolman, 1994, p. 324).

Accordingly, it has been contended that overall Erikson along with other early developmental theorists (e.g., Freud, Piaget and Kohlberg) effectively position girls and women as “deficient in development” (Gilligan, 1982, 2011, p. 19). Therefore, in a direct effort to address such androcentric theories and shortcomings concerning gender differences in identity, feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982, 2011) and colleagues (L. M. Brown, 1991, 2003; L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992) worked to provide an alternative framework to consider young women’s narratives of identity and moral development.

Feminist Developmental Identity Theories

In response to the limited consideration of young women’s developmental experiences, feminist theorists (e.g., L. M. Brown, 1991, 2003; L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 2011) have aimed to provide understandings of identity and development centring on the female rather than male experience. Carol Gilligan (1982) argues the basis for gender differences in identity development are due to sociocultural context rather than biology, as well as the socialisation of young women into hegemonic gender roles.

Furthermore, continuing to downplay the role of biology, Gilligan and colleagues (L. M. Brown, 1991, 2003; L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992) brought to the forefront the importance of relationships for the identity development for young women. Hence, unlike their male counterparts who construct themselves with a clear sense of autonomy, young women are more likely to characterise themselves in relation to others (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Nonetheless, it is premised that it is the relational aspect of young women’s identity development that becomes

particularly problematic in adolescence as young women are considered to put the needs of others before their own thus experiencing a 'loss of voice' (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982). This subordination of their own needs and opinions is executed to avoid conflict (or violence), and more so to not risk segregation and exclusion from relationships. In other words, moving from childhood to adolescence young women experience a "psychological shift" (p. 216), which results in them withdrawing or detaching from themselves (their bodies, feelings and needs) (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Essentially, L. M. Brown and Gilligan (1992) convey that young women effectively remove themselves or suppress their needs in relationships, with the objective to identify and meet the needs and requests of others and attempt to emulate "some ideal image of what a woman or what a person should be" (p. 218).

Despite the notable contributions of Gilligan (1982, 2011) and colleagues (L. M. Brown, 1991, 2003; L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992), like traditional theories these gender specific ideas of identity have been subject to criticism. Regarding 'loss of voice' in adolescence, Harter et al. (1998) questions the premise that this is a significant and unique experience for young women. In their quantitative study of self-reported voice, male and female high school students' level of voice in a range of contexts (with close friends, male and female peers, teachers and parents) was examined. Harter et al. concluded that despite discovering female participants with "a feminine orientation reported lower levels of voice in the public context of school compared with androgynous female adolescents" (p. 900), this was not apparent in private relationships or contexts (with parents and close friends). Together with not reporting any gender differences in 'loss of voice', no significant decline in voice for female participants was apparent (Harter et al., 1998). In addition to this, as explained by Marion Brown (2011) several concerns have also been noted with regard to

Gilligan's theories, including the tendency for these theories to "romanticizes women as more nurturing, caring and invested in relationships – and thus morally superior – than men...upholding patriarchy by reinforcing dualisms of women as emotional and dependent of relationships and men as uncaring and autonomous" (p. 110).

Thus, despite the significant contributions made by traditional theorists such as Erikson (1959, 1968), and feminist developmental psychologist Gilligan (1982), there is a need to further consider identity as fluid and diverse. In regards to the identity development of young women (and women across the lifespan), it is essential to not homogenise their developmental experiences, rather to recognise their identity as not only influenced by their gender but also other social positions or markers of identity (class, ethnicity, religious and sexuality) (M. Brown, 2011; Heilman, 1998). As a result of such considerations, postmodern notions of identity and identity theories have generated considerable attention (M. Brown, 2011; Nayak & Kehily, 2006).

The Postmodern Turn and Gender Performativity

Postmodern theories of identity present an understanding of identity that is ontologically distinct from many traditional (and in some cases feminist) identity theorists (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Nayak & Kehily, 2006; Wetherell, 2010). Most significantly, postmodernist theories of identity challenge the notion of an essentialised and fixed self. Rather, postmodern approaches "treat identity as fluid, fragmentary, contingent and, crucially, *constituted in discourse*" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 17 [original emphasis]; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As highlighted by Potter and Wetherell (1987) this shift in understanding of identity has worked to:

displace attention from the self-as-entity and focus it on the methods of constructing the self. That is, the question becomes not what is the true nature of the self, but how is the self talked about, how is it theorized in discourse?...There is not 'one' self waiting to be discovered or uncovered but a multitude of selves found in the different kinds of linguistic practices articulated now, in the past, historically and cross-culturally. (p. 102)

As a result, identity is comprised of multiple discursively produced identity positions, which are connected to predominant social practices (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Wetherell, 2010). Such identity positions are not only fluid in any given context but can be considerably limited and contradictory (Wetherell, 2010).

Such postmodern understandings of identity have been nominated as particularly important for conceptualising the identity development of young women (M. Brown, 2011; Griffin, 2004; Heilman, 1998). Together with recognising that young women are not a homogenous group, it has been asserted that the developmental stage of adolescence should also be recognised as complex and shifting with the sociocultural and historical landscape (Griffin, 2004; Walkerdine, 1990).

Furthermore, postmodern theories of gender performative have been significant in shifting understandings of identity and normative femininities (Nayak & Kehily, 2006). Judith Butler (1990, 1993) has been widely recognised for reconceptualising notions of gender and identity not as 'naturally' or inherently located within the person but rather gender as a socially constructed, discursive and performative act (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Chinn, 2010; Connell, 2009; Hey, 2006; Nayak & Kehily, 2006; Wetherell, 2010). According to Butler (1990), gender is a performance of various wants and actions, informed and restricted by dominant

discourses and naturalised in part due to these repeated performances (Butler, 1990). It is the repetition of these performances that create recognisable gender norms and the misconception that gender is an innate trait found within individuals (Butler, 1990). Importantly, these gender performances (e.g., the way a young woman should talk, dress and conduct herself) are informed and limited by cultural and hegemonic discourses of femininity and masculinity (Butler, 1990). Reflecting on Butler's position on gender identity, Chinn (2010) explains, "gender performativity is neither optional nor natural. Once a child has been 'girded'...she is compelled to perform girlness and (or perhaps *because*) she does not even recognize this compulsion" (p. 112 [original emphasis]).

Further to this, Butler (1990) proposes that such gender performances are part of, and conducted within a heterosexual matrix, which is understood to be a:

grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized...A hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (p. 208)

In regard to the contemporary sociocultural context, McRobbie (2007a) asserts that the 'postfeminist masquerade' effectively reconfirms "gender relations and the heterosexual matrix...[and] its voluntaristic structure works to conceal that patriarchy is still in place" (p. 726). Nevertheless, the heterosexual matrix is not fixed and thus vulnerable to being challenged (Butler, 1990, 1993). Therefore, this allows for the "hierarchical binary system of gender/sexuality" to be contested, and potentially transformed (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 317). For instance, Renold and Ringrose

(2008) examined the ways in which young women within their peer groups negotiated gender relations and normative femininities whilst challenging the heterosexual matrix. In contrast to McRobbie (2007a), Renold and Ringrose conclude:

This overwhelmingly bleak picture being cast upon a homogeneous girlhood/femininity, however did not resonate with the raced, classed and cultural configurations of how girls were navigating the heterosexual matrix...some girls...were subverting, undermining or overtly resisting and challenging the ubiquitous hegemonic heterosexual matrix (as it was operating in young tween and teenage girls' school-based social and cultural worlds). (p. 332)

Hence, despite continued revisions and movements, Butler's (1990, 1993) feminist poststructuralist theories of gender performativity have been foundational in understanding young women's negotiations and performances of gender identity (and normative femininities) in a number of contexts and across a range of disciplines (C. E. Charles, 2010a; Garcia-Gomez, 2011; Jeanes, 2011; Phoenix, Pattman, Croghan, & Griffin, 2013; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Ringrose, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2010, 2012). For instance, applying an understanding of performativity, Jeanes (2011) examined how participation in school football potentially provided a setting for girls to challenge gender norms and "perform alternative scripts of femininity" (p. 402). Consistent with Butler (1990, 1993) it was determined girls' transgressions of normative femininities were limited and risky amongst peer groups. Girls' participation in football was shaped by hegemonic discourses of femininity and normative understandings of gender; thus, girls' gender performances maintained a commitment to non-aggressive play and feminine body ideals (Jeanes, 2011).

In a similar manner, Butler's theorisations have been utilised to understand the ways in which young women (and young men) participate in violence and peer conflict (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). With a specific focus on bullying discourses in schools, Ringrose and Renold (2010) contend that young people (in particular female students) who are labelled as 'bullies' are those who often transgress normative gender scripts and therefore display deviant gender performances. Hence, it has widely been acknowledged that Butler's theories of gender performativity effectively increase awareness regarding the fluid nature of gender (Jeanes, 2011). This is inclusive of "the potential for individuals to provide multiple performances within different contexts, but also recognizing how these are constrained within a 'heterosexual matrix' in which dominant notions of femininity remain the expected norm" (Jeanes, 2011, p. 405). Furthermore, such research (e.g., Jeanes, 2011; Ringrose & Renold, 2010) not only contributes to understanding of the gender performativity of young women, rather also highlights the school as one location such performativity is negotiated.

Young Women and the School Setting: Sites of Identity Construction and Enactment

When constructing or 'performing' one's identity, individuals do so relative to other people and in varied contexts (Reay, 2010). Specifically, schools have been frequently identified as the primary setting in which young people negotiate their gender identities (Allan & Charles, 2014; Davison & Frank, 2006; Hill, 2015; C. Jackson et al., 2010; McLeod, 2000; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Reynolds & Bamford, 2016; Weis & Fine, 2001; Woolley, 2017). According to Reay (2010), more than any other setting, schools are fundamentally informing young people's identities both during adolescence and as they progress towards adulthood.

Providing further support for this view, McLeod (2000) through interviews with young people in Australian secondary schools, highlights that “students’ sense of self, in the present, past and future, and their orientation to the social world are developing in a kind of dialogue with the discourses of their particular schools” (pp. 505-506). Schools like other social establishments and settings are considered to operate within and to a varying extent perpetuate neoliberal ideas and discourses (e.g., concerning the importance of individual achievement) (O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006; Woolley, 2017). Therefore, within the school setting young people utilise the discursive repertoires and resources afforded to them to “make sense of themselves, what they do, and why they do it” (Archer, Halsall, & Hollingworth, 2007; O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007, p. 461; Woolley, 2017).

Accordingly, schools not only provide young people with formal education, they are settings, which replicate, confirm and in some cases potentially challenge sociocultural norms and discourses as well as persistent social inequalities related to gender, class, race and sexuality (Archer et al., 2007; Fiset & Walton, 2015; Susinos, Calvo, & Rojas, 2009; Youdell, 2005, 2006).

Further to this point, Fiset and Walton (2015, p. 63) and others (Paechter, 2006a, 2012) emphasise that educational institutions effectively “monitor and shape the bodies of young people” via peer dynamics, school culture and climate, and through the disseminated curriculum. Particularly for young women, it has been asserted that schools play an important role in the encouragement of customary gender roles and norms, thus young women are effectively ‘gendered’ in school spaces (Archer et al., 2007; Walkerdine, 1990; Youdell, 2005). Drawing on Butler’s (1990) theories of gender performativity, educational sociologist Deborah Youdell (2006) writes:

the girl is inaugurated into subjecthood through gender discourse – she at once becomes a girl and subject to the rules of being a girl. She must continually cite (be it tacitly or knowingly) these rules if she is to remain intelligible as a girl, and so as a subject. And behaving well in school according to school discourses of the good female student – being cooperative, empathetic, and industrious – is one of the discursive threads through which this is made possible... This understanding of the ongoing subjectivation of subjects through discursive performativity enables us to see how schools come to be suffused with exclusions, with what the student-subject cannot be, with who cannot be the student-subject. These ideas demonstrate that subjecthood – and studenthood – comes with costs. (pp. 44-45)

Additional evidence of these boundaries placed around schoolgirl subjectivities is illustrated in Archer et al.'s (2007) qualitative inquiry with female students from working class and ethnically diverse backgrounds. It was demonstrated for these young women their performances of assertive and boisterous femininity were considered to transgress normative expectations of the good passive female student (Archer et al., 2007). Consequently, these young women were positioned as subversive and educationally disengaged; and becoming 'good' students required them to alter their behaviour and assume a different identity position and performances of femininity within the school space (i.e., not talking back to teachers and being on time). Hence, signifying how the school context can be complicit in gendering young women, Archer et al. stipulate that "schools can be experienced as alien spaces for 'other' femininities" (p. 558), and for some young women schools are characterised as restrictive settings "constrained by the lack of discursive space within which to enact an acceptable, or accepted, 'bad girl' femininity" (p. 558).

Further to this, it has been suggested that young women develop their subjectivities and perform young femininities within communities of practice situated within schools (Paechter, 2003, 2006b). Similar to Youdell (2006), Paechter (2003, 2006b) draws on Butler's (1990) notions of gender performativity, to contend that young people perform gender in localised communities (such as among peers in schools), and within such communities learn what it means to be male or female within these immediate settings. Consequently, recognising such associations to these communities of practice are a vital element of comprehending an individual's identity (Paechter, 2003). Importantly, such communities of feminine practice are not fixed, with members belonging to multiple communities of practice, which in turn continues to inform their various communities (Paechter, 2003). Broader still these gendered communities of practice do not occur in seclusion rather are informed by wider practices of femininity (Archer et al., 2007; Paechter, 2003). Regarding schoolgirl femininities, Paechter (2006b) explains:

schoolgirls construct femininity collectively in relation to a range of outside forces, images and representations, and through negotiation with their peer groups about what is important to girlhood...shifting and interrelated internal and external influences bring about a constantly changing, localized collective view about what 'doing girl' is all about; they construct an ideal typical girl who encapsulates the ideas around which girlhood coalesces for any particular group, and whose image serves to normalize and regulate the behavior of all girls within the local community of femininity practice. (pp. 366-367)

Notably within schools (as well as other settings) multiple and at times contested communities of feminine practice can be founded and enacted. This means within a single setting, various notions of desired or 'proper' femininity may be

present. However, these various ways of doing 'girl' exist alongside power dynamics inherent in such settings or among peers, allowing some young women with an increased ability to control and inform such practices (Paechter, 2006b). Therefore, whilst some versions of femininity are idealised, and others are contested, both work to inform and enforce stringent perceptions of what are suitable and tolerable gender performances for young women in schools and amongst male and female peers (Archer et al., 2007; Paechter, 2006b). This coincides with Davison and Frank's (2006) premise that by adolescence, young people are not naïve to gender norms and expectations, including the positive and negative consequences that may be attached to performing and 'doing' gender in distinctive ways. Consequently, inclusion into peer and friendship groups often mandates behaviour as well as language and attitudes associated with normative understandings of what it means to be a boy or a girl (both within local and global communities of feminine and masculine practice) (Renold, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011). Thus, schools and their inherent gendered cultures and climates are in one way informed by young people, whilst simultaneously working to shape young people (Reynolds & Bamford, 2016).

Chapter Conclusion

Although there are a multitude of theories and approaches to identity, it was the objective of this chapter to briefly consider the contributions of three distinct movements in such understandings of identity. Although ideologically diverse, Erickson (1959, 1968), Gilligan (1982, 2011), and postmodern theorists such as Butler (1990) in varied ways all consider the role of the sociocultural context to be imperative in identity (or subjectivity) development. However, it was and continues to be feminist informed notions of identity (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982), which have worked to centre the experiences and voices of young women.

Further to this, feminist postmodern and post-structuralist ideologies (Butler, 1990) have provided an avenue to consider young women's subjectivity as inherently fluid and fragmented, and to appreciate the diversity in the social positions available to young women due to not only their experiences of gender but additional identity markers (class, ethnicity, religious and sexuality) (M. Brown, 2011; Nayak & Kehily, 2006). These feminist frameworks together have overtly recognised the impacts of the sociocultural context and restrictions young women continue to face due to patriarchal sentiments and limiting notions of femininity and 'doing' girl (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Butler, 1990; Chinn, 2010; Griffin, 2004; Heilman, 1998; Jeanes, 2011; Ringrose & Renold, 2010).

Furthermore, it is evident that identity (or subjectivity) development although continuous across an individual's lifespan is particularly pertinent during adolescence. For adolescent young women this is a time in which their gender performances, and their fulfilment as well as transgression of normative femininities become more notable (Abrams, 2002; Tolman, 1994). It is also asserted that the schools in which young women congregate provide a crucial setting in which young women negotiate their gender performativity and identities (Archer et al., 2007; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Woolley, 2017). Although the discursive climate of a school has been found to influence normative notions of ideal femininity (Archer et al., 2007; Fissette & Walton, 2010; Paechter, 2006a, 2012; Youdell, 2005, 2006), schools do not operate in isolation. Rather, schools too are infused with broader discourses pertaining to sociocultural norms and inequalities (Fissette & Walton, 2015). Therefore, to further appreciate how young women negotiate their identities and perform (as well as potentially resist) normative femininities including within

schools, it is necessary to consider the current and unique sociocultural context in which they are developing.

Chapter 3: Postfeminism, Young Women and Normative Femininities

Following on from discussing various understandings of identity (or subjectivity) development, the objective of the current chapter is to examine the contemporary sociocultural climate in which young women are developing. This sociocultural terrain is widely characterised as being informed by postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, values and ideologies (Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2008a; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2009). Together with considering what ways postfeminist and neoliberal sentiment has perpetuated contemporary society, the unique and complex challenges it presents particularly for young women will be examined. The neoliberal and postfeminist shifts in discourses of ‘girl power’ as well as agency, choice and empowerment will be a focus in the first section of this chapter. It is also necessary to appreciate how this neoliberal and postfeminist condition has informed normative notions of femininity and the potential impacts for young women’s understandings of successful girlhood and the ways in which they ‘do’ gender.

In addition, this current social climate is particularly complex due to disseminating the notion that gender equality has been addressed and thus the redundancy of collective movements such as feminism are central to postfeminist ideologies (Budgeon, 2011; Lazar, 2009; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Scharff, 2012; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Together with their understanding of normative femininities, the ways in which young women position themselves in relation to discourses concerning gender inequality and feminism will also likely influence their sense of self (Manago et al., 2009). Consequently, a review of research pertaining to contemporary young women’s engagement and disengagement with feminism will be considered along with the ways in which they experience and make sense of various forms of sexism.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the literature and research considered in this chapter is highly interdisciplinary. It was necessary to consider research not just from psychology, or community psychology, but also other social science disciplines. These disciplines were inclusive of sociology, feminist and gender studies, communication and media studies, cultural studies, education (including sociology of education) and girlhood studies (which encompasses many of these research traditions). The interdisciplinary nature of this current inquiry is considered a prerequisite in order to critically examine the diverse nature of young women's experiences and the challenges they mediate across various contexts (school, interpersonal relationships and social worlds, media). Furthermore, although there are some notable exceptions, research concerning young women and women's negotiations of subjectivity within the postfeminist and neoliberal social terrain, as well as their understandings of feminism and sexism within the recent Australian context, is somewhat sparse in comparison to research conducted elsewhere (Baker, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Bulbeck, 1997; Carey, Donaghue, & Broderick, 2011; C. E. Charles, 2010a, 2010b; Dobson, 2014; Hercus, 2005; Jeanes, 2011). This is most evident concerning research conducted specifically with adolescent young women in the Australian context, with many works focusing on adult cohorts (e.g., Baker, 2008, 2010b; Bulbeck, 1997; Dobson, 2014; Hercus, 2005).

Consequently, as well as considering research conducted within an Australian context; the current chapter consolidates literature and research from primarily the United Kingdom (Gill, 2007a, 2008a; McRobbie, 2009, 2015; Ringrose, 2013), North America (Canada and United States) (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017) and New Zealand (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; S. Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). Furthermore, although research conducted with school-aged young women

was given precedence it was necessary to extend the boundaries of this chapter to also consider research conducted with adult young women and women (over 18 years of age). However, as the current research was conducted with young women who are in mid-adolescence and approaching adulthood (15-16 years of age), they would be privy to similar sociocultural discourses and expectations; therefore, this was not considered detrimental to the aims of the research. However, it does highlight the possible gap in the consideration of adolescent young women's voices in feminist and youth focused research (Harris, 1996).

Contemporary Sociocultural Climate: Postfeminism and Neoliberalism

It is evident that the social, cultural and political climate at any one time has been (and continues to be) significantly impacted by the progressions, debates and actions of the women's movement and feminist ideologies (Hercus, 2005). Young women and women have "inherited the legacy of earlier waves of feminist activism that have contributed to the culture and politics of modern Western societies" (Hercus, 2005, p. 15). Although women's liberation both in Australia and abroad is often synonymous with the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, women were active in the call for gender equality and women's rights long before this and have continued to be since this time (Budgeon, 2011; Bulbeck, 1997, 2006; E. Evans & Chamberlain, 2015; Hercus, 2005). However, the place of feminism in the lives of young women and women as well as understandings in what constitutes feminism has remained fluid and diverse.

Often these understandings of feminism are discussed as the various 'waves' of feminism, with most significant debates being drawn between what are characterised as second and third waves of feminism (Budgeon, 2011; E. Evans & Chamberlain, 2015). However, this notion of feminist 'waves' and generational

debates itself has come under criticism. Such criticisms centre on the lack of clarity regarding what such waves represent and the ambiguous ways in which it divides up feminism (Bulbeck, 2006; N. Charles, Wadia, Ferrer-Fons, & Allaste, 2018; E. Evans & Chamberlain, 2015). Rather, E. Evans and Chamberlain (2015), call for women to “engage in a constant critique of the shifting discourses...[a] greater inter-wave dialogue, one that does not rely on the politics of opposition, but one that depends upon healthy debate and feminist solidarity” (p. 396). In brief, the objectives of second wave feminism are to increase the feminist consciousness of women and to improve the rights and equality of women in all facets of public and private life (Hercus, 2005). While third wave feminism is characterised as being more in tune with the heterogeneity among young women and therefore more ‘inclusive’ of difference, as well as identifying pleasure in contemporary culture and girlie femininities (along with feminist critique) (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Budgeon, 2011). Although it is not the intention here to add to this debate concerning the accuracy of such definitions or the validity of such waves, it is important to consider that the prominent discourses and sentiment concerning gender and women’s rights has implications for the sociocultural context in which young women gain an awareness concerning normative femininities and ways of ‘doing’ gender.

Therefore, in recent times the proliferation of postfeminist and neoliberal sentiment throughout the contemporary sociocultural climate has been identified (Dobson, 2014; Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2008a; McRobbie, 2009). Broadly speaking, postfeminist sentiment has been described as a rejection of feminist ideals and more so, the promotion of the idea that gender inequality has effectively been addressed (Gill, 2008a; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2009). However, notwithstanding such general understanding of this sentiment, postfeminism continues to be contested and

redefined (Gill, 2007a; Ringrose, 2013; Showden, 2009). For instance, Ringrose (2013) highlights that postfeminism has been discussed and positioned as a new feminist theory diverse from other feminisms (e.g., Genz, 2006; Showden, 2009). Postfeminism has also been characterised as a form of third-wave feminism (Ringrose, 2013; Showden, 2009). However, Showden (2009) asserts that although third-wave feminism and postfeminism have some similarities and are often used interchangeably to differentiate from second wave feminism, they are distinct from one another. That is, despite no fixed definition and diversity within third-wave feminism, Showden characterises third-wave feminism as having more of a focus on the intersectionality of identities, ‘girlie’ femininity, and the critique of popular culture with a limited emphasis on political engagement. While postfeminists firmly denounce collective political action for individualism and “reclaim[s] traditional femininity and heterosexuality...with its power struggles and normative gender differences more or less intact” (Showden, 2009, p. 169). In addition, postfeminism has also been constructed as a “backlash discourse” perpetuated in an effort to assign blame to women’s progression and the feminist movement, for what are perceived as new forms of sexism aimed at men (Ringrose, 2013, p. 5).

However, theorists such as McRobbie (2004, 2007a, 2009), Gill (2007a, 2008a; Gill & Scharff, 2011) and others (Ringrose, 2013, p. 5) have defined postfeminism as a collection of discourses “that infuse and shape the zeitgeist of contemporary culture”. Gill (2007a) labels postfeminism as a ‘sensibility’ and calls to draw on postfeminism as “*an object of critical analysis*, rather than as a theoretical orientation, new moment of feminism or straightforward backlash” (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 4 [original emphasis]). This postfeminist sensibility is characterised as an increased focus on self-surveillance, personal choice and “the notion that femininity

is a bodily property” – it is such themes that require critique and critical analysis (Gill, 2007a, p. 149). Positioning postfeminism as a site of critical analysis is supported by McRobbie (2007a, 2009). For McRobbie (2007b; 2009), understanding postfeminism, as solely a rejection of, or backlash against feminism is too simplistic. It is argued that whilst working to diminish the progress and achievements of second-wave feminists (1970s-1980s), postfeminism has effectively “taken into account” (p. 12) feminist ideologies to perpetuate the notion that gender equality has been realised (McRobbie, 2009). This is inclusive of the perception that gender equality has presumably been achieved within and across multiple settings and institutions, such as the home, education and the workplace (Ringrose, 2013). In many cases postfeminist ideologies argue that girls and women have exceeded their male counterparts in these domains, hence feminism has essentially overreached in rectifying the perceived power imbalances between men and women (Ringrose, 2013). Consequently, feminism is positioned as redundant and out of touch with the location of contemporary young women (and women more broadly) (McRobbie, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007).

Continuing this line of thought, Tasker and Negra (2007) charge postfeminism and postfeminist culture with ‘othering’ feminism and consequently characterising feminism as demanding and limiting for young women and women. However, it is important to note that postfeminist discourses are not necessarily overt in their disdain for feminist ideals. Alternatively, feminism is framed as unwarranted in contemporary times directly because of the gains and achievements of this collective movement (Tasker & Negra, 2007). This is what McRobbie (2009) refers to as the “double entanglement” (p. 12) of feminism in a postfeminist sociocultural context. Therefore, postfeminism seemingly recognises a specific and ultimately

contradictory form of feminism (Lazar, 2009; McRobbie, 2007a, 2007b; Tasker & Negra, 2007). However, McRobbie (2007a) warns this displacement of feminism “permits the subtle renewal of gender injustices, while vengeful patriarchal norms are also re-instated” (p. 720).

Further to this, unlike the collectivist traditions of feminism individualism is nominated as a central component of postfeminism (Lazar, 2009; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Rottenberg, 2014). Likewise, individualism is a notable centrepiece of neoliberal ideology. Therefore, the postfeminist agenda has been strengthened by neoliberal ideologies and sentiment, which have become an increasingly evident element of the contemporary sociocultural milieu (W. Brown, 2003; Larner, 2000). This neoliberal sentiment essentially refers to an economic and government ideology, which centres on increased privatisation and competition, together with the retraction of social services and support, placing individuals as responsible for their own wellbeing through the choices they make (W. Brown, 2003; Budgeon, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014). Neoliberalism has extended beyond a government level policy to a set of practices and discourses, which “produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and a new organization of the social” (W. Brown, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, neoliberalism can be characterised as a “dominant political rationality” which together with governing the state, also works to direct the “inner workings of the subject, normatively constructing and interpellating individuals as entrepreneurial actors” (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 420). Consequently, neoliberal ideologies mandate individuals be autonomous, self-reliant, take advantage of the freedoms and choices bestowed on to them, and are responsible for their own wellbeing and success (as well as failures) (W. Brown, 2003; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gonick, Renold, Ringrose, & Weems, 2009).

Therefore, it is these principles of neoliberalism, which are considered to strengthen current postfeminist discourses (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Gonick et al., 2009). Outlining neoliberalism's connection to postfeminism, Pomerantz et al. (2013) states "postfeminism can be viewed as a component of neoliberal strategy that enables girls and women to internalize the narrative of the self-determined subject who does not require support" (p. 186). Further advocating for this meeting of postfeminism and neoliberalism, Gill and Scharff (2011) draw connections between these two ideological orientations on a number of levels. Apart from the centralisation of individualism which has made redundant "any idea of individuals as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves" (p. 7); postfeminism is not only a reaction to feminism, rather also a by-product of the persistence of neoliberal values and discourses in contemporary times (Gill & Scharff, 2011). More notably Gill and Scharff contend that within neoliberal times it is more so women rather than their male counterparts who are called on to continue to "work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (p. 7). Despite this evident union of postfeminism and neoliberalism, there is a lack of critical inquiry into this relationship (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Kauppinen, 2013).

Similarly, previous research has highlighted the gender specific implications of neoliberalism (Baker, 2010a; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Gonick et al., 2009; Harris, 2004b; Kauppinen, 2013). Specifically, young women represent the "ideal, new subject of neoliberal times" (C. E. Charles, 2010a, p. 36), or in the words of Harris (2004b) "a vanguard of new subjectivity" (p. 1). Accordingly, the ideal female subject is young, successful, autonomous and in control of her individual wellbeing and welfare (C. E. Charles, 2010a; Harris, 2004b). However, at the same time young

women are living within a context of heightened surveillance (including self-surveillance), and in line with neoliberal ideologies young women who are not fulfilling their potential and 'having it all' (by the virtue of feminism's success) are held accountable (Baker, 2010a; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a). Therefore, young women are maturing in a context where "notions of autonomy, choice and self-improvement sit side-by-side with surveillance discipline and the vilification of those who make the 'wrong choices'" (Gill, 2008a, p. 442).

Observing the significance of these postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, Baker (2008, 2010b) examined young women's experiences and the psychological strategies, which they adopt to fulfil these contemporary expectations surrounding individualism and accountability for one's own wellbeing. Baker interviewed 55 young women (18-25 years of age) from North Queensland, Australia. This participant group was diverse (including young mothers, Indigenous young women and non-European migrants), many coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and continued to experience multiple life challenges and hardships (Baker, 2008, 2010b). However, it was found for these young women they avoided understanding their hardships (e.g., poverty, sexual and family violence) in the context of structural constraints (such as gender inequality), thus avoided being positioned as a victim of their external circumstances, rather adopting a "cruel accountability" (p. 201) for their difficulties (Baker, 2010b).

From this research, Baker (2010b) charges pervasive postfeminist and neoliberal discourses with essentially limiting "the space available for articulating any sense of unfairness or oppression in social relations so, instead, the participants preferred to emphasize their sense of agency and self-determination" (p. 190). Hence in modern times, some young women including those in Baker's research are privy to

discourses, which indicate the barriers to their success such as gender inequality have been eradicated, and modes and avenues to self-improvement are within reach (Baker, 2010b; McRobbie, 2007a). Therefore, young women only have themselves to hold liable for not fulfilling their potential as “a postfeminist, neoliberal success” (Baker, 2008, 2010b, p. 200; McRobbie, 2007a). McRobbie (2007a) refers to this conundrum as the “post-feminist masquerade” (p. 722).

Furthermore, inherent within this neoliberal and postfeminist climate several discourses are made available to young women to further strengthen this “post-feminist masquerade” (McRobbie, 2007a, p. 722). Most notably such discourses include ‘girl power’ as well as the discourses of personal choice, agency and empowerment.

Girl power. One of postfeminism’s most prominent discourses is that of ‘girl power’ (Gonick, 2006; Harris, 2004b; S. Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). This discursive resource of ‘girl power’ and what it represents, as well as its implications for young women, has continued to undergo considerable development and change (Gonick, 2006; Taft, 2004). Whilst at times this discourse has been celebrated, its core message to young women regarding power and gender equality has also been criticised for being inherently contradictory (C. E. Charles, 2010a; Griffin, 2004; Taft, 2004). As explained by S. Jackson and Westrupp (2010), ‘girl power’ positions young women “within the entangling discourses of feminism, neoliberalism and conventional femininity producing a contradictory femininity that delivers ‘empowerment’ through a (consuming) girlie femininity and sexuality” (p. 358). For instance, C. E. Charles (2010a) examined the discourses surrounding the notion of girl power and observed how “intersections of femininity/sexuality are produced in schools through normative discourses of heterosexuality and gender” (p. 33). Through discussions with girls at

an elite all-girls secondary college in Melbourne, Australia, C. E. Charles demonstrated that young women regulate and monitor gender norms “in ways that secure normative girl power femininity” (p. 45). Furthermore, these current depictions of ‘girl power’ are characterised as fundamentally anti-feminist and/or postfeminist in nature. The first, positions ‘girl power’ as distinctly separate from feminism and provides young women with avenues to be pro-girl without being political, whilst the latter, draws on the perceived redundancy of feminism (Griffin, 2004; Taft, 2004). Accordingly, modern notions and discourses of ‘girl power’ work to reduce young women’s political action or calls for social change, as the challenges presented by patriarchy have been addressed, resulting in girls having ‘power’ (Griffin, 2004; Taft, 2004).

However, it is important to recognise that these politically demure versions of ‘girl power’ were not always prominent. Rather the origins of ‘girl power’ can be found in the early 1990s when the Riot Grrrls’ movement coined the expression (Harris, 2004b). This movement was formed primarily from within the North American punk scene. The Riot Grrrls was a reaction to young women being excluded from the punk scene, as well as to the broader issues of sexism and violence (Feigenbaum, 2007). The phrase ‘girl power’ was used with the motivation to take back the term ‘girl’ and in many ways, resist the constraints of patriarchy (Gonick, 2006; Harris, 2004b). Therefore, the feminist and political intentions of the movement were evident, although often depoliticised at the time by mainstream media (Feigenbaum, 2007).

Despite these original objectives, a clear shift in the understanding and the fundamental ideals of ‘girl power’ occurred with the rise of girl groups, most notably the Spice Girls. This form of ‘girl power’ was more readily accepted, celebrated and

commercialised as “an easily digested form of pseudo-feminist branding” (Pomerantz et al., 2013, p. 189). This new postfeminist version of ‘girl power’ demotes challenging structural issues (such as sexism) in favour of individualised empowerment, and unlike its ‘Grrrl Power’ predecessor hyper-femininity and heterosexuality (S. Jackson et al., 2013; Pomerantz et al., 2013). Therefore, although girl power’s doctrine of liberated and self-determining young women is seemingly unproblematic, it is argued that it sets young women up as consumers and points to “confidently attracting boys or men as a source of empowerment” (C. E. Charles, 2010a, p. 39; S. Jackson et al., 2013). Critical of this turn in the discursive resource of ‘girl power’, Taft (2004) argues that the status quo is failing to be disrupted with regards to social (or gender) power dynamics, instead prompting an individualised notion of power. This style of ‘girl power’ effectively “reflects the ideologies of white, middle-class individualism and personal responsibility over collective responses to social problems” (Gonick, 2006, p. 10).

Furthermore, reflecting the fluidity of ‘girl power’, there have been calls to recognise the contemporary sociocultural context as not only one that is characteristically postfeminist, but also one which is post-girl power (Dobson & Harris, 2015; Gonick et al., 2009; Harris & Dobson, 2015). As discussed by Gonick et al. (2009), the social context in which ‘girl power’ was conceptualised (1990s) represented a time when “girls *could* be active”, whereas in contemporary times “they are now *expected/demanded* to be fully self-actualized neo-liberal subjects” (p. 2 [original emphasis]). In this age of postfeminism and post-girl power in which young women are labelled as inherently empowered, questions have been raised regarding what “young women’s resistant agency looks like” in modern times (Harris & Dobson, 2015, p. 147). In light of increasing complexities in young women’s

sociocultural environments, Harris and Dobson (2015) suggest a more rigorous understanding and consideration of the notions of choice, agency and empowerment particularly within the framework of postfeminism and post-girl power is necessary.

Choice, agency and empowerment. Fundamental to the neoliberal and postfeminist agenda are the notions of individualism and the perceived availability of ‘choice’ (Baker, 2008; Harris & Dobson, 2015). For young women (and women more broadly), postfeminist discourses insinuate that in modern times the choices available have considerably increased, and they can now exercise their right to personal choice unimpeded by patriarchy and gender inequality (Harris, 2004b; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Thwaites, 2017). As ideal neoliberal subjects, young women “are invited to pursue self-making identity projects, which focus on the confidence and autonomy to be gained through the exercise of (often illusory) choices” (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012, p. 101). However, the discourse of ‘personal choice’ and whether it is reflective of increased agency and empowerment for young women or further regulation has generated significant debate (Baker, 2008; Budgeon, 2015; Gavey, 2012; McRobbie, 2015; Thwaites, 2017).

Contributing to this debate, Jessica Taft (2011) questions what represents the empowerment of young women. She argues that discourses of empowerment as well as the organisations which seek to ‘empower’ young women are more inclined to integrate them “into the social order as it stands, rather than empowering them to make any meaningful changes to it” (Taft, 2011, pp. 23-24). Hence, with a focus on individualised empowerment, young women are encouraged to develop the skills and knowledge to make autonomous choices and more so to manage barriers to their wellbeing (e.g., economic inequality, gendered violence or sexist media landscape); rather than perforate or modify such barriers. While not entirely dismissing the

capacity building of young women, Taft clarifies that when looking beyond the progressive and affirmative undertones of the current discourses surrounding girls' 'empowerment' it is:

simply another way to present meritocratic notions of personal growth and individual opportunity. As an entirely individualized project of self-creation and transformation...individual empowerment makes no references to social and political rights to economic justice, to equality, to changing the overall contexts and conditions of girls' lives, but only discusses girls' individual strengthen and resilience. Any girl then who does not 'succeed' is just not empowered enough. (p. 30)

Echoing these concerns regarding what in general constitutes authentic empowerment of individuals and groups has also generated substantial critique and deliberation (Christens, 2013; Rappaport, 1987, 1995; Riger, 1993; Zimmerman, 1990). Consequently, there are multiple definitions of empowerment, however, from a community psychology perspective empowerment has been defined as "a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives" (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). More specifically, Zimmerman (1990) emphasises psychological empowerment, which unlike purely individual notions of empowerment encompasses a "contextually oriented conception of empowerment" (pp. 173-174). Therefore, empowerment has been conceptualised as a complex concept, present at a myriad of levels including the individual (e.g., increased self-determination) and collective levels (e.g., shifts in political/systemic power relations) (Christens, 2013; Hur, 2006; Rappaport, 1987). Rappaport (1987) also emphasises the multifaceted nature of empowerment. However, despite this attention to individual and collective notions of empowerment, concerns have been raised

regarding the tendency to overlook empowerment at the collective level (Christens, 2013; Kitzinger, 1991; Riger, 1993).

Specifically, Riger (1993) states that often what is being classified as signs of empowerment at the individual level is a person's increasing "sense of" (p. 281) agency and self-determination (or empowerment). Whilst these individual feelings of control and self-esteem are important, such feelings in the absence of actual shifts in power at the macro level (e.g., gender equality) represent a form of pseudo-empowerment (Kitzinger, 1991; Riger, 1993). Kitzinger (1991) is also critical of the practice of feminist empowerment, which "attempts to create in women a certain state of mind (feeling powerful, competent, worthy of esteem, able to make free choices and influence their world) *while leaving the structural conditions unchanged*" (p. 122 [original emphasis]). It is these concerns, which are mirrored in the critiques of contemporary notions of choice and empowerment promoted to young women (Baker, 2008; Budgeon, 2015; Gavey, 2012; McRobbie, 2015; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Taft, 2011; Thwaites, 2017).

The critics of this postfeminist endorsed version of 'personal choice' do not maintain that the social conditions for girls and women have not improved or that the choices available to them have remained static (Baker, 2008). Similar to Riger (1993), they take issue with how such discourses of 'personal choice' are individualised and overlook the sociocultural conditions in which such choices are made, as well as the overestimation of girls' and women's agency to choose (Gill, 2007b; McRobbie, 2007a, 2007b; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). As articulated by Budgeon (2015):

as long as women's choices continue to be made under conditions of oppression and exploitation the reliability of individual choice as a guarantor

of freedom is open to debate. Social-structural conditions continue to limit choices available to many women and shape differential access to resources – economic, political, cultural, emotional – needed if they are to avail themselves of those on offer. (p. 308)

This orientation to view a young woman's 'personal choice' as indicative of agency has been labelled as a form of choice or neoliberal feminism (Budgeon, 2015; M. L. Ferguson, 2010). This ideology is based on the premise that any choice a young woman makes can be considered feminist and any effort made to critique such choices works to restrict her agency (M. L. Ferguson, 2010; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). Supporters of this approach include Baumgardner and Richards (2000, 2004) who proclaim that contemporary young women possess the freedom to participate in 'girlie' femininity without contention, or consideration of the potential role patriarchy continues to play in the lives of women. According to Baumgardner and Richards (2004), young women are fulfilling the aspirations of second-wave feminists and thus have the privilege to choose to adopt "the tabooed symbols of women's feminine enculturation – Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels" (p. 60) without feeling fooled. Hence, they go further to assert that any choice a young woman makes is feminist if she has made this choice with a level of awareness regarding the reasons underlining her actions and choices (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000).

Conversely, third-wave feminist Snyder-Hall (2010) takes a somewhat middle ground approach, arguing against the uncritical acceptance of choice for more of a recognition and valuing of a women's right to self-determination, and an appreciation of heterogeneity among women. Whilst not rejecting the gender biased sociocultural context in which women pursue their choices, it is notably argued that by observing women's choices does not necessarily make us privy to the tensions and reflection a

woman may participate in to make this choice. Therefore, such choices should not be belittled or underestimated (Synder-Hall, 2010).

However, in a similar sentiment to Baumgardner and Richards (2000, 2004), researchers have worked to validate and endorse young women's individual agency across numerous contexts (Bishop, 2012; Duits & van Zoonen, 2006, 2007; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010; Peterson, 2010). For example, Duits and van Zoonen (2006, 2007) maintain that young women's agency is often overlooked, including when it comes to clothing choices, whether it be a G-string and crop-top or the headscarf. Duits and van Zoonen argue unlike young men, the bodies and clothing choices of young women in Dutch society and beyond has become a site of heavy critique. Hence, regardless of wearing the headscarf or crop-top, young women "are submitted to the meta-narratives of dominant discourse...[which] 'resignify' their everyday practices as inappropriate, and relieve them from the power to define their own actions" (Duits & van Zoonen, 2006, p. 103). Therefore, young women's clothing choices are considered 'speech acts' and to define these choices as a result of the social conditions of patriarchy are limiting young women's active agency (Duits & van Zoonen, 2006).

Likewise, Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) and others (Peterson, 2010) have called for recognition of the agency young women can practice in their romantic relationships and over their sexuality. In Maxwell and Aggleton's qualitative research with young women aged between 16 and 18 years attending a private co-educational school in England, they assert that young women's 'feelings' of power in their heterosexual relationships and their ability to characterise their personality as strong and powerful goes some way to "sustained 'agency in action'" (p. 339). They propose developing an understanding of young women's agency not by considering how their

practices may be characterised as resistant against hegemonic discourses; rather via their own experiences and narratives of the choice and agency they exercise in their intimate relationships.

However, similar to earlier critiques of empowerment (Kitzinger, 1991; Riger, 1993), these individualised discourses and notions of personal choice, agency and emancipation have been questioned (Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2007b; Ringrose, 2013). Ringrose (2013) asks (in reference to the work of Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) in particular), “does girls’ agency simply mean the capacity to speak and think?” (p. 62). Here Ringrose challenges the ideas of Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) that a young woman’s agency and empowerment can be simply located in her strong personality. Whilst Gavey (2012) highlights that although young women (and women) may practice self-determination and thus control their own individualised choices, more often than not, they do not control the connotations and consequences of such actions. She warns against the efficacy of a version of empowerment that lacks “some deeper political analysis that takes seriously the sociocultural terrain in which individuals are crafting their lives as well as the psychosocial complexities of individual subjectivities” (Gavey, 2012, p. 719). Gavey’s concerns are in line with Riger (1993) who similarly points to “the illusion of power without affecting the actual distribution of power” (p. 282), which is often inherent in such neoliberal forms of empowerment (Christens, 2013).

Consequently, in an effort to continue to critique postfeminist varieties of personal choice, agency and empowerment, previous research has examined and critiqued the role of this individualised discourse for young women and women across a number of contexts. For instance, the function of the ‘personal choice’ discourse has been examined in relation to young women and women’s

participation in beauty practices and hair removal (Fahs, 2011; Li & Braun, 2017; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012); wearing high-heeled shoes (Dilley, Hockey, Robinson, & Sherlock, 2015); how they foresee their futures with regard to work and family (Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Murray & Cutcher, 2012); name changing practices post-marriage (Thwaites, 2017); and the conceptualisation of pole dancing as a recreational and fitness activity (Donaghue, Kurz, & Whitehead, 2011). More specifically, Stuart and Donaghue (2012) explored the ways in which Australian female undergraduate students (aged 18 to 42 years) position themselves and their engagement with feminine beauty practices within a postfeminist context, which continues to stress the “disciplining and beautification of women’s bodies” (p. 99). The focus of Stuart and Donaghue’s inquiry was to consider the ways in which participants conceptualised this engagement in beauty practices as freely chosen rather than a consequence of contemporary social conditions. It was concluded that young women’s engagement with feminine beauty practices was positioned as something enjoyable, an avenue to compete with other women as well as a way to increase their self-esteem. With regards to the notion of choice, these women did not imply that adopting feminine beauty practices was a choice, however they positioned women’s withdrawal from such practices as an active choice. Thus, as explained by Stuart and Donaghue, “the lack of explicit reference to choices *to* conform indicates that conformance to feminine beauty standards is not constructed as requiring as much effort or risk as does non-conformance, serving to render beauty practices unremarkable” (p. 116).

In a somewhat contrast to Stuart and Donaghue’s (2012) focus on women’s engagement in beauty practices, Currie et al. (2006) examined the ways adolescent young women actively transgressed gender norms and developed their identities in

opposition to the normative femininities inherent in their school cultures. This also included a consideration of whether these transgressions were evidence of their individualised choice and empowerment as well as the potential to reinscribe hegemonic notions of girlhood at a broader level. Currie et al. examined the experiences and narratives of 18 young women (aged between 12-15 years) from various Vancouver high schools. These young women were labelled as empowered by the researchers as they demonstrated a level of reflexivity regarding normative (girlie) femininities, and they participated in potentially gender non-conforming activities such as skateboarding. However, Currie et al. unexpectedly identified that their participants employed a “discourse of rational individualism” (p. 431), rather than feminist informed discourses when reflecting on the ways in which they positioned themselves outside emphasised femininity and normative notions of girlhood. Hence, although this discursive resource provided young women with the opportunity (or ‘choice’) to develop a sense of self in contention with mainstream girlhood, it also restricted their agentic potential as they were obligated to concede gender equality had been achieved in order for them to be themselves (Currie et al., 2006). Therefore, in accordance with Gavey (2012) and others’ (Christens, 2013; Kitzinger, 1991; Riger, 1993) critiques of individualised notions of empowerment in the absence of social changes, Currie et al. concludes:

empowerment as (simply) the ability to ‘be yourself’ in opposition to conventional girlhood *does not* necessarily bring with it the transformative agency we had hoped to hear. The irony is that adult encouragement echoed in girls’ claims – that they can do as much as boys, be anything they put their minds to – can contribute to a competitive individualism that, in effect, incites

girls to act competitively while failing to acknowledge actual barriers to the possibilities of their ‘becoming’ as women. (p. 434 [emphasised added])

Summary. Overall, this postfeminist and neoliberal social climate together with the contested discourses of ‘girl power’, as well as choice and empowerment, presents a very complex, and at times, contradictory everyday context for young women. Consequently, although individualised notions and approaches to empowerment and capacity building may present some value for young women, there is a shortfall in the producing of change at the collective level. It is this social and systemic change which is necessary for young women to truly experience empowerment, and for the sociocultural terrain to be less restrictive for young women. Furthermore, the management of this restrictive social climate is particularly pertinent for young women who are maturing and constructing their subjectivities in this complex social terrain which “traps girls between an idealized neoliberal girl subject who is told she ‘runs the world’ and the everyday realities of girls’ lives, which include experiences of inequality” (Pomerantz et al., 2013, p. 187). Therefore, a consideration of what forms of successful girlhood are made available to young women and how they are negotiating everyday normative femininities within this contemporary social terrain is warranted.

Normative Young Femininities in Contemporary Postfeminist Times

Overall, it is apparent that for young women the current social climate is one, which is inherently complicated and conflicting. The gendered nature of neoliberal discourses and principles have been widely acknowledged and identified, including the consequences for contemporary experiences of girlhood (Baker, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Gill, 2008a; Gill & Scarf, 2011; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2013). For young women who

are developing and mediating their gendered subjectivities and ‘sense of self’ within this postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural terrain, there are implications for how they ‘do’ gender and understand contemporary normative femininities. Normative femininities refer to the socially and culturally inscribed expectations and understandings of what it means to be a young woman (Budgeon, 2015). Normative femininities underscore:

the social and material reality of being gendered...enacting femininity successfully, therefore, requires negotiation of cultural prescriptions enshrined in specific formulations of idealized, hegemonic definitions. Specific constructions of femininity convey normative expectations regarding women’s rights to choice; understandings of what women should value when they make choices, and the goals they should aspire to achieve through their choices. (Budgeon, 2015, p. 308)

Importantly, it is recognised that the discourses of girlhood are varied and multiple, and consequently not all young women themselves may prescribe to a singular version of girlhood. Apart from gender, young women’s notion of self and understandings of femininity intersect with and are informed by discourses pertaining to ethnicity, sexuality, class and religion amongst other social categories (Griffin, 2004; Scharff, 2012). However, despite this diversity in the social locations young women and women occupy, notions of ideal femininity “often obscures the intersectional social relations which constitute gender by misrepresenting white, middle-class, heterosexual and westernized femininity as the norm” (Budgeon, 2015, p.309; Harris, 2004b; Scharff, 2012). Thus, many young women often find themselves in the position of the ‘other’ when surveying themselves (or when they

are being surveyed) against homogenic understandings of femininity (Budgeon, 2015).

Therefore, it is evident that young women's understandings and experiences of normative femininities have consequences not only for their gender performativity; rather their psychosocial wellbeing can also be impacted. Psychosocial wellbeing recognises the "intersections of the social, cultural and psychic" (Hollway, 2004; Frosh, 2003; Ringrose, 2008b; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001, p. 15); as well as the multiple dimensions of wellbeing (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Ryff, 2004). Such dimensions of wellbeing are inclusive of but not limited to self-acceptance, the maintaining of affirmative relationships and "environmental mastery" (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Ryff, 2004, p. 1071). Furthermore, due to this entanglement of the psychological, cultural and social (Walkerdine et al., 2001), Tolman, Impett, Tracy, and Michael (2006) highlight the need to consider that young women's development and wellbeing is informed and influenced by the current sociocultural environment.

With regards to this current social terrain, it calls for young women to "display both characteristics – those ascribed to femininity as well as masculinity – apparently with ease" (Budgeon, 2015; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 7); as young women are considered unimpeded to reach their full potential (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017). Therefore, young women are provided with the opportunity to, and expected to, excel in the traditional masculine spheres (e.g., education and assertiveness), whilst not transgressing hegemonic notions of femininity (Gill, 2008a; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007). As a result, this new neoliberal subject takes shape in the form a "supergirl" (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 7), or in Anita Harris' (2004b) words

the “can-do girl” (p. 16). Nevertheless, managing these somewhat impossible contradictions inherent in contemporary notions of femininity can lead to detrimental consequences for young women, particularly within a neoliberal climate that holds only the individual responsible for their own failings (Baker, 2010; Gill, 2008a). As outlined by Ringrose and Walkerdine (2007), “the production of a fiction that perfection may indeed be attained, that oppositions between masculinity and femininity may easily be crossed...mean that most girls are likely to experience anything less than perfection as failure – their failure, their pathology” (p. 10).

In addition to this orientation towards perfection (McRobbie, 2015; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007), it has been asserted that young women in contemporary times are “subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance that has no historical precedent” (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013; Gill, 2008a, p. 442; McRobbie, 2015; Riley, Evans, & Mackiewicz, 2016). Riley et al. (2016) identifies that unique to the current sociocultural climate and more so to the current postfeminist sensibility is the surveillance and ‘looking’ which occurs between young women and women. This looking, which Riley et al. labels as the ‘postfeminist gaze’ refers to the pejorative, and persistent looking women engage in to appraise the extent to which they themselves have succeed (or failed) in reproducing normative femininities. The neoliberal undertones of this postfeminist gaze are apparent. Therefore, further contributing to the parameters and surveillance of young women’s subjectivity, Riley et al. explains:

the postfeminist gaze foregrounds women as the viewers of other women but their looking is structured within heteronormative sense making, creating an oscillating dynamic between subject and object: women are scrutinised by a viewer (a subject) who, in her scrutiny, also has to scrutinise herself (as an

object). This oscillation may be one reason for the power of the postfeminist gaze since its continual shifting renders self and other surveillance permanently compulsory. (p. 108)

Consequently, without completely disregarding the continued role of the male gaze, looking between women is offered as fundamental to the subjectivity development of young women (and women) (Bailey et al., 2013; Hutton, Griffin, Lyons, Niland, & McCreanor, 2016; Riley et al., 2016; Ringrose & Coleman, 2013). Despite Riley et al.'s (2016) postfeminist gaze being primarily focussed on the surveying of women's body work and appearance, previous research would suggest that this critical surveying (as well as self-surveillance) is also present in other domains of a young woman's life and subjectivity (Bailey et al., 2013; Hutton et al., 2016; Ringrose & Barajas, 2011; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013). For instance, Bailey et al. (2013) examined young women's perceptions and judgements regarding representations of conventional femininity (e.g., physical attractiveness, eventful social life and having a romantic partner) on social networking sites. Similarly, research has also established that young women's sexuality is also significantly scrutinised in online spaces (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013). Therefore, it is apparent that modern young women are developing their gendered subjectivities both online as well as in their immediate contexts (e.g., amongst peers and within schools) (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011).

Furthermore, two prominent postfeminist discourses, or trends have been nominated as fundamental to shaping contemporary girlhood and understandings of normative femininities. These include young women as academically successful (Allan, 2010; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Ringrose, 2007, 2013) and expectations

concerning emphasised femininity and beauty related consumerism (Riley et al., 2016; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011; Sur, 2017).

Young women's negotiations of academic success. In recent times the notion that young women are outperforming boys in the domain of education has been perpetuated (C. Jackson, Paechter, & Renold, 2010; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Renold, 2001; Ringrose, 2007, 2013). This trend in gender differences has been witnessed across Western nations, including in the Australian context (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Ringrose, 2007, 2013; Spencer, Walsh, Liang, Mousseau, & Lund, 2018).² This has generated public concern and commentary, which has often been played out in the media.³ Nevertheless, despite this perceived 'gender gap' in education, this has not been replicated in the areas of STEM⁴ or in the workplace more broadly, with the gender pay gap continuing to the impairment of women (Crofts & Coffey, 2017; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017). This is in addition to young women and women being overrepresented as victims of physical, sexual and domestic forms of violence (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014).

In general, this 'failing boys' discourse has resulted in attention shifting away from the schooling experiences of young women to the crisis of boy's underachievement (Archer et al., 2007; Francis, 2010; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose,

2 Within the Australian context, girls' and young women's educational participation and achievement rates have steadily outperformed those of their male counterparts, with young women more likely to achieve Year 12 and above qualifications (year 12 represents the final year of the Australian secondary education system), as well as tertiary level Bachelor degrees than young men within the same age range (www.abs.gov.au).

3 Maslen, G. (2012, 17 July). A new take on the gender gap. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au>; Martin, S. (2015, 17 August). Gender gap widens as women graduates outpace the men. *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au>

4 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Girls and women are significantly underrepresented in subject and vocational areas of STEM across all levels from school to the workforce (Prinsley, Smith, Baranyai, & Ladewig, 2016). For instance, it has been reported that in Australia, of all students graduating from STEM courses only 16 percent are female (Prinsley et al., 2016).

2007, 2013; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007). However, researchers within critical girlhood studies and related disciplines have worked to refocus some of this attention on the complexities of young women's engagement with and gendered performativity of academic success (Allan, 2010; Allan & Charles, 2014; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017; Ringrose, 2007, 2013; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Furthermore, this trend of 'over' performing girls has been cited as further evidence to support the postfeminist ethos that society has moved beyond sexism and gender inequality (Baker, 2010a; McRobbie, 2007a; Ringrose, 2007). More so, young women's success and the perceived overreach of feminism have been attributed to the underdoing of boys' and young men's educational progression (Francis, 2010; Ringrose, 2007, 2013).

More notably and to the possible detriment of female students, in contemporary times being academically successful has been positioned as synonymous with 'doing' girl (Allan, 2010; Francis, Archer, Moote, de Witt, & Yeomans, 2017; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017, Ringrose, 2013). Being academically successful is an inherent characteristic of normative femininities in the current sociocultural climate, with narratives of young women's "academic success narrowly shap[ing] adult perceptions of girls, restricting what is considered to be normal ('Aren't girls supposed to do well in school?'), possible...and realistic" (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017, p. 5). Unimpeded from now redundant concerns of gender inequality, postfeminist discourses premise that being an academic high achiever is absent of contention for young women (C. Jackson et al., 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Ringrose, 2013). However, young women are not a homogenous collective, therefore academic achievement is not shared by all young women, more accurately "for some girls (perhaps especially middle-class girls) striving for excellence can be damaging for their bodies and subjectivities" (Allan, 2010; C. Jackson et al., 2010, p.

2; J. Evans, Rich, & Holroyd, 2004; Rich & Evans, 2009). For example, Rich and Evans' (2009) research with young middle class white women, points to their schooling and neoliberal discourses of academic success as being a factor in their experiences of bulimia and anorexia nervosa.

Hence, research has also stipulated that these postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of academic excellence are not just gendered, rather they are also highly classed and racialised (Allan, 2010; Allan & Charles, 2014; C. E. Charles, 2010b; J. Evans et al., 2004; C. Jackson et al., 2010; Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2002; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Rich & Evans, 2009; Walkerdine, 2003; Walkerdine et al., 2001). That is, elitism and high educational attainment are normalised amongst the middle class and expected as a method to maintain this cultural and social position (J. Evans et al., 2004; Lucey & Reay, 2002; Rich & Evans, 2009; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Consequently, this seemingly unproblematic endorsement of educational achievement overlooks the potential psychosocial damage and feelings of insufficiency middle-class young women report feeling (J. Evans et al., 2004; Lucey & Reay, 2002; Rich & Evans, 2009). As signalled by J. Evans et al. (2004), "clearly, there is a hidden price of middle-class girls' apparent effortless achievement – obsessive hard work, guilt, and devastating feelings of inadequacy" (p. 138).

Consequently, for school-aged young women (particularly middle-class young women) their relationship with and experience of academic success (and failure) is far from easy and straightforward (Allan, 2010; Francis et al., 2017; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Renold, 2001; Skelton, Francis, & Read, 2010; Spencer et al., 2018). Postfeminist discourses and notions of contemporary girlhood essentialise as well as understate the complexities, the labour

and the compromises inherent in young women's engagement with their academic identities (Allan, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Renold, 2001; Skelton et al., 2010). Similar to the remarks of J. Evans et al. (2004), with regards to their research with self-identified smart girls, Pomerantz and Raby (2017) commented:

all of them had stories to tell about how they managed and negotiated high achievement, what it had cost them socially and emotionally...being a smart girl was not an easy identity to occupy in school – it took work, worry, and the kind of structural and familial support that not all girls can access. (p. 6)

Likewise, Allan (2010) examined upper-middle-class girls' experiences of success in a single-sex selective educational setting in which academic achievement was overtly praised. Despite this seemingly supportive schooling context, Allan learned that these girls still experienced academic achievement as “something that was fragile and performative (not fixed or stable but rather something that had to be constantly worked upon)...many of them felt restricted to perform success in narrow and competitive ways that clashed with dominant discourses of femininity” (pp. 40-41).

These observations (Allan, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017) are further corroborated by Spencer et al.'s (2018) findings regarding privileged young women's experiences of stress with regards to academic achievement and being successful. It was noted that for these young women “they felt like they were swimming in a sea of pervasive stress” to maintain high-level grades as well as their college aspirations (Spencer et al., 2018, p. 11). Interestingly, this sense of stress, which often remained undisclosed (and experienced in private) was normalised and accepted amongst female students as the status quo (this was also somewhat reflected in the insights of parents and teachers). Young women who were considered not to be under stress

were perceived as lacking the necessary work ethic to achieve their full potential (Spencer et al., 2018).

In addition to these direct impacts on the social and emotional wellbeing of young women, it has also been asserted that young women are required to balance their academic identities against broader hegemonic notions of femininity (Allan, 2009, 2010; Archer et al., 2012; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Francis, 2010; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006; Skelton et al., 2010). That is:

being an ‘acceptable girl’ is not in harmony with being a successful, academic achiever: the former involves passivity, accommodation, a concern with social relations and projecting feminine ‘desirability’ whilst the latter demands, hard-nosed determination, singularity and concern with mental intellectual (rather than social) pursuits. (Skelton et al., 2010, p. 187)

Consequently, despite valuing their education and being proud of their achievements (although not boastful or overtly proud) smart girls are required to monitor this against their social standing among male and female peers (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006; Skelton et al., 2010). This leads to a hyper-vigilance regarding the potential benefits as well as hazards of being recognised as a ‘smart girl’ in any given context (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Skelton et al., 2010). Young women thus strategically play up or down their smartness, “illustrating how girls’ high academic performance is neither easily embraced nor ambivalently accepted, but is carefully and consciously navigated” (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015, p. 508).

For instance, overtly academically successful girls who disengage from normative ‘girlie’ and peer culture (which includes investment in their appearance and heterosexual relationships) are often subjected to (or at least at risk of) social

exclusion within school (Allan, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Renold, 2001). This phenomenon has been identified with girls and young women both in primary school years (Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006) as well as with older adolescents (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; 2017; Ringrose, 2015; Walkerdine et al., 2001). More specifically, young women have been found to downplay their achievements in an effort to secure popularity amongst their peers, and in some cases increase their heterosexual attractiveness (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Raby & Pomerantz 2015; Skelton et al., 2010). The prevalence of this notion of young women masking their academic achievements to perform 'proper' girlhood signifies that not only being a 'smart girl' is a contested identity position but also experiences of (everyday) sexism continue to accompany young women in their sociocultural worlds (Raby & Pomerantz 2015; Ringrose, 2013).

Postfeminist appearance related discourses and expectations. Together with educational achievement, young women's physical appearance has been nominated as fundamental to their popularity and in some instances assigned more significance than intellect (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017). Along with this conceptualisation of young women's trouble free and natural participation in academics, postfeminist and neoliberal notions of ideal and normative femininities continue to centre on emphasised femininity and beauty related consumerism (Gill & Orgad, 2015; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Riley et al., 2016; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Sur, 2017). Cultural practices and hegemonic notions of femininity and girlhood particularly within the West continue to accentuate restrictive beauty ideals for young women (and women) (Betz & Ramsey, 2017; Burns & Gavey, 2004; Carey et al., 2011, 2013; Jeffreys, 2005; Lazar, 2011; Terry, Braun, Jayamaha, & Madden, 2017). As explained by Lazar (2011):

‘doing’ beauty is a vital component of ‘doing’ femininity: being beautiful, as defined by the norms of a society – for example, in terms of skin type and complexion, and body shape, size and appearance – and working towards achieving those conventional standards are an accepted (and expected) part of what women do by virtue of being ‘women’. (p. 37)

These beauty ideals orientated towards women across age groups, have been a site of feminist critique (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Burns & Gavey, 2004; Jeffreys, 2005). Nevertheless, Shelia Jeffreys (2005) highlights that in modern times the beauty practices young women and women engage with and practice has markedly increased in their harshness and relentlessness. However, this increased intensity has not been mirrored in the critique of such practices (Lazar, 2009). Instead, in the modern sociocultural context young women and women’s engagement with and adherence to feminine beauty ideals and practices has been caught up in the postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of choice and empowerment (Fahs, 2011; Gill, 2007b; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Jeffreys, 2005; Lazar, 2009; Li & Braun, 2017; McRobbie, 2007a, 2015; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Terry et al., 2017). Likewise, Lazar (2009) identified the postfeminist discourse of “entitled femininity...which claims leisure and pleasure as women’s entitlement, along with the celebration of all things feminine and ‘girly’” (p. 374), to be widespread within beauty advertisements directed at young women.

Irrespective of this discursive shift in positioning beauty modification as celebratory and evidence of young women’s liberation (Lazar, 2009, 2011), the understanding that “beauty practices are not about women’s individual choice or a ‘discursive space’ for women’s creative expressions but...a most important part of women’s oppression” persists (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Jeffreys, 2005, p. 2; Stuart

& Donaghue, 2012). Jeffreys (2005) goes as far to state that as a result of the negative consequences of feminine beauty practices and their contribution to the oppression of girls and women, such practices meet the conditions “for harmful cultural practices in United Nations understandings” (p. 28). Further explaining her justification for such a recommendation, Jeffery asserts that positioning Western beauty practices in such a light removes the ambiguity around individual choice and rather acknowledges “that the attitudes which underlie harmful cultural practices have coercive power and that they can and should be changed” (p. 3). Although Jeffreys’ ideas may be deemed as extreme within the current sociocultural climate, the detrimental impacts of restrictive beauty ideals (particularly the desire for thinness) on the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of young women has been well established (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Calogero & Thompson, 2010; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Mueller, Pearson, Muller, Frank, & Turner, 2010; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tischner & Malson, 2012).

Furthermore, although young women are not a uniform group, adolescence has been identified as a time in which young women are particularly vulnerable to the harmful impacts of hegemonic understandings of femininity and beauty (Calogero & Thompson, 2010; Duchesne et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). In regards to young people’s perceptions of, responses, and adherence to various contemporary beauty ideals, peers and friends have been nominated as central particularly for young women (Ata, Ludden, & Lally, 2007; Carey et al., 2011, 2013, 2014; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005; C. J. Ferguson, Munoz, Contreras, & Velasquez, 2011; Gondoli, Corning, Salafia, Bucchianeri, & Fitzsimmons, 2011; Helfert & Warschburger, 2013; D. C. Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Kenny, O’Malley-Keighran, Molcho, & Kelly, 2017; Mackey & La Greca, 2008; Muller et

al., 2010; Shroff & Thompson, 2006; Webb & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2014). In particular, peers have been found to encourage and strengthen normative beauty criteria and young women's rumination regarding body dissatisfaction (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005; Helfert & Warschburger, 2013; Shroff & Thompson, 2006). More specifically, research has pointed to the role of school-based appearance cultures on young women's (and in some cases young men's) monitoring of their appearance and overall body image (Carey et al., 2011, 2013; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; D. C. Jones et al., 2004). Appearance cultures are understood to comprise of appearance-focused dialogue among peers, peer-to-peer appearance related teasing and disparagement and familiarity with and sharing of appearance related media (Carey et al., 2011, 2013; D. C. Jones et al., 2004). In their qualitative inquiry with young women from an Australian all-girls' school, Carey et al. explored participants' experiences of and reflections on school-based appearance cultures. It was ascertained for these female high school students, appearance cultures including appearance related talk had manifested as a significant part of their daily school experiences (Carey et al., 2011). Broader cultural appearance norms were found to inform school-based appearance cultures. Accordingly, young women avoided transgressing such norms in order to secure their social position amongst peers and avoid being the subject of weight gossip (Carey et al., 2011). Hence as highlighted by Mueller et al. (2010), although under researched the school setting is imperative in impelling young women's understanding of herself and the extent she satisfies normative body ideals.

In addition to the school context, and more so young women's peer circles, contemporary beauty and appearance norms are perpetuated and communicated to young women via a number of avenues including the media (Gill, 2007a, 2012; Gill & Elias, 2014; Lazar, 2009, 2011), popular and celebrity culture (Duits & van

Romondt Vis, 2009; A. Evans & Riley, 2013; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Press, 2011), and more recently online through social media and beauty blogs (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015; Sur, 2017; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). For instance, in an Australian based study conducted with adolescent young women, it was found that increased engagement with appearance related content on the Internet was associated with participants' discontentment regarding their body weight and their desire for thinness (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). The same research also determined that social networking platforms (e.g., MySpace and Facebook) were influential in increasing young women's preoccupation with thinness. Meaning, participants who spent an increased amount of time on social media platforms like Facebook, experienced increased weight dissatisfaction and a more significant internalisation of appearances norms (e.g., the thin ideal) (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). The role of social networking sites like Facebook in young women's self-objectification tendencies and peer appearance comparisons has been noted elsewhere (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015). In reference to the proliferation of online beauty blogs, this has been considered as an additional method utilised to "teach women how to 'do femininity' ...promote that beauty is an essential component of femininity and encourage women to take beauty as a serious thing to be achieved" (Sur, 2017, p. 283). Sur (2017) illustrates that the beauty blogs utilised by the teenage women interviewed, effectively promoted "stereotypical meanings of girlhood, beauty and consumption" (p. 279), as well as strengthened the postfeminist and neoliberal narrative that young women participate in such body work out of pleasure and as a virtue of their "right to be beautiful" (p. 283).

In addition to this association between beauty practices, and young women's prerogative to participate in self-improvement and beauty consumption (Lazar, 2009; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Sur, 2017), the modern postfeminist sensibility also emphasises "femininity as a bodily property" (Gill, 2007, p. 149; McRobbie, 2015; Rice, 2014; Riley et al., 2015; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). As explained by Gill (2007):

it appears that femininity is defined as a bodily property rather than a social, structural or psychological one...in today's media, possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity. The body is presented simultaneously as women's sources of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and re-modelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgements of female attractiveness. (p. 149)

Thus, the body has been recognised as fundamental to young women's identity development including to what extent she perceives herself to be successfully meeting normative femininities (Azzarito & Solmon, 2006; Boyd, Reynolds, Tillman, & Martin, 2011; Coleman, 2008; Oliver, 2001; Rice, 2014; Tolman et al., 2006).

However, Oliver (2001) draws caution regarding the role in which the body plays in young women's (and women's) identities and nominates the omnipresent imagery of normalised beauty as an additional way in which women are regulated. Consequently, she stipulates, "the body becomes a site for political struggles...as women begin to internalize the social meanings that are publicly attached to the body their private feelings of self-worth are jeopardized" (Oliver, 2001, p. 145). For instance, contemporary normative beauty ideals and femininities centre heavily on the thinness ideal, more so an extreme thinness that would be deemed as unachievable for the

majority of young women (Ahern, Bennett, Kelly, & Hetherington, 2011; Betz & Ramsey, 2017; Bordo, 1993; Boyd et al., 2011; Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tischner & Malson, 2012; Wick & Harriger, 2018).

Further to this, in the current sociocultural landscape a young woman's body and more so body weight is not merely a measure of her femininity, rather is indicative of her psychological and physical wellbeing as well as her self-discipline (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Tischner & Malson, 2012; Woolhouse, Day, Rickett, & Milnes, 2012). Due to thinness being discursively linked to health (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017), the overweight female body is positioned as deviant and unmanaged (Smith, 2012; Woolhouse et al., 2012). Confirming this sentiment Tischner and Malson (2012) assert:

not only does fatness continue to be constructed negatively as unattractive, particularly for girls and women, and as a prominent signifier of ill-health, but the fat subject thus also appears as a failed neoliberal citizen...ignorant of, 'health truths' and/or too lazy to engage in the technologies of self-improvement. (pp. 51-52)

Furthermore, together with pairing restrictive notions of beauty and thinness with normative notions of 'doing' girl or femininity, this postfeminist sociocultural terrain sets up the body as a continued site of improvement for young women (Gill & Elias, 2014; Riley et al., 2016; Terry et al., 2017). This mandated bodywork and self-surveillance has been magnified within the postfeminist and neoliberal condition (S. Jackson & Vares 2015), and effectively bolsters the already restrictive focus on young women's (and women's) appearance (Bordo, 1993; Jeffreys, 2005).

In addition, young women's negotiations of normative femininities and their bodies is further complicated by the diverse and affirmative body acceptance

messages, which are prevalent in the current postfeminist context (Beale, Malson, & Tischner, 2016; Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015; Murphy & Jackson, 2011). In recent times, “love your body discourses” (Gill & Elias, 2014, p. 179), have been widespread across the media, social media as well as employed by companies targeting young women and women (Beale et al., 2016; Gill & Orgad, 2015; Murphy & Jackson, 2011). Initially such discourses appear progressive and effective in dismantling orthodox notions of feminine beauty, particularly the thin ideal (Beale et al., 2016). However, on the contrary Gill and colleagues (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015) stress the counterintuitive nature of these discourses, which position young women’s body discontentment not as a result of patriarchy (or the restrictive monitoring of the female body), rather of their own faulty thinking. Consequently, these pseudo-feminist (and inherently neoliberal) discourses require young women to work not only on their bodies but also their minds and to just ‘be confident’ (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015). Therefore, the defect is not located at the systemic, or cultural level rather within the young woman herself.

Alongside “love your body discourses” (Gill & Elias, 2014, p. 179), research has highlighted that together with the continued emphasis on the thin ideal (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; Wick & Harriger, 2018), modern young women are increasingly exposed to other body types and standards (Betz & Ramsey, 2017). These diverse messages comprise of the thin but curvy ideal (Ahern et al., 2011; Betz & Ramsey, 2017); the plus size model (Beale et al., 2016); and the fit and athletic body type (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Robinson et al., 2017; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017). In particular, recent attention has been paid to the athletic or fit ideal, with the rise of

'fitspiration'⁵ content on various social media platforms, which are highly accessible to young women (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Robinson et al., 2017; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017). As explained by Simpson and Mazzeo (2017), the objective of 'fitspiration' imagery and mantras are to encourage 'healthy' weight control and exercise practices. However, in their content analysis of 'fitspiration' material, Simpson and Mazzeo concluded that although "fitspiration is thought to inspire exercise behaviours, it appears to include an equal amount of inspiration for the pursuit of thinness...[and] the idea that the primary reason to engage in physical activity is to enhance appearance" (pp. 564-565) rather than health.

Furthermore, like the thin ideal, quantitative studies have found that messaging which promotes the athletic and fit ideal has poor outcomes for the body satisfaction of female undergraduate students (Betz & Ramsey, 2017; Robinson et al., 2017). Importantly, Betz and Ramsey (2017) argue that regardless of the body type being endorsed, the intense focus on the female body and one's appearance is what is most detrimental to young women. Similar to previous criticisms (Gill & Elias, 2014), Betz and Ramsey go further to highlight the limitations in body confidence initiatives and movements, which are based on the premise that all female bodies are beautiful while the sociocultural environment continues to be inundated with images and messages which are counterintuitive to this objective.

Summary. Young women's experiences and understanding of normative femininities, and what successfully 'doing' girl looks like is framed within postfeminist and neoliberal discourses and ideology. Despite the perceived success of young women in various domains of academic and social life (Harris, 2004b), the

⁵ The term 'fitspiration' is a combination of the word fitness and inspiration. This is similar to the additional term 'thinspiration' (thinness and inspiration) which is also prevalent on social media.

current sociocultural terrain continues to essentialise, and homogenise girlhood, as well as regulate and limit young women's access to diverse notions of femininity (Gill & Scarf, 2011; Gonick, 2006; Griffin, 2004). As identified, prominent discourses which contribute to this postfeminist and neoliberal agenda is young women as natural high achievers (Allan, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Ringrose, 2013), and the continued value placed on young women's bodies and physical appearance (Gill & Orgad, 2015; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Riley et al., 2016; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Sur, 2017). Both these manifestations of normative femininities lead to what is considered to be an unachievable idealised version of girlhood (Griffin, 2004). Together with this persistent requirement to be ideal neoliberal subjects (Charles, 2010a), young women continue to be subject to various forms of inequality and sexism bolstering the hostile contemporary sociocultural context for young women (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Swim et al., 2001).

However, due to postfeminist (and neoliberal) ideologies dismissing gender inequality and encouraging moves away from collective movements such as feminism (Frith, 2001; Scharff, 2012), there is a potential for young women to be limited in their ability to recognise the cause of disadvantage or struggle as located outside themselves (Baker, 2008). Alternatively, it is proposed that the ways in which young women understand and position themselves in relation to the issues of feminism and gender inequality contributes to their subjectivity and understandings of what it means to perform successful girlhood.

Feminist Identity in a Postfeminist Context

In addition to having potential consequences for the subjectivity development and psychosocial wellbeing of young women, it has been maintained that rather than

espousing empowerment at a collective level, such complex neoliberal and postfeminist discourses fundamentally move young women away from collective activism and ideologies such as feminism (Lazar, 2009; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007). On account of this, together with understanding how young women are negotiating normative femininities and postfeminist discourses surrounding successful girlhood, it is also necessary to appreciate how they are constructing their subjectivity within macro-level discourses of gender and gender inequality. Due to an increased level of maturity and capacity by adolescence, young people are well versed in understanding social inequalities and identifying forms of discrimination including those pertaining to gender (Ayres & Leaper, 2013; C. S. Brown & Bigler, 2004, 2005; Leaper & Brown, 2008; Leaper, Brown, & Ayres, 2013; Manago et al., 2009; Montanes et al., 2012; Rutland & Killen, 2015). For young women, their lived experiences are informed by various discourses in relation to gender, gender inequality and feminism (Ahmed, 2017; Hercus, 1999, 2005; Manago et al., 2009). As described by Sara Ahmed (2017) “feminism involves a process of finding another way to live in your body” (p. 30). Therefore, it is asserted that a young woman’s values concerning such inequalities, and more so the way she understands and positions herself within such discourses will to an extent impact her notions of self (Manago et al., 2009).

Even with this increased understanding and recognition of social inequalities and discrimination, it has been recognised that in contemporary times the support and identification with the feminist movement have somewhat diminished among girls and women across age groups (Budgeon, 2011; Duncan, 2010; Scharff, 2012). Feminism in general is characterised as the valuing, and support of equality between men and women, and the recognition of sex-based discrimination, which continues to

manifest within society both at the interpersonal and systemic level (Leaper & Arias, 2011). However, irrespective of this retreat from feminism, or labelling oneself a 'feminist', a strong belief in and encouragement of gender equality and gender egalitarian values pointedly persist (Aronson, 2003; Crossley, 2010; Hughes, 2005; Olson et al., 2008; Quinn & Radtke, 2006; Rich, 2005; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Numerous reasons why this disjoint between what are fundamentally feminist values, and the feminist collective have been offered.

With regard to such reasons, within the current sociocultural context, two narratives persevere, which have both worked to weaken the place of feminism in the lives of young women (and women) (Frith, 2001; Scharff, 2012). For instance, feminism is positioned as important for young women, however redundant, or unwarranted as the new gender order is one of equality (Budgeon, 2001; McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012; Thwaites, 2017). Consequently, feminist ideologies and values are considered to be common sense for young women and therefore their impact diluted (Scharff, 2012). Conversely, the second narrative surrounding feminism is its principles are inherently excessive and irrational (Ahmed, 2017; Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Frith, 2001; Scharff, 2012). Following on from this narrative, several discourses persist to position young women and women who identify with feminism as unfeminine and 'man-haters' together with questions regarding their heterosexuality (feminists are positioned as lesbians) (Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Scharff, 2012). This therefore, constructs 'feminist' as a potentially untenable position for young women to occupy within the current climate.

In addition to these sustained narratives surrounding feminism and those who adopt a feminist identity position, McRobbie (2007a, 2009) and others (Gill, 2008a; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harris, 2004b; Scharff, 2012) also point to the broader

postfeminist and neoliberal sensibility as a contributing factor in the diminishing place of feminism in contemporary girlhood. More specifically, the positioning of young women as the ideal neo-liberal subject is regarded as the core protagonist in the ‘undoing’ of feminism (Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Scharff, 2012).

As explained by Scharff (2012):

in a neoliberal postfeminist era, young women are positioned as beneficiaries of increased opportunities. Now able to work, consume, and control reproduction, young women are called upon to manage their lives independently. This neoliberal, individualist imperative does not sit well with perceptions of feminism as involving collective struggle. Young women reject feminism because they regard it as a collective movement which robs them of the opportunity to navigate their lives self-responsibly, even if this involves dealing with structural inequalities on an individual level. (p. 1)

As follows, McRobbie (2007b) contends that within this postfeminist and neoliberal terrain where young women are characterised as free from the struggles of patriarchy, the critique of the contemporary social condition is suppressed. That is to say, “this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom” (McRobbie, 2007b, p. 34).

Therefore, the following section will review previous literature in an effort to further consider the ways in which young women (and women) relate to and understand feminism and their potential engagement and disengagement from the identity position of ‘feminist’. Subsequently, research concerning the ways in which young women experience, understand and potentially respond to contemporary sexism will also be considered.

Feminist identity development. As briefly alluded to young women and women’s withdrawal from feminism whilst still valuing feminist notions of gender

equality has been widely examined (Aronson, 2003; Crossley, 2010; Olson et al., 2008; Quinn & Radtke, 2006; Rich, 2005; Robnett, Anderson, & Hunter, 2012; Zucker, 2004; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). However, it is important to note that this topic of inquiry has predominantly been examined amongst adult women (18 years of age or older). As a consequence, the relationship to feminism and potential activism of school-aged young women is often overlooked (Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft, 2011). Nevertheless, there have been some notable exceptions of late (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; Keller, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft, 2011).

Prior to considering young women and women's complex engagement with, and potential withdrawal from feminism, it is necessary to consider theories of and approaches to feminist identity development. For instance, early theorists such as Bartky (1975) asserted, "to be a feminist, one has first to become one" (p. 425). This 'becoming' a feminist is positioned as an "experience of a profound personal transformation" which centres on women developing their feminist consciousness (Bartky, 1975, p. 425). For Bartky whose theories emerge within a time of significant social change and continued contradictions for women (1960s-70s USA), she conceptualises the development of a feminist consciousness as complex, testing and one of increased awareness and change. Importantly, Bartky identifies this feminist consciousness as simultaneously a "consciousness of weakness and consciousness of strength" (p. 431), as women are required to understand themselves a victim of an oppressive "alien and hostile force outside of oneself" (p. 430), whilst called to recognise their own power.

Following on from Bartky's (1975) notions of feminist consciousness, psychologically informed stage theories of feminist identity development emerged; notably Downing and Roush's (1985) staged model of feminist identity development.

This feminist identity theory, which was based heavily on Cross' Black Identity framework, was also developed in reference to Downing and Roush's early research in the areas of liberation and group consciousness raising as well as their own clinical experience. Downing and Roush's model consists of five stages, the first stage is referred to as 'passive acceptance' in which a woman is naïve to or overlooks systems of gender bias, assumes traditional gender roles willingly and purposefully shuns ideas which contrast her understandings of womanhood. Following this is the second and third stages, 'revelation' and 'embeddedness - emanation' respectively. Briefly, 'revelation' refers to when a woman ceases to ignore gender inequality. Downing and Roush contend a woman might move to this stage as result of "one or a series of crises or contradictions" (p. 698) and although for some women this progression may occur in haste, for the majority of women it is an arduous and prolonged transformation. The third stage is initially characterised by increased connection and solidarity with other like-minded women (embeddedness) and concludes with "the beginnings of an openness to alternate viewpoints and to a more relativistic versus dualistic perspective" (emanation) (Downing & Roush, 1985, p. 701). 'Synthesis' the fourth stage of the model, a woman is able to develop a positive feminist identity, strengthen her ability to recognise and respond to instances of oppression or gender inequality, whilst also maintaining non-stereotypical judgements of her male counterparts. The final stage is 'active commitment', in which the feminist woman progresses this "newly developed consolidated identity into meaningful and effective action" (Downing & Roush, 1985, p. 702). It is proposed that women can move through and return to these various stages throughout their life.

However, notwithstanding the contributions of this seminal theory it has been subject to various critiques (Marine & Lewis, 2014; Moradi, Subich, & Phillips,

2002; Zucker, 2004; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Moradi et al. (2002) questions the applicability of this feminist identity development framework to a diversity of women including women of different ages and abilities as well as diverse ethnic, class, and religious backgrounds. While, Zucker (2004) questions the applicability of a feminist identity model developed during the second-wave feminist movement for modern young women. In addition, it has been suggested that rather than proposing a model of feminist identity, Downing and Roush's (1985) theories should be regarded as understandings of feminist attitudes rather than one of identity (Moradi et al., 2002; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Furthermore, Marine and Lewis (2014) calls into question the quantitative traditions of this area of research and theory, stating "until we better understand the process of being feminist, we cannot attempt to 'measure' it in any meaningful way" (p. 14). Qualitative and narrative approaches to understanding a woman's feminist becoming have also found support elsewhere (Bulbeck, 1997; Hercus, 2005).

Subsequently, in an effort to provide an enhanced, or diverse way of understanding feminist identity development, Marine and Lewis (2014) conducted a qualitative inquiry into the experiences and stories of self-identified young feminists. Despite the diverse, and non-linear ways in which participants came to adopt a feminist identity position, several commonalities were found. For instance, feminist role models (teachers, parents and grandmothers) and university experiences contributed to participants' feminist identity development, which was considered to have transpired over a period of time; whilst non-feminist peers also played a role in solidifying young women's identification with feminism (Marine & Lewis, 2014). Importantly, Marine and Lewis identified numerous parallels as well as disparities with earlier theorists.

Significantly, for these young feminists, their feminist becoming was not as a result of a notable calamity as stipulated by Downing and Roush (1985), but rather “as a subtly growing sense of inequality” which coincides with Bartky’s (1975) notions of feminist consciousness (Marine & Lewis, 2014, p. 15). Further diverging from Downing and Roush, Marine and Lewis (2014) contend that prior to adopting their feminist identity, these women were not overlooking sexism rather from their formative years a “feminist belief was ever-present in their consciousness and only through recognizing that it was not universally shared were participants forced to come to terms with themselves as politically distinct from the society at large” (p. 19). Finally, in opposition to Downing and Roush’s stage theory, but reflective of Bartky’s conceptualisations, for these young women coming to adopt a feminist identity was not one fraught with irritation or guilt, but one of seeming enjoyment, empowerment and satisfaction (Marine & Lewis, 2014).

Despite this sense of positivity in maintaining a feminist identity (Marine & Lewis, 2014), it has been commonly found for some young women (and women) whilst maintaining a commitment to gender equality, they do so without adopting this identity position (Aronson, 2003; Crossley, 2010; Olson et al., 2008; Quinn & Radtke, 2006; Rich, 2005; Robnett et al., 2012; Zucker, 2004; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Zucker (2004) maintains that an additional shortcoming of early feminist identity theories is they do not adequately speak to this occurrence or “phenomenon of nonfeminist liberal egalitarianism, in which women espouse feminist beliefs regarding the equality of women and men, whilst simultaneously rejecting feminist identity” (p. 424). Hence, previous research has pointed to the notion that women who identify as feminist are “ideologically distinct” from those that maintain gender egalitarian values without characterising themselves as feminists (Zucker, 2004;

Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010, p. 1918). That is, the latter group place more emphasis on neoliberal doctrines and moralities of self-governance, and autonomy in comparison to women who accept the label of feminist (Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010).

Contemporary negotiations of feminist ideology and ‘being a feminist’.

This renewed focus on individualism, potentially at the expense of collective identities and movements such as feminism has been found to be symptomatic of the postfeminist and neoliberal contemporary social climate (Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Scharff, 2012). Because of these shifts, generational differences have been identified in young women and women’s relationship to feminism (Budgeon, 2011; Bulbeck, 1997, 2006; Duncan, 2010; Peltola, Milkie, & Presser, 2004; Stevenson, Everingham, & Robinson, 2011; Zucker & Stewart, 2007). Rich (2005) examined the life stories of a small group of successful young adult women (aged in their early 20s) in an effort to explore the ways they effectively inhabit multiple subject positions when discussing or considering issues of gender, as well as gender inequality and feminism. According to Rich, with regards to this group of non-feminist young women, it was evident that several:

embodied the ideals of feminism, yet also actively tried to manage their identities so as to distance themselves from feminist identities...gender was a structuring and influential dynamic in their lives, whilst at the same time constructing a narrative wherein gender inequality was seen as undesirable and a thing of the past. (p. 496)

Hence, while not completely dismissing the values of feminism, contemporary neoliberal discourses of individualism and the perceived achievement of gender equality were meaningful in shaping these young women’s understanding of their gendered subjectivities (Rich, 2005). The broader social, political and historical

climate is considered to impact modern young women's conceptualisations and identifications with the feminist collective (Aronson, 2008; Stevenson et al., 2011).

In addition to considering the role of neoliberalism on women's identification with feminism (McRobbie, 2007b; Rich, 2005; Scharff, 2012), common discursive repertoires (e.g., "I'm not a feminist, but..."), which are frequently utilised by young women and women to negotiate their relationship to feminism have been examined (Crossley, 2010; Olson et al., 2008; Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 187). Specifically, in such research feminism is conceptualised as "a culturally available discourse upon which people draw strategically on specific occasions and feminist identity as a subject position that is necessarily contingent and unstable" (Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 188). Analysing the talk between female undergraduate and graduate students, Quinn and Radtke (2006) found their participants moved between identifying "themselves as not feminist, covert feminists, feminists in the past, or feminist by virtue of how they live" (p. 190), whilst persisting to rework and clarify what such positions meant for them. This discursive analysis highlighted positioning oneself as a feminist or not a feminist, were both unsustainable subject positions. The first presents risks for women being labelled with stereotypical ideas concerning the irrationality of feminism (Edley & Wetherell, 2001), whilst the latter challenges young women's desires and commitment to gender equality (Quinn & Radtke, 2006).

Similarly, maintaining a commitment to social justice and gender equality, whilst continuing to retreat from identifying with feminism was also found amongst educated international university students (Crossley, 2010). Crossley (2010) identified that these diverse young adult women (aged in their 20s) demonstrated incongruent views and understandings of feminism, often withdrawing from feminism due to persistent negative stereotypes and difficulty in balancing their

orientation towards individualism and choice together with assuming a collective identity. Furthermore, despite some of these young women preferring to label themselves as 'humanists' rather than 'feminists', they disclosed adopting a feminist identity when confronted with explicit sexism (Crossley, 2010). Crossley characterised this as a fluid form of "situational feminism" (p. 129), which is mandated by the context in which a woman finds herself.

Extending the examination of this seeming support for the ideological foundations of feminism, whilst rejecting the collective identity of feminism was further examined with both young women and men (Olson et al., 2008). More specifically, Olson et al.'s (2008) qualitative inquiry focussed how these young men and women discursively positioned themselves with regards to the feminist label and identity. Olson et al. contend that identity labels are fundamental to an individual's sense of self; that is, "the label signed to the corresponding aspect of self interacts with the individual and social practices of enacting the role, thereby giving meaning to its enactment" (p. 105). Consistent with Quinn and Radtke (2006), Olson et al. also identified that young people's discursive positions were fluid and multiple and centred on four types of language "embracing, denouncing, reframing, and resisting" (p. 127).

However, concerns with the flexibility of the interpretative repertoires employed and feminist subject positions adopted by young people (primarily young women) have been noted (Crossley, 2010; Quinn & Radtke, 2006). These concerns are particularly for the political orientations of feminism and the potential to neglect persistent forms of gender inequality and sexism (Crossley, 2010). For example, as asserted by Quinn and Radtke (2006), "the lifestyle feminism interpretative repertoire

individualizes feminist identity and carries no ethical obligation to work publicly for others' equality" (p. 196).

Interestingly, in apparent contrast to the concerns highlighted by Quinn and Radtke (2006) and others (Crossley, 2010; McRobbie, 2007b; Rich, 2005; Scharff, 2012), Aronson (2003) insinuates that young women are not naïve to gender inequality in postfeminist times and more so, does not view the diverse positions young women adopt in relation to feminism as a negative. Alternatively, it is suggested that previous research concerning young women's engagement with feminism adopts a singular and static understanding of feminism and more importantly, focuses their inquiries "on groups that are too homogenous to provide conclusions about the full diversity of today's young women" (p. 906), whilst disregarding potential disparities inherent in different generations of girls and women (Aronson, 2003). Therefore, with a consideration of participants' diverse life experiences and backgrounds, Aronson argued that young women do possess a level of understanding and apprehension concerning gender inequality (although this was still discussed at an individual level rather than a social or political level). Furthermore, similar to previous inquiries (e.g., Olson et al., 2008), these young women were also located on a continuum with regards to feminism, with many being labelled by Aronson as "fence-sitters" (p. 918). However, instead of finding a cause for concern, Aronson positions even ambiguous rhetoric regarding feminism as positive:

Whether or not young women call themselves feminists, they support feminist goals...and none expressed antifeminist sentiments. The fence-sitting stance, while not as politicized as in previous generations, is not entirely individualized and apolitical either...my results offer some promise for

feminism. Many of these young women may be passive supporters rather than agents of change, but they are supporters nonetheless. (p. 919)

In a similar sentiment to Aronson (2003), Frith (2001) and others (Griffin, 2001; Jowett, 2004; Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft, 2011) challenge the notion that young women are removed from feminism and collective activism and calls for flexibility in understandings of feminism and feminist engagement. According to Frith:

problems with arguments about whether young women identify with feminism is that these arguments rely on a model in which a homogeneous group called ‘young women’ are presented with a monolithic version of feminism which they choose either to adopt or reject. (p. 148)

Similarly, Budgeon (2001) reiterates the fluidity and non-fixed nature of identity, which also pertains to feminist identity. Furthermore, as a result of her interviews with young women (aged 16-20 years), like Aronson (2003), Budgeon denies that young women are ignorant to, or unsuspecting of continued gender inequalities. Accordingly, in regard to modern young women’s relationship to feminism, Budgeon proposes “that identification does not depend on recognition” (p. 24). More importantly, she asserts that by attending to the voices and perspectives of young women an improved appreciation for “how agency, informed by feminist ideals, operat[ing] as a form of decentralized resistance at the level of the everyday” (p. 26) can be achieved. This is in addition to identifying the ways in which such ‘agency’ can make productive contributions towards feminism as well as broader gender relations (Budgeon, 2001).

Further to this, feminism as a movement, or ideology has always been contested, thus to position feminism as beyond critic and re-negotiation is short

sighted and limiting (Frith, 2001; Griffin, 2001). To this end, rather than expecting young women to merely assume, or rescind a predetermined and singular form of feminism, their contributions to feminist conversations and ways of participating in feminist activism needs to be permitted and acknowledged (Frith, 2001; Keller, 2016). This coincides with calls for further exploration of school-aged young women's engagement with feminist practice and more specifically with those who actively adopt feminist identity positions (Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft, 2011). As highlighted, prior research has primarily favoured a focus on the ways in which adult women have discursively accepted the underlining values of feminism whilst resisting the feminist identity position (Crossley, 2010; Quinn & Radtke, 2006).

Despite potentially overlooking young women's contributions to feminist conversations, in recent times further consideration of how adolescent young women are negotiating the intricacies of 'being a feminist' in a postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural milieu has ensued (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; N. Charles et al., 2018; Keller, 2016; Keller & Ringrose, 2015; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2012, 2016; Schuster, 2013). Further still in recent times a somewhat resurgence of feminism and proclaiming of a feminist identity position has been identified among school-aged young women (N. Charles et al., 2018; Retallack et al., 2016). In their research with a school-based 'girl power' group, Ringrose and Renold (2016) explored what it meant for participants in this group to adopt a feminist identity within the school context. Despite the potential challenges, far from retreating from the ideology of feminism and feminist subjectivity, it was found that these teenagers viewed their feminist "girl power group as a joyful site of powerful solidarity and strength" (Ringrose & Renold, 2016, p. 116). Thus, although not positioning this engagement and identification with feminism as fixed, it is evident

that at least for some young women pursuing a burgeoning feminist identity is viable in light of postfeminist connotations which construct this collective movement as redundant (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2017; Jowett, 2004; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose & Renold, 2016).

Likewise, within the New Zealand context, Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016a, 2017) have also worked to gain further insights into how young self-identified feminists construct their feminist identities. It was determined that young feminists are aware of and continue to challenge and negotiate discourses of “unreasonable feminism”, which positions feminism amongst other things as unfeminine, irrational, obsolete and a detriment to men (Ahmed, 2017; Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, p. 503; Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Scharff, 2011, 2012). These teenage feminists were considered to be negotiating and rebutting such dismissive discourses and responses towards feminism within the immediate context of their friends, peers and families. To further counteract the negative connotations surrounding feminism, Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016a) argued that these self-identified young feminists made use of the discursive resource of ‘fair feminism’, which “domesticated feminism by positioning it as advocating equally for men and women...participants’ recuperative claims about the fairness of feminism depended on the interactional accomplishment of ‘reasonable feminism’. This practice helped to carve out (limited) space for feminist speech” (pp. 503-504). In addition to this, Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2017) observed that the same group of young feminists “spoke of their attachments to feminism through a discourse of authenticity” (p. 792), in an effort to neutralise the contemporary and often dismissive depictions of feminism. Like the students in Ringrose and Renold’s (2016) inquiry, for these young people their overt feminist identities differentiated them from others, it “functioned as evidence of their non-

conformity...a marker of difference that signalled their authenticity and willingness to stand apart from others” (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2017, p. 790).

Further to this, such insights gained from young feminists indicate that despite the postfeminist and neoliberal sentiments permeating the current sociocultural context, which work to destabilise and ‘undo’ feminism (McRobbie, 2007a, 2009), young women (and potentially young men) are still creating ways and spaces to engage with feminism and ‘be feminists’ (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; Keller, 2016; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016). Such spaces are inclusive of online spaces including blogs and social networking sites (Baer, 2016; Guillard, 2016; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2016; Schuster, 2013). It has been asserted that unbeknown to adult feminist (or previous generations) modern young feminists are actively participating in feminist education, activism and community building online (Keller, 2016; Schuster, 2013). Therefore, it is not that young women have a decreased identification with feminism, rather there is a need to “understand activism from the perspective of girls, whose lives are often situated within particular material, social, and political constraints” instead of only recognising overt and public displays inherent in traditional activism (Harris, 2008; Keller, 2016, p. 262). Thus, echoing the calls of Ringrose and Renold (2016) and others (Frith, 2001; Harris, 2008; Taft, 2011), rather than discounting contemporary young women’s feminist voices, Keller (2016) argues it is necessary to acknowledge the legitimacy online spaces in which young women are engaging in feminist practice and activism, and importantly not frame their methods as ‘less than’ traditional feminist practice.

However, even with young women’s engagement with feminist subjectivities (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; Retallack et al., 2016) and the potential of spaces both in schools and online for young feminist activism (Keller, 2016; Ringrose

& Renold, 2016; Taft, 2011), it has also been noted that sexism, stereotyping, and the policing of young women's (and women's) restrictive performances of femininity has not subsided (Haines, Deaux, & Lofaro, 2016; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2018; Ohn, 2009; Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). Interestingly, Keller et al. (2018) suggests that we are experiencing a "fascinating cultural moment whereby both feminism and misogyny are increasingly visible" (p. 23). Consequently, together with understanding how young women are positioning themselves in relation to feminism, it is necessary to also have an appreciation for the ways in which they experience and reconcile contemporary forms of sexism in the current sociocultural terrain.

Young women experiencing and accounting for contemporary sexism.

Despite the connotations inherent in current postfeminist and neoliberal discourses which effectively advance the view that sexism and gender inequality are essentially redundant (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017), young women continue to experience various forms of overt and covert sexism and inequality (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Swim et al., 2001). As articulated by Pomerantz et al. (2013), this idea that gender equality has been achieved has become so engrained in modern times, that efforts to point out gender-based discrimination are regarded as misguided and questionable. In contradiction to this falsehood, sexism can and continues to manifest in diverse ways including sexist comments and jokes, the maintenance of stereotypes, doubting one's abilities and competencies based on gender, sexual objectification of women and sexual harassment and violence (Swim et al., 2001; Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). Young women and women have been found to experience significant psychological and physical distress due to sexism (Sabik & Tylka, 2006; Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006; Watson & Grotewiel, 2016).

It has been reported that young women and women directly witness and/or are subjected to such sex-based discrimination across multiple contexts, including but not limited to schools (C. S. Brown & Leaper, 2010; Leaper et al., 2013; McCullough, 2017; Ohm, 2009, Ringrose, 2013; Ringrose et al., 2013); universities (Lewis, Marine, & Kenny, 2018; Morrison, Burke, & Kelly, 2005); and in public and online spaces (Baer, 2016; Keller et al., 2018; Megarry, 2014; Sills et al., 2016). This is in addition to the diverse and pervasive forms of sexist, discriminatory, and misogynistic discourses and rhetoric perpetuating in broader political domains (Donaghue, 2015), as well as the media and popular culture (Gill, 2008b). Therefore, the paradox between such messages of gender equality and young women and women's experiences of sexism are apparent (Crofts & Coffey, 2017).

Although various overt and covert forms of sexism and gender inequality endure in contemporary times, it has been asserted that young women and women are diverse in the ways in which they make sense of and respond to experiences of sexism. Research has found that an orientation towards a feminist identity acts as a protective factor against the psychological distress caused by sexism (Leaper et al. 2013; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Sabik & Tylka, 2006; Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006); and has an impact on a women's ability to recognise (as well as respond to) sexist events (Ayres, Friedman, & Leaper, 2009; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). In addition to this, it has been suggested that young women who belong to ethnically diverse minority groups are more cognisant of sexism due to experiencing other forms of discrimination and oppression such as racism (Ayres & Leaper, 2013; Ohm, 2009).

In general, it is evident some young women (and women) are able to identify sexism and avenues to critically respond to gender related prejudice (Keller et al,

2018; Lewis et al., 2018; Ohn, 2009; Sills et al., 2016). At the same time others seemingly recite postfeminist and neoliberal doctrines, which effectively shift the issue of sexism from the systemic to the individual level (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Morrison et al., 2005; Pomerantz et al., 2013). For instance, Pomerantz et al. (2013) examined how school-aged young women experience and understand incidents of sexism (in school, their social circles and anticipated futures), within a broader sociocultural landscape flooded with narratives of 'girl power' and gender equality. It was determined that despite experiencing incidents of sexism within school and among peers, in contradiction to such events, the young women interviewed utilised postfeminist discourses to refute the idea that these experiences were related to systemic gender inequality. These experiences were seemingly reduced to the individual level. Furthermore, many young women espoused views locating sexism as something of the past, or only currently existing in societies outside the West. Pomerantz et al. conclude that postfeminist discourses centred on gender equality do not provide an accurate depiction of the lives lived by girls and young women. More significantly, this postfeminist and neoliberal version of young women's emancipation from inequality effectively limits their knowledge and critical vocabulary to call out gender-based discrimination, and patriarchal ideologies and practices (Pomerantz et al., 2013).

In a similar vein to Pomerantz et al. (2013), Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016b) also examined young people's talk regarding sexism. Despite reiterating examples of sexism (including sexual harassment, stereotyping and the questioning of women's capabilities), the young people in this research adopted a gender impartial view of sexism (boys and men also are victims of sexism) and demonstrated a somewhat nonchalant opinion of this discrimination, downplaying its potential consequences

(Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b). Similar trends have also been found in college or university cohorts, in which young women avoid labelling experiences of disadvantage as equating to broader sexism (Morrison et al., 2005).

Overall these reactions to sexism or attempts to ignore or explain away experiences of sexism have been labelled as coping strategies (Ahmed, 2017; Ayres & Leaper, 2013; Baker, 2008, 2010b; Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Leaper et al., 2013; Morrison et al., 2005; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017). That is, to admit that sexism is still pervasive in the contemporary sociocultural landscape, young women (and women) would need to succumb to the notion that they are not as empowered or liberated as they thought (or were led to believe). This is in contradiction to neoliberal sentiment that places the individual in control of their wellbeing as well as their failures (Baker, 2008, 2010b; Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b). To admit that sexism continues is to place oneself in a position of victimisation – which is not a place young women want to be (Baker, 2008, 2010b; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017).

However, in light of this neoliberal and postfeminist condition which characterises sexism as a myth and discourages young women from utilising the tools of feminism to address such inequalities, some young women are able to find ways of speaking back to and critiquing their experiences of sexism (Keller et al, 2018; Lewis et al., 2018; Ohrn, 2009; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Sills et al., 2016). In her school-based research within a Swedish multicultural secondary school, Elisabet Ohrn (2009) observed female students often initiating discussions regarding gender and patriarchy during class time, and more so, openly challenging and tackling prejudicial and misogynistic behaviour displayed by male peers. However, it was noted that this behaviour was demonstrated predominately by young women who

were considered to belong to immigrant or ethnic minority groups, rather than the Swedish young women who were more likely to make allowances for or minimise the sexist behaviour of their male peers. Furthermore, Ohrn stipulated that it was the support and encouragement of teachers for such young women that made this educational space unique, and safe for overt sexism to be matched with overt resistance. In addition, these assertive young women were also considered to be driven and high achieving students, thus despite being outspoken and loud in class, they also satisfied normative expectations of schoolgirl femininity (Ohrn, 2009). It is predicted that this was also a contributing factor in the support received from teachers, as in other cases assertive and brash behaviour from female students has not been as readily accepted (Archer et al., 2007).

In addition to the school setting providing an important site for young women's resistance to sexism (Ohrn, 2009; Ringrose & Renold, 2016), in recent times social media and other online platforms have also been utilised by young women (and women) to challenge everyday experiences of sexism (Keller et al., 2016; Sills et al., 2016). Keller et al. (2016) examined teenage feminists' use of digital media to respond to and resist various forms of sexism. It was found that this online medium provided an avenue for young feminists to develop connections with other like-minded young women and importantly make visible and protest the sexism and persistent rape culture they are subject to, including within schools.

Summary. In short, modern young women continue to have a very complex and multifaceted relationship with and appreciation (or non-appreciation) of feminism. However, the ways in which they understand macro-level issues and discourse of gender, and more so persistent gender inequality and sexism is important for their subjectivity, how they respond to normative expectations of contemporary

girlhood and subsequently their wellbeing (Manago et al., 2009). Previous research is clear that feminism is not redundant for all young women despite postfeminist and neoliberal protests, which claim otherwise (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; N. Charles et al., 2018; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft 2011). Further still, not all young women accept gender equality as a common-sense notion and therefore actively work to respond to sexism and the impacts of patriarchy in their schools and social lives (including their online networks) (Budgeon, 2001; Keller et al., 2018; Ohn, 2009). This is important as various forms of sex-based discrimination continue to impact the worlds of girls and women at all life-stages (Swim et al., 2001; Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). Therefore, it is essential that we continue to further understand young women's engagement and disengagement with feminism to further aid in dispelling negative narratives which surround this collective movement (Aronson, 2003). Further still, although not deemphasising the need for collective change and resistance, it is also necessary that young women's unique forms of feminist activism are recognised and supported (Frith, 2001; Griffin, 2001; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2016; Taft, 2011).

Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, the current sociocultural terrain presents young women with multiple complex and multifaceted challenges. At the immediate level young women are negotiating their subjectivities, and ways of being in light of hegemonic understandings and discourses of normative femininities, which are characterised as being restrictive and at times, detrimental for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women (Baker, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Gill & Scarf, 2011; Gonick, 2006; Griffin, 2004; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2013). For many young women, it has been found that their social

and emotional health and wellbeing has been significantly tested by the notion that they engage in their academic identities without contention and the need for support (Allan, 2010; C. Jackson et al., 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Ringrose, 2013). Furthermore, the impacts of gendered beauty ideals including, but not limited to the thin ideal, and more recently the fit ideal (Betz & Ramsey, 2017), on young women's psychological and physical health have been widely noted (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Calogero & Thompson, 2010; Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Mueller et al., 2010; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tischner & Malson, 2012). In addition, young women who transgress such normative notions of femininity and ways of performing successful girlhood run the risk of criticism, or exclusion from within the school context, from peers both within and external to their educational settings (including online) (Carey et al., 2011; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007). That is, contemporary girlhood is performed under high levels of surveillance of young women including self-surveillance (Bailey et al. 2013; Riley et al., 2016). Furthermore, the increased focus on individualism in postfeminist and neoliberal times, holds young women solely accountable for both their successes and failures, hence young women are called on to continue to work on and better themselves (Baker, 2008; McRobbie, 2009).

In addition, to the gendered nature of neoliberal discourses (Gill & Scharff, 2011), which position young women as autonomous and empowered, young women continue to experience various forms of sexism and gender inequality (Brown & Leaper, 2010; Calder-Dawe, & Gavey, 2016b; Swim et al., 2001). Consequently, current postfeminist sentiments have complicated young women's relationship with feminism, making feminist values important but the identity position of feminist untenable for some young women (Frith, 2001; McRobbie, 2007a, 2007b, 2009;

Scharff, 2012). However, despite persistent narratives which frame feminism as unfeminine, unnecessary and extreme, some young women have found spaces to engage with feminism and ways to respond to sexism (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; N. Charles et al., 2018; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft 2011).

Despite the increased attention directed towards young women's subjectivity and wellbeing, young women are not a homogenous group and the ways in which they experience and negotiate gendered subjectivities (including their positions regarding the macro level issues of feminism and sexism), are fluid and do not remain static (Griffin, 2004). Thus, it is important to build on and renew the existing knowledge basis and continue to understand the diverse ways young women in diverse social locations mediate the everyday challenges (and opportunities) inherent in contemporary girlhood. Furthermore, in recent times research conducted with school-aged young women within an Australian context is somewhat limited. Thus, although research from comparable western contexts is of value, it is important that Australian school-aged young women are included in these contemporary conversations. This is particularly with regards to young women's disengagement as well as engagement with feminism and the ways in which they make sense of contemporary forms of sexism within an Australian context. Furthermore, despite the criticisms young women often face regarding their neglect of feminism and the feminist identity position, research in this area has in general been pursued with adult women. Therefore, school-aged young women's insights continue to be necessary.

Finally, it is asserted that together with other institutions and settings (e.g., family), schools play a primary role in defining, reaffirming as well as potentially challenging sociocultural norms, discourses and inequalities (McLeod, 2000; O'Flynn

& Petersen, 2007; Youdell, 2004). Schools act as a key site in which young women (and young men) develop their subjectivities including their gender identities (Youdell, 2005). Specifically, within the school setting young women utilise the available discursive resources, which are inherent in the school climate and peer dynamics to negotiate and develop their subjectivities in conjunction with broader notions of acceptable schoolgirl femininities (Archer et al., 2007; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Woolley, 2017). Accordingly, it was thought to be imperative that in understanding young women's negotiations of normative femininities within an Australian context, the contribution of their educational settings should also be examined and reflected on. Thus, this current study sought to conduct research within an Australian educational setting.

In light of these areas for continued knowledge development, the aim of the current qualitative study is to explore how young women within an Australian all girls' secondary college understand and negotiate normative (young) femininities and how this may influence their overall psychosocial wellbeing. Furthermore, it was the objective to also consider how this educational context (including inherent peer dynamics) contributed to young women's sense of self as well as the ways they reconciled their position with regards to feminism and persistent sexism. Therefore, the primary research questions include: 1) how do young women interpret and perform sociocultural informed normative femininities; 2) how do young women negotiate normative femininities within their immediate contexts such as school, peer groups and interpersonal relationships; and 3) what are the consequences of sociocultural informed normative femininities for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women?

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted in the current study, beginning with a consideration of the theoretical framework employed to understand young women's subjectivity within the complex contemporary sociocultural milieu. In addition to the theoretical framework, the research design is detailed including the process for using a secondary school as the primary research setting. Within this discussion of the methodology a description of the data collection methods utilised in the current qualitative inquiry is also provided. This chapter concludes with a consideration of the value of qualitative data as informed by social constructionism as well as a review of the data analysis procedure.

Theoretical Framework

The current study's theoretical framework draws together complementary ideologies and theories which at times are located within the principles of postmodernism. What and what does not constitute postmodernism is often highly contested and critiqued (Gannon & Davies, 2012; K. J. Gergen, 2001; Weedon, 1997). Extending beyond psychology and social sciences, postmodernism is understood to be reflective of movements in cultural life, including architecture, literature and the arts (Burr, 2015). Specifically, within postmodern thought "an emphasis is placed on the communal construction of knowledge, objectivity as a relational achievement, and language as a pragmatic medium through which local truths are constituted" (Gannon & Davies, 2012; K. J. Gergen 2001, p. 803). More importantly for the purposes of the current study, to examine young women's negotiations of normative femininities, the theoretical orientation of social constructionism is adopted (Burr, 2015; Davis & Gergen, 1997; K. J. Gergen, 1985, 2003; Willig, 2013). Burr (2015) considers postmodernism to be "the cultural and

intellectual backcloth against which social constructionism has taken shape” (p. 12). Like broader theories of postmodernism, which challenge traditional understandings of objective truth and knowledge (about the world and ourselves), social constructionism refers to the notion that all knowledge is constructed from the interaction that occurs between an individual and their social context or environment (Burr, 2015; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Acknowledging the possibility of multiple worldviews and truths, social constructionists contend that an individual’s diverse experiences, knowledge and meanings, are constructed and influenced by their relevant cultural, historical and linguistic context (Davis & Gergen, 1997; K. J. Gergen, 2003; Willig, 2013).

Central to the social constructionist framework is the role of language (K. J. Gergen, 1985; Davis & Gergen, 1997). As explained by Davis and Gergen (1997), a social constructionist position is based on the notion that “people generate their truth from languages available to them. Thus, any ‘fact’ about the world depends upon the language within which it is expressed” (p. 5). Importantly, the meanings derived from language are fluid, diverse and continually contested (Burr, 2015). It is within this contested site of language that power relations are executed and challenged. This notion has been significantly informed by Foucault’s theories concerning knowledge, language and power relations (Burr, 2015; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Furthermore, it is through language and the social exchange of language that a person constructs their identity. This social constructionist approach to language and identity discards the notion “of the coherent, unified self...if the self is a product of language and social interactions, then the self will be constantly in flux, constantly changing depending upon who the person is with, in what circumstances and to what purpose” (Burr, 2015, p. 62). Therefore, identity is developed via the engagement, negotiation

and challenging of varied discourses and linguistic resources which occur during social interactions (Burr, 2015; Wetherell, 1997). However, this is not to imply that this engagement with language and construction of identity only occurs at the relational level. Rather, the language available to individuals is limited and fundamentally informs social practices which has implications for what individuals can say and do as well as what can be done to them (Burr, 2015; Willig, 2013). As Burr (2015) explains:

a person's identity is achieved by the subtle interweaving of many different threads...All these, and many more, are woven together to produce the fabric of a person's identity. Each of these components is constructed through the discourses that are present in our culture – the discourses of age, of gender, of education, of sexuality and so on...For each thread of our identity there is a limited number of discourses on offer of which we might fashion ourselves.
(pp. 123-124)

Coinciding with the potential limitations inherent in culturally available discourses, it is also necessary to consider the way in which discourse informs power relations and works to maintain the institutional and social practices which favour those in powerful positions (Burr, 2015). For instance, discourses of femininities work to maintain the social and institutional fabric of patriarchy. However, such culturally informed discourses can be challenged and resisted, although there are also risks and consequences inherent in challenging the status quo.

For the objectives of the current research, together with understanding the available and contemporary discourses of normative femininities and the potential to challenge such discourses, it is also necessary to consider social constructionist definitions of gender. According to Clarke and Braun (2009) gender is a highly

significant and multifaceted concept (or social categorisation). Gender shapes the various and diverse prospects and expectations that men and women are faced with along with their respective experiences of privilege and inequality (Clarke & Braun, 2009). However, within the theoretical underpinnings of social constructionism, gender is not considered to be an inherent characteristic or trait found within a person, rather gender “exists in those interactions that are social constructed as gendered” (Bohan, 1997, p. 33; Clarke & Braun, 2009; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Thus, what is regarded as masculine and feminine (or gendered) is not located within the individual rather it is a shared construction (via language) situated within a particular social, cultural, political and historical context (Clarke & Braun, 2009). Gender is not something that one possesses; rather gender is understood as something that an individual does (Bohan, 1997; Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In ‘doing’ gender we simultaneously strengthen the social and cultural constructions of gender (Bohan, 1997; Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). That is, due to the persistent and ever-present “gendering of experience”, individuals learn to ‘do’ gender appropriately and more so are privy to the consequences of transgressing such gendered norms (Bohan, 1997, p. 40; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In addition to adopting a social constructionist orientation, to further understand the complex ways in which young women ‘do’ gender within the current sociocultural climate, the current research broadly draws from feminist poststructuralist theories (which is often used interchangeable with postmodernism) (Butler 1990; Gavey, 1989, 1997, 2011; Weedon, 1997). For Gavey (2011), feminist poststructuralism is positioned as “a particular variant” (p. 187) of social constructionism. Feminist post-structuralism is defined as “a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social

process and institutions to understand existing power relations and identify areas and strategies for change” (Weedon, 1997, p. 40). According to Scott (1997), poststructuralism provides feminism with theories that strengthen understandings of patriarchy including the ways in which its materialisations have persevered, as well as altered (at the subjective, ideological and institutional levels). Importantly, poststructuralist theories provide avenues (like social constructionism) to consider “pluralities and diversities” replacing notions of essentialism and allows for “alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them” (Scott, 1997, p. 758). Therefore, in line with overarching notions of social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism rejects the plausibility of objective and absolute truth and knowledge, as well as adopting the centrality of language and discourse in the construction of meaning (Gavey, 1989, 1997; Scott, 1997).

Further expanding on this role of language and discourse, subjectivity is the primary principle underpinning feminist poststructuralism (Weedon, 1997). Subjectivity is defined as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). This notion of subjectivity represents one of the most significant departures feminist poststructuralism makes from traditional and humanist perspectives (including modernist feminist approaches) (Baxter, 2003; Gavey, 1997). That is, mainstream and humanist frameworks are based on essentialised notions of gender and the idea of a coherent, stable and unified self (Azzarito, Solmon, & Harrison, 2006; Gavey, 1997). This approach particularly for the current research increases the risk of oversimplifying young women’s experiences and negotiations of self (or subjectivity) and potentially neglecting the intricacies and inconsistencies

present both within and amongst young women (A. Jones, 1993). Rather, in line with Foucault's understandings of discourse, feminist poststructuralism ascertains that an individual's identity is "determined by a range of 'subject positions' ('ways of being'), approved by their culture, and made available to them by means of the particular discourses operating within a given discursive context" (Baxter, 2003, p. 25). Therefore, discourse is understood to be "a structuring principle in society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity" (p. 40), with some discourses maintaining more power and credence within various contexts, thus working to secure the status quo (e.g., patriarchy) (Weedon, 1997).

Foucault's (1977, 1982) theories of power and discourse have greatly contributed to post-structural theories and understanding of subjectivity (Gannon & Davies, 2012; Gavey, 1997; Weedon, 1997). That is, as explained by Jeanes (2011), Foucault contributes an understanding of power which outlines the ways in which discourses become "normalized and readily taken up by girls and women" (p. 405). Further still, it is Foucault's work and theories of "surveillance as a regulatory technique" (p. 405) which further explain young women's (and women's) susceptibility to adhere to normative notions of femininity (Jeanes, 2011). This theoretical approach allows a consideration of the ways in which young women are negotiating their subject positions in relation to the discourses available to them in this unique and contemporary sociocultural milieu of postfeminism and neoliberalism.

This orientation to subjectivity prioritises multiple meanings and offers "a *subject* that is fragmentary, inconsistent, and contradictory" (Gavey, 1989, p. 465). Thus, it is with this potential conflict and contradiction, feminist poststructuralism positions women not as passive but rather active agents in the construction of their

subjectivity; including the ways in which they locate themselves within and against various discourses (Azzarito et al., 2006; Gavey, 1997). According to Azzarito et al. (2006), the consideration of agency is a strength of feminist poststructuralist theory.

That is, this theoretical orientation:

offers a tool to destabilize or subvert dominant gender discourses by presenting women not as passive victims of oppression, or as “problems” but as active participants who make choices and participate in structuring their identities...by dismissing the unitary and universal notion of oppression and essentialist concept of gender, feminist poststructuralist theory instead recognizes women as agents in negotiating power relations and interests that are “structural”, or present historically and culturally in the institutions and organizations of a society. (Azzarito et al., 2006, p. 224)

However, an appreciation of girls (and women) as ‘active’ in mediating discourses and hegemonic power relations does not concede that girls or women can simply choose to take up subject positions, which refute patriarchy (Gavey, 1997; A. Jones, 1993). As highlighted by A. Jones (1993):

there is no ‘pure’ (or non-gendered, or non-patriarchal) space within which girls develop and become powerful...Children (and adults) are less likely to take up alternative rather than prevailing subject positions...The ‘alternative’ or oppositional positions are usually not seen by girls as desirable – or even possible – alternatives. (p. 161)

Rather it is contended that this fluidity and potential conflict in subjectivity provides opportunities for different ways of ‘doing’ gender, thus allowing young women to challenge oppressive subject positions, whilst recognising the cultural, social and

political context in which such negotiations are located within (Azzarito et al., 2006; Baxter, 2003; A. Jones, 1993).

In summary, as purported by Gavey (2011, p. 187) it is maintained that “multi-theoretical flexibility”, or to an extent “embracing theoretical impurity – in an informed and sensitive way” is at times required to fully hear and contextualise the narratives shared by women across age groups. Specifically, for research informed by feminist post-structuralist thought, Gavey calls for consideration of “two contradictory understandings of language – as descriptive on one hand and constitutive on the other” (p. 187). Thus, it is proposed feminist poststructuralist theories together with the broader epistemological ideas of social constructionism are well situated to assist in understanding the complexity and contradictions inherent in young women’s negotiations of hegemonic discourses of femininity.

Research Design

Consistent with the outlined theoretical framework, the current study employed a qualitative research design and methodology. Qualitative research allows for the explorations of how individuals (and groups) construct meaning (Erickson, 2018; Patton, 2015; Willig, 2013). There is an objective to know people not only as individuals, but instead to understand individuals as being part of a number of contexts or systems including “social, family, organisational, community, religious, political, and economic systems” (Patton, 2015, p. 8). It is contended that membership to such contexts and systems informs the meaning-making process. Thus, attention to context forms the foundations of qualitative research methodology (Patton, 2015). In reference to the current research, with a focus on language and discourse this methodological approach facilitates the exploration into how young women are positioning themselves and negotiating their subjectivity in relation to

current gender ideals and normative femininities (across multiple contexts).

Furthermore, as a result of the “openness of inquiry” in qualitative research (Patton, 2015, p. 11), this approach allows for the exploration and acknowledgment of the diverse ways in which young women engage with discourses inherent in ‘doing’ normative femininities and girlhood.

More broadly, qualitative research goes some way to minimise the power imbalance often present between a researcher and their participants (M. M. Gergen, 2010; Way, 1997). While not overlooking the role of the researcher (DeVault & Gross, 2012; Olesen, 2018), qualitative inquiry in particular feminist-informed inquiry allows the voice of participants to remain central to the research process (Marshall & Young, 2006). Together with acknowledging gender and power inequalities, feminist-informed research values the voice of (young) women and maintains that they are the authorities on their own understandings and experiences (Banister, Tate, Wright, Rinzema, & Flato, 2002; Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

Thus, it is contended that this qualitative orientation effectively allows for exploration of the ways in which young women understand, engage as well as potentially disrupt normative notions of femininity and girlhood. This research design included a two-phased approach. The first stage of the research was a pilot study followed by the primary study, which utilised ethnographic methods of inquiry.

Pilot study. Prior to conducting the principal research, a pilot study was conducted.⁶ The benefit of conducting a planned pilot study in a qualitative research project is that it provides the researcher with the opportunity to confirm the appropriateness of the data collection procedures as well as resolve any unforeseen

⁶ Ethics approval from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) was received prior to conducting the pilot study.

ethical, or methodological issues that may impact the primary study (Kim, 2011). The main purpose of the pilot study in the current research was to trial the interview schedule. Furthermore, the pilot study provided the opportunity to generate further discussion points for the interviews and focus groups to be conducted in the primary research.

Similar to previous research (Ringrose, 2008), the pilot study was conducted with young women external to the school context. This increased the opportunity to talk with a diverse range of young women (e.g., different school settings and socioeconomic status). The inclusion criteria for participants in the pilot study were young women aged between 14 and 18 years of age, who were currently attending secondary school, or had completed their secondary schooling within six months prior to the interview. Participants were recruited via purposeful and convenience sampling from the researcher's extended social and professional networks. Eight young women aged between 14 and 18 years participated in the pilot phase of the research project (see Appendix A for demographic details). Unlike the young women who participated in the primary research, these pilot participants primarily attended co-educational secondary schools. Necessary participant and parental information and consent forms were provided to the pilot participants and their parent/caregiver. Participation in this phase required participant as well as parental consent.

Primary research. The primary stage of the current study involved a small-scale ethnographic study, which was conducted in all-girls Catholic non-government secondary school in Melbourne, Victoria. The current research adopted ethnographic methods consistent with previous research investigating young women's negotiations of gendered discourses and positioning within the school context (e.g., Allan, 2009, 2010; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Duits, 2008; Hey, 2002; Jeanes, 2011). Ethnography or

ethnographic research lacks a single definition (Brewer, 2000; Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2012; Pole & Morrison, 2003). As a result of the fluidity in what constitutes ethnography it has been discussed as a methodology, as well as a method, or "set of methods" (Brewer, 2000; Duits, 2008; Hammersley, 2016, p. 2), and as a research practice (O'Reilly, 2012). This diversity in the ways of talking about ethnography is due to the diverse social science disciplines and theoretical orientations, which have come to adopt ethnography as a form of qualitative inquiry (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Traditionally ethnography was synonymous with early anthropological studies that sought to study non-Western cultures and communities (Erickson, 2018; Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). However, in the 1960s it was evident that researchers within the discipline of sociology were also adopting ethnographic approaches to research. Following this transition, modern forms of ethnography are now present across a range of social science disciplines and educational research (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001; Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2012).

Despite the diversity in definitions and the way in which ethnographic research can be conducted, there are a number of shared characteristics that are found across ethnographic research (Brewer, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Pole & Morrison, 2003). For instance, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) the qualities of ethnographic research include, research which is conducted:

in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher...data are gathered from a range of sources...the focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting...the analysis of data involves interpretations of meanings, functions, and

consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps also wider contexts. (p. 3)

It is these characteristics of ethnographic research design that the current study aimed to adopt. Specifically, the current small-scale ethnographic study maintained one research site in the everyday setting of an all-girls secondary school and employed a number of data collection methods (interviews, focus group, fieldwork and archival data). Furthermore, maintaining the school as the primary research site, allowed for the consideration of the discursive practices inherent within this setting and how this may inform young women's understandings of themselves and representations of successful girlhood. This is imperative, as it has been contended that schools signify a "key site where young people negotiate their understandings in the world and develop their capacity for social engagement and meaning making" (Powell, 2003, p. 204). Furthermore, McRobbie (1994) also proposed that an ethnographic method is the sole manner in which to gain an appreciation of "the social conditions and experiences, which play a role in constituting [young people's] subjectivities and identities" (p. 193). Further to this, ethnographic research focuses on the everyday lived experiences of people within a setting, or context and gives priority to communicating findings in a way that respects the participants' voice and frameworks of meaning (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

In addition, notions of social constructionism have informed contemporary forms of ethnography (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008); and synergies have been identified between feminism and ethnographic approaches to research (Allan, 2012; Hey, 2002; Skeggs, 2001). For instance, Beverley Skeggs (2001) asserts that feminism and ethnography can be considered complementary as "they both have experience, participants, definitions, meanings and sometimes subjectivity as a focus

and they do not lose sight of context” (p. 426). Similarly, due to the diversity in the ways in which ethnographic research is conducted, this approach is considered well positioned to assist in generating an intricate and comprehensive understanding and appreciation of young women’s lived experiences (Allan, 2012). It is this detailed understanding of young women’s negotiation and potential performance of available gendered discourses and subjectivities that were pursued in the current research.

However, consistent with feminist poststructuralist approaches to ethnography (Allan, 2009; Britzman, 2000; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Youdell, 2006), it is understood that it is impossible for this research site and more importantly the young women who are present in this setting to be understood or ‘known’ in totality. Rather, as Allan (2009) highlights that when conducting research with young women (or any group) their explanations should not be:

understood as ‘authentic’ knowledge emanating from true or unified subjects, just as the interviews that generated them are not to be thought of as ‘pipelines’ to people’s interiors...Rather, both are to be viewed as constructions and as partial truths that allow researchers to explore the multiple subject positions people speak from as the effect of discursive practices. (p. 148)

Consequently, together with maintaining the school as the research site, the current study also extends this focus by situating a school’s role in constructing the normative femininities of their female students within the broader sociocultural climate of postfeminism and neoliberalism. That is, Marshall and Young (2006) call for gendered research within the educational context to look beyond the boundaries of schools and examine how “complex social, political and cultural forces” also

continue to “provide legitimacy to patriarchy and reify oppressive gender relations” (p. 64).

Research Context

Following ethics approval from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) (Appendix B), consent was sought to conduct research in Catholic and Government secondary colleges across the city of Melbourne, Victoria from the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). Once approval from both educational bodies (Appendices C and D) was received approximately 30 plus secondary schools (Catholic and Victorian Government schools) were contacted via email and invited to meet with me to discuss possible participation in the current research (see Appendix E for initial email). An attempt was made to contact as diverse a range of schools as possible. Therefore, secondary colleges across inner and outer Melbourne suburbs including coeducational and all-girls schools were contacted. The initial email sent directly to principals or other relevant staff, outlined the aims of the research, the methodological approach and what participation in the research would involve for staff and students. Along with this initial email, principals were provided with a detailed Information for Principals Letter (Appendix F), the VUHREC approval memo and the relevant CEOM or DEECD letter of approval.

Soliciting schools’ engagement with, and interest in the research was at times difficult. This was to an extent not unexpected as schools and teachers are notoriously time poor. Also, due to school holidays, final year exams and similar events, negotiating an optimal time to contact schools within the project timelines was also limited. Some schools responded positively to the research, however were unable to progress any further due to various barriers and constraints. Some schools contacted

were in a period of transition to a new principal, while others had significant commitments and priorities to focus on during the research period. Many schools contacted did not provide a reason for not wanting to arrange a meeting, rather stating that my request could not be accommodated at this time. Several schools did not provide any form of response to my request to meet with them.

Initially, it was intended that this research would involve the participation of two secondary schools. To assist in exploring the diversity in young women's experiences, it was planned that the schools recruited would ideally include all-girls and coeducational settings. Further to this, it was an objective to recruit two schools diverse in sector, religious doctrine and the socio-economic status of the local area. From my initial invitations to such secondary schools, personnel from two secondary schools made contact and expressed their interest in the research and a willingness to further discuss the possible participation of their staff and students. The first of these schools was a large co-educational government school located in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne. Unfortunately, after initial conversations with the contact person at this school, my attempts to organise a meeting were not reciprocated, thus no further contact between staff at this school and myself occurred.

The second school, which expressed interest in participating in the project was an all-girls Catholic secondary college located in Melbourne. Following my initial email invitation, the school's Director of Student Welfare contacted me. After the initial email and phone communication, a meeting was organised between the Director of Student Welfare, a member of the teaching staff and myself. At the conclusion of this meeting, the school's commitment to participate in the research was confirmed.

School Profile: St. Cera's Ladies College.⁷ St. Cera's Ladies College (SCLC) was the research setting for the primary study. SCLC is a Catholic non-government girls' secondary college, located on the fringe of the inner-city suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria. SCLC has over 1100 students enrolled from years seven to twelve on a single school campus. SCLC offers their senior students both Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and Victorian Certificate of Allied Learning (VCAL) programs together with Victorian Education Training (VET) certificate options.⁸ SCLC employs approximately 100 teaching staff and 40 non-teaching staff. SCLC operates under the Catholic Education system and therefore is a non-government school. According to Catholic Education Melbourne, the Catholic school system educates one in five Victorian children and young people (www.cem.edu.au). The Catholic doctrine of the school significantly informs the school values and ethos including their mission statement and strategic plans. For instance, pertaining to their Catholic traditions, SCLC maintains a social justice focus, as well as a strong pastoral program and an orientation towards restorative practices.

Regarding the student cohort at SCLC, the vast majority of students are Australian born with only close to seven percent of students being born overseas; none of SCLC's students identify as Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander. Being a

⁷ Pseudonym

⁸ The Victorian Education system allows secondary students the option to complete their secondary school education by completing either the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or the Victorian Certificate of Allied Learning (VCAL). The latter is more focused on work-related skills and applied learning, together with numeracy and literacy education. It is not mandatory for Victorian education providers to deliver VCAL (although many do). The majority of Victorian high school graduates achieve their VCE, which provides them with a wider range of post-secondary pathways including tertiary education. VCAL is positioned more for students who want to move directly into employment or further training in the TAFE sector (Training and Further Education) (www.vcaa.vic.edu.au). As part of their VCE and VCAL programs students at SCLC are provided with the opportunity to complete a Vocational Education and Training (VET) certificate. VET certificates are nationally recognised qualifications that allow students to undertake vocational studies whilst completing secondary qualifications. Example VET qualifications include Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance and Certificate III in Sport and Recreation (www.vcaa.vic.edu.au). SCLC is among a select number of schools that provide VET opportunities for students.

Catholic school, as would be expected majority of SCLC students and their families nominate various forms of Catholicism as their religion (81.9%). However, a small segment of the SCLC school community practice other faith systems (18.1%).

According to the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) values,⁹ the school is comprised of students who come from relatively advantaged socio-educational backgrounds. As a whole, SCLC have been assigned an ICSEA value of 1090 with approximately 40 percent of their pupils being placed within the top quartile of socio-educational advantage and only approximately six percent in the bottom quartile (www.myschool.edu.au). A student's socio-educational advantage is determined primarily by their parents' occupation and educational achievement (www.acara.edu.au). Regarding students' academic performance, recent NAPLAN¹⁰ results indicate that students mostly perform at an average to above average level in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy (www.myschool.edu.au). This would be somewhat expected due to SCLC's relatively high socio-educational advantage and the prioritisation of academic achievement. For instance, in the area of writing students at years seven and nine perform above average and substantially above the average of comparative schools and all

9 ICSEA values are a measure of socio-educational advantage (SEA) that is calculated for each Australian school. ICSEA values are calculated to enable the comparison of student performance between schools that have comparable SEA. Hence, it is recognised that the academic performance of students is related to school and family characteristics such as the education level and occupation of parents, the location of the school and the socio-economic background of the school's student cohort. ICSEA is determined via the following formula: $ICSEA = SEA + Remoteness + \text{Percent Indigenous student enrolment}$. School ICSEA values are computed on a scale ($M=1000$, $SD=100$) with scores within the 500 and 1300 ranges signifying schools with very significant educationally disadvantaged pupils and those, which are comprised of students with highly privileged educational circumstances respectively. Increasing the contextual information concerning the socio-educational profile of the pupils in any one school, together with a school's ICSEA measure, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) also maps for each school the spread of students across four SEA quarters from "relative disadvantage to relative advantage" (www.myschool.edu.au).

10 The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a nationwide assessment that annually assesses students in years three, five, seven and nine. NAPLAN tests students' performance and progress in the domains of numeracy, reading, writing and language principles (www.nap.edu.au).

Australian schools respectively. Positive performance was also reported in reading, spelling and grammar, and punctuation with year nine students performing on average above the Australian school average. However, this same group of students achieved numeracy scores below the average attained by statistically similar schools (www.myschool.edu.au).

Overall, it is contended that understanding the contextual details of SCLC is essential for further exploration of the discourses (gendered or otherwise) made available to their students and how young women are positioning and locating themselves in relation to such discourses. Therefore, see Appendix G for a more comprehensive school profile further detailing important elements of the student cohort (including parental demographics), the school's culture and values as well as important policies, which contribute to the school climate at SCLC.

Participants

The current research sought to conduct data collection with two participant groups within the SCLC school setting. The primary participant group consisted of young women completing Year 10 at SCLC and the secondary participant group were members of the teaching staff at the school. The following section provides a description of both participant groups.

Primary participants: Young women. The primary participant group were Year 10 students attending SCLC.¹¹ In total 11 young women elected to participate in the study (see Table 1). At this stage I had made the decision to commence data collection in only one school, therefore this was slightly less than I had originally anticipated would participate. However, this small sample size is consistent with the

¹¹ Year 10 students were the primary target participant group as this year level is considered to be symbolic of mid-adolescence (James & Owens, 2005).

traditions of qualitative research therefore was not considered to be a disadvantage (Willig, 2013). All the young women were aged between 15 and 16 years of age.

Table 1

Student Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	COB*/Nationality	Religion
Pia	15	Australia	Catholic
Jacinta	15	Australia	Catholic
Alexis	16	Australia/Greek	Greek Orthodox
Antonia	15	Australia/Spanish-Italian-Filipino	Christian
Carissa	16	Australia/English-Italian	Catholic
Sian	15	Australia	Catholic
Talia	16	Australia/Serbian-German	Catholic
Yen	15	Australia/Vietnamese	Catholic
Louise	16	Australia	Christian
Kate	15	England	Anglican/Christian
Chiara	16	Australia/ Italian -Sri Lankan	Catholic/Buddhist

*Country of Birth (COB)

They predominantly resided within two parent homes, with only two participants living in single parent or multigenerational homes (e.g., with mother and maternal grandparents). Majority of participants reported that both their parents were employed. Parents' reported occupations ranged across a number of professional occupations and sectors, with only one participant reporting their parents were engaged in manual type work. Reflecting the overall school population, all the participating young women were born in Australia (although some identified with other nationalities) and the majority followed the Catholic faith to some extent (see Table 1 for further demographic details). In addition, to further situate the current participant group (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999), and to assist in contextualising

young women's experiences and opinions, see Appendix H for detailed individual participant descriptions.

Secondary participants: Teachers. Although the primary motivation of the research was to hear directly from young women, teachers were also invited to participate, as they could provide supplementary information concerning contextual details. Teachers were also able to comment on the school environment (and school ethos), student cohort and policy responses to student wellbeing and peer relationship issues. Also, as educators of young women, they are in a unique position to provide further insight regarding the current opportunities and challenges presented to young people today. In total three teachers¹² nominated to participate in an individual interview. Of the three teachers who took part, one was primarily a Junior Coordinator, another was a Senior Coordinator and the other was the Director of Student Welfare. The diversity in their positions within the school was considered an advantage. All three teachers had extensive teaching experience prior to commencing at SCLC in varied teaching contexts (public, co-educational, private). Overall, these participants had been teaching at SCLC from three to ten years in a range of subjects and teaching positions (see Table 2 for teacher demographics). For further description of the participant's teaching experience and teaching ethos see Appendix H.

Table 2

Teacher Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Current Position	Years Teaching Experience
Gina	Director of Student Welfare	Between 10-15 years
Valerie	Junior Coordinator	Over 20 years
Lindsey	Senior Coordinator	Between 10-15 years

¹² There are approximately 100 teachers employed at SCLC in various capacities (full-time/part-time). However, not all teachers were directly invited to participate in the research. See procedure for further details regarding recruitment of teachers.

Procedure

The following section outlines the procedural details for recruiting participants (students and teachers) for individual semi-structured interviews and the focus group, which were conducted in the research site during fieldwork.

Individual semi-structured interviews and focus group. At a year level assembly, Year 10 students at SCLC were informed about the research and invited to participate in interviews and focus groups. At this assembly I introduced myself, explained my presence at the school, the objectives of the research as well as why their contribution to such research was valued. The young women present were provided with the opportunity to ask me questions about the project and myself. They were each provided with a participant information pack that included a Letter to Participants, which outlined the details of the research, a Participant Consent Form and an additional document including descriptions and contact information for a number of accessible support services focused on the needs of young people (e.g., Youth Beyondblue and Kids Helpline). An Information Letter for parents and a parental Consent Form were also included in the participant's information pack together with a return envelope (see Appendix H for participant information pack). Participants were advised that if they would like to participate in the research they would need to return both the signed participant and parental consent forms in the return envelope to the study's dropbox, which was located in the student reception area. The information included in the participant pack was also made available to students electronically via their student portal.

When signed student and parental consent forms were returned, these young women were contacted to organise necessary meeting times. With regards to coordinating meeting times, I communicated directly with the young women via their

student email. Apart from being the easiest form of communication (as they regularly use their email), it also upheld to an extent the confidentiality of their participation in the research (as I did not communicate with them during class unless they approached me). In total, of the eleven students who consented to participate in the research eight nominated to participate in an individual interview and six participants initially nominated to participate in a focus group. Of these six, three participants selected to participate in a focus group only, and three participants nominated to participate in both an individual interview and focus group. Of the latter, two young women eventually opted to not participate in a focus group in addition to their individual interview. Therefore, only one focus group including three participants was conducted.¹³

The interviews and focus group were conducted during lunchtime and in the morning before school, in private meeting rooms located around the school campus. Interviews and the focus group were completed over two or three meetings. Individual interviews varied in duration from 70 to 100 minutes. The focus group went for approximately 80 minutes. Meeting participants on multiple occasions was not my initial intention. Nevertheless, in some instances meeting with students on multiple occasions was beneficial as it further assisted in developing rapport with the young women and, also provided the opportunity to follow up on issues raised in more detail when necessary.

Prior to commencing the interviews and focus groups, participants were provided with the opportunity to raise any questions regarding the research. Together with confirming their willingness to still partake, participants were reminded of their

¹³ Regarding the focus group participants, two young women were close friends and had requested to participate in a focus group together. The other participant although not close friends got along well with the other two girls, therefore the dynamic of the focus group was positive.

right to withdraw from the study at any time and to respond to questions as they saw fit, including opting to not respond to any question in which they perceived as intrusive. Participants were reminded and assured that their responses as well as their identity would remain confidential as their name would be replaced by a pseudonym and any identifying information would be removed. In addition, at the start of the focus group, we also discussed the issue of limited confidentiality in focus group settings. Participants agreed they should each be respectful of one another's privacy and not share what was discussed in the focus group with other peers. I also advised the participants that they should avoid explicitly discussing other individual students, to which they agreed. It was restated that if the participant at any time felt distressed or the need to discuss any issues arising from the interview or focus group, they were provided with information on support services as well as the contact details of a psychologist who was available to them free of charge. All interviews and the focus group were audio-recorded (with the permission of the young women) and transcribed verbatim for the purposes of data analysis. All identifying details were removed from the interview and focus group transcripts and students' names were replaced with a pseudonym.

In addition to ensuring participants' understanding of confidentiality and related matters, it was important that an environment was created that young women partaking in interviews and the focus group felt respected and, in some ways, had an impact on the direction of the interview. This is not to underestimate the role I played as the researcher in structuring the interview and the topics addressed (Preissle & Han, 2012). However, it was imperative from not only the perspective of my ethical standing, but also for the success of the research that young women felt respected and safe enough to share with me their intricate reflections and opinions concerning their

experiences as young women. These discussions required young women to at times demonstrate their vulnerabilities, their strengths (which can be equally as confronting for young women) and the ways in which they at times participated in creating barriers for themselves and other young women to transgress normative notions of femininity. Therefore, as a researcher, I found myself needing to engage with these young women in way that was free from judgement but also did not collude with them to further strengthen potentially limiting or sexist discourses (e.g., the inherent and normalised meanness of young women); and importantly I remained vigilant in my goal to understand these participants in the context of their developmental age and the contradictory sociocultural climate in which they are maturing. Finding this balance was imperative for the exercise of rapport building and encouraging the young women's contributions to the research.

Individual semi-structured interviews (teachers). Prior to commencing research at SCLC, I was invited to present a staff workshop regarding female friendships and bullying. Approximately, 30 male and female members of teaching and support staff voluntarily attended the interactive workshop.¹⁴ Using this as an opportunity to recruit teachers to participate, at the conclusion of the workshop, I introduced the current project's aims and methodology. The teachers in attendance were offered a participant pack that included a Letter to Participants (Teachers), outlining the details of the research and a Participant Consent Form (Appendix I), along with a return envelope. This information was also made available to teaching

¹⁴ This workshop was based on previous research I had conducted as part of a Master of Applied Psychology (Community Psychology). The workshop was one in a series of workshops, which were being offered to staff at SCLC as part of their strategic planning process. Dialogue groups and related workshops focused on different issues of concern and/or importance for the school were being offered to staff with the intention to inform their strategic planning. One of these groups was a wellbeing strand; the workshop I facilitated was a part of this strand. Other workshop topics in this strand included, adolescent sexual behaviour, drug and alcohol use in young people and same sex attractedness.

staff on their online portal. Teachers were instructed to return the signed consent form to the study's dropbox located in the student reception area or alternatively email me directly.

Once signed consent forms were received, teachers were contacted via their staff email. As outlined above three staff members elected to participate in an individual interview. At the preference of the participants, interviews took place in the private office of each participant and the duration of the interviews ranged between 70 and 85 minutes. Prior to commencing the interview, issues of confidentiality were discussed; participants were reminded of their rights to respond to interview questions as they saw fit as well as their ability to opt out of answering any questions they felt were intrusive. Interviews were audio-recorded (with the permission of the participants) and transcribed verbatim for the purposes of data analysis. Identifying details were removed from the interview transcripts and teachers' names were replaced with a pseudonym.

Data Collection Methods

Ethnographic research involves the inclusion of a number of data collection methods (Brewer, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Pole & Morrison, 2003). Thus, multiple qualitative data collection methods were employed in the current research. The advantages of engaging with multiple methods of qualitative data collection have been noted (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan, & Dupuis, 2011; Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005). With regards to the current study, data collection activities commenced in term three of the school year and continued for approximately 13 weeks into the final school term. The current research primarily utilised individual semi-structured interviews (with young women and teachers) and focus groups as well as fieldwork and archival data.

Individual semi-structured interviews. Individual semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool adopted in the current research. Semi-structured interviewing is the most common data collection technique employed in qualitative research, including feminist-informed research (Carey et al., 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Willig, 2013). That is, “interviewing is a powerful research tool for feminist researchers interested in exploring women’s experiences and the context that organize their experiences” (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 229). Furthermore, the advantage of semi-structured interviewing is that it provides the researcher with the opportunity to build rapport with their participants (Willig, 2013). The establishment of such rapport was essential for the current research as the interviews at times focused on somewhat sensitive topics for the interviewees.

The interviews focused on several broad themes regarding the participants’ experiences at school and more generally as young women, their friendships, as well as their values and beliefs surrounding contemporary representations of women. The interview schedule was developed with reference to previous research (e.g., C. E. Charles, 2010b; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2006, 2013), as well as information gained during the pilot study. Similar to the approach adopted by Duits and van Zoonen (2011), the current research considered young women to be “relatively autonomous individuals who are able to reflect on themselves, their peers and their cultural environment” (p. 495). Likewise, in the current research young women are considered “reflexive actors” (Duits & van Zoonen, 2011, p. 495) in debates concerning the wellbeing and social worlds of young women. Consequently, questions such as ‘there continues to be a lot of discussion about the pressures girls experience to be thin or to try and satisfy a particular idea of beauty. What are your thoughts on this issue?’ were included in the interview schedule. The interview

schedule also included two excerpts from Rookie which is an online website and publication written by and for young women (www.rookiemag.com). The first of these was a passage from an article entitled 'The Perfect Girl' (Harder, 2011), which reflected the contradictions the 17-year-old author felt as she was negotiating amongst her friends and society in general. The second excerpt was extract from an article entitled 'Getting Over Girl Hate' (Gevinson, 2011). In this article Tavi Gevinson (2011) the founder and editor-in-chief of Rookie proceeds to unpack the myth that girls should dislike other girls who might be perceived as better or higher performing in various ways than themselves. These extracts were included in the interview with the aim of further facilitating participant reflection and discussion. These extracts were considered particularly suitable for this purpose, as the authors were young women close in age to the current participant group (see Appendix J for semi-structured interview schedule).

The interview schedule utilised in the primary phase of the research was fairly consistent with the pilot interview schedule with some minor amendments. For instance, at the conclusion of the pilot study, a vignette and some questions were amended or removed from the interview schedule and the order of some questions were revised to improve the movement between topics. Also, to satisfy the requests of Catholic Education Melbourne, the article extract "The Perfect Girl" was also amended to be more reflective of Catholic teachings, thus language such as 'bitch' and 'slut' and references to sex were removed from the original excerpt. The issue of language and areas of discussion in regard to the student interviews was raised with the Director of Student Welfare at SCLC, who expressed trust in my judgement and the ability of the young women to navigate what was appropriate or not for themselves to discuss.

Semi-structured interviews (teachers). The semi-structured interview schedule which was utilised with the teacher participant group was designed to facilitate broad discussions regarding participants' understanding of their current school's climate, peer relations and the potential challenges their female students are negotiating in contemporary society. These interviews with teachers were also useful to further explain or provide context to notations made during fieldwork. The schedule included such questions as: 'are there particular challenges that you feel your female students are dealing with?'; and 'are there particular students you consider to be influential or leaders among the student body?' (see Appendix K for the semi-structured interview schedule).

Focus group. Rather than simply collecting further insights from individual participants, focus groups allow for a more collaborative form of data to be collected (Hays & Singh, 2012). The importance of group work in feminist-informed research has been identified (Banister et al., 2002; Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Wilkinson (1998, 1999) has called for the increased use of focus groups in feminist research, asserting that focus groups often shift the power imbalance towards participants; which was fundamental in this methodological approach. Furthermore, focus groups importantly provide "the opportunity to observe the coconstruction of meaning and the elaboration of identities through interaction" (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 229).

The objective of the focus group in the current research was to provide participants with the opportunity to further explore the issue of gender roles and expectations, the image of women in the media, body image and friendship dynamics. The focus group questions and activities were informed by previous research (e.g., L. M. Brown, 2003; C. E. Charles, 2010a, 2010b; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2006, 2013) and developed to further complement and work in conjunction with the

semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix L for focus group schedule of questions and activities). In addition to open-ended questions, two focus group activities were facilitated to assist in further stimulating discussion between participants.

The first of these structured activities was a vignette task, which had been adapted from Khattab and Jones (2007). A number of vignettes and scenarios were placed in a box and each participant was required to select a vignette and discuss what was happening in the scenario; all participants then considered corresponding questions connected to the scenario. The vignettes related to social situations commonly faced by young women in schools, including, changes in friendship dynamics or issues related to peer exclusion and potential bullying. It was intended that the use of hypothetical vignettes would assist participants in discussing the day-to-day challenges young women may negotiate (and what factors they may take into consideration) in a non-threatening way (refer to Appendix M for vignettes and activity instructions).

The second activity was a word association task adapted from Colucci (2007). This word association task required participants to list the first three words that come to mind when they heard particular words and saw contemporary images of well-known women. This activity allowed for exploration into how the participants were responding to common representations of women, and what may influence the participants' perceptions of such women. The images used for the current activity were sourced from popular media available in the public domain (refer to Appendix N for documentation related to this focus group activity).

Fieldwork. Fieldwork and the drafting of field notes was utilised as an additional data collection method (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008). Fieldwork is

understood to be the extended engagement or immersion of a researcher in any one setting with the purpose of generating a “thick description” of the research environment (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 225). This method also provides an opportunity to comprehend “how individuals construct their realities...[and] to evaluate how participants interact with each other” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 392). The researcher’s engagement in the research setting is documented using field notes. Field notes can be made up of both descriptive and reflective records (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008; Hays & Singh, 2012). With reference to descriptive notes, details of key events, the physical location and paraphrased informal conversations were included in my field notes. I also maintained a reflective journal both in addition to and together with my field notes. Such reflective styled memos are necessary as they document the feelings and reaction of the researcher and assist to position the researcher in relation to the field (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008).

In relation to the current research, the fieldwork that I engaged in was understood to be overt and fairly unstructured. Overt fieldwork is conducted in full knowledge of those in the research setting and involves the researcher making contact with “gatekeepers and potential participants and if engaging in observations, makes a conscious effort to let others know that” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 344). The primary purpose of engaging in fieldwork for this project was to develop an understanding of the school’s climate and how the school operates. I was primarily interested in what discourses concerning successful girlhood and normative femininities were being prioritised within this educational space. Therefore, how this school environment informs and influences the subjective positioning of their female students as well as their overall understanding of contemporary gender relations was of importance. Consequently, field notes focussed on the broad activities and

interactions in the classroom (e.g., topics of class discussions) as well as general activities occurring in the setting during fieldwork (e.g., school assemblies). Overall, as a relative novice in fieldwork, I entered the field with an unstructured approach and allowed for the purpose of the fieldwork to evolve throughout the research process.

The time I spent conducting fieldwork at SCLC varied from week to week and was conducted over a three-month period. Although this was not an extensive time period, it was time intensive as I was present in the school setting two to three days per week. Unlike traditional ethnographic studies, shorter periods of fieldwork are commonplace in what can be characterised as multi-method and rapid ethnographic approaches (Millen, 2000). More importantly, this period of fieldwork satisfied the objectives of the research and provided me with sufficient time to gather necessary information concerning the research setting. During this time, I familiarised myself with the campus, spent time having informal conversations with teachers in the staff room, attended various school assemblies and celebration days and undertook class observations. Regarding class observations these were firstly organised by my contact at SCLC (Director of Student Welfare). However, as the research progressed I developed a good rapport with a few teachers and I was able to negotiate entrance into classrooms. Hence, the classes I could visit were reliant on teachers allowing access. Classes at SCLC run for a duration of seventy-five minutes and I visited between twenty-five to thirty classes during my time in the research setting (some classes I visited more than once). Upon visiting a class for the first time, I was introduced to the student group as a researcher from Victoria University (or a PhD researcher). It was explained to students that I was spending time at the school researching young women, friendships and wellbeing and as part of this

research I was moving around to different classes to develop a better understanding of what happens in class. I was open to the students asking me questions. Students often asked questions regarding the purpose of my time at the school or in their classroom. I attempted to be as overt and transparent about my research and my intentions as possible. In general, students were seemingly not concerned by my presence in class. It was mentioned to me on numerous occasions by teachers that the students are familiar with people observing their classes for various reasons (e.g., student teachers).

During my observations I acted primarily in the “observer as participant role” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 226), thus during my class visits I primarily observed and had limited interaction with participants. Depending on class content and planned activities, I had a moderate level of interaction with students, and at times teachers involved me in class discussions. For instance, in more practical classes such as design, media or food technology I would often go around to different group of students to discuss what they were doing. In other classes where appropriate I would join various group discussions. Other times I would find a discreet place to sit in the classroom or more often students would instruct me where to sit. In all class visits, it was my objective not to intrude on the class or any student’s personal space and privacy. In addition, in an effort to further protect their confidentiality, I was mindful of not acting in an overtly familiar manner with the young women who participated in interviews and the focus group. In general, I felt like my presence was well received, with young women often greeting me and asking how my research was going.

With reference to the recording of field notes, if appropriate I would draft short handwritten notes or memos during fieldwork. After a day in the research setting I would expand on such notes as well as complete a reflective journal entry

when necessary. These handwritten notes were further reviewed and catalogued when transcribed electronically. Together with the insights provided by student and teacher participants, data collected from field notes were primarily used to further understand the research setting. The ways in which young women were positioned within the setting, including how understandings of normative girlhood (as well as potentially alternative ways of 'doing' girl) were disseminated to young women was of primary interest during fieldwork.

Archival data. To gain increased contextual information regarding SCLC and their student body, archival materials were also considered as a secondary form of data collection. Such materials included a range of school policies, value statements and newsletters which were provided to me by the school or available in the public domain via their website. Hay and Singh (2012) explain that in many cases the absence of such secondary forms of data collection results in "important aspects of a study left unexamined or not understood" (p. 287). In addition, SCLC also provided me with statistical data regarding student and parent demographics. This data was primarily used to develop the school profile and further develop an understanding of research setting.

Validity of Knowledge and Data

The issue of producing 'good' or 'quality' qualitative research has generated extensive debate and discussion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kvale, 1995).

Traditionally, qualitative research was (and in some cases, continues to be) inappropriately evaluated against criteria and principles, which originated from within positivist and quantitative research traditions (Morse, 2018; Willig, 2013). However, it has been recognised that customary concepts of reliability, validity and generalisability have limited applicability in the evaluation of qualitative research

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Kvale, 1995; Morse, 2018; Patton 2015; Willig, 2013). In response to this call for the evaluation and legitimisation of qualitative research (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001), Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1986) developed an evaluation approach fitting to constructionist qualitative inquiry. Whilst keeping to the underlining ‘scientific’ sentiments of positivist notions of evaluation, Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed “credibility as an analog to internal validity, transferability as an analog to external validity, dependability as an analog to reliability, and conformability to objectivity” (pp. 76-77). However, Patton (2015) and others (Whittemore et al., 2001) warn against and to an extent question the possibility of fixed criteria for evaluating the ‘quality’ of qualitative research, as qualitative research itself is not fixed or singular in its approach to inquiry.

In addition to acknowledging the potential diversity in qualitative research, in more recent times it has been proposed that judgements of qualitative research need to be informed by the theoretical orientation and anticipated objective of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Patton, 1999, 2015). For instance, social constructionist orientation fundamentally views knowledge construction and the possibilities of qualitative inquiry in ways that renders traditional understandings of validity and reliability as incompatible (Burr, 2015; Patton, 2015). As explained by Burr (2015), social constructionist inquiry does not pursue objective understandings of ‘truth’, rather privileges that notion that “there can be no final description of the world, and ‘reality’ may be inaccessible or inseparable from our discourse about it; all knowledge is provisional and contestable, and accounts are local and historically/culturally specific” (p. 177). Therefore, research conducted within the frameworks of social constructionism does not aim to achieve generalisable outcomes or identify unitary truths. Rather, value is located in research, which focuses on

subjectivity and produces in-depth and contextual understanding of people's experiences and the ways they construct meaning (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis

Overall, the current study utilised multiple data sources. The primary data sources included individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group with SCLC students as well as individual semi-structured interviews with a small number of teaching staff. Field notes and archival data sources were considered supplementary data sources providing further illustrative evidence. Individual interviews (with both students and staff) and the focus group were transcribed verbatim. The data collected in the current study was analysed thematically as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This thematic analysis was informed by a social constructionism paradigm (Burr, 2015) and feminist poststructuralist understandings (Gavey, 1989, 1997, 2011; Weedon, 1997) of the role of language and discourse in young women's development of gendered subjectivity. Therefore, the focus of this social constructionist informed thematic analysis is the "broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings...underpinning what is actually articulated in the data...the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 85). This data analysis framework provides the opportunity for the culturally situated discourses available to young women to be nominated, whilst considering "the social context of language and its function in or relation to structures of power" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Gavey, 1997, p. 56; Shefer et al., 2008; Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

More specifically, thematic data analysis refers to the identification, analysis and interpretation of patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allowed for both inductive and deductive approaches to the current data analysis

activities (Willig, 2013). An inductive approach provides the opportunity to identify themes “firmly grounded in the data” (Willig, 2013, p. 60). While no pre-determined categories or themes were identified prior to the data analysis, a deductive technique maintains the theoretical orientations of the research central to the analysis and provides an opportunity to explore the ways in which young women’s responses in the current research were consistent with previous literature (Willig, 2013).

Despite this data analysis process being far from linear, it was conducted in line with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) phases of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke outline a six-staged approach to conducting thematic analysis. Consistent with the first phase of this data analysis framework, the initial objective was for the data (across data sources) to become well known and familiar to the researcher. Hence, this process began with the reading and re-reading of the interview and focus group transcripts to gain an understanding and draw meaning from the participants’ responses. At this stage initial notes and memos were made regarding points of interest in the data set. Following this familiarisation with the interview and focus group transcripts, phase two of the initial coding of the transcripts was completed with the assistance of NVivo, whilst subsequent coding and refinement of themes was completed manually. Welsh (2002) contends using both computer assisted and manual methods of data analysis can produce strong data analysis outcomes.

Whilst reading and coding transcripts, summary notes continued to be made, assisting in the identification and conceptualisation of themes and sub-themes (phase three). A theme was understood to constitute “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Furthermore, whilst progressing back and forth through these phases of thematic data analysis, it is

important to recognise as the researcher I perform an “*active* role” in recognising themes, their level of importance (or lack thereof) to the research questions, how these findings are reported and what data extracts will be shared (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). That is, these themes do not simply materialise as “a passive account of the process of analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). Moreover, as outlined in phase four of Braun and Clarke’s guidelines, the reviewing, modification and refinement of themes and subthemes across the data set continued. As this process of confirming and reconsideration of themes occurred, meaningfully differences, contradictions (as well as similarities) were identified in an effort to appreciate and “capture the contours of the coded data” (Braun & Clarke, 2003, p. 91). Themes, their initial label, description and the illustrative quotes were organised into several tables to further highlight the connections between themes and sub-themes (phase five). Lastly, providing the final opportunity to confirm the thematic analysis of the data, the findings were composed (phase six) into three distinct finding chapters. These findings were produced with the current research questions as well as previous research in mind; and involved the selection of appropriate illustrative quotes to sufficiently evidence the reported themes and sub-themes.

Importantly, it should be acknowledged thus whilst young women in the current study were regarded as knowledgeable of their own experiences, there was also a requirement to consider “what is occurring on a more contextualized level” (Britzman, 2000; Pomerantz et al., 2013, p. 193). Consistent with the poststructuralist tradition Britzman (2000) contends, “subjects may well be the tellers of experience; but every telling is constrained, partial, and determined by the discourse and histories that prefigure, even as they might promise representation” (p. 32). Thus, similar to previous research (Pomerantz et al., 2013), the young women in the current study

were often contradictory in the ways in which they utilised postfeminist and neoliberal discourses when discussing their own subject positions as well as broader issues such as sexism and gender inequality. Although this was anticipated, the challenge was to ensure that through the current thematic data analysis the intricacies and messy negotiations depicted in the talk of young women was represented appropriately and in context of the complexities of their current sociocultural milieu.

Chapter Conclusion

Overall, the current qualitative inquiry utilised ethnographic research methods to examine the ways in which young women understand and perform normative femininities, in particular within the setting of an all-girls Catholic secondary college. This secondary school caters to young women who are of relatively high socio-educational advantage. From within this student cohort, eleven young women formed the primary participant group. The secondary participant group was comprised of three members of the teaching staff. Multiple data collection methods were utilised including individual semi-structured interviews, a focus group, fieldwork and archival data. The data collected was analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Importantly, the current study including the methodology, data collection techniques and approaches to data analysis, were all informed by social constructionism (Burr, 2015; Davis & Gergen, 1997). Together with this theoretical orientation, the current inquiry also drew on feminist poststructuralist principles (Weedon, 1997). Consequently, these theoretical paradigms recognise the fluidity and contradictions in the ways in which young women perform their subjectivity and position themselves in relation to culturally available (gendered) discourses (Gavey, 1997; A. Jones, 1993). It is these movements and contradictions within young women's talk, which is apparent throughout the proceeding findings chapters. Particularly, their

understandings of normative femininities and their negotiations of sexism and feminism, which are, examined in chapters six and seven respectively. The following findings chapter (Chapter 5) further explores the discursive climate of SCLC.

Chapter 5: Schools as Safe Spaces? Challenges and Complexities of St. Cera's Ladies College

This first findings chapter will use the safe space concept (Mansfield, 2014; The Roestone Collective, 2014), to examine SCLC and the prospects and limitations this educational space presents for students. Educational settings and schools have been recognised as a key site in which young women perform and mediate their gendered subjectivities (Allan & Charles, 2014; Davison & Frank, 2006; Hill, 2015; Reay, 2010; Reynolds & Bamford, 2016; Woolley, 2017). Consequently, schools are social institutions that go beyond providing young people with a formal education; they are settings in which sociocultural norms and inequalities are often reproduced and reaffirmed (Fisette & Walton, 2015; Youdell, 2005, 2006). However, Weis and Fine (2001) highlight that schools have the potential to be sites where young people can also question hegemonic discourses, including those pertaining to gender; and contest taken for granted ideas and notions regarding themselves, their peers and others more broadly.

Likewise, feminist community psychologists Meg Bond and Sharon Wasco (2017) argue that gender does not solely function at the individual level. Settings, including formal school settings, have entrenched structures and norms together with gendered beliefs, values, and narratives (Bond & Wasco, 2017; Wasco & Bond, 2010). Hence, settings can “incorporate gendered opportunities and constraints” (p. 372) by forming and enforcing customary ways of being and operating within a setting based on individuals’ perceived gender (Bond & Wasco, 2017). Consequently, young people who are considered to have transgressed the ‘gendered’ standards and norms of a setting (e.g., a school) can be subjected to ostracism, and their ability to participate fully in the space significantly limited (Bond & Wasco, 2017).

Therefore, schools (together with other settings and institutions) have a profound role in the subjectification of students (McLeod, 2000; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Youdell, 2004, 2005). This is particularly pertinent for young women, as it has been asserted that schools can limit young women's engagement and performativity of diverse femininities, in favour of traditional schoolgirl subjectivity (Archer et al., 2007; Walkerdine, 1990; Youdell, 2005, 2006). It is important to consider if and how schools can provide settings for young women that potentially allow them to critique hegemonic discourses concerning gender, normative femininities and sexism, which continue to be prevalent in today's postfeminist and neoliberal society.

Specifically, SCLC as a gendered setting (Bond & Wasco, 2017; Wasco & Bond, 2010) is a fundamental site (although not the only important setting) in which the young women in the current study learn and perform normative femininities. This key site also contributes to these young women's awareness and position regarding macro-level issues relating to sexism and gender inequality. Therefore, using the safe space concept (Mansfield, 2014; The Roestone Collective, 2014), this chapter will examine the opportunities, challenges and limitations SCLC as an educational setting presents for young women. Key findings in the current study centre on how SCLC demonstrates the potential to be a safe space for young women; as well as, the limitations inherent in the school setting, restricting the possibility of creating such spaces. Figure 1 illustrates these co-occurring positive and negative aspects of SCLC, which effectively work to advance as well as limit the emancipating potential of what is occurring within this setting. These findings were primarily based on interviews with three female teachers at SCLC. The teachers interviewed are experienced members of the school's leadership team, therefore, as well as, sharing their personal views and attitudes regarding the education of young women, they are also in a

position to reflect on the overall objectives and challenges specific to SCLC. Further supplementing these discussions with members of the teaching staff, this chapter will also draw on fieldwork notes and the young women’s perceptions (gathered from eight individual interviews and a focus group with three participants) regarding the positives and negatives of SCLC as an educational setting.

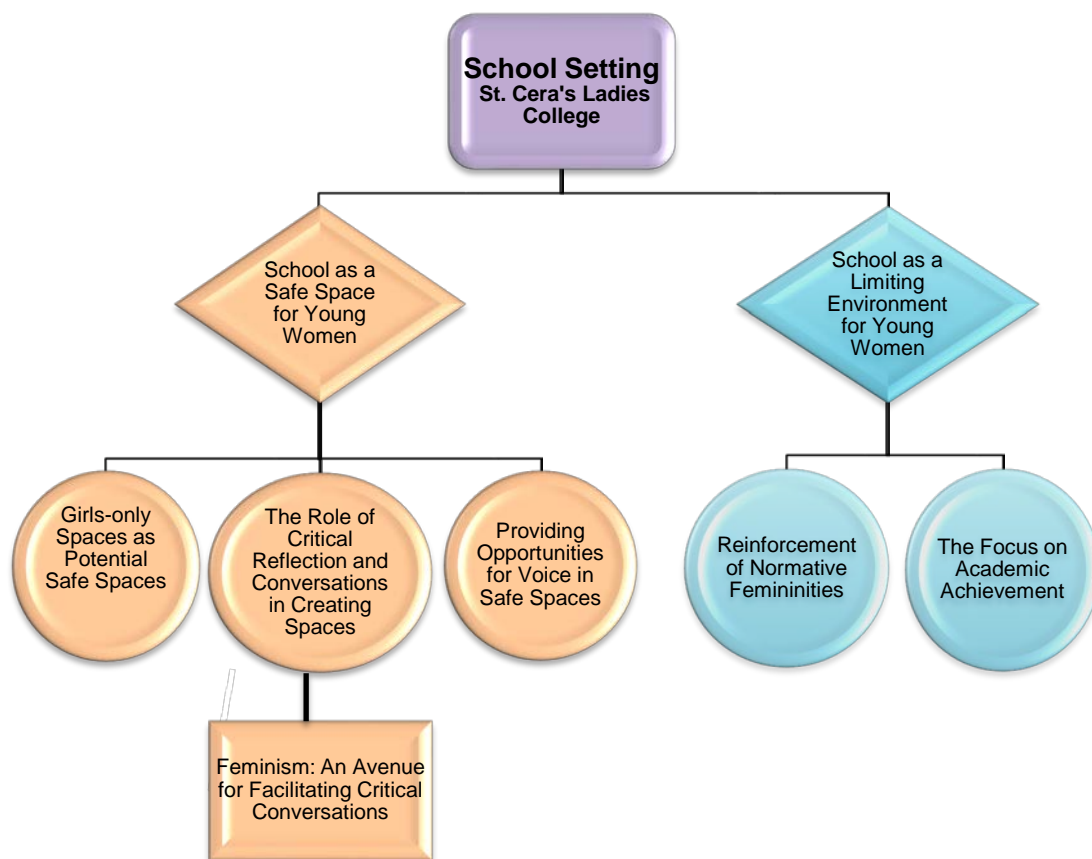


Figure 1: Affirmative and restrictive elements of St Cera’s Ladies College

School as a Safe Space for Young Women

The notion of safe spaces originated from the early stages of the feminist (or women’s) movement, however it continues to be applied in a range of contexts with diverse objectives and definitions (Barrett, 2010; The Roestone Collective, 2014). Safe spaces have been understood as spaces where individuals including those from marginalised groups (including, young women and women) can collectively speak

back to and resist various forms of oppression (McConnell, Todd, Odahl-Ruan, & Shattell, 2016). Additional definitions also characterise safe spaces as settings (e.g., classrooms and educational settings) that “allow students to feel secure enough to take risks, honestly express their views, and explore knowledge, attitudes and behaviours” (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p. 50). In specific reference to schools, Mansfield (2014) asserts that for schools to effectively generate safe spaces for female students there are several fundamental elements that need to be addressed. Among these are participating in critical conversations that speak to sociocultural norms and the “entrenched ‘isms’” (p. 61) as well as prioritising the voices of young women in the setting (Mansfield, 2014).

Safe spaces are understood to be dynamic, complex, and can be inclusive and simultaneously exclusionary (McConnell et al., 2016; The Roestone Collective, 2014). Thus, the following consideration and discussion of SCLC as a potential safe space for students is not neat and absolute, but rather is reflective of, and conducive to, the “normative messiness” of safe spaces (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1348). As outlined in Figure 1, in exploring SCLC as a prospective safe space for young women, the themes which emerged from the data analysis included, SCLC as a girls-only space, the role of critical reflection and conversations in creating safe spaces, providing avenues for and the valuing of student voice. These concepts will be discussed below.

Girls-only spaces as potential safe spaces: “The fact that you can be with just girls and like everyone is safe”. Safe spaces can be categorised as “separatist safe spaces” or “inclusive safe spaces” (McConnell et al., 2016, p. 476; The Roestone Collective, 2014). The former refers to spaces, which are organised around a single shared aspect of identity (such as gender) or focus, whilst membership in the latter is

not dependent on a collective identity (McConnell et al., 2016). As is common with safe spaces, SCLC could be described as sitting between these two extremes. SCLC is in one way a separatist space, due to being an all-girls secondary school, however students vary on a number of intersecting identity markers (e.g., ethnicity, religion, sexuality, ability), also making the space ‘inclusive’ (as in a number of collective identities may be represented in the space). As confirmed by McConnell et al. (2016), “separatist spaces organized around a particular intersection of identities function as inclusive spaces along other axes of identity” (p. 485).

With regards to SCLC, it is not the assertion that because it is an all-girls educational setting that is it an automatic safe space for female students. However, it is contended that this separatist element of the setting adds to the potential for a safe space to be developed for female students, where they can challenge themselves and the status quo determined by normative femininities and hegemonic discourses of ‘doing’ successful girlhood. For instance, Lindsey who is a Senior Coordinator at SCLC, acknowledges the role the school has in assisting young women to build their confidence and points to the benefit of the all-girls space to achieve this goal:

I think it’s good that they’re here in an all-girls school so that their confidence can be built a little bit more...It’s definitely a world that’s geared more towards boys. So, I think we’ve got a role in – in helping girls in that respect. That’s probably an issue that boys don’t have. So, they’re told from the outset, you know, they’re the best and they can do anything...With girls, they’re told that there’s certain things they can’t do.

Furthermore, girl-only settings such as SCLC are presented with a unique opportunity to educate and challenge young women in a context where “gender-related self-knowledge” (p. 283) may be less apparent due to the absence of male

peers (Kessels & Hannover, 2008). For instance, subjects like mathematics and science are often characterised as traditionally more masculine and suited to the ability of boys (Francis et al., 2017; Kessels & Hannover, 2008). However, as specified by Sian (student), female students are provided with varied opportunities including those considered to fall within the masculine domain:

I really like this school. I think the education is really good and I get opportunities to have lots of experiences. Like I went to Japan last term for studying the language and that's a really good opportunity...also like I really like science so there's a lot of opportunities for girls who like science and maths and that kind of thing.

Kessels and Hannover (2008) determined that female students in girls-only physics classes, in comparison to mixed gender classes, demonstrated notably better physics aptitude confidence. Many of the young women interviewed also cited science and maths as being areas of interest both at school as well as something they may want to pursue in the future. Comparable to the female students in Kessels and Hannover's (2008) research, Pia (student) demonstrated a secure self-concept with regards to her abilities in the areas of maths and science, stating "I do well in school most of the time: maths and science sort of things".

Furthermore, similar to her peers, Carissa (student) also highlighted an interest in these traditionally 'masculine' subject domains, "I really like doing art kind of subjects, but I'm also interested in sciences". Interestingly, as is evident in the following exchange, Carissa does have an awareness that there are some activities and subjects that are not "stereotypically things that women would be into" however she does not feel restricted by this:

Like in my life I feel like there isn't too many stereotypes coz I know with some of my friends [pauses]...They are into things that sometimes aren't stereotypically things that women would be into...some of my friends, they went to the mock UN meeting...and some of them do like debating and like science...But I don't know, I don't really feel like I have to be pressured to do something because, like I never really noticed that females aren't really involved in like more science based careers. Like there's a lacking number of females in that career area.

Hence, it is evident that Carissa to an extent is aware of the gendered stereotypes about young women's participation in science and other school activities. However, her continued interest in such areas could partly be because of the single-sex space that SCLC provides female students to explore these areas of interest; as well as the school creating such opportunities for female students and emphasising young women can participate in these arenas (despite historical gendered stereotypes).

In addition to providing young women with a well-supported maths and science program, SCLC places a heavy emphasis on sport participation and achievement. This was evident during fieldwork and in the review of archival materials (e.g., school newsletters, website content, and school documents). Lindsey (teacher) further confirmed the investment the school makes in competitive sports and how this is part of the active work the school does in creating a connected school community:

There's a lot of opportunity here...I think the sports program that we have here makes a big difference...it's not the sort of thing that you get in a school like this...I think that makes a big...with connectedness to the school...it's something that's important to the school to have that...I think it does pay off,

you know, there's increase in school pride...girls working together, connectedness. You just need to see them when they're out doing that sort of thing...it's not even about winning... they don't win all the time, but when they – when they do, they're happy. I think they have a pretty good attitude.

The focus on a wide variety of sports at SCLC (including but not limited to, athletics, soccer, football (AFL), basketball, gymnastics, aerobics, swimming, softball, tennis, netball and hockey) is considered a positive element of the school environment.

Previous research has emphasised the complexity of young women's engagement and disengagement with physical activity (or sport) and physical education in the school context particularly during adolescence (Azzarito et al., 2006; Hill, 2015; Jeanes, 2011). Young women's gender performativity and negotiations of gendered discourses have been cited as reason for this complex (dis)engagement within the context of sports (particularly those considered male dominated) for some young women (Azzarito et al., 2006; Hill, 2015). However, it has also been proposed young women's participation in sport "can provide girls with the opportunity to resist traditional gender norms and perform alternative scripts of femininity" (Jeanes, 2011, p. 402). In a somewhat similar manner, Gina (teacher) contends that sport can assist young women to "stretch" themselves:

The idea was very much that the girls get involved. Mainly, to give them opportunities for success, so even if they're not good in the classroom, there are some other options...to meet new people to get them out of their cliques more than anything...But it's also about the girls getting out of their comfort zone and trying something and stretching themselves a little bit. You know, that idea that if they don't ever stretch themselves everything becomes scary...push yourself in a safe environment.

Furthermore, together with providing these varied opportunities and reduced chances for cross-gender comparison (Hill, 2015; Kessels & Hannover, 2008), it is contended that being an all-girls setting, also has implications for how the setting is experienced by female students, and therefore contributes to SCLC's potential to provide safe spaces for their students. In their examination of a women's only music festival as a counterspace, McConnell et al. (2016) reported that participants experienced this women's only setting "very differently than other settings in their lives" (p. 479). Apart from feelings of physical safety, this setting provided women the opportunity to "express, celebrate, and affirm their marginalized identities as women" (McConnell et al., 2016, p. 479). Likewise, students shared that SCLC's all-girl environment was positive because it allowed them to relate to each other as young women. For example, Chiara (student) stated that "you just feel more comfortable" in an all-girls school, while Alexis (student) explains how girls have a shared understanding and can discuss issues like their menstruation without restrictions:

Everyone just like shouts at you, you talk about the stupidest stuff and you don't care. You can talk about like your periods and stuff...The girls will be like, "Ohhhhh, like nah! Don't talk to me! It's not that time now!". So that's a good thing because you can all like relate and stuff.

Similarly, student interviewees Pia and Yen also point to this notion of young women being able to effectively "relate" to each other:

I honestly like it. I really like our school. I feel like all the girls are pretty supportive and nice. It's a really good community most of the time, pretty much all of the time...I think in class it's probably better to concentrate [laughs] and to be able to help each other out. We're all going through similar

issues, I suppose, and can relate a bit more I think. So, it's probably a bit more focused with all girls. (Pia, student)

You can...not be yourself *more* [interviewee's own emphasis] but...I feel like in an all-girls school...Like you can talk about your periods so freely. "Hey, can I just have a pad? I'm on my period", but I imagine in a different [school] like where girls – [in a co-ed] school, you'd have to be more quiet about it...in an all-girls school, you have more freedom to talk about girl issues as well. So that's really good. (Yen, student)

Further illustrating this "supportive" environment among female students at SCLC, as characterised by Pia and her peers, Junior Coordinator Valerie describes the potential encouragement and comradery she witnessed among young women at a performing arts day held at the school:

We recently had house arts, so girls were able to sing, play an instrument, or show off their talent. And I was gob-smacked by the amount of people that volunteered...to me that's saying we're doing something right, that girls feel really comfortable. They're proud of what they've done, and they know they're not going to get shut down...- the beautiful voices that we have in-Year 7, and they weren't show off-y kind of thing, it was just like, "Oh, okay, I'll give it a go". I thought the way the audience just responded, they just really embraced it, and no one walked out of there going, "Ugh, check her out. She thought she was so good", or whatever. They were genuinely celebrating with them. And I think that was the whole essence of the afternoon, the spirit...

This theme of SCLC as a supportive and comfortable environment for young women was also expressed by Talia (student) who also demonstrates a preference for being in a single-sex school for similar reasons:

Talia: I love it here, which is kind of really cool coz like in primary school it was co-ed and I don't want to be in a co-ed school...I like the fact that you can be with just girls and like everyone's safe. Do you get what I mean? It's like everyone knows about your problems [laughs]...Everyone's really supportive and they understand because you are a girl, like they can relate to you a lot better.

Linda (Interviewer): Yeah. So, you said that you feel safe in a girls' school. What do you mean by that?

Talia: Yeah ahhh [pauses] not safe, just like [pauses] they know how to make you feel better about yourself in a way and there's no discrimination...It's just like you know that you're really important here...sometimes in primary school, boys can put you down or you're separated by that kind of thing...they really focus on your success here and I really like how they teach us how to be...that they make us feel really important.

Therefore, it was evident that SCLC was providing opportunities for students to develop shared understandings as young women, and according to Talia make female students feel “really important” and “better about [themselves]”. It was also suggested that the absence of boys and the male gaze in this context allowed for female students to be more confident. Year 10 student Carissa shared this sentiment:

I really like being at [SCLC]. I don't really have any problems with it...[Pauses] I feel like I can be more confident here. Like I'm not feeling any

pressures by boys or anything or getting any distractions...I just like the atmosphere.

While, Antonia (student) considers the introduction of the boys in the context may be restrictive for female students:

I like being in an all-girls environment. I think it's more relaxed. I think if this was a co-ed school...I don't think I would be as comfortable or as carefree as I was right now...I think it just wouldn't be the same as it is now. I think girls would probably be a lot more reserved.

In summary, although SCLC's single-sex context does not intrinsically make this a safe space for female students, the above points provide support for the notion that this setting is conducive to the development of safe spaces for young women. The preceding reflections highlight that for the young women interviewed, they expressed a confidence in and a positive orientation towards traditionally masculine subjects such as maths and science. These young women also pointed to their school being a place where they felt relaxed and comfortable, more confident, free from discrimination and less distracted. Also, in the absence of boys, the young women outlined that female students were able to support and relate to each other and discuss issues like their menstruation without restriction. It is also important to acknowledge that despite these positive aspects of being in an all-girls environment, both students and teachers interviewed commented on the negative aspects of an all-girls setting, including the hierarchical nature of young women's friendships and the judgemental looking and talking which occurs between students. This is not unexpected due to the complexity of young women's friendships and social worlds (L. M. Brown, 2003). Hence, although the male gaze may be directly absent in a single sex setting, young women still have ways of governing each other's performances of femininity (these

issues will be addressed in Chapter 6) (Hill, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to further consider the activities and relationships being developed in this space.

The role of critical reflection and conversations in creating safe spaces:

“So it’s giving them stimulus to create a conversation to then break it down”.

Fisette and Walton (2015) suggest in contemporary schooling contexts, students are forced to “engage in schooling practices that ignore the world in which students live” (p. 62), to focus instead on academic benchmarks and assessments. Although the objectives of SCLC are to produce high achieving young women, it is asserted that a part of this objective is also to assist students to be critical and socially minded community members. One way in which it is hoped this is achieved is through the promotion of social justice awareness and activities (e.g., fundraising and opportunities for volunteer work with communities outside the school environment). This orientation towards social justice and outreach is informed by the Catholic underpinnings of SCLC, and set by the principal, who is characterised as “very sort of politically aware”, thus there is “an expectation that [the students] would all have an awareness of and be involved with” (Gina, teacher) such activities. As a student of SCLC, Yen also confirms the school’s focus on social justice:

The school...they have so much to do with social justice [pauses] like it’s really good...[SCLC] is like really active in the community, which is really good. I guess being a student here, you get more of...I think a community feel.

In addition to providing students with the opportunity to support social issues that are of interest to them (students are able to highlight issues they wish to support), the focus on social justice values was considered as a potential avenue to teach students about the privilege they exercise, as well as helping them to negotiate contemporary

pressures by providing them with a more critical perspective. Two teachers discussed this further:

I think it's good. I think that they see that there's something out there other than themselves. There's something bigger than them, helps them to not be so self-centred as well. And for our – yeah – middle class sort of girls and I know having been with them as well and I've come from a very similar background to them myself to go down there you know, to the [Outreach Community]¹⁵ and see how disadvantaged people are. It's a real eye-opener and such a shock and the girls I think, you know, they find that it is such a shock. But I think they – can see that – how – how privileged they are and not take things for granted. (Lindsey, teacher)

I think it's got a bit of well-being benefit to it in that it raises their awareness of everyone else and the difficulties they have and that idea of comparison. And it's not always easy, like, as an adolescent girl but sometimes I think it does hit them, the fact that my bestie hates me today is nothing compared to the fact that that woman hasn't got anywhere to go. So, it gives them a little bit of perspective as well. (Gina, teacher)

Therefore, it is suggested that together with expanding young women's school experiences, social justice activities and principles provide a potential avenue to increase the prospects of young women at SCLC developing critical reflexivity skills. Similarly, it is argued that a safe space allows young women to not only critique along the lines of gender, rather this space should also allow for reflection of other identity categories including race and class and how these may intersect to inform

¹⁵ Pseudonym

one's lived experiences (Mansfield, 2014). At a minimum, Lindsey and Gina indicate that for some young women, they enjoy this community engagement and the encouragement of this social consciousness is effective in motivating them to continue to participate in volunteer work outside the school context:

There are some [students] that will keep going back and even go on their school holidays, like to go to the community – and serve dinners...or they go to a soup kitchen, or they go to a men's home and visit people there, like there's lots of things that they do. And they go in their own times...They see it as something that they should do – as so role that they need to – fulfil.

(Lindsey)

Two of the girls have gone to [Local Housing Estate] every week since their first week of going. And they're in Year 12. And they just love it and they play with the kids and they try and tutor some of the kids who are still going to school who are in that community, so it's – once they experience it, they really want to keep doing it. (Gina)

Apart from the potential value and enjoyment that some young women at SCLC gain from these experiences (Kackar-Cam & Schmidt, 2014), together with being more socially minded, it is suggested that such increased awareness can potentially encourage young women to push the boundaries of normative femininities (or at least assist them in developing the skills to do so). Martin and Beese (2016) state that social justice and service learning “can influence girls to talk back to oppressive forces...engaging in resistant voice, which involves questioning harmful societal or school practices, can facilitate gains in agency, belonging, and competence” (p. 212).

In addition to these attempts to promote critical reflexivity using social justice principles, engaging in direct critical conversations and taking advantage of potential teaching moments that allow students to reflect on their gendered experiences has also been nominated as fundamental in creating safe spaces (Mansfield, 2014; Weis & Fine, 2001). The teachers interviewed indicated that providing pathways for critical discussions regarding gender expectations, media literacy and sexuality was taking place at SCLC. As explained by Gina the Director of Student Welfare, the role of critical conversations is becoming more prevalent at SCLC:

I talked about the different efficacy of pastoral leaders...the ones who are more effective are the ones who have a conversation and a debate, and critique things, and break it down. I think the girls love Media for the same reason because they spend a lot of time in Media critiquing and breaking stuff down...we're getting better at giving them opportunities to view things or use clips, or speakers, or articles where it does create the conversation...giving them stimulus to create a conversation to then break it down. And I think the staff are getting more confident with that because we do it as a staff and some people do it with their kids and it's highlighting that those people are doing it with their kids that is giving other staff the confidence to do it. I think we have gotten better at that.

In addition to highlighting Media classes as being one way students are encouraged to critique gendered messages, Gina (teacher) suggests that teachers are engaging in such conversations between themselves and are increasingly more confident to have these conversations with their female students. She readily admits that not all teaching staff are effective in engaging students in such critical conversations. Despite this, it could be argued that this willingness to engage in

critical conversations is potentially becoming an increasing part of the school climate. This is further evidenced by observations during fieldwork activities, where on multiple occasions, teachers' efforts were observed to encourage their students to think critically about their experience as young women. One such instance occurred during a Year 7 health class; young women were challenged to consider why is it that the majority of girls feel the need to remove body hair in adolescence and boys do not necessarily express such a need. This was done in the context of a lesson about the physical changes young women and men experience during puberty.

In a similar class, the students raised concerns about breast growth and how they found boys looked at their chests instead of their faces because of their male "sexual desires". As a result of these comments, the teacher engaged students in an age appropriate conversation regarding this, and how such behaviours should not just be accepted from boys; as well as their rights as young women to not feel uncomfortable. In addition to allowing young women to raise critical topics in class; other teaching moments occurred during classes where positive female role models were raised, as well as during conversations about positive and negative risk taking, sex education and why a young woman may want to engage in or delay sexual activity.

Such examples alone are not presumed to be necessarily emancipating from the hegemonic normative femininities young women are negotiating. However, these lessons and critical discussions expose students to other ways of being and allow for a (mostly) safe place for young women to explore their values and ways of thinking. Such observations confirm the significant role adults or teachers (as well as other young people) play in enabling and prompting young people to engage in critical discussions (Weis & Fine, 2001).

Furthermore, this desire for critical conversations is not just promoted by some of the teaching staff; rather according to Lindsey (teacher) students motivate such discussions also:

They love to talk about [same-sex marriage]¹⁶...Anything contentious in the media gets them talking and they've got an opinion on...anything or anyone that the Catholic Church places constraints on – they'll have an opinion on. We're doing Sex Ed in Year 10 at the moment, so they've got pretty strong opinions on contraception, sexual relationships and things like that, gender, anything – anything like that really...They're very – they're very open-minded. Well, they say they are.

Interestingly, the traditions and values of the Catholic Church are also reflected on or included in such discussions. The young women are aware of the potential “constraints” placed on them with regards to particular issues as a result of the school’s orientation to Catholicism. Irrespective of such overarching principles, students were also considered to form their own “strong opinions”. For example, Valerie (teacher) highlights students’ tendency to want to discuss issues, which are contradictory to the values of the school’s faith. However, unlike Lindsey (teacher), Valerie unfortunately seems to question some students’ motives for such conversations particularly, the motivations of senior students:

Oh yeah, gay marriage right, you know, and whether that's just trying to - to ask the question we are in a Catholic school, like, to try and be controversial. And maybe even it is like, “are we allowed to believe in that?”, especially for the younger ones. “I'm seeing this in the newspaper. They're saying it's wrong.

¹⁶ These interviews were conducted prior to same-sex marriage laws being passed in Australia in late 2017. However, the lead up to this eventual change in the Marriage Act generated extensive debate and commentary in various public, political and media circles.

Is it really? Can you confirm that for me?”. Whereas the older girls just like to think, well if it's - we need to break that rule. If it's a rule we're going to break it.

Valerie's reflection and questioning of students' intentions could be considered as limiting the potential for open dialogue within the classroom. It is also indicative of traditional notions of schoolgirl subjectivities which position young women as passive, thus when young women are assertive and question the status quo within the educational context, they could be seen as deviant and attention seeking (Archer et al., 2007).

Valerie's statement also points to the complexity of school settings particularly those, which are informed by religious teachings and ideologies. Previous research has also considered the role religious schooling contexts have on teaching pedagogy, and on a teacher's ability to meet the needs of their female students despite potential tension between these needs and Catholic principles (McCarthy, 1999). Similarly, the potential role Catholic values and the overall belief system has in restricting as well as possibly enriching critical reflection was discussed:

It's one of the things I found really hard here is the Catholic context. So, there are certain things that theoretically according to the Catholic Church don't happen but happen in the girls' lives and how you walk that line. And I think for the girls they feel that there's a lot of things that get silenced particularly in their RE¹⁷ classes...so trying to open those conversations is really hard...I think it depends on the teacher. And it's been really interesting because we've been working on a strategic project this year. It's been one of the things we've been looking at. Some of the things I was surprised by, so some staff are at the

17 Religious Education

level where talking about IVF and contraception they get worried about. Other staff are happy to talk about those, but they won't talk about sex; because they shouldn't be having sex before marriage, which is unrealistic. And then there's the fact that we do have a fair portion as you would, of girls who are still exploring their sexuality and they're like, "Well, I think I like girls. I think I like both girls and guys, I don't know", but those conversations around that and the language around that of staff is always a boyfriend breaking up with you or the assumption that all of the girls are heterosexual which means that those girls feel on the outer...And for us to help staff to find the language to be inclusive without bagging out the Catholic Church. Sometimes I think it is just...about saying your partner dumps you or you and your partner, or your romantic interest or something that doesn't put a gender role on it. (Gina, teacher)

Therefore, it is evident that hetero-normative discourses continue to be prevalent in educational settings (Youdell, 2005), although this is potentially compounded in this case likely due to the Catholic doctrine of the school. It is also clear that the teaching staff (at least some) seem to be aware of the changing discourses concerning gender and sexuality, which young people are engaging with and therefore, are attempting to disrupt this assumption of hetero-normative.

Furthermore, Gina's (teacher) comments reiterate that this engagement with issues, which are potentially counterintuitive to the teachings of Catholicism, but nevertheless critical topics for young women, is a work-in-progress at SCLC. From Gina's reflections as well as the comments offered by teachers Lindsey and Valerie (and fieldwork observations), there is seemingly a space for such conversations and to some extent some students at least must feel safe enough to challenge the status

quo and raise such topics. It could be suggested that some members of the teaching staff at SCLC seem to also want to make this space for such critical conversations more apparent and safe for students and staff. That is, instead of restricting these opportunities, Gina refers to “a strategic project” amongst other things to improve the school’s orientation to critical issues for young women (such as sexuality) as well as “[helping] staff to find the language to be inclusive”.

Further to this point, previous research has warned against and questioned the feasibility of entirely safe spaces and more precisely entirely safe classrooms (Barrett, 2010; Stengel & Weems, 2010; The Roestone Collective, 2014). Rather than potential “discomfort” being obstructive to learning and critical examination, it is proposed that unsettling contexts can “sharpen students’ perspectives and analytical capacities” (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1354). Therefore, this potential tension, which the Catholic doctrine of SCLC brings to such critical conversations and teaching moments, may in some ways enrich students’ ability to critically explore socio-political issues with which they are engaging. Interestingly, Yen (student) acknowledges the role of discomfort when discussing social issues:

Yen: I do civics at the moment, we just talk about current issues - and voice...I voice my opinion there.

Linda (Interviewer): Is voicing your opinion important to you?

Yen: Yeah, it’s important - I don’t know, it’s just one of the ways to get issues out that you have to talk about it [pauses]...even if it makes people uncomfortable.

Thus, it is proposed that young people should feel an adequate sense of safety to offer their sentiments and views, including engaging in critical conversations with both teachers and peers. However, these spaces should not necessarily be comfortable for

students (or teaching staff) (Boost Rom, 1998; The Roestone Collective, 2014). According to Boost Rom (1998), safe spaces can also be counterproductive if “everyone’s voice is accepted, and no one’s voice can be criticised” (p. 407). More accurately, “we need other voices in order to grow...we also need to be able to respond to those voices, to criticize them, to challenge them, to sharpen our own perspectives through the friction of dialogue” (Boost Rom, 1998, p. 407). Therefore, challenging and revising the boundaries that are placed around some topics (e.g., IVF and sexuality) by some teachers may further enrich such crucial conversations and classroom spaces.

In addition to allowing for critical conversations, as will be examined in the subsequent section, it was apparent that SCLC utilises feminism as a tool to enhance such critical conversations and critical thinking skills in relation to gender. Previous research has highlighted the positive impact such approaches to education can have for young women (DiGiovanni, 2004; Martin & Beese, 2016).

Feminism: An avenue for facilitating critical conversations. According to Mayberry (1999), feminist pedagogy “invites students to critique the unequal social relations embedded in contemporary society and to ask why these circumstances exist and what one can do about them” (p. 7). Although the consequences of such pedagogical approaches have been considered in the context of higher education (Dyer & Hurd, 2016), there has also been an acknowledgement of the value of feminist principles and approaches in secondary classrooms (DiGiovanni, 2004; Martin & Beese, 2016). Jacinta (student) acknowledges the presence of feminism at SCLC:

Being at an all-girls school they talk a lot (like a lot) about like young women and feminism and [pauses] and then like women in history and all that sort of thing, so we hear a lot of it at school.

Likewise, from a teacher's perspective, Lindsey (teacher) explains the fundamental role feminism plays at SCLC:

Lindsey (teacher): In terms of feminism, I think it sort of underpins a lot of what we do here. We have a lot of like the image of a – a strong female and – and what that looks like going forward. Coming more so from all staff – some staff more than others, but I think that's definitely a strong message that they get here.

Linda (Interviewer): What is the image that is promoted to girls about what a strong woman is?

Lindsey (teacher): That they should be equal to men and that they shouldn't stand for anything less, that inequality – currently, it exists and that they – that happens and that they should point out where that exists, and I don't think they're afraid to do that. Some are – yeah – I think we – we encourage them to have a voice, you know.

Gina (teacher) also identifies the importance of having “feminist conversations” with female students:

Gina (teacher): ...breaking it down and showing them different role models, introducing them to different ideas, and helping them critique stuff. And probably, I think particularly that at an all-girls school having the feminist conversation and what does it mean and what does it look like, what is the world doing, is or isn't and all those sorts of things...giving them an avenue to have [the conversation], because some of them might not have it at home. It's

not the family dynamic, so they have a place to do that and to think about it, it is important for them...one of the really interesting things is that the girls have been pretty good about talking about how it's different, so the girls who come from different backgrounds will say, "oh my parents don't think that". And you are like, "oh okay, what do your parents think? Why do they think that? Where does that come from and how does that sit with you?" And for the other girls to hear that not all families are like theirs. I think it's really important as well.

From her above statements, it is apparent that Gina feels that it is important for the school to engage young women in feminist conversations within this educational setting as there may be limited opportunities for students to engage with such issues in the home and other settings. According to teachers Lindsey and Gina, SCLC attempts to utilise feminist ideologies in an effort to promote critical conversations with their students. Such conversations are intended to assist female students challenge and negotiate the complex discourses and expectations inherent in contemporary girlhood. From the following student reflections, it can be contended that these critical, or feminist conversations are somewhat contributing to SCLC students' ability to negotiate such demands and imagine a future where they "can do whatever [they] want":

I think they accept that everyone has different qualities. Like we're doing this thing for [Celebration]¹⁸ Day different like girls. We're doing it in our pastoral [groups]...we're going to get pictures of what we like aspire to be in the future and it's trying to show that you can do whatever you want. And so,

18 Pseudonym

I think this school is actually really good at yeah, not just saying, “You have to be this”. We do get more opportunities to express ourselves. (Sian, student)

Just that... as men can do in society; you can be like whatever you want. I guess that’s a really good thing and that’s something I feel [pauses] at [SCLC] you can just do whatever you want...I think the school does a pretty good job. (Yen, student)

Furthermore, consistent with the fundamental goals of feminist pedagogy (Mayberry, 1999), it is the objective that students are able to highlight instances of gender inequality. That is, in addition to promoting critical thinking skills to disrupt hegemonic discourses concerning gender, this use of feminism is also utilised to keep young women cognisant of the sexism and gender inequality that young women (and women) continue to experience. For instance, it was pointed out that (everyday) sexism may be something young women are not necessarily attuned to as a consequence of attending an all-girls school:

A lot of the senior girls would say they think it’s a really feminist school, which has its advantages except that they then go out into the workplace and particularly the part time jobs and experience things that they weren’t prepared for. Because they’ve never had to here, because they’ve always been told girls can do anything and that’s not how you should be speaking to people, and so they cop it from a guy they worked with and don’t know what to do with that. So, double edged...They are still going to face it [sexism and inequality] ...And what do you do when a guy makes a sexist comment to you at work or does something that borders on sexual harassment, how do you handle it? I think that’s a really hard thing to find an avenue to have those

discussions... You're trying to do it in a way that the girls will engage with that's not preachy or totally out of context. (Gina, teacher)

Similarly, Lindsey (teacher) also discussed using critical teaching moments to disrupt potential sexist rhetoric concerning victim blaming and sexual assault and discourses, which places young women as responsible for the sexual behaviour of men:

But then sometimes, it (feminist conversations) just sort of slips into teaching...like even what I was talking to you about before about this Taekwondo instructor talking to the girls about how they should behave out in public to keep themselves safe. I know next lesson and I'm going to go and speak to them about men's role in – in that. So, things like that I think happen a little bit as well.

Therefore, young women in this setting are receiving the message from teachers such as Gina and Lindsey, that despite the opportunities they are being provided at SCLC (as well as possibly in other contexts) that sexism and gender inequality is something they still need to address. Such teachings act as juxtaposition to the prevalent postfeminist discourses concerning the redundancy of feminism and the eradication of sexism (McRobbie, 2009). Moreover, feminism is adopted in this space to hopefully improve the connection young women have to their sociocultural world and assist them in balancing (and ideally resisting) postfeminist discourses against the sexism and sexist rhetoric they will experience as they progress in their personal and professional lives. However, Gina (teacher) acknowledges finding ways to effectively do this within the classroom is challenging. Lindsey (teacher) perceives that a lot of students welcome the inclusion of feminist values and ideologies and thinks female students would consider feminism to be a “source of power”:

I think more and more so, feminism is a big one for them here...I think a lot of them would identify as feminist here at this school. So, they'd see that as a source of power as well.

Regardless of the belief that "feminism underpins a lot of what [they] do" (Lindsey, teacher) at SCLC, it could be argued that feminism and the feminist objectives highlighted remain outside the formal syllabus and therefore is a fundamental element of the 'hidden' curriculum at the school (DiGiovanni, 2004). What constitutes hidden (although not necessarily covert) curriculum is vast and diverse and can include, expectations around student behaviour (e.g., sanctioned and unsanctioned behaviour), the physical space and place of the school, the role models students are exposed to, and the discourses and interactions that develop in a classroom (between peers as well as between students and teachers) (DiGiovanni, 2004). That is, with regards to SCLC feminism per se is not explicitly cited as part of the formal curriculum, however it is promoted and articulated in overt and covert ways.

Despite specific references to feminism being absent from the school's promoted values and curriculum; a long-standing female principal leads SCLC. Lindsey (teacher) reported that this principal, encourages the place of feminism in the lives of young women and demonstrates a concern with the way her students are positioned. On a number of occasions during formal and informal conversations with teaching staff during fieldwork, references were made to the principal disagreeing with particular language being used to address or describe female students:

And the type of language that we use, like we don't ever call them ladies at our school...We are not to call the girls here ladies. They're young women or girls. The principal would be very quick to pick up on anybody who ever did

that...So yesterday the school captains called themselves ladies, which is unusual, because I've never heard a girl at this school called themselves a lady and the principal corrected her immediately because it's got connotations of, you know, something soft and frilly and like – downtrodden and, you know, submissive to men...and the girls, they know that. We don't call them ladies and all the staff know that from the minute they walk in the door. (Lindsey, teacher)

Apart from the school's leadership taking steps towards setting the feminist tone of the school, there were numerous ways feminism (or feminist values) was integrated into classes and the school environment in more everyday ways. For example, references to feminism were on display in the student reception area. Although these were more comical (e.g., feminist memes) than liberating it makes somewhat progress towards demystifying feminism. One way in which this move towards feminism was displayed was the theme chosen for the school's primary celebration day.

The student nominated theme for this school event was "Like a Girl". This theme was influenced by a viral online campaign.¹⁹ The online campaign included images of people running in a manner that they perceived to be "Like a Girl". In preparation for the school-wide celebration day, this theme was promoted throughout the school and integrated into various pastoral activities. Prior to the school-wide celebration day a school assembly was held to reflect on the theme. Importantly, at this assembly, the school's intention to promote feminist ideologies, as well as some

¹⁹ #LikeAGirl was a campaign initiated by Always an American based brand, which produces feminine hygiene products. Always which is a subsidiary of the larger P&G Corporation, maintain that they are "dedicated to empowering women and girls around the world" (www.always.com). The purpose of their #LikeAGirl campaign and this initial video was to address girls' decreased confidence and self-esteem during puberty and more so to counteract the notion that #LikeAGirl is an insult. The video is available in the public domain at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjQBjWYDTs>

of the challenges to achieving this objective was demonstrated. At the assembly students were presented with stories from previous students regarding their experiences after secondary school, which included the development of their feminist identities. The assembly also highlighted civic accomplishments by current students, and celebrated student performances, which focused on their experiences as young women transitioning into secondary school. However, as evident in the following field notes extract, despite the positive sentiments of the student lead assembly, the presentation of diverse ways to ‘be a girl’ and the way feminism was integrated into the event, this feminist orientation was not shared by all students (and teachers):

As the assembly ended and the students were waiting on instructions as to when they could leave the gym, a group of Year 10 students that I was sitting next to turned to two male teachers sitting behind them. One of the students stated “I am so not a feminist” – and one of the male teachers asked her why and she responded along the lines that “they say it is not all this man-hating and hairy legs stuff – but it really is!” and the two male teachers looked at each other and seemingly unsure how to respond just said “yeah” without really saying anything at all. (Year 10-12 assembly, Fieldwork notes).

For the complete field note entry regarding this notable assembly, see Appendix O.

The field note extract (Appendix O) outlining the student assembly signifies many things regarding the ways in which feminism has been integrated to provide the space and opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences as young women. Celebrating the civic achievements of current students and promoting the success of previous pupils, in a way provides young women with different avenues to be “Like a Girl” and further challenges hegemonic discourses and stereotypes. However, as insinuated in the above extract, resistance to the development of such spaces for

critique from (male) teachers and students can be unfortunately common (Weis & Fine, 2001). Furthermore, it is contended that questioning students' commitment to feminism in this public setting (see Appendix O) may be confronting for some young women and can overlook the difficulty they experience in adopting a feminist identity position particularly among peers, due to the negative narratives regarding 'feminists' (Scharff, 2012). This exchange and the various forms of support and resistance demonstrated also confirm the "normative messiness" of safe spaces and how these settings can simultaneously be "rife with problems but also possibilities" (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1348).

In short, it is evident that SCLC tries to create an environment in which critical reflection and conversations are encouraged. Assisting students with developing critical thinking skills and providing opportunities to reflect on their gendered experiences is regarded as necessary for such educational contexts to be considered safe spaces for young women (Mansfield, 2014; Weis & Fine, 2001). At SCLC a commitment to social justice (which is highly aligned to the Catholic traditions of the school) and the support for feminist values are two ways in which the school works towards this objective. However, it is important to recognise that from observations made during fieldwork as well as by the reflections of the teachers interviewed, it is evident that SCLC still has improvements to make in this area.

Although, it could be argued that improving pedagogy is a continuous process, the school leadership and teachers were still negotiating the best way to promote avenues for critical thinking with regards to but not limited to sexism and gender inequality. It appeared that some teachers at SCLC were more confident, equipped, or willing to engage young women in critical conversations than other members of the teaching staff. This diversity among teachers is also further

compounded by potential tensions created by the Catholic values of the school and how in some ways these are contradictory to the young women's lived experiences. Consequently, it is imperative to note that due to the Catholic ethos of the school as well as some teachers' lack of willingness to engage in critical conversations some topics were effectively "silenced" (Gina, teacher) within the classroom. Such topics included premarital sex, contraception and same-sex attractedness, which are arguably important issues for some young women during adolescence. Despite the possible tension around these topics (for some teachers), it is contended that within safe spaces such potential uneasiness and conflict in ideas is considered important to improve students' ability to critically examine their experiences as young women (Barrett, 2010; Stengel & Weems, 2010, The Roestone Collective, 2014).

Providing opportunities for voice in safe spaces: "I think the more voice, the better". According to Mansfield (2014), the recognition and valuing of student voice is a fundamental element of developing safe spaces for female students. This includes providing avenues for self-expression (Mansfield, 2014). It is suggested that in relation to SCLC, this is a setting where student voice appears to be increasingly encouraged. However, each of the teachers interviewed Gina, Valerie and Lindsey, all referred to their students as "compliant"; this was not necessarily positioned as a positive characteristic. In Gina's (teacher) characterisation of the student cohort she outlines why compliance is not necessarily a valued characteristic in young women (at least at SCLC):

They are incredibly respectable sometimes to the point where it means they don't actually speak up when we'd like that they would...Compliant. Not always in a good way...I mean it's an institution; you need some degree of rules and regulations for it to work. But sometimes when they do challenge

the status quo, like when [Courtney] came up with the idea for the Nigerian schoolgirls²⁰ that stuffs great when they do it. You kind of want them to feel more and more that they don't have to just smile and nod and do what they're asked, that they can come up with ideas themselves. So, I think that's giving them confidence to see different role models and different things that girls put forward that they can then feel confident, that they can put an idea forward, and that they'll be heard, and I think that takes time.

Accordingly, it is clear that there is a desire for young women to "speak up" and have the confidence to "challenge the status quo". The notion of wanting young women to be assertive is also reflected in Gina's comments; she wants them to not "just smile and nod" and follow the rules but also "come up with ideas themselves". This desire to promote assertiveness is in contrast to traditional expectations of passivity (Allan, 2009). Lindsey (teacher) also echoes this similar sentiment:

Sometimes, they might be a bit too kind, like we've talked a bit sometimes in class about apologising. Like all the time like, "Oh. Sorry". And I'll say, "What are you – what are you sorry for; What are you apologising for?" I think it's a female thing sometimes. I think they could probably be a bit more assertive, a bit more forthright in what – in what they do and say and not be just so afraid. So, I think that's probably something we need to instil in them a little bit more. I think they're sort of they're willing to do anything really, like if you – if they're asked to do something, they'll do it. So, they might not want to, but they're very – they're very compliant – is a word that's used for

²⁰ This refers to the over 200 Nigerian schoolgirls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram. Students at the school wanted to raise awareness about the issue and consider the politics around the lack of global response to this crime and the lack of rights some young women have to their education. An assembly was organised by students to discuss and a prayer was held for the safe return of each girl who was kidnapped.

our girls quite a lot...So they're good girls, but compliance is not always a good thing, but yeah – they are compliant [laughs].

Consequently, there is a clear intent to encourage young women to challenge restrictive and stereotypical normative femininities and hegemonic discourses, which couple femininity with niceness (Letendre, 2007) and passivity (Allan, 2009), including the tendency to unnecessarily apologise. Teachers, Gina and Lindsey effectively evoke these images of femininity in an effort to highlight their desire to disrupt young women's acceptance of such ways of 'doing' gender. It is evident for Lindsey that she is actively trying to dispel this in her classroom. However, both Gina and Lindsey are also seemingly cognisant of the notion that they as teachers, and SCLC as an education setting for young women may need to do more to "instil in [students]" the skills and confidence to question and challenge the status quo.

Furthermore, in accordance with the objective to improve the confidence of young women, the increased valuing of student voice in the activities of the school was apparent.²¹ In the case of SCLC, students have opportunities to participate in various student leadership and representative roles; nevertheless, the amount (if any) of formal student participation at the level of school council is unknown. However, on a positive note in recent times, as explained by Gina (teacher), students outside these formal leadership roles have been able to directly address the school leadership with proposals and ideas for changes at the school:

This year was, I think, the first year in a long time that [the Principal] let students with an idea come into staff leadership and put their idea forward...and engage in the debate with staff leadership about how that will

²¹ This is in line with a recent trend particularly within Victorian government schools to increase the validity of student voice and participation at the school council level. In recent times recommendations have been made to make student representation on school councils (including voting rights) mandatory in every Victorian government school (Cook, 2017; Mayes, 2016).

work. So, I think for the girls to feel that they can do a proposal and put it forward and someone's going to listen, it won't be an automatic yes, you're going to have to justify and talk about it but that they will be heard. And a couple of the girls came to uniform committee and put forward proposals for new uniform items and argued their points on those. So, I think for them to feel that there's avenues, they can do to it.

According to Mansfield (2014), such opportunities for student voice and the genuine commitment to listening to student voice is paramount in creating a safe space for young women. Fortunately, there appears to be a more of a consideration by SCLC to increase such avenues for student participation and voice:

Lindsey (teacher): I think the more voice, the better. And, you know policies that are for them and about them, they should have a voice on, like I think that makes sense.

Linda (Interviewer): Yes, and to what extent do you think that's already being done here?

Lindsey (teacher): Yeah not enough. So, you know we had a three-hour meeting on this yesterday afternoon, about student voice and student rights... I think it's something that's developing, and we will see changes very in the very near future...I think they should have policy input so yeah which would inform what happens day to day.

Although this element of student voice is still considered a work-in-progress, it illustrates SCLC's potential to create and be a safe space for developing young women. Furthermore, it is asserted that apart from providing avenues to challenge notions of passivity, encouraging student voice promotes the notion that young women's voices are important; as young women they can make valuable

contributions to the communities and environments, in which they are a part of – both in and external to the school.

Summary. SCLC provides female students with a learning environment that demonstrates the potential to produce positive spaces for their continued development as young women in the broader postfeminist sociocultural climate. This girls-only space provides a unique context for young women to learn and challenge themselves with reduced opportunities for cross gender comparisons and to build shared understandings of their experiences as young women. Aligned with Mansfield's (2014) requirements, SCLC has made moves to make this setting one in which critical conversations are more commonplace and student voices are taken into consideration. Although with regards to student voice, SCLC does have some way to go to ensure that this is a core part of the school climate and not something, which is approach in a tokenistic manner.

Furthermore, the presence of feminism and Catholicism, make this a contested but “safe enough” (p. 407) space to encourage students to critique and reflect on their experiences as young women (Boost Rom, 1998). However, it is important to acknowledge that these efforts to engage young women in critical conversations are at times obstructed by the limited willingness and efficacy of some teachers to encourage discussion of topics, which are contested by the Catholic Church (e.g., contraception, pre-marital sex and same sex attractedness). This apprehension by some teachers seemingly reduces SCLC's capacity to develop the critical reflectivity skills of their female students. Hence, despite feminist values being promoted within the school in a number of ways, this support for feminism and students being feminists is met with some resistance from both students and staff. Therefore, while it is evident that there are genuine intentions for SCLC to be a positive space for their

students, many aspects of this objective still require further progress and development. Thus, this setting is also vulnerable to being one that is exclusionary and limiting for (at least some) young women.

School as a Limiting Environment for Young Women

As indicated in Figure 1, irrespective of the potential for SCLC to act as a safe space for young women, the current findings also made evident the ways in which this school space is limiting or restrictive for students. Similarly, previous research has also highlighted that schools are primary settings in which sociocultural norms and inequalities can be reproduced and reaffirmed (Fisette & Walton, 2015; Youdell, 2005, 2006). Consequently, to what extent schools can act, as true safe spaces for young women may be considered questionable. Schools such as SCLC are dynamic settings, with inherent power structures (including between students) and have diverse student groups who although are all female would vary on a number of intersecting identity categories. What may be presented as a safe space for some students may be viewed as exclusionary for others (McConnell et al., 2016; The Roestone Collective, 2014). Additionally, without overlooking the overall positive intentions of SCLC and teachers' attempts to create a safe space for young women to learn, develop, and challenge themselves free from the constraints of gendered expectations; there are times when the practices and climate of SCLC inevitably (and potentially unintentionally) reinscribe discourses and normative femininities that limit young women. Accordingly, as highlighted in Figure 1, how SCLC reinforces normative femininities and the potentially negative focus on academic achievement will be considered.

Reinforcement of normative femininities: "...Skirts force the girls to behave like [ladies]". SCLC in many ways provides young women with a space to

challenge normative femininities, in particular with regards to challenging notions of passivity. As previously highlighted, young women are encouraged to express their voice and contribute to critical conversations within this educational setting (although arguably this is still limited in some ways). However, it was also evident there were ways in which young women's performance of gender were restricted. For instance, regardless of SCLC encouraging young women to confidently participate in traditionally masculine subjects of maths and science, there were still some apparent limitations in the variety of subjects offered. This was of concern to Talia (student) who although was in some ways content with the learning environment, she also wanted more opportunities to step outside traditional notions of femininity:

They teach us how to be women but not like the stereotypical way. They give us all these opportunities being you know [pauses] whoever we wanna be...I would like a bit more [pauses] let's say, the option to do some things like you know in co-ed [schools] how they can do woodwork and all that kind of stuff? We never really get encouraged to do stuff like being a builder or anything like that, like a carpenter. Do you get what I mean? - it's all kind of like [pauses] a lot of us are pushed towards nursing...We're still kind of pushed in that sense...But I'm just saying like it'd be cool if we were [pauses] like given the exact same opportunities as others. In the sense that yeah, other schools do more - boyish things I guess...it'd be like nice coz [pauses] when you're a girl, you kinda depend, like my grandma depends on my grandpa to fix everything, whereas like maybe if I was taught at school, maybe I didn't have to depend on a man; I could just fix it myself.

In addition to these limited opportunities to develop diverse skills, young women at SCLC who may be considered to have “big personalities” or “strong

personalities”, or those that do not fit the stereotypical image of the good female student are often discussed as something that needs to be managed or contained. As evidenced in Lindsey’s (teacher) following reflection:

There are girls who have a lot of positive influence here at the school. They’re very into having their voices heard and they can have a lot of influence over each other, definitely, mostly positive. Within a classroom setting, I think strong personalities can sometimes have a negative influence. As a coordinator, I sometimes see that, you know, if I get emails from other staff members saying, you know, maths class is not going so well because such and such is just talking flat out...I hear from students who will come and see me and, you know, make complaints about other students in a class that are, they feel that are bullying their teacher or influencing the mood of the room, you know, creating a – a mood where people are not working or an environment where people are not working and talking too much and things like that. So, I think some big personalities can be very influential...in negative ways within a classroom setting, but – that said, I think there are girls who have made some very positive impacts by being influential in getting things done.

Hence, it is evident that there are expectations regarding how young women should and should not behave in the classroom and that this behaviour was being monitored by teachers and students alike. This is reflective of the ways in which young women are gendered within the school context, and how ‘proper’ young women are positioned as studious and well behaved in the classroom (Archer et al., 2007; Youdell, 2006). Bond and Wasco (2017), also point to “the ways in which setting practices enforce particular gendered patterns of communication that convey or challenge gendered expectations of participants” (p. 377). The suitability of young

women having dominant or assertive personalities is only discussed in relation to the “classroom setting”. Therefore, this brings to the forefront that the traditional conventions of the classroom setting may place restrictions on young women having and exercising their “big personalities”, instead labelling this as disruptive behaviour. Furthermore, stereotypical perceptions and expectations concerning female students continued to persist among some teachers. For example, Valerie (teacher) discusses behaviours, which are expected more from male students rather than young women:

There are girls that take on the role of boys in some way, in the classroom. And that’s putting all boys in one category, but, but they would probably display behaviours that I would’ve seen in the boys in co-ed schools...playing the class clown, that kind of thing, getting the laugh off the others. The one that is sort of pushing the envelope, not to say that girls never do that when it was co-ed, but it was, it was more likely to be the boy rather than the girl.

From the above exchange, it is apparent that Valerie has specific ideas about what she typecasts as expected behaviour from male and female students. However, it is not known how Valerie necessarily responds to young women she perceives to be transgressing gender typed behaviour in the classroom.

However, for Lindsey (teacher), it appears that her intention to manage ‘dominant’ young women in the classroom, is with the purpose of encouraging the participation of young women who are not as assertive:

I’ve got a particular Year 7 class where – great class, but there is probably 6 girls in there who are louder – not –that they’re naughty, but they just will have their hand up for every single question...they just want their voice to be heard over everybody every other time. And then there are girls who are just very, very quiet and I noticed like in the first couple of weeks...– I just

thought to myself – I have not spoken to that girl for the entire lesson, and thought – that’s really bad, like I’ve not heard her voice...you have to sort of – when you’re in a classroom situation, make sure you go around and speak to every single girl...make sure everybody has the opportunity to say something...sometimes that really annoys those girls who are quite dominant. Like I was standing next to a girl one day. We’re outside, and she’s standing next to me with her hand up like just bursting, and she’s like, “I know the answer. I know the answer”. And I kind of just ignored her and I was like going, you know, like, “Anyone? Anyone?” And she’s next to me like, “Me, me, me!” ...then I picked somebody else and she like threw her hand down to her side and she went, “Oh!”. I said, “I beg your pardon?” She said, “Oh I had my hand up!”, and I said, “I know, but...you answered the last six questions as well and it’s great, but I have to pick other people as well because they need to have a turn as well”. So, it can be hard for some students to understand that everybody needs to have a voice.

Therefore, although such examples of teaching practices are clearly aimed towards creating a balanced environment where all young women are encouraged to participate, there is still this element of silencing or restricting some students for the sake of others. This dynamic of the classroom setting is therefore the issue not necessarily the teacher’s intentions. It is also argued that this contributes to the contradictory notion of girlhood and the ways in which young women engage with their academic identities (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Ringrose, 2013). That is, from Lindsey’s reflections, young women are seemingly praised for their academic pursuits on one hand, whilst simultaneously being silenced or censured for being too smart and engaged.

In addition, another way in which normative femininities is often reinscribed at SCLC is via the focus on uniform and therefore the appearance of young women. This focus on uniform labels some young women's appearance as acceptable and others as deviant or breaking the rules. This attention to uniform and appropriate appearance was observed during fieldwork:

As we (the teacher and I) walk up to the classroom door there is a student in her sports uniform tucking in a hoody into the collar of her sports jacket. [The teacher] loudly says "don't even bother I have seen it" she indicates that she is going to write this girl up for her uniform. [The teacher] appears to be very strict about uniform – as the girls come up to her to ask questions about their work and/or today's class, she starts throwing out questions and commands – "why am I seeing earrings?", "take off your ring", "why am I seeing makeup?" etc. Some of these instructions seem fairly undirected in their aim but the girls seem to know who she is referring to and they mostly comply.

(Year 12 Design class, Fieldwork notes)

Likewise, Sian (student) confirms the stern focus that SCLC has on students observing uniform expectations:

Just some of the rules, I think this school is very focused on uniform. And like for example if you're wearing a sport uniform, it's yeah like harsh penalty like getting infringements and I just think those kind of things, it's maybe a bit harsh.

However, despite uniform compliance being a fundamental rule at SCLC and something that is evidently enforced, not all members of the teaching staff are supportive of these measures. Gina (teacher) highlights how this emphasis on uniform

compliance, refocuses attention towards the appearance of young women, and in many ways, disciplines some students for their appearance:

And you try and decrease the appearance factor which is really hard and then the more that we, I always feel the more we enforce uniform, the more we're actually playing into a particular appearance factor, but that's what you have to do. But I do think I like every time we say to the girls their skirt is too short, take it down, I want to hurt myself because I feel like it goes against everything I would stand for but it's what you have to do.

Hence, it is evident that at least for Gina she feels the policies of the institution require her to enforce such rules, regardless of her personal beliefs. Therefore, this again raises the question around how emancipating schools can be for young women.

Further to this point concerning uniform and the reinscribing of normative femininities, towards the end of fieldwork at SCLC, there was increased momentum around the notion of introducing trousers into the standard school uniform (currently trousers only form part of the school sports uniform). As explained by Gina (teacher), a group of students proposed this notion to the leadership team:

A couple of the girls came to uniform committee and put forward proposals for new uniform items and argued their points... There is a push for pants. They did a great presentation bless them. They were so good, and I don't think they're going to get it but they were so good.

Despite this being an unlikely change, it was also stipulated this is a change that would also be championed by staff, "there's a big push from a lot of the staff to introduce pants into school uniform because the skirts force the girls to behave like the lady" (Lindsey, teacher). Therefore, it is apparent that the perceived restrictiveness of the current school uniform (i.e., summer dress and winter skirt), and

linking this to connotations regarding 'being a lady', goes against the feminist values promoted at the school (particularly by the principal). It is also worthy to note that this dismissal of the students' uniform proposal is counterproductive to SCLC's intentions to increase the presence of student voice. Therefore, without being informed of the rationale behind not approving such a change to the uniform, on the surface it appears to be contradictory to the 'empowering' environment that SCLC aims to produce and reinforces traditional notions of femininity regarding what is appropriate for young women to wear.

To summarise, irrespective of the opportunities SCLC attempts to provide to their students, it is evident that this is an educational setting, which in many ways continues to monitor (at times unintentionally) young women's engagement with and performances of diverse femininities. The regulation of young women's behaviour and assertiveness within the classroom environment works to move young women into traditional representations of schoolgirl subjectivity (Youdell, 2006). This is in addition to more skill based (and potentially traditionally masculine) curriculum for example, woodwork being absent from the subjects offered to young women at SCLC. Further contributing to this favouring of traditional schoolgirl subjectivities is SCLC's focus on uniform compliance and the rejection of non-customary uniform items such as trousers. This attention paid to uniform compliance continues to redirect attention towards and evaluate young women based on their physical appearance. These elements, which presumably to a degree would be common across schooling environments (e.g., the disciplining of behaviour), effectively limit the opportunities young women have to talk back to and resist normative femininities and gendered discourses within this context.

The focus on academic achievement: “We have really high expectations of the girls”. Within schools the narrative, or discourse of academic achievement is prevalent. In recent times this continued emphasis on academic achievement has been labelled as a symptom of neoliberal sentiment and the prioritisation of individual success (Davis & Bansel, 2007; O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Walkerdine & Ringrose, 2006; Woolley, 2017). Regarding SCLC, it was evident that there was an increased focus on the school being regarded as academically competitive. Throughout interviews with the teachers, continued reference was made to SCLC’s culture changing to be a more “academically rigorous” environment:

Increasingly over the past ten years, we have gone to a community of learners...learning is the focus...we're trying to become more academically rigorous yet it's not all about marks...I want to say high achieving but I still don't think we've got a community of girls that want to work as hard as they possibly can. I think they're really interested - they want to do well. I think they, know that they've got the support, but I don't think we have the tradition and the culture in this school yet. (Valerie, teacher)

Although academic achievement and healthy competition can in many ways be positive for young women, when this focus leads to avenues of exclusion and criticism the positives for young women’s wellbeing are negated. For instance, Lindsey (teacher) commented on the negative impact high expectations have on students’ thoughts regarding their post-secondary options:

We have really high expectations of the girls. It’s assumed that they will go onto university, which I think it can be a bad thing as well because, there are a lot of other legitimate pathways in terms of study and work and – and the training that girls could be taking. So, I think maybe sometimes we’ve got

unfair pressure on some types of girls...there's a sort of an expectation and a culture around striving for your best and I don't think it's cool to be the dumb girl at this school. I don't think that's looked very favourably upon especially when you get to the senior school...There's definitely a culture of wanting – of wanting to do well.

Therefore, it could be argued that this assumption communicated to young women that they will all go to university, advocates essentialist notions regarding young women's academic achievement as something that is natural and free from struggle (Allan, 2010). Baker (2010a, p. 3) and others (Francis, 2010; Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2007, 2013; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007) explain that within contemporary neoliberal times, education in particular has been identified as a “key marker of female progress”. It also highlights the discursive repertoires adopted at SCLC regarding what it means to be a successful (as well as an unsuccessful) young woman. Such discourses bring into question SCLC's (and school settings in general) potential to be real safe spaces where young women can explore and develop their academic identity free from judgement and gendered expectations.

Notably, it was the perception of some of the teaching staff that young women at SCLC were well aware of these discourses centring on academic success and the implications of not meeting these expectations of being a high achieving young woman:

I know one of the things we're working on is the girls in VCAL feel a real judgement that they aren't good enough. And I think that's become greater the better the results have gotten...But there are some girls who are still really strong enough to stand up for it and like we were talking about psychological perceptions and what it is that makes you stressed about something and

someone else not...I was saying to the girls in my class, "it's that idea that you're going in for a SAC²² and you do not understand how that girl doesn't care. But she's decided she doesn't need the ATAR²³, so she's doing this to get her Year 12, she doesn't need to be on 99.9, so she could just do the best that she can do and that's it". And I had to laugh because one of the girls in my class went "yeah that's so me". And I was like, "and it is her", because she just does what she has to do. She doesn't push herself too hard, but for her she doesn't need to. And I suspect there are times where the way she said it I wonder if she has felt judged for not driving herself to get a really high score.

(Gina, teacher)

I think they're kind of in awe of people who are like really, really smart...I don't think there's a stigma where they're like thinking negatively of anyone who's extremely intelligent. I think they're a bit in awe of them...I think there's a stigma with not being smart enough...there's definitely a stigma with doing VCAL. You know, I've spoken to girls who would like to do VCAL and it's a legitimate pathway, but because a stigma that that's for dumb kids and that's an easy option and that's where all those kids go, they won't do it and they'll struggle along with VCE for two years and come out of it with, you know, not much of a score. And they could have had qualifications across two years...There's definitely a stigma with not being smart enough. But too smart, I don't think so. (Lindsey, teacher)

22 School-assessed coursework completed as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE).

23 Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a course that is calculated from students' subject study scores. ATAR scores are used by universities to assess the achievement of individual students and their eligibility for course admission.

The following exchange with Yen (student) further points to students' awareness of these prevalent discourses concerning academic achievement. However, Yen's reflections also highlight that complexity of these negotiations among female students:

I feel like you can't do anything right. I guess if you don't do well in school: "Ah well, you're dumb - you're off to VCAL... You're off to TAFE"²⁴ even though it's not a bad thing. Or if you achieve really well...everyone's like...[pauses] I remember at a ceremony like assembly at the school, they were announcing the top achievers of the school. And the people behind me were actually bashing the girls like, "Oh look at them. They're so ugly! Stop smiling like that! You're getting so many awards, stop being so smug!".

Thus, it is imperative to recognise that young women do not "engage their academic identities easily, naturally, and without struggle" (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015, p. 508). This tension young women can experience with regards to their academic identities will be further examined in the following chapter (Chapter 6). However, with regards to SCLC, this discourse and expectation concerning academic achievement in many ways permits another prospect of exclusion for young women who are not observed to be achieving at the desired standard. At SCLC these young women are the students who are in or recommended to pursue the VCAL stream rather than VCE. More broadly, this narrative (and expectation) around essentialist notions of academic success, communicate to seemingly underperforming young women that they are not successfully fulfilling the opportunities and obligations afforded them in contemporary times (Baker, 2010a; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011). Overall, consistent with previous research (e.g., Allan, 2010; Francis et al., 2017;

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Lucey & Reay, 2002; Rich & Evans, 2009; Spencer et al., 2018), the current study found that the need to be considered a high achiever was prevalent among the young women at SCLC. For instance, the anxiety induced for young women around other people's perceptions was noted:

Their academic success is important to them. So, I think if they're not doing well, they don't want to be seen as the dumb girl. They do care what other girls think of them. They care what their teachers think about them and they care what their parents think of them. They want to be doing well and I think it's a – it's a great deal of frustration to some girls, especially if they're trying hard and they're not doing well. They can't understand why not. (Lindsey, teacher)

In year nine, late year eight, early year nine, you don't want to be seen to be too much of a nerd or too dumb. And it's interesting the anxiety that both create for different kids. And like one of the girls in the little Year 9 power group had some learning assessments done and her biggest fear was it would label her as dumb because then she would lose her social power. She didn't verbalise that, but that was the way I read into it. And she has got a learning disability and that is going to impact on her, but she doesn't want to be seen to be putting strategies into place to improve that because her only sense of power has come from being a little player in that group. For her, it's going to be really complicated to break it down and work out what it is she wants and how she'd get there. (Gina, teacher)

Furthermore, as emphasised in previous research (Archer et al., 2012; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Renold, 2001; Skelton et al., 2010), girls'

academic achievement or identity as a ‘smart girl’ is often contested against other notions of femininity. This was also apparent at SCLC, as being considered a smart girl alone was not looked upon favourably:

If they’re well regarded on a social level and they’re incredibly intelligent, I think that’s okay. But if they’re not well regarded on a social level, maybe seen as a bit annoying and their hand is constantly up. They’re demanding of their teacher’s time. I think maybe there might be a case of eye-rolling, “She’s got her hand up again. She’s answering the question again”. (Lindsey, teacher)

Apart from the potential social and psychological impact this anxiety around academic achievement can have for young women (Spencer et al., 2018), it also breeds an environment of competition within schools (Allan, 2010; Ringrose, 2013). This competition around results was evident among both junior and senior students at SCLC:

In a Year 7 classroom...when they first come in, it’s even as physical as covering their work kind of – “What have you got?” “I’m not telling”. Or doing that before assignments are due, “Can I have a look at your – No, I haven’t got it here today” ...it’s still very primary school. It’s their development. They think, “I want to do the best. If I show her my work, she might get higher marks” - so it’s still very much that...But definitely academically, they’re very private with their marks. They might share them with others but generally it’s hands over, not going discuss it. Yeah, so the younger ones definitely, it’s all about who’s the best. (Valerie, teacher)

Recently, there was supposed to be a SAC on the same day for two different classes, but one of the classes had to be moved. So that caused a little bit of inequity, I suppose...one of the SACs got moved to later on in the week, so that they would've had a little bit more time to prepare. One of the girls in the SAC earlier in the week stood up and said to every single girl in the class, "none of you under any circumstances are to tell any of that other group what was on the SAC today. They are not to know because then they'll have time to prepare for what's on it and that's not fair to any of us. And they will do better than us and that's, you know, not okay" ...And apparently just went to town...I don't think they would have told anyone because...they would have been assisting somebody to perhaps get a better grade than what they got earlier on the week. I don't think they would have told them. I put money on that they wouldn't. (Lindsey, teacher)

Importantly, it is not contended here that young women should not be competitive within the realm of academics. However, it can result in a negative dynamic between students within a classroom and go somewhat towards disrupting the fostering of safe spaces in schools.

In short, it is somewhat expected that schools particularly in the current neoliberal landscape would prioritise the academic performance of their students (O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Woolley, 2017). However, it is necessary to consider that SCLC's continued emphasis on the academic achievement of students effectively strengthens postfeminist and neoliberal discourses which positions academic attainment as an essential aspect of 'doing' girl (C. Jackson et al., 2010; Ringrose, 2013). This is further evidenced by the teachers' reflections that young women are

cognisant of the ways in which others perceive their level of achievement, including the stigma attached to doing VCAL or not being a 'smart' girl.

Chapter Conclusion

The primary aim of this chapter was to examine the norms, narratives and discourses young women at SCLC are privy to; and the ways in which these elements may inform, permit and restrict the fluid ways young women negotiate and perform normative femininities. Although schools are widely regarded as the primary setting in which young women are afforded the opportunity to negotiate their gender identities, it has been asserted that gender discourses prevalent within schools (as well as other settings) work to restrict the development of young women (Archer et al., 2007; Bond & Wasco, 2017; McLeod, 2000; Reay, 2010; Youdell, 2006).

Within this chapter the safe space concept was utilised as a way to make sense of what was occurring within this setting, as depicted by teacher and student insights, and fieldwork experiences. Inherent in such safe settings is a sense of "normative messiness" (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1348), which is reflective of this discussion of SCLC as a place that can be both safe as well as restrictive for young women. On a positive note, SCLC provides young women with a girls-only setting, which young women reported feeling comfortable, supported and understood as young women. The absence of the direct male gaze provides students with the opportunity to relate to one another as young women and cross-gender comparisons are limited. SCLC was also found to be encouraging of critical reflection, feminist conversations, and motivated young women to be cognisant of their social worlds. Finally, steps were seemingly being taken to position student voice and participation as more central elements of the school's culture. These are necessary elements of a safe space (Mansfield, 2014; The Roestone Collective, 2014), a setting in which it is

hoped that students can challenge themselves, their understandings of normative femininities and recognise the value of their voice.

However, this assessment of SCLC as a potential safe space for young women is measured against the limitations that persist in this setting. Specifically, the silencing of important topics by some teachers due to the Catholic underpinnings of the school; as well as the rejection of feminism and the reinforcement of negative stereotypes of feminists by some students and teaching staff. With regards to student voice, despite the positive intentions outlined by the teachers interviewed this has seemingly yet to be fully integrated into the culture of SCLC. Nevertheless, to their credit, the teachers interviewed (who are members of the school's leadership team) for the most part did not shy away from these limitations.

Furthermore, SCLC simultaneously is an institution, which has rules and practices that are counterintuitive to the goals of safe spaces; and centralises postfeminist and neoliberal discourses regarding academic achievement and proper schoolgirl femininities. Primarily, although the positive intentions of the school and specifically the teachers interviewed are not questioned, it was observed that at times adherence to normative femininities were reinforced. Young women's eager or loud behaviour within the classroom was suppressed; curriculum choices were not inclusive of skill-based subjects; and uniform compliance (which is mostly restricted to traditional dresses and skirts) was prioritised in this setting. Also, the normalisation and expectations surrounding academic achievement of students works to limit their post-secondary options (e.g., avoiding TAFE and other non-university pathways), stigmatise young women who do not meet these expectations and minimise the struggle some young women experience with regards to their academic identities.

Overall due to such complexities, it is contended that the assessment of SCLC as a safe space cannot be achieved via the adding and subtracting of dichotomous advantages and disadvantages inherent in the space. Instead, it is asserted that without being complacent to such limitations, safe spaces will never be flawless and the work to make such spaces “better” safe spaces is “ever-incomplete” (The Roestone Collective, 2014, p. 1360). Similar sentiments are also shared by Bond and Wasco (2017), who argue that gendered contexts are always in a state of unrest and the pursuit to make such settings more gender equal, or in the cases of SCLC more open to diverse femininities and ways of ‘doing’ gender for female students is endless.

Chapter 6: Young Women's Negotiation of Normative Femininities

The current chapter presents the findings in relation to young women's understandings and experiences of normative femininities, and the implications of this understanding for their sense of self, as well as their psychosocial wellbeing. To reiterate, normative femininities refers to the socially and culturally inscribed expectations and understandings of what it means to be a young woman (Budgeon, 2015). Contemporary culture has been increasingly characterised as highly postfeminist and neoliberal (Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2008a; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2009), and this sociocultural setting has varied implications for the subjectivity of young women and the ways in which they understand notions of femininity and girlhood (C. E. Charles, 2010a; Gill & Scarf, 2011; Gonick, 2006; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017). Therefore, how young women 'do' gender and mediate their subjectivities in such a postfeminist and neoliberal climate is of importance.

The way in which an individual positions themselves in relation to culturally available discourses is fluid, fragmented and continuously shifting (Azzarito et al., 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Jeanes, 2011; Nayak & Kehily, 2006; Wetherell, 2010). As explained by Butler (1990) and others (e.g., Bohan, 1997), gender is conceptualised as something that is performed. This fluidity of subjectivity and performativity of gender is demonstrated via young women's strategic, but at times contradictory engagement with postfeminist discourses concerning contemporary girlhood. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the broad, multifaceted and potentially conflicting negotiations young women are participating in, together with what may influence their engagement (or disengagement) and performance of normative femininities.

Based on individual interviews with eight young women from SCLC and one focus group (three young women), the current chapter will examine these young women’s messy negotiations of academic success, appearance related discourses and talk, the subjectivity position of the all-rounder, and the role of looking between female peers as the immediate context within which such identity development occurs. Further to this, Figure 2 illustrates the ways in which these primary themes identified from the analysis of the young women’s talk relate and overlap, signifying the complex and intricate nature of these issues.

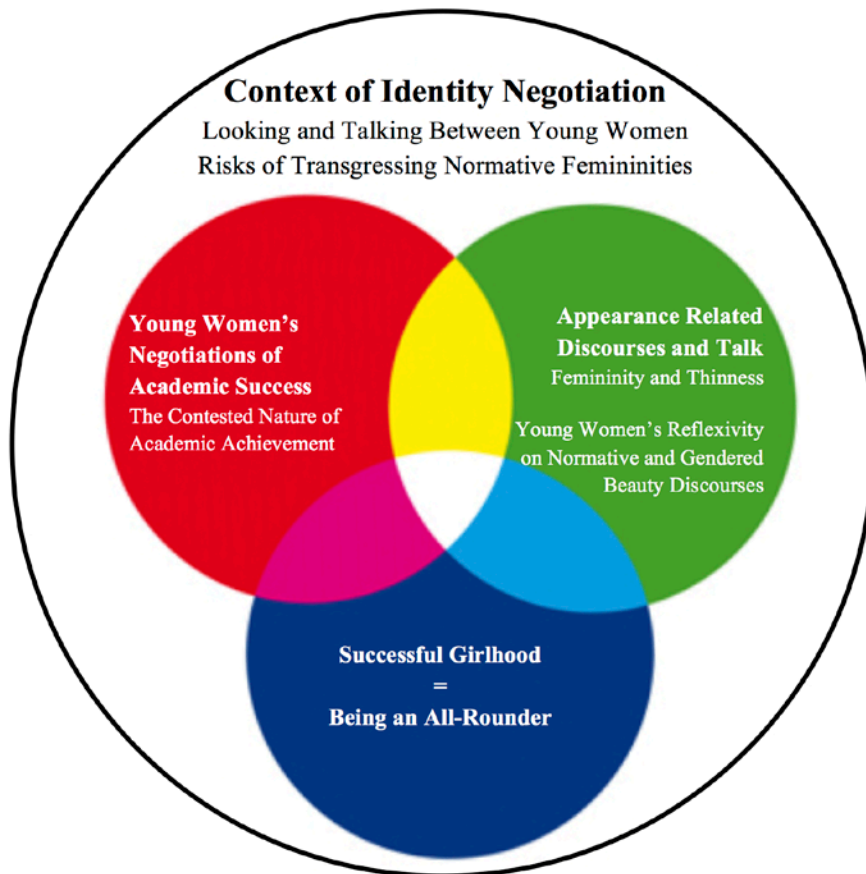


Figure 2: Context of and intersections within young women’s negotiations of normative femininities

Young Women's Negotiations of Academic Success

In the current sociocultural context, expectations concerning the educational achievement of young women have intensified. The educational success of young women is posed as further confirmation that modern young women have been unburdened of systemic impediments such as gender discrimination (Allan, 2010; Baker, 2010a; Francis, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017; Ringrose, 2013). Therefore, the initial primary theme of this chapter examines participants' talk concerning academic success. In examining young women's intricate negotiations of academic expectations and success, the sub-theme – the contested nature of academic achievement – was also constructed from the reflections and insights shared by the young women interviewed.

With regards to academic achievement, although directed towards diverse groups of young women, it has been suggested that this discourse concerning smart and high achieving young women is further directed towards middle (and upper) class young women (Allan & Charles, 2014; C. E. Charles, 2010b; J. Evans et al., 2004; Lucey & Reay, 2002; Rich & Evans, 2009; Skelton et al., 2010; Walkerdine et al., 2001). The majority of female students at SCLC and their families would be considered to belong to this middle-class group (see Appendix G). Therefore, for the young women interviewed it was anticipated that academic achievement, or under-achievement would potentially form part of their sense of self. For example, Jacinta mentioned that being a high achiever (academic or otherwise) was necessary to feel a sense of self-worth, “if you don't have [pauses] I don't know, really good grades, or if you don't [pauses] like [pauses] excel in anything you feel sort of like you're not as important”. Jacinta further explains how despite potential stereotypes young women do not want to be labelled the “dumb one”:

People always think that you know, for girls it's okay to be like you know, dumb or [pauses]...not dumb but...not [pauses] like that smart. But...I've had conversations with people ...they're actually like kind of insecure about it. They don't like being like the dumb one. And [pauses] it's a bit of a stereotype I guess but [pauses] it's something that they don't feel comfortable about. Then the other way is like if you're quite smart [pauses] I don't think that's really anything like that different.

From Jacinta's reflections, it is clear young women are conscious of the way they are perceived and do not actually want to be labelled unintelligent. Her comments position the intelligent young woman as not "anything like that different", illustrating contemporary postfeminist (and neoliberal) ideologies, which nominate academic success as part of the normative expectations of girlhood (Allan, 2010; Archer et al., 2007; Francis et al., 2017). Hence, contemporary discourses concerning gender and academic success in effect essentialise young women's experiences and perpetuate the notion that all young women should be academically successful (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017). This expectation impacts the 'underperforming' young woman's subjectivity by leaving her feeling "insecure" and "not as important" (Jacinta), with only herself to blame (J. Evans et al., 2004; McRobbie, 2015).

Similarly, Antonia demonstrates a concern about how her academic pursuits would be perceived outside the school context. For Antonia, her level of academic achievement was inherently part of her "image in society":

I'm more concerned about what other people think...people that don't go to the school - I'm worried about what they think (about her level of academic achievement) ...we actually had dinner with family friends last night and... They're a very smart family...Physics, Chemistry, you know - all the smart

subjects. And my best friend, she's taking like two science subjects, a General Maths subject, German and you know, other subjects. And then there's me, just taking - you know, English Language, English and French, General Maths and Psychology. Like it's all the [pauses] not smart subjects! [Laughs]. Not that they're not smart, it's more...I just feel kind of dumb next to you know, everyone else. I think your image in society is more important than your image at school. I think I value that as more important as opposed to [pauses] people: what they think of you at school.

From the above quote, it is evident Antonia is actively engaged in comparing herself to her contemporaries both internal and external to the school environment. Antonia's concern about being perceived as "kind of dumb next to you know everyone else" further signifies the potential pressure, which underlines young women's engagement in their academic identities (Allan, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017; Spencer et al., 2018). More so, it is proposed that Antonia seems worried "her image in society" (potentially being considered an academically [un]successful girl) will not measure up to normative neoliberal and postfeminist expectations of individualised success, which has seemingly filtered into school-level discourses (O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Woolley, 2017), as well as common representations of girlhood (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Harris, 2004b). Similarly, Jacinta confides that she is apprehensive about telling people she has not done well because of what they might think:

If I didn't do so well in something and people asked me how I went, you know it's sort of like; you don't want to say, just because you don't know what they'll think of it...And then my brothers as well, they're really, really high-achievers...sometimes that sort of [pauses] I don't know, makes me feel a bit like not as good as them...[pauses] just sort of like even when I think I'm

going well, it's like oh well, [Peter] did this, like [laughs] you know. [It's] not really like [pauses] [my] parents are like giving me any pressure about it. It's just like I sort of feel it, you know.

Therefore, similar to Antonia, Jacinta is participating in a form of self-assessment comparing her achievements against her high-achieving brothers and people's perceptions more broadly. Jacinta identifies this perceived pressure to do well is not something applied externally (from parents), rather something she feels internally. These elements of self-assessment and individualised responsibility are inherent in neoliberal ideology (Baker, 2010a; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2015). As illustrated by McRobbie (2015), contemporary young women have effectively been assigned a "neo-liberal spreadsheet" which motivates "a constant benchmarking of the self" (p. 10).

However, it was apparent that this postfeminist rhetoric of the unimpeded and carefree academically successful smart girl (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017; Spencer et al., 2018) was not reflective of the experiences of all the young women interviewed. For many of these young women, their academic success was something that induced apprehension. These reflections are consistent with previous research on self-described 'smart' girls (Allan, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Spencer et al., 2018). The young women in the current research often discussed academic achievement as becoming somewhat an area of competition among peers. For instance, Sian reflects on times she competed against other students to see "who comes out with the highest mark":

Maybe like in classes, there might be like a couple of girls that are kind of like wanting to get the highest mark, or whatever...I know that's happened with me a couple of times... Just like me and some other girls like doing kind of

well and then like exams and stuff. Trying to see who comes out with the highest mark.

Consistent with the current study, Allan (2010) also noted that exam and assessment results fuelled in-class competition between young women. In a similar manner, Carissa also finds herself wanting to “be better” than her high achieving cousin:

Carissa: I try like my hardest in everything, so I like to be proud of what I do, but because I have my cousin at the school- like in my year level, she’s like one of the smartest ones. Like last year she won the top year level award. So sometimes I feel like there’s a bit of a comparison between me and her in a way.

Linda (Interviewer): And who’s making that comparison?

Carissa: I feel like I am [laughs]! Yeah.... [Pauses] I don’t know. It just sometimes makes me want to like try harder because I want to try to I don’t know, be better than her.

McRobbie (2015) asserts that in the current sociocultural climate in which young women are striving for perfection a “competitive self among the ranks of young women” (p. 15) is created. For some young women this competition between female peers was considered a good thing and assisted them in furthering their own academic success. Jacinta expressed this positive sentiment:

In class, I find it’s really good because it’s like competitive in a good way...you’re always trying to like even though it’s just like in your own head and you don’t say anything but like you know, “Oh gotta try and do better than that person”. That’s a good thing because you’re just trying to push yourself. It’s good.

In line with her peers, Jacinta describes this competition to be somewhat covert, or an internal thought process. Thus, these young women are not running the risk of transgressing hegemonic notions of femininity, which call for young women (and women) to be considerate of rather than competitive with others (Walkerdine, 2006). Likewise, Talia shares this appreciation for academic competition and defined this desire to outdo her peers as “instinct”:

I've been worried...sometimes when I don't get such a good grade, it's like [pauses] I need to better myself. So, I feel like competition isn't a bad thing - coz yeah like the people I'm around, they get really good [grades]...You're kind of like, “Oh... [puts on a catty voice] see what I can do!”. And it's that whole thing of, you know [pauses], “I'll show you and I'll be improving” ...But like together we can improve...It's better when it's competition. But sometimes I just worry way too much about what they're going to get instead of just focusing on myself, and like giving myself my own goals and...focusing on myself...that's kind of just instinct though. You want to be the best, in a way...

For Talia and Jacinta out doing their peers in school provided motivation to work harder. Importantly, it is not the intention here to position healthy academic competition between young women as entirely negative. What is considered to be of concern is this seemingly innate, and covert competition described by Jacinta, Talia and their peers, which is reflective of what McRobbie (2015) labels an “inner-directed self competition which is in effect self-beratement about not being good enough” (p. 15).

Overall, it is evident that doing well and being perceived as academically successful, is a priority for many of the students interviewed in the current research.

In line with previous inquiries into young women's academic identities (Allan 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017), together with feeling proud of their achievements, these young women also highlighted the internal pressure they often felt to achieve good grades as well as the competition it inspired amongst their female peers (as well as encouraging to compete with family friends and siblings). Further to this, it is considered that contributing to this underlining pressure or stress which accompanies academic success for many young women both in the current as well as in previous research (Spencer et al., 2018), is the contested nature of the 'smart girl' identity position.

The contested nature of academic achievement: “No one really wants to be seen as a... well, a nerd”. Irrespective of the value attached to their educational achievement and the desire to out-perform their peers, for many of the young women interviewed, being considered intelligent or high achieving was not trouble-free. This subjectivity position was continuously being negotiated and monitored. The current discussions clearly confirm the notion that young women participant in their academic identities without tension, is no doubt a postfeminist myth (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015). Although young women spoke about their apprehensions of being considered not intelligent, there also appears to be risks and social threats inherent with being a 'smart girl'. For example, Alexis demonstrates a level of acceptance and pride in being “book-smart”, however is also quick to highlight she is “well-liked”:

Look, I don't want to look like a dork, but honestly, I'm going to be who I want to be, like - I'm book-smart and okay, I'm well-liked. Obviously, everybody cares what others think of them, but it's not the biggest thing to me. I've got other things... Like you've gotta... you've gotta be smart but you don't want to [pauses] be too smart, then you're a dork; you don't want to be

too dumb.

Alexis describes the complex negotiation and performance of her smartness. This is not simplistic; she wants to be smart in fact she stipulates this as a requirement (“you’ve gotta be smart”), however, wants to avoid transgressing the arbitrary boundaries of being “too smart” and therefore a “dork”. This continued monitoring of the potential advantages and disadvantages of being positioned as a smart girl has been identified in previous research with young women (Allan, 2010; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Skelton et al., 2010). Like Alexis, Louise in the focus group, also points to similar tensions:

No one really wants to be seen as a... well, a nerd... Everyone gets really self-conscious over their marks, and [pauses] achievements... I feel like you just don’t really want other people knowing [pauses] like your achievements coz it might make you look [pauses], I don’t know: kind of cocky a bit. Like if you start talking about your achievements and all that, everyone’s going to start thinking, “Oh she’s a bit of a show-off” ... I personally prefer to keep all my stuff to myself. And only tell my really close friends if I’m proud of myself for something.

Apart from not wanting to be positioned as a “nerd”, Louise also highlights the risk in young women being perceived as boasting about their accomplishments. Consequently, young women not only have to avoid being ‘too smart’ or not smart enough, they also need to be modest and self-deprecating (McRobbie, 2015; Skelton et al., 2010). In other words, central to customary notions of femininity, young women are expected to demonstrate a level of humility and unpretentiousness (Skelton et al., 2010). This was evidenced by Antonia’s frustration at her friend’s perceived boasting, or “flaunting” of her academic achievements. Such “flaunting”

seemingly transgresses normative notions of femininity, or satisfactory ways of 'doing' smart girlhood:

The girl that I've been friends with since Year 7 and this other girl, we wanted to confront the girl that's really smart and everything. We wanted to confront her about, you know, her behaviour, because it was getting really annoying. And how she just, she flaunts a little bit...Flaunts, not her intelligence but her...sometimes her grades, and we just don't want to hear it. Like we know you're wonderful; we know you're brilliant: we don't want to hear it because it makes us feel crap. It makes us feel bad. And as selfish as we might be being...- you know, we don't need to hear it.

Consequently, like the British young women in Skelton et al.'s (2010) study, it could be stated for the current group of young women "managing achievement alongside 'doing girl'" (p. 186) continues to be problematic. Further to this point, Jacinta and Sian both expressed levels of discomfort discussing their accomplishments and skills (even within the interview context), and accordingly demonstrated censorship of their achievements. Jacinta was reluctant to admit she does "quite well at school":

Jacinta: I've always been someone who does [timidly and tentatively -] quite well at school [laughs]. I hate saying it but like...

Linda (Interviewer): Why don't you feel comfortable saying that you're good at school that you do well?

Jacinta: It just sounds kind of up yourself or dorky or something, I don't know.

Jacinta's aversion to disclosing her status as a good student centres on not being positioned as "dorky" thus potentially socially inept. Additionally, by admitting that

she is a good student, Jacinta also runs the risk of being considered confident and boastful (“up yourself”). Accordingly, being “up yourself” or “dorky” both, in one way or another, breach hegemonic notions of femininity, or successful girlhood. In addition, Sian also explained, young women do not want to be perceived as boasting:

Sian: I feel like we don’t want to feel like we’re boasting about ourselves or saying, “Oh look how good I am”. We don’t want to draw attention to what we’re good at. Um yeah coz people might think, “Oh, she’s a bit like cocky or full of herself”.

Linda (Interviewer): Can you imagine that boys would have the same concerns, or do you think that...?

Sian: Maybe a little bit, but they are more [pauses] like willing to tell people what they’re good at, like sports or [pauses] um whatever.

For Sian, transgressing this requirement of passivity continued to be difficult in the interview:

Sian: I don’t know. I’m not overly confident. Like I’m confident but not like overly [whispers -] confident I guess. I kind of feel like what are people going to think of me? ...I don’t know [pauses] if there’s anything that I’m especially confident about. Just like, I’m generally like I’m happy with myself and what I can do and... etcetera. Yeah [laughs]...Um [pauses] I don’t know. I don’t want to sound like I’m boasting [laughs] but... I think I... I’m a hard worker and therefore it allows me to do well at school. Umm and like with my music, [pauses] I do exams and stuff, and [pauses] umm yeah. I think [pauses] that [pauses] I’m like an independent person. And I can do things on my own and maturely. Like - have a job, or [pauses] I catch public transport to and from school like those kind of things. I’m confident I can do that without

necessarily having my parents [pauses] right next to me. I went overseas by myself. Those kind of things. I think I'm confident with that [laughs] aspect of me.

Hence, irrespective of Sian providing an image of herself as seemingly independent and confident, she was still hesitant in defining and talking about herself in such a way. Skelton et al. (2010) and others (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Renold, 2001; Renold & Allan, 2006) have argued that in some ways the strength of mind and individualism required for high academic attainment is in opposition with the traits inherent in being a 'normal' young woman (e.g., nice as well as considerate of others) (Jeanes, 2011).

However, it could be argued that this tension becomes more nuanced as young women are consistently monitoring the arbitrary boundary of being smart but not too smart. For instance, the notion that smart girls and 'popular' or socially active young women are in many ways mutually exclusive continued in the current study (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015). It appeared that the peer culture at SCLC was influenced by this dichotomy between young women who are concerned with their education and those who were perceived to prioritise hetero-normative attractiveness and their social lives (at the expense of their academic success). For example, many participants talked about how there are two types of students at the school:

I think they're different: probably different interests, because my group of friends... We don't talk about [pauses] guys as such. We're more worried about, you know, studying or teachers and... I think the discussion topics are different compared to some other groups. I think some other groups [pauses] that I'm thinking of - like popular groups - would probably talk about parties

and boys and then subjects and school would come last in that discussion topic. (Antonia)

I feel like it's split between two...like Mean Girls kind of thing. You get girls who don't really go out much, who are more like academic-based. And then you've got girls here who like you know [pauses] are more liberated at parties and like [pauses] maybe not care so much about [their] education. (Yen)

I hate calling them the popular group because it's like [pauses] "Let's be serious" ...Okay, we call them the Ys, ²⁵ you know, like the typical like they're really pretty. They can be nice to people. They like parties, the boys and stuff like that. So that's like the big group, right? Then you've got the other end of the spectrum and it's like the dorky group. So, they're more like the book-smart, they're friends with each other but they're all like introverted. (Alexis)

Throughout the interviews, it was evident when making the distinction between the different 'types' of girls or groups at SCLC, the young women interviewed did not position themselves to belong to the 'popular' group who they positioned as being disinterested in education. However, unlike previous research (Raby & Pomerantz, 2015), these young women did not necessarily discredit their own interests in school and education, rather they spoke about the 'popular' girls²⁶ as "different" (Antonia) from the majority (although this could be for numerous reasons). Talia spoke of them as being in "their own little bubble" and Chiara stated,

²⁵ Young sluts (YSs) was the name Alexis attached to this 'popular' group of girls.

²⁶ Young women's discussions of popularity are often complex and fluid. Although they may label a group as popular they are not necessarily well liked or well-respected students in a traditional sense.

“I think it’s...like them, and then there’s like everyone else”. This is in some ways indicative of Valerie Hey’s (1997) contention that given the performativity of gender, within schools “girls have to make sense of themselves *against* other girls but they have to do so not in conditions of their choosing” (p. 136 [original emphasis]).

Therefore, through young women’s identity talk, they construct how they want to be seen against ‘other’ girls, representing “episodic moments of belonging or exclusion” within their friendships and peer groups (Hey, 2006, p. 450).

Adding to the ‘othering’ of these young women, it also seemed that the ‘popular’ girls were being criticised for their perceived difference in priorities (boys and parties over education); and denigrated by being referred to as ‘young sluts’ or “YSs”. These derogatory expressions such as ‘slut’ are often employed to monitor young women’s sexualities, and thus discouraging them from “transgressing acceptable ways of being feminine” (C. E. Charles, 2010a, p. 34). Hence, whilst normative discourses of femininity stipulate heterosexual attractiveness, young women’s ability to express overt sexual desire, or ‘promiscuous’ behaviour is limited and criticised. Furthermore, in postfeminist and neoliberal times, whilst hetero-attractiveness is fundamental, this also should be balanced against subjective position of the academically successful girl. Therefore, similar to the findings of C. E. Charles (2010a, 2010b), it is possible the young women in the current study placed more weight on being academically successful than heterosexually attractive (however this is not fixed and can vary across settings). Likewise, in C. E. Charles’ (2010b) research with female students of a single-sex elite school in Australia, she concluded that it is “important for many young women to be attractive, maybe even ‘raunchy’, but not in a way that will compromise their success in the world of elite education” (p. 68).

In addition to the peer dynamics and hierarchies present within an educational setting, school culture and the prevalent discourses concerning the academic success of students has also been named as fundamental to the way in which young women understand and value (or devalue) their smart, or not smart girl subjectivity (Allan, 2010; Allan & Charles, 2014). Regarding SCLC, as previously discussed (Chapter 5), it was the objective of the school to continue to develop a school culture in which high academic achievement was valued and expected from students. This therefore to some extent maybe contributing to these young women's emphasis on education.

However, regardless of the negative ways in which 'popular' girls were positioned against other (academically inclined) students, these popular students still maintained a level of social currency through their relationships with boys and their active social lives, thus indicating the complexity in young women's negotiated subjectivities in modern times (L. M. Brown, 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to note that there is no actual evidence to suggest that these so called 'popular' girls are not invested in their education or are not high performing students. Antonia, Yen and Alexis are making the assumption that for these students their social objectives override their academic interests. Although, some participants questioned how disengaged these 'popular' young women really were from their education. Antonia questioned how authentic this withdrawal from education was on the part of the 'popular' students:

Do they really not want to be too smart? Because I know people in my Maths class who are kind of popular. I mean, you could consider them popular, but they - I mean, they know what they're talking about and I overhear their conversations and they know, "Oh yeah, that's how you do this; that's how you do this". Like they know how to do that...

Similarly, during the focus group in which the ‘popular’ group was being discussed, Kate highlights the possibility that these students do care about their education despite appearances:

Louise: They don’t care as much about their education.

Kate: Yeah. [Pauses] Well that’s what it comes across as; they may, like at home they may care a lot, but it comes across as they’re just not caring about school at all.

Thus, according to Kate she suggests that they do not really know if these young women do not care about their education and perhaps, for some young women caring about their education may be kept hidden or “at home”. Therefore, highlighting the continued intricacy and fluidity regarding young women’s engagement with education and smart girl identity positions.

Further indicating the challenging nature of being a ‘smart girl’, was the way in which some participants discussed young women needing to mediate their smartness in the presence of boys. The focus group conversation highlights how at least for some young women it was a concern that being considered smart was not appealing to boys:

Louise: I think a lot of the time girls are afraid to come across as [pauses] interested in their education. And without having boys here (at SCLC), we can fully focus on that and not worry about what boys might be thinking even though they probably wouldn’t care –

Chiara: [Laughs] Mmm that’s true.

Linda (Interviewer): So why do you think girls are worried about what boys think of their achievement or -?

Louise: I have...don't really know but [pauses] it's just [pauses] I don't...
[laughs]... Does anyone -?

Kate: I feel like girls think boys go for the umm sort of dumber people.

Chiara: Pretty ones that are normally dumb.

Kate: The stereotype of like, the pretty, dumb one. So then if you're seen as umm like smart, girls feel like they're not going to be recognised...

The above focus group exchange highlights the potential incompatibility between academic achievement and other normative expectations of young women (Skelton et al., 2010). Evoking this stereotype of "the pretty dumb one" provides further evidence of this. Additionally, it further counters postfeminist and neoliberal philosophies, which essentially claim young women can succeed within the domains of education without contention. In contrast, the young women in the current research still had questions regarding the value of academic achievement; academic achievement was not considered to be valued and attractive to their male peers, thus potentially forcing young women to downplay their intelligence in the presence of boys. The notion of downplaying her intelligence was also discussed by Yen:

Yen: ...I guess [pauses] with males... You can't be too smart...Definitely not. You can't be too smart, or you'll make them seem bad. But you can't be dumb because then no one likes you...They can't strike...like hold a conversation with you, so yeah. Like you have to seem humble about it but be smart but don't act too smart.

Linda (Interviewer): Have you ever felt a situation like that for yourself or you've kind of felt that you had to monitor that?

Yen: I guess like at work - I'll hear them talking about something that I don't agree with, but I won't say it - in fear that they'll say, "Oh you know, well

don't blow it into a big thing. We're just having a joke", you know. Like when people talk...have like a... I don't know, like an uneducated opinion - like a really biased opinion, you might like say, "Oh yeah, but you know, I've seen this research" ... You might prove them wrong, but they'll be like, "Woah, hold it right there! Like I was just having my own opinion, but now you're attacking me with all your statistics and stuff", you know, like that... I guess it makes me feel a bit [pauses] I don't know, like your opinions aren't taken seriously. That's what I feel a lot. Like when people don't listen to you, or they cast your opinion off as like invalid, or not important, that really hurts a lot.

From Yen's description, the complexity of this negotiation for her was apparent. According to Yen, it appears it is not that young women cannot be smart; rather they cannot be smarter than a boy and need to be just smart enough to hold a conversation. Yen again highlights the need for young women to be "humble" and not "act too smart", thus protecting a boy's masculinity by not potentially outsmarting him ("you'll make them seem bad"). For Yen, who is a smart girl (this was also highlighted by her teachers during fieldwork), she consciously monitors her performance with her male co-workers out of "fear" she will be dismissed and more so, positioned as overreacting. She expressed concern that by simply sharing her opinion she can be positioned as "attacking" her male co-workers. Therefore, in addition to being humble, inherent in normative femininities is the expectation that young women control their knowledge and remain not too opinionated (Archer et al., 2007; Ohn, 2009).

Summary. Overall, like previous research the young women in the current study were able to nominate both risks and rewards of being highly invested in their

education (Allan, 2010; C. E. Charles, 2010a, 2010b; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015).

Education was highly valued among the current group of young women. They spoke of wanting to do well and competing (mostly covertly) against their female peers for results. In comparison to postfeminist rhetoric which positions academic achievement as commonplace for young women, the participants outlined a picture in which this notion of being smart was continually being positioned against other normative femininities. For these young women it was evident that they needed to be smart but not too smart, dedicated to school but also socially competent, competitive but passive, informed but not too opinionated. Therefore, reiterating the potentially unattainable position young women are often put in within the modern sociocultural milieu.

Appearance Related Discourses and Talk: “If my stomach’s flat then that’s fine”.

Part of the complexity of the postfeminist and neoliberal context is the continued emphasis on hyper-femininity, or emphasised femininity and beauty related consumerism (D. M. Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005; Riley et al., 2016; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011). Connell (1987) defines emphasised femininity as the overall subservience of women together with an orientation to meeting the needs of men. Connell accuses the media including magazines, television shows and advertisements for promoting such patterns of emphasised femininity in a manner far more excessively than representations of masculinity. Similarly, in more recent times, S. Jackson et al. (2013) asserts that, “the production of femininity in girls’ magazines provides a good example, wherein pages celebrating girls’ cleverness juxtapose pages of instructions about ways to make themselves prettier (through clothes, makeup, diet) and more attractive to boys” (p. 146). Therefore, particularly within Western

settings, the subordination of women continues to be emphasised and, in many ways secured via restrictive beauty ideals for young women (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Jeffreys, 2005; McRobbie, 2007; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). Hence the current theme specifically examines young women's understandings of such beauty or appearance related ideals. This theme includes two sub-themes. These sub-themes are: femininity and thinness (as well as, celebrities and Victoria's Secret models) and young women's reflexivity on normative and gendered beauty discourses.

With regards to appearance related ideals, although, young women's experiences should not be essentialised, it has been established that adolescence is a time that induces significant body dissatisfaction (Calogero & Thompson, 2010; Duchesne et al., 2017; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Consequently, it was anticipated that the young women interviewed, would identify body image and their physical appearance as significant issues for themselves and their female peers. Body image particularly as it pertains to young women, is often part of the public discourse concerning young women's mental and physical wellbeing; therefore, this issue was directly addressed in the interviews. However, the young women interviewed habitually highlighted appearance related concerns unsolicited. For example, the prevalence of young women participating in appearance related talk was confirmed by Pia who states that such commentary about wanting to be thin and pretty "just comes up in daily conversations". Also, Alexis despite her trying to separate herself from this issue, identifies poor self-esteem and body image as a matter, which impacts young women:

I reckon self-esteem levels but that's because I'm like a fighter for that. I want everybody to know that they're like beautiful, but everybody...so, so many girls, even the prettiest girls – they're like so insecure. And that would be the

biggest issue for me, not like me personally because, I'm not like a very insecure person, but like looking around and seeing everyone. That is the biggest impacting thing.

Antonia also identifies appearance related concerns as common for young women:

Body kind of issues, a lot of girls are concerned about...how much they weigh...I mean some would say, "Oh no, I don't think about it", but everyone does. Every girl does at some point. You know, I think everyone does think about it at my age.

The prevalence of appearance-related concerns among the young women interviewed is in accordance with recent Australian measures of youth mental health. In a recent investigation, body image was nominated within the top five concerns for adolescent young women (Bullock, Cave, Fildes, Hall, & Plummer, 2017). However, apart from being selected as a substantial and common concern for young women, it was apparent from the current interviews, body image and appearance-related concerns were in some way normalised among young women. As indicated by Antonia, "every girl" thinks about this "at some point". Similarly, regardless of her mother's advice when it comes to appearance related concerns, Talia expressed that she "can't help it", implying it is out of her control:

Obviously, the whole appearance thing as well...my mum has always told me, you know, she's always taught me how to respect myself ever since I was little...but you still can't help it, even when you're a teenager, when you've been brought up to respect yourself and love who you are. There's always that thing where it's like because I've been exposed to other girls and also social media. I still have some of those insecurities about let's say, like umm [pauses] my arms, my stomach - is that thin enough, is that healthy enough?

Like it's just...whereas I'm fine, I'm fine, whereas it's just like I still have these little insecurities that shouldn't really matter.

For Talia, it is evident that she seems somewhat conflicted about this continued focus on her appearance. In the above quote, she attempts to reassure herself ("I'm fine, I'm fine"), however also demonstrates a level of (neoliberal) self-assessment and surveillance ("my arms, my stomach - is that thin enough, is that healthy enough"). Talia also indicates exposure to "other girls and social media" contributes to her ruminating about her appearance. In the following extracts, Pia also highlights similar sentiments, in that body related anxieties are essentially normalised amongst young women and other peers' apprehensions "rub off" on you:

I think a lot of girls see that as their ideal and I do as well, that it's possible to look like a lot of models do and even though they you know have Photoshop and make-up artists and things like that. Mum actually, she tells me that a lot of the time, whenever we're watching TV or something, I'll say, you know "oh she looks really pretty". She'll say, "you know they've got like fitness trainers and make-up artists. You know, it's all lighting" ...she sort of reminds me of that a lot. [Pauses] But I feel like a lot of girls feel pressure to [pauses], to look that way. Like coming to summer and everyone's like talking about, "Oh yeah, I need to start wearing tights, I need to you know, fake tan, and I need to stop eating all this"...I don't think many people are like pressured by others to do that but a lot of girls feel like they need to fit in, I think. (Pia)

I like food too much to ever like [laughs] go on a diet. I can't do that but [pauses] I think it's like you hear a lot like, "I hate how I look", or "I hate, you

know, my legs or my...you know, my face or whatever”. You hear girls being negative about themselves a lot which is um [pauses]...I think it sort of rubs off on other people as well to, you know, think about, “Oh what don’t I really like about myself?” And... compare yourself to other people. (Pia)

In addition to this normalisation of body related concerns, both Talia and Pia indicate that within the home their mothers have attempted to dispel negative body related, or appearance centred messages. Previous research has pointed to the contribution the family environment in particular mothers’ own body dissatisfaction (or satisfaction) has on the beliefs and behaviours of young women (Arroyo & Andersen, 2016; Maor, & Cwikel, 2016; McBride, Kwee, & Buchanan, 2017; Ogden & Steward, 2000). Recent qualitative inquiries have also highlighted the potential protective role mothers can have in reducing body dissatisfaction in their daughters, particularly when promoting critical discussions (Maor, & Cwikel, 2016; McBride et al., 2017). However, despite Talia and Pia’s mothers (attempted) positive influence, the young women’s reflections suggest that participating in the assessment of one’s appearance is in some ways necessary “to fit in” for young women. This signifies the inherent normativity of this engagement in appearance related discourses. Peers and friends have also been considered fundamental in young women’s observance to beauty ideals (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005; Helfert & Warschburger, 2013; Shroff & Thompson, 2006). Furthermore, appearance centred dialogue has been nominated as fundamental in the development of appearance cultures within female school-based peer groups (Carey et al., 2011, 2013; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; D. C. Jones et al., 2004).

The following focus group exchange further underscores young women's rumination regarding their appearance and awareness relating to expectations concerning hyper-femininity, or 'girlie' femininity:

Chiara: I think that people forget to realise that the majority of girls have [pauses] normal bodies, and they forget that those celebrities [pauses]...they might have intense workouts...like some movies have special requirements. Like you need to lose this much weight for this movie. Like they forget that there's things that play a part as well as editing and stuff. They forget that the majority has normal bodies.

Louise: And also like, we always forget it but we're all girls and we all have the same problems, like - with our looks.

[Collective speakers]: Yeah.

Louise: Like we don't feel confident in ourselves, or [pauses] we feel we have to apply make-up to [pauses] umm... be [pauses] like [pauses] recognised as pretty or something.

Chiara: Mmm (affirmatively).

Kate: Yeah.

Louise: And we always forget that we all have the same problems, so we kind of [pauses] lose track about why [pauses]...why are we doing this? Like why does it even matter?

From the above exchange, similar to their peers (e.g., Pia, Talia and Antonia), the young women in the focus group position body, or appearance-related concerns as normative and to some extent an inherently fixed and essential aspect of girlhood ("we're all girls and we all have the same problems, like - with our looks"). Louise also indicates a level of perplexity regarding the concern and focus they place on

appearance. In other words, like Talia who talked of this rumination being somewhat out of her control, Louise also implies a level of unconscious compliance with this normative expectation (“so we kind of [pauses] lose track about why [pauses]...why are we doing this?”). Louise’s comments could also be considered reflective of contemporary discourses, which locate the cause of appearance-related concerns in young women’s flawed thinking rather than patriarchy (including the restrictive scrutinising of the female body) (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015).

Further to this, the perceived gender differences in appearance related concerns were reflected on during the focus group discussion:

Kate: I think girls are very different to boys in that way...I mean, we are judged by appearance a lot more - than boys.

Linda (Interviewer): Why do you think there’s that difference?

Kate: Umm [pauses] I think expectations –

Louise: It’s a lot... in media...

Kate: - yeah, media and society: they’re just - the expectations are so different.

[Unidentifiable speaker] [whispers -]: That’s true.

Kate: Like if you look at men: they all wear a suit; they all look almost identical [at] big like media events, so there’s nothing to really pick them apart. Whereas women: it’s like every single person is wearing a different dress.

Chiara: Yeah, like the Brownlow.²⁷

Kate: Yeah, exactly.

²⁷ The Brownlow medal is an award presented in Australian Rules Football (AFL) to the best and fairest player at the end of the season. This medal is presented to the winner at a televised voting and presentation night. The players and their guests attend this event. The television coverage also includes a red carpet event where players’ female partners are judged on their gowns.

Chiara: It's meant to be about the guy who gets the medal but –

[Laughter]

Kate: Instead everyone focuses on what the girl's wearing; what's wrong with their make-up; how their hair's looking.

Louise: Which dress was the ugliest, which one was the prettiest? [Laughs]

Kate: Yeah, they pick it apart to like girls feel so self-conscious that even going to like a party on the weekend, they're like, "Ohhhh..."

Louise: It's a big deal picking out an outfit [laughs]!

Kate: I've got to admit: I do that too –

Louise: Oh, so much! Yeah.

Kate: - like when I'm going to a party, I send pictures to all my friends: does this look alright? Do I look alright? Like should I go or not?

Louise: What are you wearing [laughs]?!

Therefore, these young women identified this public critique regarding a woman's looks as contributing to their own apprehensions regarding their appearance. This commentary was considered to further heighten gender differences in expectations regarding beauty ideals. This perceived difference in expectations was further addressed and clarified by Louise and Kate:

Louise: Especially because there's like a pressure for women to *always* look good [interviewee's own emphasis]. Like...I don't want to have to bother looking good [laughs] in the morning! Like I don't have time for that, so I think it's just a bit of a pressure to always look your best and all that which is a bit annoying.

Kate: Yeah. [Pauses] Like when you go to parties, guys are always wearing jeans and a top.

Louise: [Emphatically -] *Oh guys* can get away with *anything* [interviewee's own emphasis]!

Kate: They wear the same thing every week. No one cares. They just wear whatever: their runners –

Louise: [In slight disgust -] Oh! [Laughs]

Kate: their... whatever they got out of bed in. And the girls are in like their high heels and their dresses and their skirts and their hair looking nice, their nails done and their make-up.

Louise: Make-up done [laughs].

Kate: It's like oh...And they [pauses] they can...like guys can expect it of us. [Pauses] But yeah...and then you feel like sort of pressured by everyone else to do it even if you don't like want to particularly.

Thus, it was evident for the young women in the focus group (as well as the other young women interviewed), satisfying sociocultural expectations concerning beauty ideals and appearance was fundamental to 'doing' girl (Lazar, 2011).

According to Kate, Louise and Chiara, there are clear gender differences in the "pressure" young women are subjected to "to always look [their] best" in comparison to their male peers. These young women expressed feeling under increased scrutiny regarding their appearance and spoke of feeling pressured when deciding what to wear to social functions. Importantly, these young women spoke of a performance of femininity that young women are expected to participate in ("the girls are in like their high heels and their dresses and their skirts and their hair looking nice, their nails done and their make-up"). It could be asserted for some young women this performance is forced or engaged in reluctantly ("you feel like sort of pressured by everyone else to do it even if you don't like want to").

Femininity and thinness. In addition to the pressure to maintain this performance of femininity, it was evident these appearance-related concerns discussed by the young women, focussed heavily on body weight and thinness. Reference to concerns regarding “weight” (Antonia), if aspects of their bodies were “thin enough” (Talia), and having the “ideal body” (Pia) were inherent in their reflections on body image and the perceived pressure young women (including themselves) feel to maintain such ideals. Boyd et al. (2011) assert the importance of a girl’s body and the assessment of her body to her identity. Thus, a young woman’s assessment of her body and overall physical appearance against contemporary beauty ideals and expectations will communicate to her to what extent she is successful in satisfying normative femininities (Rice, 2014). Antonia’s discussion concerning her desires for her body, indicate a level of self-assessment and critique in relation to what “everyone else want[s]”:

Antonia: I used to be concerned about it (her appearance). I used to [pauses], I used to want [pauses] stupid things like a box gap or a thigh gap because, I don’t know, everyone else wanted it so why not?

Linda (Interviewer): When you say a box gap –

Antonia: A box gap is like when there’s, when you put your legs together, there’s a whole like square and there’s like a... [makes a gesture outlining a rectangular shape] like that, and a thigh gap is when it’s just a gap between your thighs. So, I used to want like a thigh gap or a box gap - either one - but, no I’ve just changed my eating habits and it’s...I have lost a bit of weight and I’m happy with that. And I’m happy with that. I don’t want a box gap anymore because as long as I’m like this then [gestures a smaller triangular shape] I’m good; not like *this* [interviewee’s own emphasis; gestures a

rectangular shape], like that's way too skinny. But like, if my stomach is flat then that's fine.

Despite Antonia trying to initially indicate that her physical appearance is no longer a concern for her, it is evident she continues to have a desire to maintain a thin appearance, which includes a “thigh gap” and “flat” stomach. Moreover, her contentment that she has “lost a bit of weight” further signifies the importance of weight control and thinness for young women (Tiggemann & Miller, 2010).

Furthermore, it has been asserted that postfeminist and neoliberal discourses force young women into a state of continued self-improvement, with potentially negative implications for their psychological and physical wellbeing (Gill & Elias, 2014; S. Jackson & Vares, 2015; Riley et al., 2016; Terry et al., 2017). This sentiment was also apparent in young women's management and surveillance of their appearance and weight management. For instance, Yen admits that she “could do better” or “try harder” when it comes to her physical appearance:

I'm not really confident in like looks and body...I don't feel too happy but like um, I kind of like just accept it. It's me, but like I could do better...I guess I could try harder [pauses], try not to eat as much junk food, try to get out more, do more sports. Because I only do sports once a week and that's tennis. I guess I could like [pauses], put an effort into caring for myself.

Yen's admission that she could make more of “an effort into caring for [her]self”, further signifies this monitoring and expectation to continue to approve one's appearance, or body that young women are continuously contemplating. That is, the contemporary neoliberal and postfeminist discursive space positions weight management (or lack thereof) as indicators of women's beauty as well as their integrity and health (psychological and physical wellbeing) (Woolhouse et al., 2012).

In the current social milieu, being “overweight is to be regarded as morally weak, deviant, lacking in self-discipline and vulnerable to ill health” (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Tischner & Malson, 2012; Woolhouse et al., 2012, p. 46). This focus on thinness and weight control as necessary for one’s health legitimises and strengthens young women’s desirability to satisfy such gendered constructions of beauty (Burns & Gavey, 2004; Carey et al., 2011).

However, on a positive note, it appears that at least for some of the young women interviewed, they could identify the limitations of the thin ideal particularly when it was co-opted within the ‘thinness equals health’ discourse (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017). Both Talia and Carissa question the validity of the thinness equals health binary:

Instead of just saying for people to be healthy, they’re telling you how to like be...have the perfect waist and that kind of stuff and it’s just a bit [pauses] you know...putting down people’s [sighs]...the way they look at themselves. (Talia)

Well, I know recently people are trying to look like, you know, like - really like fit but it’s not really fit. It’s skinny and I don’t know. I feel like, because I know, like people in my year level, they talk about how much they exercise and how they’re going to the gym...But then....They’re not really in like a fit looking way; they’re like in a skinny kind of looking way...Well I know with me last year, I went on a - well what I thought was a healthy way of going - where I used to eat only healthy foods and I used to exercise every day...and that was a negative consequence for me, but I think that some people think if

they just go and exercise every day and do those sorts of things, then [pauses] it'll be better for them but it can lead to bad consequences. (Carissa)

In addition, the young women interviewed were also consistent in pointing to the role media and social media play in communicating normative beauty ideals including the necessity of slenderness. For instance, Pia nominated the media (and the norms promoted) as a reason why young women participate in dieting behaviours, “from [the] media, I think, just looking at [pauses]...girls that...have the ideal body and things like that, as the ideal and wanting to be like that...”. Pia’s reflections are consistent with that of previous research, which has established that continued attention towards appearance centred media can have detrimental consequences for young women (Carey et al., 2011; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Interestingly, Carissa highlights the subliminal nature of this impact that the media’s promotion of female beauty ideals has on her:

I don’t feel like I take much notice, but I think at the same time I do take notice...I don’t sit there and think...I don’t look at every single aspect and think, you know, “I want to look like that”. But then like, internally it kind of, I just eventually begin to think like that. It’s like an ideal.

In more recent times, the specific role of social media has been critiqued for increasing body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Fardouly et al., 2015; Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; McLean et al., 2015). It is asserted that this form of engagement in social media further encourages young women to evaluate themselves (their appearance and lifestyle) against what they perceive as an ideal of successful girlhood. In addition to evaluating themselves they are attaching aspirations and goals to such images however unrealistic. Carissa, raises

this concern in attaching the term “goals” to images as well as the role social media plays in promoting contemporary beauty ideals:

Especially like with like the word like "goal" you know like, "body goal"...Like people are always saying it or like sometimes the goals aren't really realistic or they're not really something that you should aspire to, in a way...I do feel like there's a lot of pressure for people to look a certain way...on Instagram...people always navigate towards people who look a certain way and they kind of praise how someone looks or something. So, I feel like with those kind of things combined, it creates pressure to look that certain way.

However, for Carissa, she disclosed that this engagement in social media and her investment in “normal people” online had significant health consequences for her:

Last year I suffered from anorexia, so that was quite like an issue for me, and [pauses] well social media kind of impacted that a bit from just seeing people...I used to have Tumblr²⁸ and I used to have an account and follow other people. And a lot of the pictures and different things [pauses] they were just like normal people, or just like, they weren't like people too skinny or anything, but just like seeing images I kind of got in a little bit into like being very healthy but like it wasn't really healthy. Like pictures of people just working out and I'd just work out too much and yeah. Just that kind of like influenced my life.

Consistent with Carissa's experience, this exposure to specifically fitness related content on social media has been identified as potentially leading to increased body discontentment and young women's desire for thinness (Deighton-Smith &

²⁸ Tumblr is a social networking site that allows people to share a range of images and posts in the form of blogs.

Bell, 2017). As depicted in Carissa's reflections on her previous social media use, her continued exposure to what is often labeled as "fitspiration" content (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017, p. 1; Robinson et al., 2017; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017), influenced her engagement in health threatening practices (restricted eating and excessive exercising). Betz and Ramsey (2017) as well as Simpson and Mazzeo (2017) have highlighted the limitations inherent in such athletic but thin body representations. Similarly, Carissa came to realise her behaviour and the "normal" people online were not "really healthy"; further signifying the complex messages young women are exposed to regarding, thinness and fitness and what is or is not healthy.

Although not related to the fitness themed content, like Carissa, Pia also demonstrates a level of reflection and potential awareness regarding her social media use and how the particular images she is exposed to on social media influences her assessment of herself:

Pia: I suppose celebrities that I'm interested in or like. I think I follow too many [pauses] not fitness ones but like...in summer I think I follow like all these bathers²⁹ [brands] Seafolly and Triangl and all those ones that I think now [laughs] it like comes up too much it's like...I think that's a bit, I think I should stop that...I feel like I just see too many [pauses] of the same sort of body type coming up over and over. It's probably a bit influential like [pauses]...I'm doing a project in Inquiry on body image and media and things like that...and I've sort of realised that [pauses] it's pretty influential on how I like see other people and see myself. Yeah. I think I follow too much of [pauses]...of that, and models, and things like that...Not that I put myself down, but I see them as like better...Or you know, more beautiful and things

29 Swimwear

like that. But I know that it's not really achievable so [pauses] yeah.

Linda (Interviewer): So, do you ever feel a sense of pressure or - do you want to be like those images?

Pia: Yeah, I'd like to, but I know that [pauses] like I'm happy with [pauses]...not happy. I'd always like to look a bit better, but I'm sort of comfortable with [pauses]...

Linda (Interviewer): It's okay to say you're happy –

Pia: No, no, I'm comfortable with like how I am but definitely like seeing that often makes me feel like it's [pauses]...it's quite common and you know, the ideal sort of what you want to be...

Accordingly, both Carissa and Pia demonstrate how engaging with certain images via social media can impact young women's engagement with representation of normative femininities. In addition, Pia's statement "I'd always like to look a bit better" as well as her hesitation to claim she is "happy" with her appearance, rather settling on "comfortable" again, highlights this expectation around young women continuing to work on and improve themselves (Riley et al., 2016). Pia also highlights the role of celebrities and models in communicating normative beauty ideals. As highlighted in the proceeding discussion, like Pia the other young women interviewed also reflected on the part celebrities (and specifically Victoria's Secret models) play in shaping beauty ideals.

Celebrities and Victoria's Secret models. It has been argued that postfeminist definitions of femininity have become highly accessible to young women via popular and contemporary culture (C. E. Charles, 2010b; Gill 2012; S. Jackson et al., 2013). Celebrities are central to popular culture and form a significant place in young women's talk and more generally in their daily lived experiences (Duits & van

Romondt Vis, 2009; A. Evans & Riley, 2013; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Press, 2011).

Likewise, the young women in the current research identified celebrities as influential in framing normative femininities. Alexis and Yen, nominated the Kardashian family and specifically Kylie Jenner as setting the tone for what young women consider to be achievable beauty ideals:

The Kardashians, straight away that's who comes to your head. Like how everyone calls them hot and stuff and it's like they're so fake...how they've got their curves and stuff. I reckon girls look up to them...all of their stuff and um all of their looks, like pretty much - except for Kendall³⁰ [laughs]...She's like stunning. She's like the natural one. But their appearances are so fake, and everyone's like, "They're so attractive", but it's so negative because everyone wants to look like them but it's like, even if you tried, you couldn't unless you got surgery [laughs]. (Alexis)

[The Kardashians are] so big right now. Like they're the hottest thing. Their family is *massive* [interviewee's own emphasis]. You can't have a conversation or look on social media without an article or someone talking about it. They're just: I think they're a bad role model, in a way...like - Kylie...she's really young. Yet she looks 26/27/28. She just looks really mature and old for her age kind of. And that's the way she's put herself umm you know, like she had lip injections and I think that's a really bad way because girls feel insecure, like, "Oh your lips are so pretty, Kylie, I want them like that". And I see that in my friends, like: "I want lip injections too because my lips are too small". And I feel like that's kind of bad [pauses],

³⁰ Kendall Jenner

girls should have a choice, but I don't think it should come from an insecurity made by a celebrity and like - the way Kylie Jenner contours³¹ ...everyone thinks it's not. So, like, "Oh I want like you know her cheek bones" even though they're just contoured. "I want like to be like her: rich, have a mansion. I want to have her body even if it's I'm really sick". And like her sister, Kim...Her body is pretty unrealistic, and boys love that, for some reason. And girls want to be like her in a way...They won't say, "Oh I totally look up to them", but they'll say, "Oh I love Kylie Jenner; did you see that post she put up last night? She looked really good [pauses] that body was like on point". (Yen)

Therefore, despite Alexis and Yen's seeming disapproval of the influence such celebrities have on their peers, their statements confirm young women's significant engagement in such celebrity talk and the way such popular culture influencers³² shape gendered beauty ideals ("I want lip injections too"). This provides further support for the notion that celebrities are accountable for shifting and strengthening "gendered practices and expectations" (A. Evans & Riley, 2013, p. 268), including those pertaining to normative beauty ideals (Z. Brown & Tiggemann, 2016).

In addition to such reality television, or social media celebrities, many of the young women interviewed were consistent in their identification of Victoria's Secret³³ models being an influence on young women's body ideals. Both Carissa and Yen identify Victoria's Secret models to be somewhat of a phenomenon amongst their peers:

31 A make-up technique known to define and shape the face.

32 Kim Kardashian West and Kylie Jenner together have in excess of 200 million Instagram followers.

33 Victoria's Secret is a large American high-end women's lingerie, clothing and beauty brand.

I know a lot of people really like Victoria's Secret models and they think that they should act and dress like - more dress like - them and be like them...I remember people talking about how they want to look like them and they were like, "Oh they're not skinny like other models; they're like...like a bit skinny"...and they're like, "Oh I want to look like them", and stuff like that. And then because like deb's³⁴ coming up next year, people are starting to like organise that and they're like, "Oh I want to look like them so I'm going on like, go on this diet", and stuff like that... (Carissa)

Oh yeah, definitely, [pauses] at this school, in my year level, you'll hear about it all the time. "Oh yeah Alessandra³⁵, whoever she is, is so perfect". Um if a runway show's going on, everyone will talk about it "did you watch it last night? Oh my god! Their outfits were perfect, they were perfect". Even my friend who I sit next to all the time is like, "I love Victoria's Secret: they're so perfect; I want to be like them", you know...Victoria's Secret models like [pauses] it's such a bad expectation. Because only so few can achieve that body. (Yen)

Similarly, confirming the apparent influence such celebrities have on further shaping the thin ideal, Pia nominates Victoria's Secret models as the ideal body type: I suppose like a Victoria's Secret model. Like that's what you hear a lot, like skinny and tall and tanned...I think it...it's possible for some people but not a lot...A lot of girls, you know, watch the fashion show³⁶ and then go, "Oh I want to look like that; I need to start going on diets"...You hear that a lot.

³⁴ Debutante ball.

³⁵ Alessandra Ambrosio (Victoria's Secret model).

³⁶ Victoria's Secret is well known for their widely publicised fashion shows, which are broadcast worldwide.

Therefore, from Pia's as well as Carissa's comments it was apparent that the popularity and exposure to Victoria's Secret models has real consequences for the health-related behaviours of young women. Both, Pia and Carissa refer to young women participating in dieting to emulate the body types of such models regardless of how unachievable.

Young women's reflexivity on normative and gendered beauty ideals.

Despite the negative consequences inherent in the many gendered expectations of beauty (Calogero & Thompson, 2010; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tischner & Malson, 2012), including those which are communicated via celebrity culture and media, the young women interviewed in many ways were not passively accepting of such messages. As previously highlighted, participants such as Carissa, Yen and Pia demonstrate a level of reflexivity and critique regarding their own negotiations of gendered beauty ideals. Like her peers, Talia's discontentment with contemporary representations of women and the continued focus on their appearance was evident:

We're all trying to be the same thing, but then there's no individuality amongst us all...everyone's trying to become something they're not instead of embracing who they are...But if we're all trying and become the same person, then the world would be a pretty boring place to be [laughs]...Like when articles say how you should be acting around a boy, how you should be taking care of your skin, how you should be doing this [pauses] and it's like all how you should be doing this to become a girl. Whereas like it's just I *am* a girl [interviewee's own emphasis]. Like it's just - the worst, trying to make us all be the same instead of just saying, "Okay, stop: these are the girls who are really inspiring in the world". Like why can't we have more articles on people who have like been really successful and all that kind of stuff...Like there's

just like so much focus on the wrong things...I want to see a girl who is like really passionate about something that isn't what everyone else is passionate about. Let's say if you're really passionate about making documentaries like...which I am [laughs]. I really love it. Let's say you want to see someone like that or you want to see someone who's making a change in the world...We never see it... It's all about [pauses] make-up and what this person's doing in her life instead of focusing on ours.

Without overstating Talia's agency, it is positive that she is developing the ability to point out the limitations of such gendered representations of women and the media content (online or otherwise) aimed at young women. At times, however, Talia shifts between identifying this as an individual level problem ("we are trying to be the same thing") to something more systemic and culturally situated ("why can't we have more articles on people who have like been really successful"). Sharing similar thoughts to Talia, Sian was also critical of the lack of individuality and diversity located within contemporary femininities:

Sian: I think [pauses] like girls like kind of think they have to fit into this mould of like a person but that's not really the case...like celebrities, [pauses] people want to look like celebrities, be like skinny or tanned or whatever. That kind of thing.

Linda (Interviewer): Why do you think girls are trying to fit that mould?

Sian: Maybe just to be noticed or [pauses] yeah, just want to be like their favourite celebrity or that kind of thing.

Linda (Interviewer): How do you feel about that: trying to fit in with a particular look?

Sian: Umm I think it's okay to like aspire to have like have a [pauses] role model, but I don't think if you copy them it's...like you're not even your own individual person. I like having my own style [laughs].

Linda (Interviewer): How do you describe your style [laughs]?

Sian: Oh, I wear a lot of like [pauses] cute like...I like Japanese culture and like their clothes [laughs] that's kind of my thing...I like that cute kind of thing. And that's not really on the front page of a magazine! ...I think [pauses] you need to be like confident in who you are - yeah, instead of just saying like I'm not going to wear that because [pauses] people are going to not like me.

For Sian she seemingly demonstrates a form of resistance to traditional beauty ideals by not succumbing to current fashion trends and highlighting the “need to be like confident in who you are”. However, although not the intention here to disregard Sian's perceived confidence in herself (at least in the realm of fashion), this way of thinking is evident of postfeminist commentary, which locates young women's confidence (or lack thereof) as something that she can simply control and remedy herself (Gill & Orgad, 2015). Together with pointing to the lack of diversity present in contemporary notions of femininity, the young women also demonstrated a level of media literacy. For instance, both Jacinta and Kate highlight an ability to evaluate the authenticity of advertising directed at young women:

I always hate like when you see advertisements and it's all about you know, accepting...- that everyone has a different sense of beauty but then every single picture of the person...the person like in their pictures and stuff, they always look the same. It's like you're advertising all this like [pauses] you're beautiful but every single person like models for you or is the face of your

brand, they all look the exact same...Like if you took off all that make-up, they wouldn't look anything like that.... (Jacinta)

When they like airbrush and Photoshop everything, it's sort of like all the things you don't see go on behind the scenes kind of makes you get a false sense of what's real - and you sort of believe it when it's not true...So no one's really like that but they [laughs] pretend everyone's like that [laughs]. (Kate)

This ability to critique and evaluate media representations and messages concerning normative femininities was anticipated. As Gill (2012) suggests, young women are often charged with the responsibility of strengthening their media literacy skills in an effort to protect themselves from the unrealistic and unhealthy messages in the media. However, critical of the role of media literacy, Gill (2012) argues that such an approach transfers all the accountability to young people (rather than the media) to critique messages received, thus implying “that being critical will automatically displace other kinds of affective responses including shame, hatred or desire” (p. 737).

Interestingly, it was also common for the young women in the current study to identify a change in the discourses concerning body ideals and expectations. Both Yen and Carissa referred to the “two sides” of the media, although Carissa seems more tentative in her praise for these “empowering” messages:

I feel like there's two sides. There's the feminist approach to it. Like girls are: all like skin colours, all cultural identities, all ages, all body shapes, sizes and stuff like that. So that's a really like empowering positive side. And then there's the side like [pauses] celebrities who are stick thin, really pretty, really

tall and like [pauses] although they...some of them do work hard, they set an unrealistic [pauses] kind of standard for girls in a way because boys will view them as perfect, beautiful. Like Victoria's Secret models...girls will be like, "Oh like they're perfect. I really want to be like them". So, it's kind of a bad side to how girls [pauses] are portrayed...I feel like the nice side, like you know, everything is *really* good [interviewee's own emphasis] because like we're moving away from the time you have to look like this stick thin, really nice, really pretty, like everything and to just be proud of who you are...Buzzfeed...They're doing more articles on like body empowerment and stuff like that, so it's really good. And you see a shift coz everyone generally has like positive feelings about it. (Yen)

Well, I think there's kind of like two sides recently. Well, one of the sides ...recently in the media [there] have been like a lot of campaigns, like empowering women. So, trying to get women to you know, be more confident and stand up for what they believe in. But then I also feel like also in the media...there's still like [pauses]...there's like stereotypes of people...If you just look at a lot of ad campaigns, sometimes it's not like a normal person. In the advertisement, it's a person made up to look a certain way...I think it creates an ideal way that they want a person to look with that product or something. (Carissa)

Also, similar to Carissa, Pia was quick to point out the continued contradictions in positive media messages:

I think there's a lot in the media about being independent and being a feminist and standing up for what you believe in. You know, not really caring about

what other people think and things like that which is good, but then there's also the other side of you know, even though that [pauses] is out there a lot, there's still, you know, the typical ideal person that you want to look like or [pauses] there's still standards that you want to achieve. And it's easy to say that you know, don't care what other people think about you and um [pauses] but it's not as easy to go about that, I think. [Pauses] So yeah, there's sort of contradiction in what the media says as well.

Similarly, the young women in the focus group identified the more positive media messages aimed at women, however questioned their true impact with Chiara admitting she "still wants to be skinny":

Louise: I think like [pauses] in the past, it's been a lot: we have to be skinny and pretty but in recent times - it's become a lot more accepting of everyone and that everyone is [pauses] um perfect in their own ways and all that kind of stuff. So, I think it's got better over the last few years in particular.

Kate: Yeah, there's been like campaigns about it [pauses]. It's all through the media about –

Louise: Like the Dove³⁷ one and all that –

Kate: Yeah.

Louise: - the real people or something.

Kate: Which I think made a difference...I feel like people almost don't care as [tentatively -] much as they did. I'm not sure; it's hard to tell. Because you can't really tell what people are thinking, but by what they wear and stuff, people just don't - care as much [laughs].

37 Dove is a personal care products brand and their commercials and marketing campaigns particularly targeting young women and women are centred on 'real' beauty and 'discovering' or 'recognising' your potential. One of their objectives promoted is to help "make beauty a source of confidence not anxiety" (www.dove.com.au).

[Break in transcript]

Linda (Interviewer): So, do you think the pressures that girls experience has reduced...?

Chiara: I think deep it's [pauses]... I think deep down it's still there - even though we say, "Oh yeah, she has the same body as me", but I still want to be skinny.

Louise: Mmm. But we all still kind of want to be [pauses] you - know, that little bit prettier or that little bit skinnier - [pauses] sometimes it's not achievable but we all still want it.

From the above focus group exchange it is evident that discourses, which emphasise that everyone is "perfect in their own ways" (Louise) may not be as simple and "empowering" (Yen) as one may initially think. Although this message of body acceptance on the surface is welcomed, Gill and colleagues (Gill & Elias, 2014, p. 179; Gill & Orgad, 2015) warn against what they label as "love your body discourses" (LYB). Specifically, such discourses are considered part of (or symptomatic of) the postfeminist neoliberal condition and thus result in the "more pernicious regulation of women, that has shifted from *body* as image/project to *psychic* life. Beauty becomes 'a state of mind' ...in a way that represents and *intensification* of pressure and its extensification from body work to psychic labour" (Gill & Elias, 2014, p. 185 [original emphasis]). Therefore, due to the availability of these positive and pseudo-feminist discourses young women only have themselves to hold accountable for having low self-esteem and still trying to live up to the hegemonic and gendered beauty ideals, which continue to manifest alongside the doctrine of body acceptance. This potential for self-blame was apparent; Chiara and Louise highlight that despite this new appreciation of body diversity, they "still want

to be skinny”, or “little bit prettier” even if it is “not achievable but we all still want it”, thus locating the issue within themselves and their way of thinking (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015).

Summary. In the current research, appearance-related talk and concern was positioned as an inherent part of ‘doing’ girlhood. Thus, despite postfeminist rhetoric which positions young women as ‘empowered’ consumers free from seemingly dated notions of gender inequality, restrictive (and in many ways unattainable) gendered beauty ideals representing ‘proper’ femininity persist (Carey et al., 2011; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Tischner & Malson, 2012). In particular for young women, the body continues to be a sight of surveillance and regulation. The way in which a young woman views her body in relation to contemporary images of the feminine physique (as well as the way her body is ‘viewed’ by others) provides her with insight into how successfully or otherwise she is ‘doing’ girl (Rice, 2014). For the young women in the current study, it is evident that the thin body represents the ideal. From the participants’ reflections it was apparent that this thin ideal continues to be perpetuated by contemporary culture together with social media and celebrity culture including the increased popularity of Victoria’s Secret models. Despite these participants demonstrating a level of critique and concern regarding such representations of normative femininity, many if not all were found to be self-surveying their own appearance in relation to these perceived norms.

Successful Girlhood = Being an All-Rounder: “We have to be smart; we have to be pretty; we have to do this; we have to do that”.

From the insights and narratives offered by the young women in the current study, it is evident that they are continually negotiating complex and at times contradictory expectations regarding academic achievement and gendered beauty

ideals within the context of postfeminist ideas of successful girlhood. Increasing the complexity of the current sociocultural terrain for young women is that they are developing in a time where celebratory messages of ‘girl power’ are prominent and the notion of sexism as obsolete, are all encompassing (Gonick, 2006; Harris, 2004b; S. Jackson & Westrupp, 2010; Ringrose, 2013). Consequently, young women, in particular western middle-class young women (like the participants in the current study), are positioned as no longer being impeded by their gender therefore have the opportunity (and the expectation) to succeed in all aspects of their lives (academic, social, romantic, work, family and so on) (Baker, 2008; Harris & Dobson, 2015). Some researchers have argued that truly ‘doing’ successful girlhood mandates young women prosper in “customary masculine domains (academic, intellectual, confidence, assertiveness)” (p. 146) whilst simultaneously satisfying hegemonic feminine ideals including heterosexual attractiveness (S. Jackson et al., 2013). In the current research, many of the young women interviewed were mindful of these multiple and co-occurring demands. Pia stated that “looking good and being intelligent and [pauses] sort of everything” were underlining expectations that she was trying to meet. Also, Sian reflected on the broad range of expectations young women need to manage:

Sian: [Girls] are expected to do a lot of things. Like be at school, or have a good social life [pauses], as well as like...[pauses] have a job or [pauses] yeah that kind of thing. Like there’s a lot that is expected of us. Yeah and [pauses] what we look like as well I think, yeah.

Linda (Interviewer): And how do you feel about those expectations?

Sian: They’re not really an accurate representation of like everyone. Like everyone’s different. I don’t think you should put pressure on girls and just

like stereotype broadly when like everyone has a different personality, way of life...I think people expect that like I have a really good social life, that I'm always at a party or like having a boyfriend when that's not necessarily like what I really want in my life right now...because I don't think I necessarily want those things in my life right now but maybe in the future.

From the above quote it is notable that Sian demonstrates some resistance (and frustration) to this idea that young women need to have it all at the same time. Sian confirms the notion that young women like herself are expected to engage and perform well in school, while maintaining their physical appearance, participate in an active social life, have a job and a boyfriend (Harris, 2004b; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013). However, she also implies that this is not something she desires currently in her life. Nonetheless, it is important not to simplify this action as purely her choice as what has potentially influenced this action (e.g., parents, friends, previous experiences) as well as the potential consequences of this decision for Sian is not discussed here. Furthermore, this does not necessitate that Sian is immune from this discursive construction, which positions successful young women as all-rounders. Previous research has utilised several labels to refer to this new idealised version of femininity and 'doing' girl, including the "supergirl" (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 7), and the "can-do girl" (Harris, 2004b, p. 16). Despite the difference in such labels, these subjective positions mandate that young women "balance contradictory subjectivities with ease" (Budgeon, 2015; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 7). In the current research, young women who did not maintain such a balance were often open to criticism. For instance, Kate and Louise discussed the criticism they experienced from their peers regarding their commitment to their sport rather than their social lives:

Louise: Especially the going out thing.

Kate: Yeah.

Louise: I know with – I know coz we’re both quite sporty - and having to decline invites all the time due to our –

Kate: Yeah.

Louise: - sporting commitments, it’s quite –

Kate: Even when you... yeah.

Louise: - hard. A lot of people don’t understand it, especially when you’re getting into the elite levels of sport. If you say, “I can’t go because I’ve got a big competition the next day”, people start getting their noses out of joint, and start assuming that you think you’re too good for them.

[Break in transcript]

Kate: Yeah. So, if you do sport, you’re sort of seen as a sporty person kind of thing. So, you miss out on all of the social events and the...you know. It’s hard to like catch up with your friends and things.

Chiara: I used to be a sporty person, but...Like even now sometimes, coz like I play basketball on Saturday nights - and most things are on Saturday night, so I have to be late to certain things and people are like, “Why?” I’m like, “I’m sorry” ...

Consequently, the young women in the focus group felt criticised and pressured to maintain the active social life of a ‘supergirl’ (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007), despite how unachievable this may be because of their sporting commitments. Further contributing to this trend, Antonia also demonstrated that she is highly critical of her friend who although is smart and performing well in school, does not demonstrate customary feminine qualities of being caring and patient:

I mentioned to her that, you know, “I feel like I can’t ask you for help because you get impatient”, which she does; she does get impatient, and she almost feels like it’s inconsiderate for her to help you. And so, then she kind of said, “Oh no, I don’t want it and it’s not meant to come out that way” ...So if she’s impatient, it’s because she doesn’t know how to [pauses] deal with other people [laughs], I guess. She’s not really a people kind of person. Like she knows she’s socially awkward, and I know that she’s socially awkward because I guess she’s not really empathetic in that way. She doesn’t understand, like she’ll have an idea that, oh yeah, something’s wrong with her, but she won’t query about it. Like she’ll just kind of...Like she’ll know something’s up, she won’t [pauses] ask. She won’t take out that time and go, “Oh”, you know, “what’s wrong? How are you feeling?” Yeah.

Antonia’s comments correspond with Walkerdine’s (2006) observations of girls’ gaming behaviour. Within this study, despite their strong desire to win (like their male peers), girls were obligated to accomplish this whilst exhibiting feminine qualities of “sensitivity, caring, and co-operation” (Walkerdine, 2006, p. 519), much like Antonia expected from her smart friend.

Additionally, Yen’s reflection on current depictions of female characters in popular culture including in teen novels and movies further points to the all-rounder subjectivity position being promoted to young women:

You always hear in books...Oh yeah, this girl’s like skinny, pretty-ish, cool and strong so she can stand up for herself, but she’s always delicate so a man can save her...so he seems masculine as well. And it’s always impossible because this book portrays them as the perfect person, whereas if you think

about it, it's impossible...Like just your average like teen rom-com³⁸ kind of movie: the girls are always like perfect, in a way. And the boy's [pauses] nerdy, but somehow, he gets the girl anyway. And the girl's pretty, smart, skinny, she's athletic - but you know, she doesn't try to do those things...Like the books that are in right now, like the dystopian novels...books catered for young adults and teens coz they'll always have a kind of like supernatural element but like a romance part to it and girls are always portrayed as like strong but [pauses] weak at times when a man needs to save her.

From Yen's description, it is evident young women are being sent the message that these idealised versions of 'doing' girl require them to excel in a number of areas (including traditional masculine domains) whilst demonstrating sufficient levels of femininity ("girls are always portrayed as like strong but [pauses] weak at times when a man needs to save her"). Interestingly, Yen has somewhat recognised these depictions of female characters effectively set young women up to fail, in that she proclaims this "perfect person" is essentially "impossible" to emulate. Griffin (2004) also labels modern day girlhood as an "impossible project", explaining that young women are "caught between competing forces, in a permanent state of dissatisfaction or desire, surrounded by idealized representations of itself, and simultaneously invisible" (p. 42). Furthermore, like Yen's comments, during the focus group it was acknowledged that this paradox of girlhood is not something necessarily replicated in understandings of boyhood:

Chiara: For us (girls) it's more pressure [pauses] to do whatever. With guys it's more like you just have to be [pauses] a man.

Kate: [Laughs]

38 Romantic comedies

Chiara: For us, we have to be smart; we have to be pretty; we have to do this; we have to do that. And then for guys it's like: have muscles –

[Collective laughter]

Chiara: - and that's it. Like you don't have to be smart.

Therefore, like Yen and the other young women interviewed, the participants in the focus group construct the multiple and omnipresent expectations they are mediating as being a distinctly female experience. However, it is important to acknowledge these young women may not necessarily have an understanding or appreciation of the pressures young men also experience. Therefore, in some ways they are oversimplifying young men's negotiations of gendered discourses and hegemonic notions of boyhood.

Furthermore, young women's engagement with and desire to replicate this all-rounder or "supergirl" subjectivity (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 7) was further emphasised in their discussions regarding their role models. Talia highlights that her friend is her role model because she "balances everything out":

Well she's like one of the top students, but the thing is it's not really about that. It's the fact I love her attitude. I remember the first day I met her, and she was just like so welcoming and like she does everything. She is in everything, she gets really good grades and she just balances everything out and I *really* like that about her [interviewee's own emphasis]. She's just...yeah, she's someone that really stuck out to me. And I like it that the teachers, kind of make her a role model and they make sure that girls do look up to someone like that.

Similarly, Antonia and Jacinta both portray their role models as all-rounders who successfully manage competing demands and excel in both traditionally masculine and feminine domains:

I think my mum, actually - she's always been a role model and she's always been strong and confident and when I tell her that, she goes: "Oh no, I haven't been confident". It's like, "Oh stop it! Stop it!". So, I think it's mostly her because she's...she's a strong - she's just really strong because she works and she's also a mum. And I think that's amazing. I think it would - it might be different for stay-at-home mums and people who don't, those mums that raise their children at home. And it's a different kind of strong. You know. They stay home, and they take care of you. That's a different kind of strong compared to a corporate woman taking care of her child while she's working. To me I just think that's amazing, for someone to do both of those things and at the same time: to be nurturing and to be strong and confident at the same time and to not be emotional is amazing...It's taught me to be the same thing. I want to be just like that. I want to be, you know, nurturing enough to let people know that I'm not a complete bitch [laughs] - you know - but be strong and confident to get my point across so people can take me seriously.

(Antonia)

I just think like my brother's girlfriend is like I just like *love her* so much [interviewee's own emphasis]. She's just really cool and [pauses] just I dunno, someone that's sort of I want to be like when I'm older, I guess. So just because I sort of connect with her, I sort of look up to her...She's like [laughs] the best. She's a dancer and [pauses]...This is what I say to everyone

who asks about her: like she is pretty like professional with like her dancing. She does it for like the NBL³⁹, like the basketball. She does like cheerleading for like that, and she dances with like Samantha Jade⁴⁰ and I thought that was [laughs] pretty cool. And so, she, you know, she runs her own business and that sort of thing... But then like you see pictures and she's like pretty like you know, she looks sort of like a typical dancer: like she's short and really, really pretty and has long blonde hair. And you know, the outfits that they have to wear are sometimes a bit showy but like in person she's just not like that at all. If you didn't know anything about her, you would just think she would just be the type of person who just walks down the street in like jeans and like a jumper...she's just so friendly and [pauses] I just think it's really cool that like even though for like her job she has to be that sort of person [pauses].

When she's not doing that, she's just so like [pauses] different. (Jacinta)

For Antonia this image of the all-rounder is replicated in her description of her mother and why she is her role model. According to Antonia her mother successfully displays customary masculine traits such as confidence, strength and limited emotionality whilst not transgressing normative femininities by continuing to be nurturing (Connell, 1987). Likewise, Jacinta creates a faultless image of her brother's girlfriend who has experienced professional success, is attractive and maintains the necessary balance of friendliness and confidence, thus the true "supergirl" (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 7). However, due to postfeminist rhetoric which positions young women as carefree and not managing the obstacles of patriarchy (Harris, 2004b; Pomerantz et al., 2013), an awareness of the potential struggles and sacrifices

39 National Basketball League (Australia)

40 Australian singer

these women may have endured to appear as though they are fulfilling all these roles successfully (which they may be) seems to be unfortunately missing.

Summary. Symptomatic of postfeminist and neoliberal trends and ideologies, young women in contemporary times have been placed in the unique position of being considered the ideal neoliberal subject (C. E. Charles, 2010a). Participants in the current research were seemingly aware that as young women they were not only expected to do well at school, maintain an active social life, meet restrictive beauty ideals and continue to be considerate of those around them including their friends, but in the words of Pia they were expected to be “sort of everything” at the same time. This is reflective of the characterisation of the ‘can-do’ girl (Harris, 2004b) who is effectively assigned the task of succeeding in both traditionally feminine and masculine domains without apparent struggle (despite the inherent contradictions and monitoring which occurs) (C. E. Charles, 2010a; Griffin, 2004; S. Jackson et al., 2013). This idealised version of girlhood was evident in the young women’s reflections regarding the expectations they felt people had of them, their role models and their criticisms of other young women. However, the young women in the current study (some more than others) were cognisant of the contradictions inherent in such expectations and the challenges of trying to balance such competing requirements. They were also under the impression that their male contemporaries might not need to manage the same requirements. Therefore, this affirms Harris’ (2004b) contention that this new mobility of young women is not only “celebratory, but is, in part regulatory as well...in holding [young women] up as the exemplars of new possibility, we also actively construct them to perform this role” (p. 1).

Immediate Context of Identity Negotiation

In addition to the multiple challenges in understanding normative femininities and contemporary girlhood, it is necessary to recognise that young women are not negotiating and constructing their subjectivity and sense of self in isolation. Rather, it is apparent that the young women in the current research, are constructing their identities in the context of multiple, co-occurring and often contradictory expectations set by their families, their female peers, boys outside the school context, their school and more broadly media and contemporary culture. In spite of developing and negotiating their identities in relation to a number of factors, for young people peer groups are considered central to these negotiations (Paechter, 2003, 2006b; Warrington & Younger, 2011). Inclusion into friendship groups often mandates behaviour as well as language and attitudes associated with normative understandings of what it means to be a boy or a girl (Renold, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011). In addition to this, regarding the subjectivity development specifically of young women (and women in general), previous research has discussed the significant role of the male gaze (Calogero, 2004).

Similarly, within the current research, the privileged position boys maintained within the social world of participants was illustrated. The young women interviewed often discussed how they and their female peers monitored their behaviour (e.g., perceived smartness and appearance) in an attempt to appease boys. However, consistent with previous research (Allan, 2009), the young women in the current research often (but not always) discussed boys in very abstract terms rather than reflecting on specific interactions, or relationships (romantic or otherwise) with boys outside the school context. Together with the consistent male gaze, young women also identified other forms of 'looking'. That is, due to the young women in the

current research attending a single-sex educational setting, the process of identity development within the immediate presence of other young women is of particular importance. Therefore, within this theme specific consideration will be given to, looking and talking between females and the risks of transgressing normative femininities.

Looking and talking between young women. Riley et al. (2016) and others (Bailey et al., 2013; Hutton et al., 2016; Ringrose & Coleman, 2013) have drawn attention to the role in which looking between women contributes to subjectivity development of other females. What is referred to as the “postfeminist gaze” (p. 108), is understood to be regulatory looking in which women participate to assess their success and failures regarding the achievement of normative femininities (in particular but not limited to appearance-related norms) (Riley et al., 2016).

Comparable to the women in Riley et al.’s research, the young women in the current study also identified the prevalence of judgemental looking between female peers and friends. Alexis proclaimed that continued judgement from female peers makes it “so hard being around girls all the time”. Likewise, the young women in the focus group highlighted the prevalence of judgemental looking between female peers:

Kate: And everyone just looks at everyone like: "Mmmmmm..."

Chiara: There’s a lot of judgement.

Louise: Lots of judgement.

Kate: The second you walk in, it’s like, “Oh my god! Who’s she? What’s she wearing?”

Louise: “Oh my god! Look at how long her skirt is” ... [laughs]

Kate: It starts...like Year 7, you get like... “Oh, look at her”.

Louise: [Laughs]

Linda (Interviewer): Why do you think girls are so quick to judge each other?

Louise: Coz it's just built into us like...

Chiara: Yeah.

Louise: It's another thing that over time it's just been um [pauses] like put into us like - oh yeah, be judgemental, I guess [laughs].

Kate: I feel like it's almost –

Louise: - it's like...it's okay to judge people if you're a girl.

Chiara: It makes you feel better when you - judge someone else.

Kate and Louise: [Emphatically -] Yeah! [Laughs].

Linda (Interviewer): It makes you feel better?

Kate and Louise: [Emphatically -] Yeah!

Chiara: Personally, it makes me feel...

Louise: [Laughs] Boost your self-confidence - yeah!

Similar to previous research, for these young women this judgemental looking was positioned as commonplace and, in many ways unavoidable (Riley et al., 2016).

Unavoidable in a sense that this postfeminist gaze within this broader postfeminist sensibility sets up young women to understand themselves (how they feel about themselves) and their performances of femininity in comparison to other young women (Riley et al., 2016).

Furthermore, such statements as “it's just built into us” and “it's okay to judge people if you're a girl” are reminiscent of the postfeminist discourse of the ‘mean girl’ (Gonick, 2004; Ringrose, 2006, 2013). With reference to broader conversations concerning young women's participation in relational forms of aggression, Ringrose (2013) asserts that popular and contemporary culture has constructed narratives which position girls' ‘meanness’ as “a middle class norm of repressive and

pathological femininity” (p. 30). Interestingly, further pointing to the perceived normality of judgemental looking and talking, Alexis proposes that young women use this talk to “feel closer” to other female peers:

I know girls feel closer to people when they bitch about people...I remember last year - I had a best friend and like the way we bonded, we...You first like bond over like, “oh my gosh, she’s so annoying, that girl!” Like it’s something to bond over immediately and it’s like so ridiculous...But I know that’s like a way to feel closer to someone.

Furthermore, together with somewhat adopting judgemental looking and talking as a part of ‘doing’ girl, the young women in the focus group nominated judging other girls as a way to “feel better” and “boost your self-confidence”. This sentiment is mirrored by Pia:

The fact that if someone else is - if you believe they’re better than you or they’re doing better in, in something you need to find something to criticise about them or...When other people talk about other girls negatively, sometimes you can be brought into that, thinking “oh yeah, I hadn’t heard that about that girl”...You put other people down, maybe to make yourself feel better.

Hence, it could be asserted that these young women are participating in a form of “positioned othering” (Hutton et al., 2016, p. 75). Hutton et al. (2016) discussed the ways in which young women utilised ‘positioned othering’ to survey the drinking behaviours of other young women. Despite participating in drinking behaviours, young women were found to locate themselves in opposition to young women they perceived to have gone too far and transgressed normative and proper femininities, thus maintaining “a sense of respectability to be retained about their own drinking

practices” (Hutton et al., 2016, p. 81). In a similar manner, the young women in the current research could be using ‘positioned othering’ to make themselves “feel better” about the ways in which they may not be satisfying normative gender expectations.

Sian also spoke of “being judged for who you are” as one of the negative aspects about contemporary girlhood. She goes further to explain this is “something that [pause] especially young people worry about” and forces young women to ask themselves questions like “what are other people going to think of me if I do this; if I wear this? If I look like this?” (Sian). From Sian’s comments, it is evident such judgemental looking between young women (the postfeminist gaze), further contributes to the self-surveillance and regulatory practices mandated in contemporary postfeminist performances of femininity (Bailey et al., 2013; Gill, 2008a; McRobbie, 2015; Riley et al., 2016).

Correspondingly, both Alexis and Jacinta identify how young women are more likely to compare themselves to other female peers potentially known to them rather than to idealised celebrities:

Everybody compares themselves to others...You could probably like bite [sic] to say social media: like all of the famous people, but I don’t think it’s the fact that [girls] want to look like famous people as much as it is like...it’s more looking like each other. (Alexis)

I find myself always thinking like even if I’m happy about something with myself it’s like, “Oh there’s always someone who’s better than me”...So it’s always like comparing yourself to other people...I don’t compare myself to

celebrities, or anything, like I just find that really stupid, but like just with like my own friends. (Jacinta)

Therefore, for Jacinta in particular, it was not entirely about judging other young women; it was about comparing herself to her friends to determine how “happy” she should be with aspects of herself. Talia also reflected on the tendency for young women to use other young women as a point of comparison and competition in an effort to become the “perfect girl”:

We try to - we keep trying to prove ourselves in every way, like just in the workforce, even our appearance. Like we have to have the perfect this, the perfect that. And that’s all because of not just men but also women...Like it’s fine if you want to like try and change yourself as much as possible, just to be the perfect girl, but like it’s not really [pauses]...It’s sometimes boys but I feel like it’s mostly women who are competing against each other to become this perfect girl. (Talia)

Evidently, Talia effectively cites the male gaze together with the looking between young women (postfeminist gaze) as the context in which young women are developing their subjectivities. Sharing similar sentiments to Jacinta and Talia, Pia provides further confirmation that looking and judging between young women is an aid to further develop an understanding and assessment of one’s self:

I think girls are always judging themselves and judging each other and it’s hard to take yourself out of that...I think it’s more judging myself compared to others. I think most people are like that and you don’t realise that other people aren’t really judging you for how you look like rather than comparing themselves to other people. Yeah. I think everyone’s busy worrying about themselves really.

This element of self-assessment and surveillance has been identified as a fundamental aspect of the postfeminist gaze (McRobbie, 2015; Riley et al., 2016). As asserted by Riley et al. (2016), this postfeminist gaze positions young women's criticisms and judgemental 'looking' of their female peers to also be criticisms of themselves. Thus, this looking between young women is complex and multifaceted.

This postfeminist gaze and judgemental looking does not only occur in person or within the school setting; social media provides an additional platform for the postfeminist gaze (as well as the male gaze) to operate (Bailey et al., 2013; Hutton et al., 2016; Ringrose et al., 2013). In contemporary times young women are engaging with postfeminist discourses of femininity and constructing their gendered subjectivities online (Bailey et al., 2013), which also has implications for the ways in which they 'do' gender offline among their peers within and external to the school environment (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011). In the current research, it was apparent the young women were aware of social media being a landscape where judgemental looking between female peers could continue. Before posting images of herself online, Jacinta admits that she contemplates "who's going to see it and what people will think of it when they see it?" Sian also acknowledges the potential for judgement when posting images online, while Carissa attempts to limit her vulnerability to such judgement:

Sian: I don't really post that much but like when I was in Japan, I'd like post pictures of that with my family. Um when I go out yeah, that kind of thing.

Linda (Interviewer): Do you think a lot about what you post before you post it?

Sian: Yes [emphatically] [laughs]! Yes! [Laughs] Yeah. Um just like [pauses] I don't know, like maybe what I look like. People might like judge or something, just like that kind of thing.

I don't really post that often, but when I do, um [pauses]. I don't know. I don't really think too much about it...Sometimes I do but I don't really post any images or things that make me feel like people are going to judge me. Like I wanna post things that I'm kind of like happy to share. (Carissa)

Bailey et al. (2013) highlights that rather than social media providing young women with increased avenues to disrupt hegemonic ways of 'doing' girl, this online presence has reinforced the surveillance and judgement with which young women are subjected. Previous research has examined the ways in which young women's sexuality is perceived and monitored online (Bailey et al., 2013; Ringrose & Barajas, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013). In the current research, it was evident that the extent to which young women satisfied, or transgressed norms of feminine modesty were subjected to critique from other female peers. Both Antonia and Talia provide instances of judgemental looking between female peers, which centred on surveying young women's perceived lack of modesty online:

A massive thing happened last year...there were these two girls and this one girl; I think she took a nude or something of the top half...and she...I think she shared it with a guy who was an ex-boyfriend of another girl [laughs]...It was honestly messed up. (Antonia)

I see online with girls who just put an image up of say in their bikini or [pauses] in an outfit that's a bit exposing, but like they get *heaps* of shit for it

[interviewee's own emphasis]. Like it's not even bad...and then it's like, "oh she put that image on, she's just trying to get attention", [they] just say mean things like that. (Talía)

One time this was on social media, a girl put on a photo of her like just in like a crop top or something, not even that bad. Like let's just be honest here [laughs]. Um and like *so many* comments [interviewee's own emphasis] and like just saying that she was [pauses] this and that and a slut and all this kinda stuff whereas she was like, not...like let's be honest [laughs]. You know? It's just like, come on! (Talía).

From the above commentary, it is evident that at least Talía is critical (or somewhat amused and bemused) of this judgemental looking and talking occurring between her female peers. However, as identified by Ringrose and colleagues (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011, p. 123; Ringrose et al., 2013) and others (Bailey et al., 2013; C. E. Charles, 2010a), young women are often put in a contradictory position of having to regulate their modesty in a postfeminist context, which emphasises heterosexual attractiveness and "hyper-sexualized displays of sexy femininity". Judgemental looking and talking occurring between young women further contributes to this regulation of modesty and sexuality of female peers. The following exchange with Yen highlights how perceived sexually overt behaviour displayed by young women puts them at risk of being "ostracised" and "put at a distance":

Yen: There was a party recently and my friends noticed this girl, doing...just doing really sexual stuff...Myself and my other friend, [Zoe], we were actually kind of like...we looked at her differently. So yeah...I feel like people are ostracised a bit, put at a distance...I guess when you do stuff that isn't

approved by others like...hang out with someone's boyfriend too much; if you um [pauses] drink, maybe go out to parties too much: stuff like that...people look at them differently in a way. I know at school, you're acting like that, but you know, on the weekends, you're definitely not. I see the photos on Snapchat and stuff so...

Linda (Interviewer): Okay. So, the girl at the party that you were talking about is she someone you know - a student here or is it from another school?

Yen: Oh no, she's from [laughs] my lit class, yeah.

Linda (Interviewer): Yeah. So, do you think differently of her now, or -?

Yen: [Pauses] Well [pauses] I always thought she was a bit annoying [laughs], just coz, I don't know, she's a little bit [pauses] [tentatively -] ditsy in a way. But once I heard about [pauses] like what she did, I kinda looked at her like, "Oh, I didn't know you would do that stuff on the weekend, so...Wow, I guess".

Linda (Interviewer): What did she do, if you don't mind me asking?

Yen: Oh yeah, um [pauses] so I think like several photos were taken of like her on some random guy's lap with his hand up her skirt and stuff like that.

Linda (Interviewer): And did she know that those photos were being taken?

Yen: Oh yeah. This is what I heard through my friends but like apparently [pauses] she didn't care. Like she just said like, "I don't care. Just take photos anyway".

Therefore, for Yen despite herself not directly witnessing her classmate's perceived inappropriate behaviour she now looks at her "differently". The looking and talking between young women works to regulate young women's subjectivities both within and external to the school context as well as online. In addition to this, from Yen's

explanation of this situation, it is evident that double standards regarding overt sexuality continues to prevail as no criticism of the boy in this scenario was expressed, or the individuals who were taking the photos (thus this female student is held solely accountable for what may or may not have transpired).

Overall, the role looking and talking between female peers has on the subjectivity development of young women as well as their peers, is evident in the current research. Remaining consistent with the underlining characteristics of this postfeminist gaze (McRobbie, 2015; Riley et al., 2016), young women participated in judgemental talking and looking to survey 'other' young women whilst simultaneously turning this gaze inwards. This postfeminist gaze co-opts young women as "viewers" (p. 108) of their female peers (Riley et al., 2016). However, with this looking at other young women they are in fact self-surveying their own performances of normative femininities and thus avoiding the risks inherent in transgressing such arbitrary boundaries of 'doing' girl.

Risks of transgressing normative femininities. Female peers are considered to play a fundamental role in young women navigating their subjectivities. This role also includes the enforcement and surveillance of normative femininities (L. M. Brown, 2003; Renold, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011). For young people being perceived as or making the decision to defy conventional expectations and be different from one's peers, can lead to peer exclusion (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2011; Valentine, 2000; Warrington & Younger, 2011). The young women in the current research confirmed that female peers who were considered different or did not "fit in", were often vulnerable to peer mistreatment from their friends and other students. As explained by Pia, "people that don't fit in or don't um [pauses] you know sort of...fit into those sort of standards...Anyone that isn't trying to be what

everyone else is” is at risk of peer victimisation or exclusion. Jacinta and Sian also shared similar sentiments:

I think in general it’s usually like [pauses] people that are a bit like different, people that don’t really [sighs] the ones that don’t try to follow like everyone else and they’re sort of doing their own thing or um even like within groups...if people are bullying someone within their own friendship group, it’s just usually the person who’s not following what everyone else is doing. If they’ve made a decision that’s [pauses] like different and stuff, then people will sort of gang up on them I guess. (Jacinta)

If you’re maybe a bit different, that might make you stand out more and be like a target for maybe bullying. Well not bullying but that kind of thing, yeah...I think people that are different to you [pauses]. Maybe like look different or like different things to you...if you just fit in, like don’t stand out a lot, then people don’t really notice you in particular, but if you’re um different (which is good) ...I think that makes you probably more likely to be a victim. (Sian)

Likewise, Talia also identifies that “being an individual” can expose you to peer mistreatment:

For being an individual, different, which is something that I think we should encourage but it doesn’t happen coz if you’re not mainstream, then it’s like [pauses] you’re different. Like it’s just [pauses] and people don’t like what they don’t understand, obviously and they [pauses]... [sighs] [whispers -] I don’t even know. It’s so stupid. Um and not accepting someone who they don’t yeah, understand.

Therefore, it is evident both Sian and Talia, despite favouring individuality, are aware that being “different”, or not “mainstream” increases one’s vulnerability to social exclusion from the social world of their female peers.

Such negative peer behaviours and bullying referred to in the young women’s reflections has received significant attention (Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000; Pepler et al., 2006; Underwood & Buhrmester, 2007). However, it has been asserted that traditional theories (e.g., Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Maccoby, 2004; Olweus, 1993) often essentialise and pathologise the exclusionary or bullying behaviours of young women, and overlook the contradictory and restrictive sociocultural context within which young women’s social worlds operate, as a fundamental factor in such peer victimisation (L. M. Brown 2003; L. M. Brown et al., 2007; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Ringrose, 2006, 2008, 2013). Ringrose (2013) goes further to assert, “stories of girls’ aggression constitutes a complex and contradictory representational terrain that centres on staking out the limits and possibilities of what it means to be feminine” (p. 30). Correspondingly, Alexis and Carissa both recall how a previous student was a victim of teasing and mistreatment because she was not “really doing things appropriately”:

Bullying at school - I reckon, like you don’t see too much of it, I think, but like when someone in our level is like hated on, everyone hates on them, they’ll be called all sorts of things. They do one thing: everyone stares at them. Like there’s one girl, she doesn’t go to our school anymore because like she left because it was so like [pauses] so rough. She was in my Year 8 class. She was like a lovely person; she was a bit annoying, like she was so loud. But everyone was so cruel to her. She would dye her hair one colour, and

everyone would be like, “Oh my God, did you see her hair this morning?”

(Alexis)

Well, I know that some of the people that usually get like picked on are usually people that are really out there and sometimes, like I know one of the girls that like she used to get picked on a lot, she recently moved schools...But she [pauses]...I dunno how to explain it...She kind of wasn't really doing things appropriately. Like she'd swear in class and she'd dye her hair a weird colour and people would like tease her because of it and like if she was to do something, they'd laugh at her. Yeah, just things like that...I think it was because she just stood out...I think it's just [pauses] mainly if you do things like differently. Coz I know a lot of the girls that...who sometimes are a bit different or they like different things. They can sometimes get picked out and targeted because of that interest or something, yeah...Well, for one of the girls that used to get bullied, well not yeah...[Pauses] She used to like sit with us at lunchtime because she didn't really have anyone else to go with. And I remember like after like we had like NAPLAN,⁴¹ the girls would come over and they would like tease her, like asking her like how she went and like you know...because like she wasn't really the smartest. (Carissa)

From both Alexis and Carissa's reflections it appears that this young woman was exposed to peer mistreatment as she seemingly violated several predominant normative (and postfeminist) femininities including the notion of passivity and polite speech, hegemonic beauty ideals and the expectations around perceived academic

⁴¹ National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

achievement. Hence, it is contended that she was not following the rules, which have been put in place within the “community of femininity practice” (p. 367) at SCLC (Paechter, 2006b). Paechter (2006b) contends that whilst drawing reference from the broader sociocultural representations and discourses concerning normative femininities, young women within schools, construct and draw boundaries around shared notions of ‘doing’ girl. Such boundaries effectively work to stabilise and police the behaviour of young women within the school space (Paechter, 2006b). Based on the reflections of the current participants, it could be asserted that the young women at SCLC who transgress these shared understanding of appropriate femininity are at risk of peer exclusion, or as previously discussed, increased judgemental looking and talking from other young women. The following commentary by Antonia illustrates how young women who do not satisfy normative expectations such as those surrounding the academically successful girl are positioned as “outsiders”:

But everyone also knows that there are outsiders...I don't think there's a lot of people that are on the outside, looking in...Outside, like you know, no friends or they're getting help from teachers a lot...I know there's one girl...something's not right with her and I think [pauses] it has something to do with when she almost drowned as a baby...she's academically sometimes...she's just slow, like she's not slow enough to be in a special school but she's in between, and it's really sad. I feel really sorry for this girl - sorry - because there's no place for them, I guess...there is another one that's like that. [Pauses] And I think those are the only two that I really know that's kind of going through that. And I think those are outsiders.

Despite Antonia trying to explain and demonstrate some empathy towards this young woman, she is still labelled as an “outsider” for her potential learning disability and perceived difficulties in fulfilling the expectations concerning academic achievement.

Further to this, both Alexis and Yen also highlight how potential violation of normative femininities can result in social exclusion within school. Specifically, contradicting traditional discourses of bullying, which characterise victims as weak, timid or insecure (Olweus, 1993); Alexis and Yen highlight how young women who are not satisfying gendered expectations of passivity at SCLC are often susceptible to peer mistreatment:

Their personalities can affect it because like it's not so much the quiet people that are getting bullied. It's the um, the people who are too loud, too out there and stuff. They can be bullied and victimised...Because people just want them to like shut up and sit in their place but like they're not going to: that's their personality [sounding slightly amused]. (Alexis)

It wouldn't be girls...like people would typically think, like the weaker people or like, you know, the nerdy people, kind of. They aren't really the targets. It's more like the girls who like try to fit in with [pauses] the upper social [pauses] group, I guess. Like they're going to the popular parties, stuff like that. And like the popular girls, I guess, would try to insult them and spread rumours and stuff like that...Well with the quiet girls, they don't really do anything [pauses] that's like worth kind of like insulting about. Um [pauses] the girls who try to fit in, I guess, are quite like...will sometimes do actions that are like, “Woah...” And so the popular girls, I guess, can use that as a way to insult them [pauses], put them down and show who's really bossier and that's

something you see here, like...Just kind of like...trying to put another girl in her place, kind of. (Yen)

Interestingly, Yen's explanations of which peers are exposed to mistreatment, suggest that young women who attempt to disrupt the status quo by gaining acceptance from 'popular' peers are particularly at risk. It has been established that young women's peer groups operate in a very hierarchical manner with maintaining social power being an important objective (Garinger, 2006). Primarily, within the school context (arguably including at SCLC), young women who maintain such social power are considered to effectively perform their gendered subjectivities in relation to modern sociocultural expectations.

As established from the current interviews, it is young women who transgress understandings and rules concerning gendered subjectivities who often experience forms of social exclusion. However, it is not the objective here to position such peer mistreatment or exclusion as an essential, or fixed aspect of 'doing' girl. Rather, to understand this peer exclusion reflected on in the current interviews, the contradictory and regulatory postfeminist sociocultural terrain within which young women's social worlds operate, needs to be taken into account (L. M. Brown et al., 2007; Carrera et al., 2011; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Ringrose, 2013). Specifically, patriarchy, power disparities, unrealistic beauty ideals and objectification of women in the media, influences the ways in which young women participate in peer mistreatment (L. M. Brown et al., 2007). As asserted by L. M. Brown (2003), "girls' treatment of other girls is too often a reflection of and a reaction to the way society sees and treats them...girls and women...have less power and garner less respect in our culture..." (p. 32).

Summary. Between the postfeminist gaze and social risks inherent in transgressing normative femininities (Riley et al., 2016), it is evident for the young women in the current study as well as their peers, that relationships (positive and negative) with other young women significantly influence their engagement (or disengagement) and performances of normative femininities. Also apparent was the heightened surveillance including self-surveillance, which young women participate in and are subjected to within contemporary times (Bailey et al., 2013; Hutton et al., 2016; Ringrose et al., 2013). While the male gaze is far from redundant, for these young women it was the suggested looking and talking between female peers that influenced the ways in which they positioned themselves in relation to hegemonic discourses of femininity. To position oneself in opposition to the norm and transgress normative notions of femininity particularly within the school setting, evidently placed young women at risk of peer mistreatment and exclusion. This continues to add weight to the notion that contemporary girlhood in postfeminist and neoliberal times offers young women far from a trouble-free existence.

Chapter Conclusion

The current chapter aimed to gain further appreciation of how the young women in this study negotiate and understand normative femininities. The depth and breadth of the findings presented in this chapter illustrate the extensive, intricate and varied negotiations young women participate in whilst engaging with the multiple discourses defining normative girlhood. It was evident for the young women in the current study, that contemporary discourses of successful girlhood presented them with numerous challenges. Akin to previous research (Allan, 2010; Carey et al., 2011; C. E. Charles, 2010b; Francis et al., 2017; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017; Skelton et al., 2010), young women highlighted educational attainment and the adherence to

gendered beauty ideals as central aspects of what it means to be a young woman in modern times. However, it was the current study's exploration of these domains ('smart' girl discourses and beauty ideals) together rather than individually which further contributes to understanding the tensions contemporary young women within the Australian context are often negotiating. For these young women, their understandings and negotiations of culturally available discourses were complex, at times interrelated, often fluid and contradictory. Such fluidity and contradictions in their talk was to some extent anticipated as the sociocultural context, which young women are developing within is highly contested, inconsistent and paradoxical for young women. Consequently, it could be stated that these multiple, inconsistent and complex requirements, at times forced these young women into a state of hyper-vigilance. This hyper-vigilance involves the increased self-surveillance and monitoring of other young women to determine if they themselves (as well as their peers) were meeting the benchmark of contemporary femininity and successful girlhood.

It was also apparent that this hyper-vigilance presented risks for their psychosocial, emotional and physical wellbeing. Young women spoke of the tension experienced to do well at school and appear successful as well as the challenges of performing normative femininities (including in social situations). The apprehension they expressed regarding their bodies in some cases also led to behaviours with potential health risks (e.g., restricted eating, dieting and excessive exercising).

However, it is important to note, these young women for the most part appeared aware and critical of the pressures and challenges inherent in girlhood. That is, the current findings captured the discontentment and dissatisfaction the young women in the current study had with regards to appearance-related talk and the

overall level of surveillance they and their peers are subjected to. This is an important finding in the current study, not only because it effectively works to represent young women's voices with regards to these issues, but also, because this has not previously been extensively considered. Despite this awareness, the young women in the current study were often (understandably) at a loss regarding how to resist such expectations, or how they could change such engrained ideologies. Unfortunately, trying to limit transgressions and satisfy normative femininities (at times even reluctantly) may be the only viable option these young women can envision at this stage of their development. The discourses perpetuated within their immediate peer contexts (including online communities) as well as the postfeminist gaze works to restrict young women's individuality and maintain the status quo with regards to gendered expectations and emphasised femininity.

Within the school context, this postfeminist gaze was further enacted via peer mistreatment and exclusion of young women who did not satisfy normative femininities as understood by the students at SCLC. Importantly, the findings presented in this chapter further contribute to recent research and discussions concerning the 'postfeminist gaze' (Riley et al., 2016) and 'positioned othering' (Hutton et al., 2016). In particular, how these concepts play out between school-aged young women within an all-girls school context works to extend such ideas. To an extent the young women in the current study positioned judgemental looking and talking as a normative part of girlhood, indicating that talking and criticising other young women helped them bond with other female peers as well as assisted them in feeling better about themselves. Despite being critical of the ways in which young women including themselves were judged (i.e., for their education, their appearance, their social life, etcetera); they were not able to draw a connection between their own

experiences of being surveyed and their role as the surveyor of other young women. However, it is not the intention here to locate this judgemental looking and talking and peer mistreatment as a problem within the young women interviewed. The problem is located within the contemporary sociocultural context, which despite the postfeminist rhetoric, continues to be patriarchal and limits young women's access to varied forms of power and agency as well as diverse ways to 'do' femininity and girlhood (L. M. Brown et al. 2007; Carrera et al., 2011; Ringrose, 2006, 2013).

Chapter 7: Young Women's Understandings of Sexism and Negotiations of Feminism

The current chapter explores young women's perceptions of contemporary gender relations, and the persistent forms of sexism and inequality young women (and women) continue to be subjected to in modern postfeminist and neoliberal times. Their understandings of feminism and the ways in which they relate to, and position themselves within, or against such collective ideologies will be examined. Accompanying their negotiations of normative femininities and girlhood which was the foci of the previous chapter, how young women comprehend collective issues such as gender inequality contributes to their understandings of self as young women (Manago et al., 2009; Rich, 2005). It has been argued that during adolescence, young people have an increased capacity to identify social inequalities including but not limited to sex-based discrimination (Ayres & Leaper, 2013; C. S. Brown & Bigler, 2004, 2005; Leaper & Brown, 2008; Leaper et al., 2013; Manago et al., 2009; Rutland & Killen, 2015).

As a consequence of this development and awareness, young women's subjectivities are performed within a context of multiple discourses related to gender, gender inequality and feminism. Rich (2005) highlights that "young women in contemporary society may be negotiating discourses of gender, the self and discourses of equality in often multiple and contradictory ways" (p. 496). The multiple and at times contested ways in which young women examine and debate the place of gender inequality and feminism in their lived experiences continued to be apparent in the current research. However, in line with the traditions of social constructionism (Burr, 2015), the fluidity of young women's ways of being and understandings of culturally available discourses pertaining to sexism, gender

inequality and feminism is recognised. It has been asserted that similar to other elements of one's subjectivity, engagement with feminism and the identity position of 'feminist' is not static (Aronson, 2003; Budgeon, 2001; Frith, 2001; Griffin, 2001; Jowett, 2004; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016); particularly for young women in their current developmental stage and the complex sociocultural terrain in which such negotiations are taking place.

Therefore, with a continued focus on the eight young women interviewed as well as the focus group participants (three young women), the current chapter will discuss these participants' levels of awareness of sexism and contemporary gender relations (e.g., current status of gender inequality). The ways in which they make sense of and talk about continued sexism will be examined. In addition, their perceptions of feminism including their negotiations or rejection of feminist identity positions will also be explored. The main themes to be explored in the current chapter are shown in Figure 3. These two main themes - young women's awareness of sexism and gender inequality and young women's negotiations of feminism - are inclusive of a number of subthemes, which demonstrate some of the discourses young women engage with, to contemplate and reconcile their position in relation to these macro level issues.

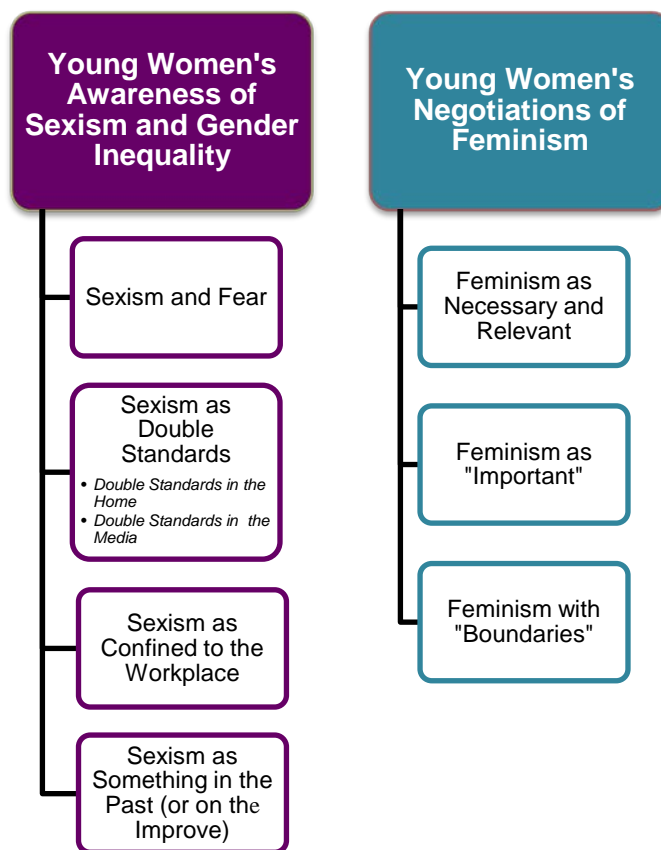


Figure 3: Young women’s understandings and negotiations of sexism and feminism

Young Women’s Awareness of Sexism and Gender Inequality

One of the central philosophies, particularly of postfeminism, is that sexism is something of the past, and accordingly young women have essentially been released from the constraints of gender discrimination and inequality (Pomerantz et al., 2013; Tasker & Negra, 2007; Volman & Ten Dam, 1998). Despite this discursive space, it has been identified that young women (and women) continue to experience various forms of sexism and inequality across numerous settings (C. S. Brown & Leaper, 2010; Crofts & Coffey, 2017; Haines et al., 2016; Keller et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2018; Ohrn, 2009; Sills et al., 2016; Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). From the insights

offered by the young women in the current study, elements of sexism continue to persist for themselves as well as other young women and women in their lives (e.g., their peers and mothers). Therefore, although it is not suggested that the social conditions have not progressed (Baker, 2008), it is important to consider the forms of gender inequality and sexism young women continue to witness and directly experience. Contemporary sexism is often characterised as being more covert, unseen and thus part of the fabric of society (e.g., sexist attitudes, the refutation of gender-based discrimination) (Keener, Mehta, & Strough, 2013). Accordingly, it is essential to understand what young women are recognising and identifying as gender inequality, and how they are engaging with instances of sexism. Within this analysis of young women's talk, the following sub-themes were identified, which convey the different aspects of sexism as understood by the young women interviewed: sexism and fear, sexism as double standards, sexism as confined to the workplace and sexism as something of the past.

Sexism and fear: “When you go out walking, girls have to look around...like be really aware”. The young women interviewed discussed sexism in relation to their safety and their perceived risk of being victims of violence. Frazier and Falmagne (2014) decree “violence against women is one of the most salient outcomes of systemic gender inequality across the globe” (p. 479). Therefore, it is without surprise participants identified that as young women, unlike their male counterparts, their safety was a concern for them as well as for their parents. Alexis states in regard to current forms of sexism, or gender inequality young women experience “being in fear of like being attacked...that would be the biggest thing”. As further explained by Alexis, this issue of her personal safety is a more visible, or immediate form of inequality that she is negotiating in comparison to other issues:

Yeah, inequality in that. I feel like [high-pitched] it's less within equal pay and stuff (you hear the usual), and more like women feeling scared to go out walking. Like I hate walking by myself, like I never do. Stuff like that; I feel that would be the biggest impact.

It is clear this fear of violence, or of "being attacked" results in Alexis restricting, or monitoring her own behaviour by "never" walking alone. Consequently, this gender inequality persists by limiting young women's access to public places and restricting their agency to occupy public space independently. This issue of being alone and the potential risks for young women (but not young men) was also raised in the focus group. The following exchange occurred in the context of a conversation regarding the different expectations these young women perceived they were required to navigate in comparison to their male peers:

Chiara: We can't go out alone.

Louise: [Emphatically -] *Oh yeah* [laughs] [interviewee's own emphasis].

Kate: Yeah...When you're going out into public places, especially at night time and stuff, it's always... [whispers -] your parents are always, "Text me every five minutes" and - ...They don't want you outside unless you're...Like my parents are okay with it if there's a [pauses] guy with me –

Louise: [Laughs]

Kate: - Because [laughs] they're sort of like...

Louise: Oh my god...It's the opposite! [Laughs] "There's a guy going? No, you're not!"

Kate: But if there's a guy there, it sort of makes you even more protected. I'm not sure...Mum doesn't even like going anywhere without my Dad, because like...if they go out to the city or something, Mum will take Dad because the

men are always seen in society as like the umm masculine like, you know...they're the ones that you sort of fear...I feel like they look down on us a bit.

Linda (Interviewer): How do you feel about that, like when your Mum will kind of say to you, "No you can't"?

Kate: Well it almost makes...When *she* does it, it almost makes *me* feel like scared [interviewee's own emphasis]. Like you know, you look up to them for example, so when you see Mum sort of scared of people sort of in the streets even, it's like ohhh [pauses] maybe that's how I should act. And like...it makes me more careful. I then sort of have a bit of fear, which I guess is a good thing, not a bad thing...

From the above excerpt, it is clear each of these young women and their freedom to "go out alone" has been challenged due to their gender and concerns regarding their safety. This conversation is indicative of the various discourses that these young women are privy to in the home. One such discourse is the role men (or boys) play in the safety (or unsafety) of young women. For both Kate and Louise, their ability to go out alone was dependent on the presence or absence of boys. For Louise, her parents would not allow her to go somewhere if boys were in attendance. Kate's parents were more comfortable to allow her to go out if there were boys present to ensure she was "even more protected". It is apparent Kate has adopted this reluctance to go out alone (or without a male) from observing her parents' behaviour. Previous research points to the influence mothers in particular have on their daughters' understanding of gender roles and "benevolent sexist beliefs" (Montanes et al., 2012, p. 468). Benevolent sexism is characterised as more covert (than hostile forms of sexism) and refers to the maintaining of attitudes and stereotypes, which

favour customary gender roles (Montanes et al., 2012). Maintaining this notion of men's traditional role as safeguarding women (and therefore women being dependent on men for their safety) could be considered an example of benevolent sexism (Shnabel, Bar-Anan, Kende, Bareket, & Lazar, 2016). Furthermore, Kate does not consider her fear of going out alone to be a bad thing rather she considers having "a bit of fear" as a "good thing". For Kate, having this "fear" acts as a protective measure, which may prevent her from potentially making risky choices. This is in many ways indicative of prevalent discourses commonly circulated in the public sphere, which often blame women for falling victim to crime, or hold them solely accountable for their own safety (rather than laying blame on the individuals who target women) (Berns, 2001; Frazier & Falmagne, 2014). This is also indicative of neoliberal sentiment, which promotes or mandates individualism and thus, holds young women responsible not only for their successes but also for their failed choices (Baker, 2008; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gonick et al., 2009).

This personal responsibility discourse was also being communicated in self-defence classes being conducted at SCLC at the time of the research. Although it does not change the meaning of the messages being presented during this classes; it should be noted that, in practice teachers were supportive of self-defence classes, particularly when well facilitated (see Hollander, 2016). However, some teachers were highly critical of the discourses of potential victim blaming and personal responsibility of young women that were being promoted by the external instructors and had plans to debrief students and counteract some of the messages being

promoted.⁴² Nevertheless, as is evident in the following exchange with Alexis these classes were impactful:

I love learning [self-defence]; it's fun. But it does make you more scared, but [pauses] I dunno. It's the reality of it. I dunno. People just have to like face it, but it's annoying that that's the reality... women are definitely more vulnerable than men, and that when you go walking, girls have to [pauses] like [sighs] look around them, like be really aware. Like for example, whenever...so I will always work late at [Retail Store] ...and it's always the girls' parents who are coming in and waiting for them and then they walk out together to the car park. But like for the boys, they just walk out. So, like that - that's the hard part, I reckon, because you're in fear. You don't want to get attacked, even though it's like a rare thing.

Alexis recognises that questions of personal safety at night, or when walking alone are not something her male peers necessarily have to consider. Yet, it is unclear whether at this stage she fully comprehends the systemic, or structural inequalities that lead to women being more vulnerable, or at risk of (sexual) assault than men. Rather, she has adopted this personal responsibility discourse (Frazier & Falmagne, 2014), stating that women need to be hyper-vigilant and “really aware” when on their own. Furthermore, instead of challenging this form of sexism, Alexis seems resigned

42 For instance, an aspect of these self-defence classes included the male external instructors taking it upon themselves to review the high-profile cases of 29-year-old Jill Meagher and 17-year-old Masa Vukotic who were both killed and in the case of Jill Meagher raped by men unknown to them in two suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria. The objective of reviewing these cases was to consider the different ‘choices’ these young women could have made leading up to their deaths. For instance, in regards to Jill Meagher who was raped and murdered in the inner-suburbs of Melbourne, whilst walking home from a night out at her local bar, observations were made regarding her drinking after a long day at work, the time of night at which she was walking home and the presumed availability of taxis due to the location of the bar, and what witnesses reportedly heard her yell during the attack. This critique of Jill Meagher's case was accompanied with news and CCTV footage. The male external instructor continued to remind the young women that although “it was not her fault” it is important to acknowledge the risks. He also made reference to being less concerned about being “politically correct” and more concerned for their safety.

to the notion that this is just a “reality” for women. This position is consistent with women (older women rather than young participants) in Frazer and Falmagne’s (2014) research, who maintained that women are characteristically and unavoidably at risk of violence. It is apparent Alexis as well as the young women in the focus group have to an extent adopted this notion, which equates “femininity with vulnerability and masculinity with dangerousness” (Hollander, 2001, p. 84).

In contrast to her peers, Carissa seems less complacent about women being positioned as victims:

I sometimes feel like with girls like when you go out people are always like, “oh dress appropriately”. Well obviously, you do, but like dress like appropriately. “Don’t get yourself into a bad situation and like put yourself in a vulnerable situation”, but like I don’t feel like boys are really like treated like that in a way...I feel like sometimes like women like are seen more as a victim and we have to be more careful not to be the victim, but I don’t really feel like it impacts me too much...we did like self-defence training at school and the instructor...he kind of made me feel like women are all victims, and someone asked, “What happens if, like, you know, if like a guy was doing this class?” And he would be like, “Oh a guy wouldn’t be doing this class. He’d be like, strong enough” ...Or something like that. Yeah. I don’t know. I kind of felt a bit [pauses] it didn’t feel right to me. Like women were seen as like weaker.

Again, it is evident Carissa has been exposed to a discourse, which charges women with keeping themselves safe by dressing appropriately and not putting themselves in vulnerable situations (Berns, 2001; Frazier & Falmagne, 2014). She also recognises how these discourses and expectations are positioned exclusively towards women and

girls and not boys or men. Importantly, unlike Alexis or Kate, Carissa is dissatisfied with women being positioned as victims in comparison to men. Her acknowledgement that this “didn’t feel right” demonstrates her discomfort and possibly the development of her critical awareness regarding sexism and the positioning of women as passive victims.

In short, these young women are not wrong in highlighting violence against women (or the fear of violence) as a prevalent form of gender inequality that young women continue to confront (Frazier & Falmagne, 2014).⁴³ However, their understanding of this form of inequality at a more systemic level seems limited. The young women interviewed, adopted discourses concerning gendered violence, which situated young women as responsible for their safety (Berns, 2001). This engagement with such discourses may be symptomatic of the postfeminist and neoliberal sentiment, which downplays the role of gender inequality and patriarchy in the lives of contemporary young women, whilst centring the notions of choice and individual responsibility (including choices pertaining to one’s safety) (Baker, 2008; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gonick et al., 2009). Hence, young women (and women) are bestowed with the task of securing their safety, via making good ‘choices’ and implementing various practices to ensure their security (Frazier & Falmagne, 2014).

Sexism as double standards: “Double standards downplay girls’ abilities: tells them to like, you know, make yourself more in the shadows”. Young women in the current study also talked about sexism more broadly as different expectations being placed on them and other young women in comparison to their male

⁴³ Recent statistics indicate that since the age of 15 one in three women have experienced physical violence, while one in five are reportedly victim of sexual violence (Cox, 2016). Whilst everyday sexism in the form of street harassment is also prevalent for Australian women, in particular for women aged under 18 years (Johnson & Bennett, 2015).

counterparts. These were often characterised as double standards. For instance, Yen points to the double standards she feels young women continue to be subjected to:

I guess because like there is a double standard like what girls can't wear and what boys can wear. Like boys can literally go topless, but for girls they might just show their shoulders. It's like, "No, you're asking for it". You know, stuff like that. I guess there's a double standard in like...girls can't be smarter than men, oh you're threatening them...double standards downplay girls' abilities: tells them to like, you know, make yourself more [pauses] in the shadows...It's pretty bad, I think girls and boys should be what they want. No expectations...it's just like it sucks that there is expectations on women, put on girls.

Concurring with Yen's assessment of the double standards between young women and men, Talia also refers to girls (unlike boys) needing to be "proper" in their behaviour:

Well [girls] can't act like boy[s], if you get what I mean. It's like you have to be really...you know, be proper...Not proper but like [sighs slightly - pauses] ...in a way that you can't do what a boy does. You can't be gross [laughs].

Specifically, in the above quote, Talia seems to be drawing on notions of appropriate schoolgirl femininities, which unlike their male peers require young women to be well behaved (or "proper") (Archer et al., 2007; Ohrn, 2009; Youdell, 2006).

Apart from these prevalent double standards identified by Yen and Talia, this examination of young women's identification of sexism as double standards centres particularly on two sub-themes. These sub-themes include, double standards in the home, and double standards in the media.

Double standards in the home: “I see it from my parents and how they interact, like my mum would do everything”. The role of the family and dynamics of the family home (e.g., parenting styles and the division of housework) are fundamental in informing young people’s values including those pertaining to gender inequality, sexism and traditional gender roles (Garaigordobil & Aliri, 2012; Malonda, Tur-Porcar, & Llorca, 2017; Montanes et al., 2012). Consistent with this notion, it was apparent throughout the young women’s interviews that their understanding of sexism was often influenced by their early and current experiences in the home. For Carissa, who is an only child, the notion she was “female” was never brought to her attention in the home:

Well I really do think that women need to have like equal rights [pauses]...In my life, there isn’t like, I don’t feel like I’m impacted too much. Like when I was younger...my parents didn’t make me play with like things that I didn’t want to, or like because when I was younger, I wanted to be like a palaeontologist and like dig up dinosaurs...my parents never really put me into a category of like being a female. But only recently, like in recent years in high school, I have really noticed like that women are treated differently.

For Carissa, this social position of “being a female” and more so identification of sexism is something, which she has become more aware of since entering secondary school. This is despite SCLC being a single-sex school; in such settings notions of gender differences are assumed to be somewhat weakened (Kessels & Hannover, 2008). However, Leaper and Brown (2008) point to the idea that although gender socialisation begins in the home, young women’s recognition of sexism (including, sexual harassment, academic and athletic bias), and gendered expectations become more solidified in adolescence. It has also been identified that learning about

feminism also heightens young women's awareness of sexism and inequality (Leaper & Brown, 2008; Martin & Beese, 2016; Mayberry, 1999). As previously highlighted (see Chapter 5), feminism and feminist principles are discussed with students at SCLC. As a result of this educational setting and exposure to feminist conversations, it not unimaginable that this may be a newly developed (and potentially still developing) level of awareness for Carissa.

However, Carissa's seemingly gender-neutral home environment was not common amongst the young women interviewed. Talia spoke at great lengths about the gender inequality and double standards she feels she is subjected to within her family home. From Talia's detailed description of the double standards she negotiates within the home, it is evident she is not only describing her experiences of sexism but those of her mother and grandmother. For Talia she has been exposed to intergenerational sexism and double standards in the home:

Talia: It's really unfair. It's really [pauses] not [pauses] equal at all. Like we say that we are a country that does have equal rights and that kind of stuff but whereas [pauses] there's all these little loopholes...It's just like men have been up on this pedestal for such a long time, even like my grandma sometimes, with all the men in our family she's been brought up to do everything for them. We have the stereotypes that we do cleaning, this, that and you know, everything...we teach, like women sometimes how to, you know, treat men like just treat them like they're everything and that kind of stuff, putting them so high. And it's like, well no [laughs]...we tell men how to treat us as well. Like it's slowly happening, but I'm just saying like that's an issue that's really annoying and bothering.

Linda (Interviewer): So, is this something that you think about a lot or that

you notice around you?

Talia: Umm I notice it a lot around my family, like my mum [laughs] no.

She's just like, "Nup. You're doing wrong" ...especially with my - because I live with my grandparents, I see it so much with like my little cousin who's a boy and then also my uncle. And like my uncle doesn't even [pauses] work or anything [pauses] and like they literally pay for everything because he's having...he's one of those people who's a bit lazy. I'm just gonna tell you everything. Ever since he was little he was always given everything. He has, all the washing done for him. He didn't have to pick up anything, whereas my mum had to help to do the washing and help do all of this, help to cook and do all of that stuff. And now that he's like in his forties, he's not...they're paying for the rent that he's in and then they're also doing his laundry. He brings a big bag. Like it's just like it's so unfair, and then like he comes over and he takes the food...He needs to learn some responsibility, but he just doesn't have to because everything's done for him.

Linda (Interviewer): And you think that has something to do with the fact that he's a man and...?

Talia: Yeah, and also my mum...because we live with them, we sometimes get a bit of, you know... "Oh, you know, like get a job". But like Mum's trying so hard, she's not like trying so hard but she's giving so much more, and she has to do heaps of cleaning...to make up for everything. Then whereas, he doesn't have to do so much. I don't know. That's just something unfair in my household, but you see it as well with the kids [pauses] like I have to do heaps of things for the boys in my family as well whereas um yeah. That's an argument at the moment, but yeah...I don't like it. It's not [pauses] fair...it

would be fine if I had to do it but it'd be nice if I just had some help...Let's say, like because I have to cook the meals at my house every day and then sometimes do the dishes, where it'd be...all the boys are sitting down watching footy and stuff whereas I'm like doing all the stuff and I'm only sixteen and then there's like forty year olds and they're not even helping pick up after their kids or anything like that. And it's like [sighs] it's just really rude.

From the above exchange, Talia's frustration with regards to the double standards that the women in her home are faced with was evident. Although, due to Talia's current living situation (and to an extent her age) she has limited power in the home, she does demonstrate a level of resistance to this. Her statement "that's an argument at the moment" with reference to the lack of assistance she receives from the men in her family, shows that Talia is not just accepting of these double standards but rather expects more from her family. Talia does not utilise postfeminist discourses, for instance the gender neutrality of sexism (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b) to explain away her experiences. This is in opposition to current arguments which stipulate that to be considered as an 'empowered' young woman in current postfeminist times, young women are required to restrain from critique of their social worlds and experiences of inequality (Baker, 2010b; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009). Talia has looked beyond the "postfeminist guise of equality" (McRobbie, 2007a, p. 718) and highlighted the "little loopholes" (Talia), which persist in current discourses of gender equality.

Similarly, for Yen, the home represented a context in which women experienced less power and where the double standards placed on women were visible. Yen who has a younger brother, nominated a number of circumstances in

which her parents' expectations of her and her brother differed. One such example included an increased monitoring of what she wore to church in comparison to her brother. Yen explains, "I can't wear a dress too short because, you know, it's revealing...but my brother could wear like bike shorts to church". However, these variations in expectations were not as evident with regards to academic achievement. For Yen's parents who migrated from Vietnam, the academic achievement of both their children was important. This similarity in academic expectations could be culturally informed, as well as reflective of current notions of 'doing' girl being synonymous with doing well in school (Allan, 2010; Francis et al., 2017; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, 2017, Ringrose, 2013). Despite these similar expectations with regards to academic results, Yen predicted that her parents' career aspirations for her and her brother varied and were highly dependent of their gender and the maintenance of traditional gender norms. Yen commented:

I'm not sure what my parents want for my brother, I guess to do well in school but that's for everyone...I guess for him to be [in a] more...a masculine job. It's like [pauses] umm to be a doctor, to be like a fireman or something like that, an engineer. But for me, I guess to go to uni and study and do something more feminine maybe. Nurse, whatever.

Despite, her parents wanting both her and her brother to do well academically, the maintenance of traditional gender roles resulted in Yen having additional responsibilities in the home. Similar to Talia, Yen was aware that unlike her brother, due to her being the girl in the family she is also expected to learn how to complete household chores:

I guess there are things...for girls in the family, you have to like learn how to do the chores (like cook, clean and do all this stuff) but my brother gets away

with it; he doesn't do anything.

Akin to Talia, for Yen this was not only a double standard she experienced, but rather it was a form of intergenerational inequality which she grew up observing and in many ways was explicitly taught. Yen explained:

Yen: My parents will tell me like a story or like lecturing...I'll take a few notes. So, this is what they expect of me as a girl...I see it from my parents and how they interact, like umm my mum would do everything. She'll pick up the kids; she'll cook; she'll clean; she'll do everything...But she also works as well, the same...like same amount of hours as my dad but just in the morning. And my dad, he will like do nothing. Umm [pauses] and then when he goes to work and then comes home, he doesn't do anything either, just relax...So I guess that's, I don't know - I've taken...so I have to be a provider. That's what I used to think, like I have to provide for my husband when I am older so yeah...I don't agree with it. I think umm partners should have an equal balance in the relationship.

Yen has recognised the double standards and gender inequality, which are present between her parents. Despite both her parents being factory workers and working the same number of hours, Yen's mother is responsible for the caretaking of both the children and the home. Yen has learnt that she is expected to be "a provider...for [her] husband when [she is] older". From Yen's description of her family dynamic, it is unknown if she ever raises her concerns with her parents. However, it is evident that Yen has experienced a shift in her thinking and expects her future relationships to reflect an "equal balance" between partners. Like Talia, Yen does not employ discourses, which justifies, or overlooks the continued presence of sexism in the home.

Double standards in the media. Together with unequal gender relations in the home, the various challenges inherent for young women in the current media landscape has been acknowledged and reflected on both within the current study as well as previous research (Carey et al., 2010; Gill, 2008b, 2012; Lazar, 2011). The young women interviewed commonly nominated the media more broadly as a site where the communication of double standards between men and women continues. For instance, Pia recalled the unequal commentary directed towards a female actress in comparison to her male counterparts:

There was something I read a few weeks ago...I can't remember who the celebrity was, and it was some red carpet event or something. And she was being judged on her dress and how she looked. She looked beautiful and was in some red carpet dress and heels and like the media was all writing about like how she looked and criticising that, but the supporting actors - the two men were in like track pants and t-shirts and they never said anything [pauses] which is interesting how you know people expect girls to look beautiful and always, you know, judging and criticising that, but it's sort of just overlooked with men. (Pia)

Similarly, for Chiara, these unequal representations of women in the media focussed on women's appearance and the objectification of women in advertising. Consistent with modern portrayals of contemporary sexism (Keener et al., 2013), Chiara characterises these forms of sexism and double standards as more "subtle":

Chiara: I actually saw it on Buzzfeed yesterday. It was like [laughs]...umm [pauses] what's it called? Like sexist [pauses] ads - throughout the years. At the start it was more about like, "You can clean and lose weight at the same time"...And stuff like that...and then... as it moved on...It's still there - but

now it's more like, you know how you look in like [pauses] um perfume ads like for men, you see women like topless or whatever...So it's still there, just more subtle.

Louise: Yeah.

Linda (Interviewer): So, what do you think that communicates then about women?

Chiara: ...Like we're just [pauses] there to be...not...not used as much as [pauses] before but - we're still like objects. Yeah.

Linda (Interviewer): And how do you feel about that?

Louise: I guess I don't really like it but - I don't spend that much time thinking about it, really. Like I've just kind of accepted it. But [pauses] I feel like [pauses] if it ever happens to me, I'm gonna be like, "No, stop! This isn't how it is". But at the same time, picking up on that would be kind of hard, so...

Kate: Mmm. Just try not to dwell on it: like you know it's there, but just move [on] like [pauses]...almost ignore it.

Within the above focus group discussion there are a number of discourses being adopted by the participants with regards to their talk concerning sexism in the media. The objectification of women in the media as a form of sexism is one, which these young women were aware of, or as Kate describes "you know it's there". However, these young women have seemingly yet to realise that the climate of the media and advertising directly informs and influences the expectations regarding women on a collective level. Keeping in line with neoliberal notions of individualism (Gonick et al., 2009; Pomerantz et al., 2013), Louise recognises that at an individual level she would not accept someone acting in a manner that objectifies her. Nevertheless, at the collective level she is disapproving of this mistreatment of

women in the media however still accepts it occurs. Similar to young women interviewed by Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016b), Kate goes further to position this form of sexism as something, which can be simply ignored. Kate and Louise effectively position themselves as unaffected and able to “ignore” or not “dwell” on this form of sexism. It has been suggested, that when young women cease to critique, or challenge hegemonic discourses and sexism in the media they are continuing to adhere to this (potentially unrealistic) idea that sexism is non-existent, or at the very least they are not personally affected by such gender-based discrimination (Baker, 2008; McRobbie, 2009). Therefore, it could be asserted that this tendency for some young women to emphasise their ability to overlook or move on from sexism and inequality is a tactic or coping strategy to limit feelings of victimisation (Ayres & Leaper, 2013; Baker, 2008, 2010b; Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Leaper et al., 2013; Morrison et al., 2005; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017). Further to this, in the current postfeminist and neoliberal climate, “being offended by sexism is positioned as a ‘choice’, and a woman can enhance her capital by showing herself to be unaffected by sexism” (Donaghue, 2015, p. 164).

Despite a level of ambivalence demonstrated in the focus group regarding the double standards surrounding women’s appearance, the young women’s frustration with regards to the double standards in the media’s coverage of women’s sport, or lack thereof, was more apparent. As discussed by the focus group, this lack of attention paid to women athletes encourages a space, which favours men’s sport:

Linda (Interviewer): What are some of the stereotypes?

Louise: Dependent on men –

[Collective laughter]

Louise: - so therefore we shouldn’t be in sports because that’s a boys’ thing.

Linda (Interviewer): And how do you feel about that stereotype?

Louise: It's completely wrong [laughs]. Yeah. Girls are just as good in sport as guys and can achieve just as much.

Kate: Mmm yeah and I think media plays a role in that because I mean the coverage of like AFL⁴⁴ -- men's cricket, you know - it's *all over* the TV [interviewee's own emphasis] but then there'll be women's cricket and it might get like ten seconds in the news bulletin and that's about it. Even though they're just as good on a world level. Just women aren't as –

Louise: No, yeah –

Kate: - recognised as highly.

Louise: Like the soccer team: the women's team, it's like higher ranked in the world to men's but they get paid like \$20,000 when the others get paid like \$300,000 or something like that.

Linda (Interviewer): And what do you think about that? How does that make you feel?

Chiara: A bit stupid, like you feel like this day and age, people shouldn't care - about it.

Kate: After people fought for all the rights for women and then still to be like ignored.

For these young women, in particular Louise and Kate who both play significant amounts of high level competitive sport, the perceived sexism and double standards between male and female athletes is clearly more of a personal issue, and not one they can simply “ignore”. This exchange highlights that for them there are some

⁴⁴ Australian Football League (AFL). It should also be noted that these interviews took place prior to the AFL introducing a national women's league in 2017.

inconsistencies between the potential postfeminist messages concerning the achievement of gender equality (Crofts & Coffey, 2017; McRobbie, 2009), and their day-to-day experiences (at least in sport and the media's lack of attention to female achievement in sport). It is evident that this incongruity between these postfeminist messages and what they are actually witnessing is somewhat unsettling to them. Chiara states that she feels "a bit stupid" that these double standards continue, while Kate shows signs of being perplexed that despite progression in the women's movement, female athletes can "still be like ignored".

In addition to underrepresentation of women's sport in the media, the young women interviewed also recognised the sexist rhetoric, which were generated in the media towards former Prime Minister Julia Gillard⁴⁵ on account of her gender (Donaghue, 2015). Although she did not feel versed enough in the topic to discuss extensively, when asked about the existence of sexism Sian nominated comments concerning Julie Gillard as an example she has witnessed:

I've just heard like comments that like male people like [make]...on the TV...it might be in a joking manner but it's not really like a joke...well this is in like politics, but like Tony Abbott⁴⁶...He said something about...Julia Gillard and then she had a speech about um [misogyny].⁴⁷ I just think he kind of might take things a bit far sometimes, but yeah. I don't really know enough about it to kind of comment...

45 Julie Gillard was Australia's 27th Prime Minister between the years of 2010 and 2013. She was also the country's first and only female Prime Minister to date. Prior to this she was also deputy Prime Minister and held a number of leadership and Ministerial roles within the Australian Labor Party.

46 Tony Abbott was Australia's 28th Prime Minister (2013-2015). He is a member of the Liberal Party of Australia.

47 During her time as Prime Minister, Julia Gillard gave a parliamentary speech in response to alleged sexism by Tony Abbott who was leader of the opposition party at the time. It is often referred to as the misogyny speech.

For Talia and Antonia, the media's mistreatment of the former Prime Minister was an example of double standards or sexism observed within the media. Both these young women highlighted this sexist rhetoric regarding former Prime Minister Julia Gillard, which often focused on her appearance, had implications for the messages young women receive. As explained by Talia:

And there's also like how [pauses] Julia Gillard was treated, like it wasn't even about her skill; it was all about her appearance and how she was just really picked on for being a woman. Like it was just the worst and then think about it with everything. Say you're a woman in the army; you're picked on, your physical appearance, all that kind of stuff. Things that are totally irrelevant to your actual job and what you're supposed to be doing. And yet they still do it just because they know they'll put you down. Like it's the worst...that's why we're so obsessed. Like that's why it's important to...look good and that kind of stuff, when really, it's just like you should be doing what you want to do - without that in your ear like all the time and it's just [pauses] yeah, I don't like it [whispers].

Similarly, Antonia shares these sentiments regarding the media's treatment of the former Prime Minister:

I think Julia Gillard has also been a victim of sexism...They make fun of her: the way that she dresses, the way she talks, even her nose, her hair [pauses]...It's very shallow of people to be picking on her appearance and I wouldn't wish that on anybody, for anyone to pick on someone because of the way they look...It's not logic at all...I think it communicates the message that we need to be pretty, we need to put on a show and we need to put on a pretty front. Um [pauses] yeah, that we just need to be happy all the time.

Both Talia and Antonia demonstrate some understanding, or the ability to make a connection between sexism and broader discourses and expectations regarding representations of women and young women's understandings of normative femininities. As outlined by Volman and Ten Dam (1998) the presumed "norm of gender equality, however, does not mean that more traditional discourses on masculinity and femininity have disappeared altogether and that the social conditions guaranteeing equal opportunities have been realised" (p. 531). Furthermore, social events and social change can have a significant impact on young women's understandings of gender inequality and the status of women depending on their own developmental stage at the time (Zucker & Stewart, 2007). Specifically, it has been asserted that, "events experienced in childhood and early adolescence are reflected in individuals' fundamental values and expectations about the world" (Stewart & Healy, 1989; Zucker & Stewart, 2007, p. 137). For these young women the appointment of the first female Prime Minister and the subsequent (sexist) criticism and double standards she was often subjected to, could be considered significant to the development of their values and understanding of persistent gender inequality.

Overall, the young women interviewed recognised sexism and gender inequality to persist via the double standards young women but not young men continue to negotiate. These young women were privy to such double standards within the home and family as well as more broadly within the media. From the young women's reflections (particularly Talia and Yen), it is apparent that the norms and discursive practices engaged in within the home seemingly shaped these young women's attitudes and awareness of gender inequality and sexism. In regard to the double standards identified in the media, some young women were less cognisant of the direct impact these could have on themselves or other young women. It was

suggested that such double standards (in particular with regards to appearance) could be ignored, thus potentially diminishing the impact and persistence of this particular form of gender inequality. Other interviewees were more mindful and critical of these continued double standards and the messages they communicate to young women.

Sexism as confined to the workplace: “It’s no concern for me right now, but I’m sure it will be a concern when I’m out in the workforce”. Sexism and gender inequality can be enacted in several ways and in various settings. The workplace is a setting in which gender inequality persists (Broderick, Goldie, & Rosenman, 2010; Crofts & Coffey, 2017). Thus, young women’s educational progression has not been matched in the workplace, with women continuing to experience a number of gender-based inequalities in the workforce (Acker, 2012; Broderick et al., 2010; Crofts & Coffey, 2017).⁴⁸ Despite postfeminist discourses perpetuating misconceptions concerning the eradication of gender inequality (McRobbie, 2009), for many of the young women interviewed, sexism was explicitly discussed as something that continues to persist in a workplace context. As highlighted by Pia:

I guess sexism is negative in the workforce [pauses]. Maybe being seen as [pauses] not as important or not as capable [pauses]...depending on what job it is, I suppose, but men being favoured over women, things like that. Um it... definitely still, still happens.

In line with Pia’s reflections, Antonia identifies “the corporate world” as the primary context in which gender inequality and sexism is evident. However, she

⁴⁸ For example, the persistent gender pay gap, which has Australian women in 2017 being paid 15.3% less than their male counterparts (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017).

admits that this inequality is not a concern for her at the moment as she is not in the workforce:

Antonia: We're still not equal to men. That's not really a concern...- for me - but I still want it to be as equal as it can be.

Linda (Interviewer): Why isn't that a concern for you?

Antonia (Interviewer): I don't know. I guess I'm not...I don't have a part time job, or I'm not working, as such. So, I don't necessarily think about it all the time. And so, it's no concern for me right now, but I'm sure it will be a concern when I'm out in the workforce, working in whatever I'm doing.

Therefore, like Pia, Antonia, does not engage with discourses which positions sexism as redundant or non-existent, which is encouraging. However, her understanding of gender inequality is also in some ways problematic, as she does not recognise these issues as operating outside of the workplace context. Consequently, similar to other young women interviewed, she has yet to fully appreciate the systemic and multifaceted nature of sexism and how it impacts her and other young women (even prior to entering the workforce).

Jacinta also adopted this discourse of sexism as something that occurs in the workplace. For Jacinta it would seem that prior to entering the workplace, sexism was not something she necessarily paid significant attention to:

I think just from what I've like heard from even when like my parents and stuff were growing up, I think [sexism has] improved a lot...I don't see it that much like in my life. But then like you hear about it and like...[pauses] I just got a job at [Fast Food Restaurant] [laughs]...I found it really interesting that on their front counter...people who are serving, they only have like the girls up the front. And all the boys have to make the burgers and stuff. So, and that

was something that was like, they're pretty like strict on it...because I don't know, when people walk in, like girls look more friendly or like approachable...they didn't really explain it but yeah, that was just the way it was [laughs]. That's yeah, the main thing that I've noticed.

It could be argued that for Jacinta her recent work experience is starting to disrupt her understanding of the different ways in which men and women are constructed in the workplace. It points to the possibility that as young women develop and reach key milestones (like attaining their first job), they will be exposed to the more covert and overt forms of sexism that continue to persist.

It is also anticipated that this identification of sexism being somewhat isolated to women in the workplace, is partly due to the gender pay gap often being presented as an example of continued unequal gender relations (when learning about gender inequality and related issues). This issue of 'equal pay for equal work' is a current campaign that young women would most likely have been exposed to via online and mainstream media. For instance, although Talia is mindful of other forms of sexism, she nominates the gender pay gap as one of the issues young women have "heard about":

Like it's that kind of thing where we're so compared to others [pauses] that we get disadvantaged all the time and [pauses] so that's annoying, especially with the whole work industry as well that we've heard about and um how we get paid less sometimes when it's like exactly the same job; we doing the exact same things [heavy sigh] yeah.

On a positive note, young women's engagement and acknowledgment of gender inequality in the workplace, is an encouraging indicator of their knowledge of sexism and the realisation that postfeminist discourses surrounding gender equality

may not be completely accurate. Workplace inequality and the gender pay gap provide tangible and important examples to present to young women about the current status quo. However, it is possible that the heavy focus on these forms of workplace inequality, may have given some participants the idea that sexism is something that does not currently impact them, or will only be a concern when they commence their careers in adulthood.

Sexism as something in the past (or on the improve): “Sexism is definitely like still around, obviously not as much as it used to be”. It has commonly been asserted that despite young women being able to identify sexism, they often are quick to minimise the significance of sexism as well as deny any personal disadvantage because of such continued sex-based inequality (Baker, 2008, 2010b; Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Pomerantz et al., 2013). With regards to the young women in the current inquiry, for the most part they did not necessarily deny the negative consequences of sexism. These consequences were inclusive but not limited to some young women not being allowed to go out alone, being responsible for a disproportionate amount of home duties, or left feeling “stupid” as a result of sexism. However, simultaneously, the young women interviewed also drew on various discourses to account for their experiences, or observations of sexism. Some of the young women talked about sexism as something that had improved in contemporary times. As stated by Pia, “sexism is definitely like still around, obviously not as much as it used to be”. Sian also identifies sexism as a current issue, however contends that she has not been directly impacted by this:

I don't really experience it but I know that there is sexism like people can say, “Oh women are equal to men”, but I don't really think that [pauses] is necessarily the case everywhere...it annoys me personally because I don't

think I'm less of a person just because I'm a woman; I think that's just stupid [laughs]. Like...like it actually bothers me a lot, umm [pauses] yeah just when I hear these remarks by people like about women...It doesn't make me any less of a person, or anyone for that matter.

From the above quote, it is evident that Sian is working through a number of contradictions concerning the prevalence of contemporary sexism. Despite Sian's evident awareness of the persistence of sexism, she at least initially retreats from the issue ("I don't really experience it"), which in some ways allows her to maintain the notion of the postfeminist ideal that sexism is without consequence (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b). Calder-Dawe and Gavey (2016b), explain that this discourse provides young women with an avenue to highlight sexism, whilst negating the potentially significant consequences inherent in sexism. Sian then goes on to retract this nonchalance approach to sexism, strongly affirming "it annoys [her] personally" and "actually bothers [her] a lot".

Furthermore, this reduced prevalence of sexism was often evidenced by the increased "opportunities" (Alexis) young women felt that they had in comparison to previous generations. This is comparable to the rhetoric, which holds up young women's academic achievement and participation as evidence of the redundancy of gender inequality (Francis, 2010; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2007, 2013; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007). Alexis reflected on how women now have the opportunity to work outside the home and in many ways a woman could be deemed just "like a man":

Alexis: I dunno, they're more understood –

Linda (Interviewer): Women - girls are more understood, or -?

Alexis: Yeah, yeah, I reckon. And like there's more opportunities for them, you know, they're not just in the household all the time. So many people are working. I dunno. I think that's like the positives of living in like the twenty-first century.

Linda (Interviewer): So, you feel like they're more understood. So, what do you mean by that?

Alexis: Like they're not just the mother figure that they're meant to be. They're like understood as like an actual - just a woman. Just another person, like a man. You know what I mean? Like it's more equal now.

Alexis' reference here that women can be understood just "like a man", is in some ways indicative of sentiments which position young women as "model neo-liberal citizens" (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007, p. 6), able to straddle both the traits of femininity and masculinity without struggle (Budgeon, 2015; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007). Alexis references "the mother figure" which is illustrative of femininity, however contends that there are also more opportunities for women to work presumably outside the home, which traditionally could be considered a more masculine domain.

Likewise, Carissa was positive about the many opportunities she has in her life and does not feel her gender is, or will be a disadvantage for her in her future science career:

I know in my life, I feel like I have lots of opportunities. I don't really [pauses] coz I know like there's not many people in like the science profession and stuff like that for females, but I feel like - like I never really thought of it as like a minority group or whatever but I feel like I have like the

opportunity to do like what I want and I don't feel like I have to be a person that's like set for me to be like I can be like who I want to be.

Correspondingly, Sian highlights the favourable position young women are in due to increased opportunities:

I think there are a lot more opportunities for women and girls now than there were like however many years ago, but yeah. I think I have a lot more opportunities for things and like at school or anywhere...I can get a job in like an area that maybe isn't considered a typically female like area...when I say to people, "I want to do like science", they'll say, "Oh it's good that girls are getting more involved in science". So, I think yeah, some areas...It's good to know that I like am kind of breaking away from kind of stereotypes but I don't think it should ever have been that way in the first place. Like women, like I think if they like something, they should just do it regardless of the stereotypes [laughs].

Interestingly for Talia, she does not necessarily consider sexism as an out-of-date concept. However, she feels that having the opportunity to speak about gender inequality and sexism has led to advancements and accordingly to "things getting better":

Ages ago it wasn't like, all these issues weren't even [pauses] discussed. Like now everything's in the open; everything's becoming more like...awareness is coming [pauses] so we are given a bit more opportunity as like things are getting [pauses] better.

This notion that sexism has diminished due to the increased opportunities and 'choices' young women perceive themselves to have, was anticipated. Young women often demonstrate enthusiasm with regards to their futures and the wide range of

choices and opportunities available to them (Baker, 2008; Budgeon, 2001). The current neoliberal climate promotes the idea that all individuals have the ability to act autonomously and therefore can structure their own lives without restriction (Baker, 2008). Young women are cited as “the success stories of current times through persuasive and up-beat narratives and are positioned as the winners in education and a ‘feminised’ workforce” (Baker, 2008, p. 54). Therefore, it would be difficult for the young women interviewed to dispute or resist these notions of absolute autonomy and thus accept neoliberal and postfeminist discourses, which centre on sexism as an out-of-date phenomenon.

Summary. The young women interviewed recognised the presence of sexism and potential inequality across various contexts including, in the home, workplace and more broadly in the media. This supports the notion that young women are not naïve to sexism and inequality (Keller et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2018; Ohrn, 2009; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Sills et al., 2016). They were quite cognisant of the ways in which sexism and gender inequality continued to impact them as well as other young women. They identified several disadvantages they are required to mediate as a consequence of sexism and gender inequality; such as, feeling unsafe in public spaces, not going out alone, needing to dress appropriately, being judged for not acting “proper”, being expected to complete more home duties than male family members and being exposed to demeaning representations of women in the media. However, even with their ability to name instances of sexism, how they might respond to sexism, or combat such sexism was limited. At times, some participants adopted discourses in an effort to rationalise or moderate their experiences and observations of sexism. Despite being mindful of the consequences of sexism, on occasions their talk regarding sexism indicated they were at this stage not completely

appreciative of the systemic nature of discrimination. Like participants in Pomerantz et al.'s (2013) research, some of the young women interviewed seemed to discuss sexism as an individual level problem, something an individual was required to manage. Despite these limitations, it is important to note throughout participants' discussions regarding their experiences and thoughts concerning sexism, it was not considered to be a gender-neutral issue. For these young women, sexism in its various forms was clearly discussed as something young women (or women) exclusively encountered. This understanding that sexism is not gender neutral is considered to be positive and goes some way to reject the postfeminist notion that boys are the new disadvantaged or equal victims of sexism (Ringrose, 2013). This contrasts with previous research, which has identified gender-neutral discourses of sexism to be commonplace among young women (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b; Pomerantz et al., 2013).

Young Women's Negotiations of Feminism

It has been identified that feminism can afford young women (and women) effective ideologies and frameworks for identifying and making sense of sexism (Ayres et al., 2009; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Leaper & Brown, 2008; Watson & Grotewiel, 2016). As a result of continued instances of sexism, the young women in the current study continue to identify and experience, it is important to examine their level of understanding and engagement with feminism. It has been argued that modern young women (and women) are increasingly likely to adopt feminist values concerning gender equality however seemingly reject the identity position of feminist (Aronson, 2003; Crossley, 2010; Dyer & Hurd, 2016; Olson et al., 2008; Quinn & Radtke, 2006; Rich, 2005; Robnett et al., 2012; Zucker, 2004; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Regardless of potential barriers, which attempt to 'undo' feminism

(McRobbie, 2007a, 2009), school-aged young women continue to find ways to engage in feminism and be feminists (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; N. Charles et al., 2018; Keller, 2016; Keller & Ringrose, 2015; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2012, 2016; Schuster, 2013).

Furthermore, unlike previous research, which has predominantly focussed on adult women's (i.e., young women in university or older women) willingness to accept or reject a feminist identity (e.g., Crossley, 2010; Dyer & Hurd, 2016; Quinn & Radtke, 2006; Zucker, 2004; Zucker & Stewart, 2007), the young women in the current research are still in adolescence. Therefore, they are still negotiating and solidifying their values. As advocated by Quinn and Radtke (2006) and others (Aronson, 2003; Budgeon, 2001; Griffin, 2001), feminist subjectivity is not considered to be a static and uniform position that can be simply adopted or rejected. Understandings of feminist identity development indicate that young women often experience a feminist 'becoming', which is complex and develops over time from their formative years into adulthood (Bartky, 1975; Marine & Lewis, 2014). The young women who participated in the current research were somewhat tentative in their talk regarding feminism. The tentative nature of this discursive engagement is considered to point to their emerging and developing understanding of feminism and possibly their development of a (future) feminist identity. In examining this potential negotiation of feminism, the following themes will be discussed, feminism as necessary and relevant, feminism as "important" and feminism with "boundaries".

Feminism as necessary and relevant: "I'm a big supporter (of feminism). Everyone should get it because it affects not only like women but everyone". It has commonly been asserted that modern young women (and women) possess a hesitation in identifying with feminism (Crossley, 2010; Dyer & Hurd, 2016; Zucker,

2004). In contrast to this, and mirroring previous research conducted with school-aged young women (Ringrose & Renold, 2016), several young women interviewed explicitly labelled themselves as feminists. Of these young women, Yen was most confident in her feminist identity:

Yen: I'm a big supporter (of feminism). Everyone should get it because it affects not only like women but everyone... There's just a lot of like misconceptions about it that it's man-hating - it's women getting more power than men. Or that like you can't be um [pauses] married and a feminist or you can't be a housewife and a feminist kind of thing.

Linda (Interviewer): So, would you label yourself a feminist?

Yen: Oh yeah, definitely. I don't have any problems telling people.

It is evident here Yen is unapologetic about being a feminist. Despite her being a "big supporter" and not having "any problems telling people" she is a feminist, Yen also makes a point to qualify what being a feminist means and attempts to dispel "misconceptions" around feminist ideologies. She is also cognisant of common narratives, which position feminist ideologies as excessive and 'man-hating' (Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Frith, 2001; Scharff, 2012). By Yen defining and clarifying the fundamental ideas of feminism, she is ensuring that she is not being misrepresented, or labelled as what she describes as a "feminazi":

I guess it (the misconception about feminism) kind of came from, like this really extreme part, like this Feminazi is a really bad name but - like they...don't really represent true feminism and that's what everyone who doesn't know what it (feminism) is looks to...and it's not really man-hating; it's not women...doing all this outrageous stuff...On social media...men will

be like [pauses], “Oh yeah, you’re a feminazi because you’re voicing your opinion”, even though it’s not [pauses] outrageous.

For Yen, it is evident she is developing her feminist identity, which includes understanding what feminism is and is not (at least for her). Despite, these misconceptions and these negative discourses, Yen’s resolve in her feminist identity is affirming that feminism may not be lost on contemporary young women (Aronson, 2003). Like previous research has made evident, despite negative narratives and the presumed disengagement of young women from the feminist agenda, adolescent young women find avenues and ways to ‘be feminists’ (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a, 2017; Keller, 2016; Keller & Ringrose, 2015; Schuster, 2013). Pia and Talia who also identified as being feminists further advocate the relevance of feminism for young women in current times. Pia explains her relationship to feminism:

Pia: I’d like to call myself a feminist. I think it’s important that women are treated the same way as men and [pauses] I don’t know why [pauses]...I suppose people wouldn’t believe in that [pauses] or wouldn’t, you know some people would think that oh feminism is putting men down for who they are and um [pauses] I think it shouldn’t be about that at all. I think it should be about equal rights and um everyone having a say in [pauses] yeah um, being equal. [Pauses] Um so I think it’s pretty important.

Linda (Interviewer): So, you said you’d like to call yourself a feminist.

Pia: Yeah.

Linda (Interviewer): Do you call yourself a feminist?

Pia: I think so. I believe in [pauses] equal rights for women.

Linda (Interviewer): Do you think it’s still relevant for young women today?

Pia: Yeah, yeah, I think so. Um [pauses] with equal pay and things like that. That - that still hasn't been [pauses] ah... hasn't happened. Um but I think it's also um [pauses] people thinking that feminism...that it's a bad thing [pauses] or that it's making ourselves look better or something like that and that can be portrayed negatively, [pauses] through like media and um [pauses] mmm.

From Pia's reflections, it is evident like Yen she is aware of the negative connotations that can come with being a feminist. Irrespective of this, Pia to some extent defends her position and again discursively positions feminism as being about "equal rights" and affirms its continued place in young women's (and women's) lived experiences. Simultaneously, Pia seems somewhat confused as to why people would not be supportive of equal rights for men and women and instead promote misleading ideas concerning feminism. Pia's, and to an extent, Yen's refocusing of feminism to be primarily about equality, is a common discursive resource utilised by young people to construct feminism as rational and to disrupt less favourable discourses of feminism and feminists (Aronson, 2003; Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a).

Likewise, Talia expresses her admiration for feminism and highlights her developing feminist identity. Talia feels aligned with feminism but thinks she needs to do more as a feminist, "I like feminism [laughs]. I like to say that I'm one coz I have those opinions, but like I don't do anything about it, if that makes sense – I wish I could". This is somewhat illustrative of Keller's (2016) comments, which suggest at times young feminists are, or feel excluded, or restricted in their ability to partake in 'traditional' social action (e.g., voting, donating to causes or participating in public protests). Consequently, there have been calls to recognise everyday acts of feminism young women partake in (Budgeon, 2001; Currie et al., 2006; M. Kelly, 2015; Schuster, 2017). That is, without downplaying the role of collective or political

action, there is also a necessity to acknowledge young women's "engagement with feminism in everyday life through individual resistance" (Budgeon, 2001; M. Kelly, 2015, p. 90; Schuster, 2017). As outlined by Schuster (2017), "feminists have always implemented feminist ideologies in their personal lives" (p. 649); therefore, highlighting instances of everyday sexism, integrating feminist ideals into relationships and engaging with feminism online among other acts all contribute to confronting inequality – at least at the personal and interpersonal level. Therefore, Talia's claiming of a feminist identity and her resistance to patriarchy in the home are examples of the way in which she participates in feminism at the everyday level.

Like her peers, Talia also takes the opportunity to reject common discourses, which label feminists as man-haters (Edley & Wetherell, 2001), "I don't like it how people say like we're man-haters [laughs] [pauses] which is not correct because men could be feminists if they want to as well". Talia continues to rationalise her position as a feminist by highlighting the inclusive nature of feminism, in that it is not just for women but "men could be feminists" if they so desired. Talia also recalls witnessing her cousin being criticised for being perceived as a feminist:

Like my cousin's really, she's a really powerful woman. Like whenever a man, like when we're at parties, whenever like you know at the end when they slow down, and they have to talk and stuff? And when guys become like really rude towards a girl, she [pauses] like just lashes [out]. She's like, "So you're saying that that's what that's supposed to be like", like that sort of stuff. And then they're like, "Stop being annoying! ...Oh, you're a feminist", like it's like a bad thing.

Recently, the revival of feminist discussions returning to the mainstream including within celebrity culture has been noted (Hamad & Taylor, 2015; Keller et

al., 2018). Nevertheless, anti-feminist sentiment is still prevalent, and clearly from the participants' reflections, it is something young women are aware of, continue to challenge and when possible, dispel falsehoods. In light of anti-feminist sentiment, it is important to identify where and how young women are engaging in feminism. Pia identifies a range of avenues for learning about feminism, at "school - and in the news and social media [pauses], friends, sort of things like that". Yen's primary source of information regarding feminism was the Internet:

I guess I first learned [about feminism] on the Internet. Like I was just following some random blogs and they just started talking about this thing and how it's not as bad as you think it is: it's not like man-haters; not being more powerful than them. It's just getting women to a point where they're equal with men. [Pauses] So I was like, "Oh yeah, that sounds fine". And then there was some opinion articles and debates I read. It really interested me coz I kind of thought about it like, "Yeah, women should definitely have equal rights and their own choice for their body and stuff like that".

Online blogs and social media have been identified as prominent spaces in which young feminists participate and engaging in feminism education and community building (Baer, 2016; Guillard, 2016; Harris, 2008; Keller, 2016; Schuster, 2013). Therefore, both Pia and Yen also point to this trend for young feminist within the Australian context.

Furthermore, for the current self-identified young feminists it seemed to an extent that feminism was not highly contested although received a mixed reception amongst their close friends. References were made to having 'feminist' friends, or feminist informed discussions with their friends and peers, however this might be in part due to feminism being discussed at SCLC. Dyer and Hurd (2016) highlight the

potential to further enhance and develop young peoples' critical understanding of structural or collective discrimination (such as gender inequality) via the classroom. Pia explained that although feminist informed conversations were limited amongst her friends, "it comes up quite a bit in classes, I guess coz it's a girls' school we talk about it quite a bit". For Talia she nominated one of her friends as the primary reason she learnt about feminism:

There's my friend [Jade] who like has a whole blog and she's just like ranting. She's just this quiet little girl who's just sitting in the back of the corner and I was like, "Oh yeah, she's a bit quiet", but then once we became friends, she just doesn't shut up all day about how: "This isn't right! This isn't right!" [Laughs]... She's just posting all day, going [makes angry noise] ...I sit with her in class. So, like before that I wasn't even really aware. Like I knew it was there and I knew that people were trying to fight for equal rights which was really unfair with just like main things like jobs and how we're treated and stuff. But there's all these other little things. I can't remember what she said, but she makes me pick out all the little details. Like she knows so much on it and I think she's influenced me to become one (a feminist).

It is evident Talia respects and admires her friend's knowledge and engagement with feminism. Hence, although the discursive repertoire of the 'ranting' feminist is often used to depoliticise or illegitimise feminism, Talia values her friend's proactive stance on feminist issues. Furthermore, in one way, these classroom discussions and Talia's reference to her feminist friend as well as her feminist cousin points to the potential young women have to develop feminist communities within their immediate context to counteract the neoliberal emphasis on individualism. Conversely, for Yen her friends at times criticised her for being "too

passionate”, however, she expressed sometimes it is necessary to make people feel “uncomfortable”:

Linda (Interviewer): So, is voicing your opinion important to you?

Yen: Yeah it’s important – because I don’t know, it’s just one of the ways to get issues out, you have to talk about it [pauses]...even if it makes people uncomfortable...[Pauses] I’m told I get too passionate, so I have to, you know...[pauses] stop a bit. Like, “Oh woah, calm down!”

Linda (Interviewer): Yeah, and who tells you that you get too passionate?

Yen: [Laughs] My friends, actually...When I talk about women’s like rights, about what they can do and what they can’t. They should have the choice, for example to abort their baby if they choose to. And if I get too passionate, I... I don’t know, I use a lot of hand gestures when I talk [pauses] so they say, “Calm down! I’m just joking”.

From the above exchange, it could be suggested that Yen’s friends are monitoring her ability to maintain her feminist identity, whilst not transgressing normative notions of femininity, which continue to equate passivity as one of the fundamental traits of femininity (Budgeon, 2015). The ‘ranting feminist’ stereotype is in opposition to such normative notions of femininity. However, Yen’s friends are quick to “calm [her] down” when she becomes “too passionate”. Furthermore, the insinuation that Yen talking to her friends about gender inequality and women’s rights could make them “uncomfortable” highlights the pervasive nature of postfeminist rhetoric, which works to delegitimise feminism and promote the idea that gender equality is guaranteed in contemporary times (McRobbie, 2009). This further signifies that being a feminist could be a risky identity position for young women to adopt amongst their peers. However, in the case of Yen (as well as to an extent Talia and Pia) this has

seemingly not deterred her commitment to and support of feminism.

In summary, for these young feminists, their orientation towards feminism was seemingly positioned as logical and necessary in light of continued gender inequality. They were also aware that feminism is highly contested and ‘being a feminist’ could come with being labeled as man-hater (Edley & Wetherell, 2001) or a ranting “femanzi”. Although an individual’s engagement with feminism is not considered static and in spite of these potential consequences which are attached to being a young feminist, at this stage of their development they seemed fairly committed to their feminist identities.

Feminism as “important”. Although some of the young women demonstrated an orientation towards feminism, this was not applicable across all participants. Whilst, not clearly assuming a feminist identity, some young women interviewed recognised feminist values and goals as important. This is to a certain degree reflective of the tendency identified by previous research for young women to nominate a commitment to gender equality, however avoid aligning themselves with the broader ideology, or collective movement of feminism (Budgeon, 2001; Dyer & Hurd, 2016; Quinn & Radtke, 2006). For instance, Antonia does not explicitly adopt a feminist identity but considers the instilling of feminist values from a young age as necessary:

Antonia: I think it’s important for women to establish themselves in society and not to [pauses] hide away behind male figures. I think it’s important to make the statement in a good way...I think that’s important for women. It’s important for education, for all of that - equal pay. Um I think that’s important. Yep.

Linda (Interviewer): Do you think that feminism is still relevant for young

women like yourself?

Antonia: What do you mean?

Linda (Interviewer): I guess sometimes people will claim that we no longer need feminism or feminism isn't relevant for young women.

Antonia: I think it is. I think if you teach the values from a younger age, I think everyone, it will be easier - it will level out in the future.

In a similar manner to Antonia, Sian conveys a passion for equal rights, however indicates she is still learning what feminism is, "I don't really know the exact definition of like a feminist, but...I [pauses] think women's right...I am passionate about that: about women being equal". In examining feminist identity development of self-identified feminists, Marine and Lewis (2014) found that "a subtly growing sense of inequality" (p. 15) contributed to them eventually assuming a feminist identity. Therefore, Sian's passion for "women being equal" could represent a stage in her developing orientation towards feminism.

While for Carissa, she accepts that feminism is still relevant, although questions if the focus of feminism should be on women outside the West:

Linda (Interviewer): So, do you think that feminism is relevant for young women today?

Carissa: I feel like it is, especially to break away from like the stereotypes and stuff like that. But I feel like the issue needs to be more like, not dealt with, but like needs to be more focused on like developing countries where like people are like less treated equally and like there's like no rights for them to like vote and stuff like that.

Carissa's diversification between inequality in western and developing countries, is a common discourse utilised. Positioning women in 'other' or developing countries "as

powerless victims of patriarchy facilitates the repudiation of feminism as unnecessary in western countries” (Scharff, 2012, p. 60).

Thus, it could be asserted that similar to previous research conducted with young women, these participants primarily equate feminism with equality of which they are supportive (Manago et al., 2009). However, they do not provide any indication of significant engagement or disengagement with feminism beyond this. Aronson (2003) conceptualised this position as ‘fence sitting’; young women neither supported nor rejected a feminist identity position. Aronson (2003) identified potential within this ambiguity, stating this position “while not a politicized...is not entirely individualised and apolitical either” (p. 919). Likewise, various feminist identity models present a woman’s merging of feminism into her sense of self as involving a number of non-linear stages (Downing & Roush, 1982), or a progressive transformation which occurs over a period of time (Bartky, 1975), including her formative years of adolescence (Marine & Lewis, 2014). These young women’s valuing of gender equality could represent their potential feminist ‘becoming’ (Bartky, 1975). Also, these young women’s reflections highlight the potential need for feminism to speak more to the everyday lives of young women who espouse feminist values but do not claim a feminist identity. Further consideration of what would be necessary for these young women to be able to identify as feminists is warranted. However, Budgeon (2001, p. 24) maintains that, “identification does not depend on recognition” meaning that whilst young women may not characterise themselves as feminists “a more subtle affinity is at play as they practice identities informed by feminist ideals”.

Feminism with boundaries: “Feminism as a whole, like I think sometimes it’s taken way too far”. The current group of young women espoused various levels of support for feminism. This was inclusive of some young women whose acceptance of feminism was conditional or had limits. They did not completely reject feminism, however raised concerns it could be taken “too far” (Jacinta). For example, the presence of these somewhat anti-feminist narratives was most evidently noted in Jacinta’s talk regarding feminism:

Umm [pauses] on like feminism as a whole, like I think sometimes it’s taken way too far [pauses] umm to the point where people are trying to put women above men...I think that [pauses] it is important though, as long as you don’t take it too far to like still make sure it’s like out there [laughs], yeah.

A common anti-feminist or postfeminist discourse regarding feminism is that it seeks to gain not equality for women but to shift the scales of power in favour of women instead of men (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a; Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Manago et al., 2009). It is evident that Jacinta has been exposed to this critique, therefore, despite finding feminism “important” qualifies this support by ensuring it has limits. These boundaries regarding the focus of feminism, and its applicability to current issues were also discussed by some of the other young women interviewed. Sian, whilst previously outlining her support for gender equality, questions feminism’s applicability in current times:

Linda (Interviewer): Do you think feminism’s still relevant for young women?

Sian: [Pauses] [Laughs] I don’t know [laughs]. Probably! Not like to an extreme level, but definitely in like women like [pauses]...still need equality, so it is definitely still relevant, not maybe as extreme as like a while ago but umm it definitely [pauses] still should exist, I think, yeah.

Like Jacinta, Sian points to feminism as being less pertinent in current times. It appears for Sian that feminism should still exist but within reason. Alexis too demonstrates mixed and potentially contradictory perceptions about feminism:

Alexis: Yeah [laughs] my sister goes, “Oh, every” – because there’s this one teacher and she’s like a feminist. “Every lesson we have with her turns into a feminist class!” And it’s like it’s so true. Like it’s such a good thing that it’s being promoted, but I dunno. Like you’ve gotta have the boundaries...I feel like feminism should be like women learning to stand up for themselves. Like, if you’re in a domestic like situation - domestic violence situation - that’s where feminism needs to come in: women standing up for themselves, supporting one another; less about like equal pay and like jobs and stuff. I know rights, and everything should be the same but I dunno that’s the biggest stuff for me: that we should be focusing on feminism not so much in the workplace.

Linda (Interviewer): So why do you think women getting paid the same as men wouldn’t be an important issue to address?

Alexis: [Laughs] Because we can’t do that much about it. I know that sounds wrong, but like I’m not gonna go up to someone and be like, “Hey, like my pay’s not the same” ...and it’s not happening all that much anymore. I’m not like that informed about it, but like I dunno. To teenagers, it’s probably not the right thing to be preaching; we can’t do that much about it.

Linda (Interviewer): So, do you think that feminism is still relevant for young women today?

Alexis: Yeah, yeah. I reckon it is. Especially a lot of the things we talk about and think about with feminism and stuff. Like my pastoral teacher, he’s

always talking about it. It's an all-girls school. You're got to preach to the values.

Alexis interestingly does not dismiss feminism rather she thinks it is important to “preach the values” of feminism. However, she thinks feminism requires “boundaries” and needs to address the right issues. With her notion that feminism should be teaching women to “stand up for themselves” especially in domestic violence situations, she is overlooking (or doesn't have the knowledge) that inequality is systemic and not an individual level issue. Also, she has a level of acceptance that some inequalities cannot change and therefore feminism is redundant in some arenas. Alexis' commentary could be reflective of the different contexts and discursive spaces that she is engaged with and negotiating. SCLC is an all-girls educational setting in which feminism is discussed. However, anti-feminist sentiment continues outside (and in some ways internal to) this school context. Marine and Lewis (2014) also found that for self-identified feminists, recognising that their feminist values, or commitment to gender equality were not unanimously supported by others contributed to their eventual identification as feminists. Hence, it could be possible that once Alexis moves beyond this educational setting (e.g., attends university) and it becomes more apparent the ways in which feminism and gender equality is contested, she might become less ambiguous and nonchalant in her approach to feminism.

In addition, this continued focus on feminism at SCLC for some young women could be contributing to their disengagement with this collective ideology. As Jacinta contends:

I think that [pauses] being at like an all-girls school [pauses] um they talk a lot (like *a lot*) [interviewee's own emphasis] about like young women and

feminism and like [pauses] and then like women in like history and all that sort of thing, so we hear a lot of it at school...but I think it is good that they like bring it up, like right from you know, Year 7 all the way through. I think it's good that we get to hear a lot about it but maybe not as much [laughs].

Therefore, what Jacinta regards (rightly or wrongly) as a seemingly excessive focus on feminism at SCLC, could in part be contributing to her ideas about feminism going “too far”. This sentiment regarding the focus on feminism at SCLC was also pointed to in the focus group:

Chiara: I think they (the school) put a strong emphasis on feminism, but I think we all get it, that – we have equal rights: we know we can go and become a doctor or a builder if we want to.

Louise: Yeah, a lot of the stuff like that, it gets to the point where the school just overdoes it and now everyone, every time we hear the word "feminism" everyone's like “ughghghgh...” inside...

Linda (Interviewer): What would be better, do you think: not to talk about it at all -?

[Laughter]

Louise: No, I guess you have to speak about it, but - I think once schools get involved, they just over drill it. Like it becomes a chore talking about it, so then nobody really wants to talk about it.

From the above exchange it is apparent that the young women do not completely reject the place of feminism (“you have to speak about it”). Rather these young women seem to be perpetuating this notion of gender equality and feminist values as common sense (Scharff, 2012), thus questioning its continued relevance (“we have equal rights”). By adopting this postfeminist notion that gender inequality has been

achieved (McRobbie, 2009; Scharff, 2012), they are limiting feminism's applicability and placing boundaries around their engagement with this broader ideology.

Furthermore, the focus group's comments, and insights offered by Jacinta also highlight the potential limitations in ways in which SCLC is presenting feminist ideologies.

Summary. Despite the continued negotiation, a number of the young women interviewed adopted a feminist identity position. Others felt like feminism was "important" for young women, however put limits on this applicability. None of the young women interviewed in this study, rejected feminism outright. However, some young women nominated the presence of feminism at SCLC, to be contributing to feminism's reduced significance, and young women's reduced willingness to engage with feminist ideas and values. In addition to school, young women identified, peers and online media as avenues to learning about feminism and engaging with feminist critiques of social issues. Overall, what was evident was that despite this variation in their engagement with feminism, all the young women interviewed held feminist values concerning the equal rights of women. However, it is imperative that when considering young women's engagement, or disengagement with feminism and with the label of 'feminist', that this is contextualised in relation to the current discourses which are attached to the position of feminist. Feminism is highly contested in contemporary times (Lazar, 2009), and for a young woman to overtly claim a feminist identity she also needs to contend with discourses that may categorise her as man hating, unfeminine and irrational (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016a).

Chapter Conclusion

The current chapter examined young women's awareness and negotiation of sexism, gender inequality and feminism within the contemporary sociocultural

terrain. Multiple and contradictory understandings of such macro level issues and other related discourses continued to be evident in discussions with the young women interviewed in the current inquiry. This was anticipated as “adolescents [include] multiple, sometimes contradictory, ideas within the same expression” (Manago et al., 2009, p. 757). Along with the development of a feminist identity being one which progresses over a period of time (Marine & Lewis, 2014), feminism as an ideology as well as an identity position is not fixed (Frith, 2001; Griffin, 2001).

In general, it is important to highlight that these young women (some more explicitly than others) often talked about themselves and their experiences with a level of gender awareness (Scharff, 2012). They were aware of the role gender played in their and other young women’s experiences, as well as the consequences and disadvantages, which accompany contemporary forms of gender inequality. This works to somewhat contradict previous suggestions that young women are ‘empowered’ and making autonomous choices unrestricted by their gender (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Duits & van Zoonen, 2006, 2007; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010; Peterson, 2010). Rather, all the young women in part understood what constituted sexism and were clear in their identification of sexism across a range of contexts. They were also able to nominate the ways in which they, or other young women were directly impacted by gender-based inequality. For instance, as a result of sexism young women spoke about needing to be hyper-vigilant concerning their safety in public spaces, or alternatively avoided occupying such public spaces alone; monitoring their dress and behaviour to ensure they were acting appropriately to avoid judgement; being responsible for disproportionate amounts of home duties; and feeling ‘stupid’ about the limited representations of women in the media including within the arena of sports coverage.

However, despite being cognisant of the very real and negative impacts of sexism, many of these young women simultaneously engaged in different discourses to make sense of sexism and position themselves in relation to such experiences; including, how affected (directly or otherwise) they were or not by sexism in their everyday lives. It was apparent these young women were to some extent still negotiating and developing their understanding of gender inequality. More so, it is somewhat concerning that in some cases young women were resigned to the notion that inequality and restriction based on their gender was an inherent part of being a young woman. However, instead of being critical of participants' rationalisation of, or accounting for sexism, it is important to be appreciative of the developmental stage at which these young women are currently within. Their critical thinking regarding gender inequality may have yet to come into fruition.

In regard to understandings of feminism, many of the young women expressed values and ideals that could be labelled fundamentally feminist. However, they varied in their engagement with feminism; some of the young women in this group confidently identified as feminists whilst others were more tentative in their understanding and acceptance of this collective movement. This tentative appreciation for feminism is positioned here to be a positive indication of learning and the potential for further feminist consciousness-raising (Bartky, 1975; Marine & Lewis, 2014). Despite some young women adopting discourses, which potentially position feminism as irrational, unlike previous research concerning feminist identity development (Dyer & Hurd, 2016; Zucker, 2004), none of the young women interviewed clearly rejected feminism in its entirety. Therefore, despite postfeminist and neoliberal rhetoric, which attests otherwise, these current findings build on previous research conducted with school-aged young women to demonstrate that

feminism continues to be recognised as relevant and necessary (N. Charles et al., 2018; Keller, 2016; Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2012, 2016; Schuster, 2013).

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of the current qualitative study was multifaceted; however, the objective was to broadly explore school-aged young women's understandings and negotiations of contemporary normative femininities. This was inclusive of the ways in which the young women reconciled their position with regards to macro-level issues of gender, gender inequality (sexism) and feminism. Together with this exploration of young women's understandings of normative femininities, the current study also examined the part played by peers in such understandings; as well as the way in which immediate school settings provide (or limit) potential opportunities for young women to explore various ways of 'doing' gender. Thus, to meet such objectives, the current research was conducted in an all-girls Catholic non-government secondary school in Melbourne, Victoria. The specific research questions addressed in the current study included: 1) how do young women interpret and perform sociocultural informed normative femininities; 2) how do young women negotiate normative femininities within their immediate contexts such as school, peer groups and interpersonal relationships; and 3) what are the consequences of sociocultural informed normative femininities for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women?

Importantly, in the current research it was argued that young women are negotiating their understandings of normative femininities and what it means to perform successful girlhood within a highly patriarchal, postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural landscape. As observed in previous research, the current study also found that the characteristics inherent within this sociocultural context have varied impacts on the social and emotional wellbeing of young women (Betz & Ramsey, 2017; Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Pomerantz & Raby,

2017; Spencer et al., 2018). This coincides with Tolman et al.'s (2006) position that young women's development and wellbeing "is shaped by and responsive to the sociocultural context of patriarchy" (p. 86). To reiterate, the characteristics inherent in this postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural terrain include an increased focus on discourses of individualism; the heightened surveillance of young women in particular self-surveillance; the strengthening of the idea of femininity as a "bodily property" (Gill, 2007a, p. 149); and the premise that gender inequality has been resolved (McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Ringrose, 2013). Pointing to the gender specific implications of postfeminism and neoliberalism, Gill and Scharff (2011) and others (Harris, 2004b; Lazar, 2009; Sur, 2017), assert that it is young women who are more strongly called on than their male contemporaries to participate in the continued project of self-improvement and regulation. This propensity to continue to push one's self to be better whether that be by achieving improved academic results, or a desirable level of thinness and physical appearance was also identified in the current research. Young women are positioned as model neoliberal subjects who are experiencing the privileges of gender equality, therefore have the ability to act autonomously and be successful in all aspects of their life free from constraints (Baker, 2008; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Harris, 2004b).

However, postfeminist and neoliberal discourses and sentiment produce a sociocultural landscape for young women, which can be characterised as a false positive. For the young women in the current research, the modern sociocultural climate is far from devoid of gender inequality. Instead they are presented with the task of navigating a multitude of contradictions, complexities and limitations inherent in contemporary discourses of girlhood (S. Jackson et al., 2013; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007). More so, due to the neoliberal orientation of

the current landscape, young women are forced to ruminate and look inwards to find reasons for perceived failures and disadvantages experienced, rather than finding fault with systemic gender-based inequalities (Baker, 2008; Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015). It is this inward gaze (and side gaze between young women) that impacts young women's sense of self, and increases the prevalence of a form of self-criticism, which could be potentially detrimental to young women's wellbeing (McRobbie, 2015).

These themes surrounding the complexities inherent in normative femininities and contemporary girlhood continued to be evident in the current research. The current findings were presented across three chapters. These chapters individually, as well as a whole, work to address the current study's specified research questions. Thus, the current findings could be characterised as interconnected and at times complex and contradictory. This is reflective of young women's experiences of girlhood, which are far from essentialised, instead are fluid and in a continued state of negotiation (Griffin, 2004; Harris, 2004a; Taft, 2011). With regards to the three findings chapters; chapter five considered the ways in which SCLC acted as one of the immediate settings in which the young women in the current study enacted and negotiated normative femininities. The ways in which this school setting endorses ideas concerning what constitutes normative and successful girlhood was considered. Young women's peer relationships and friendships also provide a context in which normative femininities are mediated. This aspect of the research question was highlighted in chapter five, however was more significantly addressed in chapter six. Chapters six and seven together tackle the ways in which the young women in the current research interpret and perform sociocultural informed normative femininities. With regards to the third and final research question, which centres on the

psychosocial wellbeing of young women, this was an underlining focus throughout the findings chapters. However, these implications for the wellbeing of young women were most evident in chapter 6 in which young women's propensity for self-criticism, whilst trying to be an 'all-rounder' were identified. The detrimental impacts transgressing normative femininities have on young women's acceptance (or lack thereof) among peers and ability to maintain healthy social relationships (which are imperative for wellbeing) was also noted in this chapter. The findings and the themes constructed from participants' insights and reflections will be further discussed below.

Young Women's Performances of Sociocultural Informed Femininities

The following discussion specifically addresses how young women in the current research understood and performed sociocultural informed normative femininities. This was the underlying focus of the study's initial research question. In addressing this first research question, consistent with social constructionist understandings (Bohan, 1997; Burr, 2015; Wetherell, 1997), and postmodern identity theories (Butler, 1990, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Walkerdine, 1993; Weedon, 1997), young women's negotiations and performance of identity within the current research were considered to be fluid, diverse, and at times contradictory. These apparent contradictions within (and between) young women's identity talk were anticipated. The current research further highlighted how girlhood is far from static, or an essentialised experience (M. Brown, 2011; Griffin, 2004; A. Jones, 1993). Girlhood and more broadly gender identity is a social constructed, discursive and performative act (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Butler, 1990; Chinn, 2010; Connell, 2009; Nayak & Kehily, 2006; Wetherell, 2010). This performativity of gender is enacted within the boundaries of cultural and hegemonic discourses of femininity

(Burr, 2015; Butler, 1990). From these culturally available discourses and resources young women ascertain how to 'do' gender and more so come to learn the effects of transgressing such gendered norms (Bohan, 1997; Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Continuing to understand and appreciate how young women negotiate these barriers and contradictions in contemporary postfeminist discourses is important and ongoing (M. Brown, 2011).

In reference to the young women in the current study, there was apparent diversity in their reflections and the ways in which they interpreted and positioned themselves with regards to normative femininities. However, it was evident that these young women could be characterised as relatively gender aware. This is similar to the way in which Christina Scharff (2012) describes the adult young women she interviewed in Britain and Germany. However, her observations specifically focus on young women's engagement with feminism. The current findings considered young women's negotiations of normative femininities and their understandings of sexism and feminism. Throughout their reflections, the participants perceived their experiences as young women different to that of young men. These young women felt that young men did not have to be concerned with being considered 'too smart', 'too boastful' about their achievements, or 'too opinionated'. They described the pressure to be physically attractive, thin and well dressed as a uniquely female experience. Admittedly, these young women spoke about young men in somewhat abstract terms and were potentially oversimplifying young men's negotiations of hegemonic masculinities. However, their insights point to the continued falsehoods inherent in postfeminist and neoliberal discourses, which position young women as 'empowered' and faced with the same opportunities (if not more) as young men (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, 2004; Duits & van Zoonen, 2006, 2007; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2010;

Peterson, 2010). More accurately, their reflections draw synergies with Walkerdine's (1993) earlier statements that "girls are always accused of being...too something and not enough something else" (p. 15). Nevertheless, this perceived gender awareness of the current cohort of young women does not necessarily lessen the impacts (including the impacts on their psychosocial wellbeing) of the contradictory and restrictive sociocultural context.

Negotiating normative femininities. For the young women in the current study there were numerous messages they received about what it means to be a young woman in modern times. Their talk was dominated by the themes of wanting to do well in school and working hard, paired with the unrelenting pressure of satisfying gendered beauty norms and participating in beauty practices. It is also asserted that such 'practices' are inclusive of partaking in negative behaviours such as rumination about one's body and appearance. Within the current cohort of young women, this rumination regarding appearance was very much positioned as part of their experiences as young women and to an extent normalised among peers. Although normalised, they were not necessarily content with the perceived surveillance of their appearance, as well as the surveillance applied to young women in general. This rumination particularly at the collective level (appearance talk between young women) is somewhat indicative of Carey et al.'s (2011) observations concerning appearance cultures within Australian secondary schools.

Consequently, the current study's findings build on and concur with previous research or bodies of knowledge, which have considered young women's engagement with their academic identities (Allan, 2010; Raby & Pomerantz, 2015; Ringrose, 2013), and body image or appearance concerns (Betz & Ramsey, 2017; Carey et al., 2011, 2013; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). Rather, the

current findings stipulate that these two sets of discourses (pertaining to young women's academic achievement and gendered beauty ideals) work together to frame young women's understandings, negotiations and performances of normative femininities, in postfeminist and neoliberal times.

These two narratives come together in the metaphor, or subject position of the 'supergirl' (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007) or 'can-do girl' (Harris, 2004b). It is this characterisation of young women, or rather the seemingly fundamental requirement that young women essentially need to be all things at once (and not 'too' much of anything), which was prevalent among the young women interviewed. In the current inquiry the young women discussed gendered sociocultural expectations which require them to be smart, but not overtly smart, proud or opinionated; humble, social, popular with boys but not preoccupied with boys, independent but considerate of others, participate in gendered beauty practices and work towards goals of thinness and 'health' but be loving and accepting of their bodies. Evidently, many of the young women (some more than others) were therefore alert to the omnipresent requirement for them to manage such co-occurring expectations. Like Pia and Sian who respectively contend that young women need to be "sort of everything" and "there's a lot of that is expected of us".

It is unmistakable that contemporary normative femininities are profoundly challenging and, in many cases overwhelmingly contradictory. Keeping true to their neoliberal responsibilities, young women are required to balance or manage such contradictions without struggle (C. E. Charles, 2010a; Griffin, 2004; S. Jackson et al., 2013; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2007). The young women were mindful of such requirements, and thus seemed to be in a state of hyper-vigilance monitoring their own and others' performances of femininity, drawing comparisons and participating

in “positioned othering” (Hutton et al., 2016, p. 75). It is these elements of contemporary normative femininities - the contradictions and the apparent effortlessness at which young women are expected to demonstrate to resolve them - that makes current postfeminist and neoliberal versions of girlhood distinct. This is in addition to being potentially detrimental for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women, as the postfeminist and neoliberal condition mandates that young women locate any barriers to successful girlhood within rather than external to one’s self (Baker, 2008, 2010b; McRobbie, 2007a, 2015).

In general, although there were similarities in the ways young women in the current study responded to normative femininities, there were also some clear distinctions within the group. A number of the young women were evidently more critical of and reflective on what it means to be a young woman in modern times than their peers. Other young women demonstrated discontentment with particular elements of girlhood (e.g., the continued focus on physical appearance). It was apparent that some of the young women yearned for the acceptance of individuality, more diverse subjectivity positions and varied representations of young women and their experiences. Although nominating areas of progression for young women in modern times (e.g., education and reduction of some stereotypes), to a degree several young women interviewed remained unsatisfied with avenues available to ‘do’ girlhood. It was apparent that these young women desired less surveillance and restrictions as well as fewer double standards, and increased equality, from within their school, in some cases their families and more broadly from society. Thus, a commonality among the current cohort of young women was they all communicated various levels of dissatisfaction (some more overtly) with current gendered expectations and the representation of young femininities. This is despite critics of

the current postfeminist landscape, maintaining that young women are required to avoid such critiques of normative femininities or their current sociocultural climate (McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Scharff, 2012).

Furthermore, it could be argued that in comparison to young women (and women) in previous research, the young women in the current study were at times more critical of normative femininities (Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). An exemplar of this in the current study was the young women's limited engagement with discourses which frame their participation in gendered beauty practices to be simply a form of 'personal choice', enjoyment, or an illustration of their 'empowerment' (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012). In contrast, for these young women they often positioned this as an imposition and something they were expected to engage in due to being young women (Lazar, 2011). This at times reluctant engagement with beauty practices and ideals, which the young women discussed, further supports Lazar's (2011) contention that "'doing' beauty is a vital component of 'doing' femininity" (p. 37). It also further signifies the restricted avenues to 'doing' femininity, or girlhood which continue to be made available to young women (Jeffreys, 2005; Lazar, 2009, 2011); and the individualised and commodified versions of 'empowerment' on offer to young women (C. E. Charles, 2010a; S. Jackson & Westrupp, 2010). These findings are importantly indicative of young women's "complex relationships with popular culture that require them to negotiate, infiltrate, play with, and undermine feminine cultural forms rather than simply reject them" (Harris, 2008b, p. 7).

Despite such awareness and at times discontentment with current depictions of girlhood, the tendency to strongly resist and overtly transgress normative femininities was somewhat limited (although not completely absent). However, this

potential reluctance to challenge such gendered ideals and discourses (even when feelings of contention are present) needs to be considered with an appreciation of the developmental stage these young women occupy. Adolescence has been characterised as a period in which questions concerning one's sense of self become more salient for young people (Abrams, 2002; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005; Wetherell, 2010). Young women during this life stage also become more privy to the demands of gender and normative femininities (M. Brown, 2011; Griffin, 2004; Heilman, 1998). These broader sociocultural discourses and narratives of gender infiltrate young women's everyday social worlds. At this stage within schools and peer groups young women form shared understandings of what constitutes femininity and acceptable performances of girlhood (Davison & Frank, 2006; Paechter, 2003, 2006b). These shared understandings are also inclusive of knowledge regarding the inherent risks in transgressing normative femininities.

The young women in the current study confirmed the insights of Riley et al. (2016), by further cementing the role judgemental talking and looking between female peers (or the postfeminist gaze) plays in their negotiations and performances of normative femininities. Further to this, the young women were consistent in their views that young women who were not considered to 'fit in' and perform 'proper' femininities were often subjected to peer exclusion or mistreatment (Carrera et al., 2011; Renold, 2006; Ringrose, 2006, 2013; Warrington & Younger, 2011). Consequently, their hesitation to challenge (and transgress) normative femininities is further appreciated when taking into account that these young women are likely at a stage in which they are not only negotiating and developing their values and subjectivity but when peers are central to such understandings of self. Also, important to the ways in which young women relate to themselves as women is their orientation

towards broader issues of sexism and collective movements like feminism (Ahmed, 2017; Hercus, 1999, 2005; Manago et al., 2009; Rich, 2005). Therefore, young women's reflections and talk concerning macro-level issues of sexism and feminism further add to understandings concerning how young women mediate sociocultural informed normative femininities.

(Dis)Engagement with sexism and feminism. Previous research has presented a fairly pessimistic view concerning young women's (and women's) engagement and identification with feminism (Lazar, 2009; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007). To reiterate, it is a common premise that in contemporary times, young women and women whilst supportive of feminist values – the equality of women – they retreat from the collective feminist movement, or identifying themselves as 'feminists' (Crossley, 2010; Olson et al., 2008; Quinn & Radtke, 2006; Rich, 2005; Robnett et al., 2012; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). Neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies based on the valuing of individualism and the notion that gender equality has been achieved have been found to contribute to this withdrawal from feminism (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Scharff, 2012). However, recent research has made attempts to dispel this notion that school-aged young women have overlooked feminism in modern times (Retallack et al., 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft, 2011).

With regards to the young women in the current study, their responses to, and identification with feminism were not uniform. Irrespective of this diversity, as well as the presence of negative views concerning feminism in the broader school setting, there was no outright backlash, or rejection of feminism expressed by the young women interviewed. On the contrary, in comparison to previous research conducted predominantly with adult women, it could be said that current participants shared a

less negative orientation towards feminism (Crossley, 2010; Dyer & Hurd, 2016; Quinn & Radtke, 2006; Zucker & Stewart, 2007). Despite only a minority of the young women overtly identifying as feminists, none of the young women seemed to completely denounce feminism. Rather, these young women were tentative in their views with regards to feminism, but as expected maintained a commitment to values of gender equality. Similar to the sentiments of Aronson (2003), these moderate views regarding feminism are not criticised nor considered necessarily detrimental to the collective or political agenda of feminism.

How one defines feminism and what it means to be a feminist is not fixed (Budgeon, 2001; Griffin, 2001; Quinn & Radtke, 2006). Particularly for young women, it is recognised that their understandings of feminism and how they may engage or disengage from feminism can alter and shift – this was evident in the current inquiry. Consistent with notions regarding feminist identity development, it is maintained that a young woman is not automatically a feminist (or not a feminist); rather the pathway to ‘becoming’ a feminist is a non-linear, gradual and complex experience (Bartky, 1975; Marine & Lewis, 2014). Thus, the current findings only present a moment in their potential solidification of their values regarding systemic gender relations; it is not known which direction the young women in the current research will take with regards to their (non)feminist identities as they progress into adulthood.

Interestingly, in their exploration of the narratives of young feminists, Marine and Lewis (2014) found that for these feminists they describe having an orientation to feminist values during adolescence. However, it was not until they were cognisant to the realisation that these values were not unanimously supported that their feminist identity strengthened (Marine & Lewis, 2014). Despite belonging to a number of

settings, the young women in the current study are engaged in an educational context in which feminist ideologies are discussed (and somewhat supported) and cross-gender comparisons are minimised. It is possible that together with demystifying feminism for these young women, their school context may have made the goals of feminism ‘common sense’ for these young women and not something that requires active support and commitment (Scharff, 2012). For these young women their orientation towards (or away from) feminism may shift as they continue to move into diverse settings (e.g., university and workplaces) where their values of gender equality are potentially challenged.

Regardless of this potentially ‘common sense’ stance towards contemporary gender relations (Scharff, 2012), young women including the participants in the current study are not naïve to the continued sexism and inequality young women and women experience (Keller et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2018; Ohrn, 2009; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Sills et al., 2016). A number of the young women in the current study were clear in their identification of sexism across varied contexts (e.g. in the home, school, part-time workplaces). Despite some challenges in articulating certain instances as clear examples of sexism and at times, contradictions in their talk, they did nominate existing gender-based inequalities or double standards, which they and other young women are required to manage. For instance, not being allowed to go out alone; being responsible for a disproportionate amount of home duties; needing to dress appropriately; being judged for not acting “proper”; and left feeling “stupid” as a result of sexism. This awareness is in direct contrast to prominent postfeminist ideologies, which characterises sexism and gender inequality as extinct (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a). Although several of the young women did rearticulate discourses which position sexism as a reduced concern in

contemporary times, no one drew on postfeminist discourses, which characterise sexism as a gender-neutral issue (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b).

Most unfortunate was that despite their awareness of sexism and gender inequality, many of the young women seemed resigned that such inequalities (i.e., young women need to protect themselves in public spaces, unequal relationships in the home) were part of their experiences as young women; and that as school-aged young women they were limited in their ability to address these issues. This somewhat acceptance of gender disparities can in many ways again be attributed to the contemporary postfeminist and neoliberal climate. Neoliberal ideologies promote, or mandate individualism and therefore, hold young women solely accountable for not only their successes but also for any disadvantage, or setbacks they may encounter (Baker, 2008; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Gonick et al., 2009). Postfeminist discourses persist to render feminism redundant based on the premise that gender inequality has ceased to exist (McRobbie, 2007a, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Together these postfeminist and neoliberal discourses and principles collude to limit young women's understandings concerning systemic oppression; and more so, how this systemic sexism and gender inequality directly influences their experiences as young women. In the current study, although at times some young women were able to draw connection between broader issues of sexism and their experiences as young women, this was not common. In contrast, it was common for young women to approach these disadvantages as an individual level issue, hence allowing some young women to 'choose' to ignore or minimise gender-based disparities.

However, this tendency to account for sexism must be understood in relation to pervasive postfeminist and neoliberal rhetoric; young women who draw attention to gender inequality risk being considered misguided (Pomerantz et al., 2013); or as

evidenced by the young women in the current research, risk being labelled 'too opinionated', or an extreme feminist (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b). Therefore, instead of questioning such inequalities, young women essentially incorporate such notions into their understandings of normative femininities and alter the ways in which they 'do' girlhood to comply with postfeminist (and neoliberal) notions and expectations. For instance, rather than questioning why young women are considered more at risk of violence, multiple young women discussed the ways in which they secure their own safety by not *putting themselves* at risk by occupying public space alone. This acceptance of gender inequality by some of the young women could also be symptomatic of this postfeminist push against collective movements such as feminism (McRobbie, 2007a, 2009). Although it has been highlighted in previous research that young women are politically active in a variety of ways (Keller, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taft, 2011); the effective dismissing of feminism sets young women up with a limited ability and vernacular to speak about gender inequality and sexism (Pomerantz et al., 2013).

Context of Young Women's Negotiations: The School Setting and Peer Groups

As outlined above, young women's understandings and enactment of normative femininities are fluid and convoluted. However, young women do not navigate gendered discourses in isolation. It is necessary to understand these negotiations in context, as well as the intricacies inherent within these contexts. Therefore, the second research question aimed to consider the peer dynamics, climate and discourses prevalent in the school setting in which the research was conducted. More specifically, understanding settings (e.g., schools, workplaces and communities), and considering people in context is a central principle of community psychology (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2009; Riger, 2017). In recent times, Bond and

Wasco (2017) have called for further attention to be paid to the ways in which settings are gendered via their structures, practices and norms. Therefore, with an appreciation for this sentiment, the current study considered the ways in which the school climate, norms and gendered discourses present in this setting (SCLC) may inform students' understandings of normative femininities and what it means to 'do' successful girlhood.

Schools have been nominated as a key setting in which young women (and young men) negotiate and perform their gendered identities (Allan & Charles, 2014; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2007; Reynolds & Bamford, 2016; Woolley, 2017). Young people within the school context also contribute to the monitoring and enforcing (as well as potentially opposing) of gender roles and expectations (Davison & Frank, 2006; Paechter, 2003, 2006b). Accordingly, schools are often characterised as spaces in which customary gender norms and inequalities are mimicked (Archer et al., 2007; Fisette & Walton, 2015; Youdell, 2006); or alternatively settings in which hegemonic discourses can be challenged (Weis & Fine, 2001). More specifically, an individual's attitudes and views concerning gender "are not only shaped by environmental characteristics; once formed, such attitudes or stereotypical beliefs become part of the gendered culture of the social environment" (Wasco & Bond, 2010, p. 628). As explained by O'Flynn and Petersen (2007), "through the privileging of particular discourses, to which they themselves are subject, schools make possible, as well as constrain, what students can be; how they can understand themselves; how they can envisage their lives; how they can desire" (p. 460).

In regard to SCLC, from the insights offered by the teachers and young women interviewed it was evident that both these characteristics (the enforcement of traditional gender norms and the opportunity to challenge such norms) were present

within this particular school setting, arguably often concurrently. Utilising the concept of safe spaces (Mansfield, 2014; The Roestone Collective, 2014), it was found that SCLC provided a girls-only space where young women reported feeling comfortable, well understood as young women and cross-gender comparisons were minimised. Opportunities to have critical and feminist conversations with students were encouraged (although clear boundaries around topics were identified); and feminism was made visible in this school space in a number of ways (some more effective than others). Although these likely strengths contributed to SCLC's potential to be a safe, or maybe a more accurate description would be 'safer' space for (some) young women to challenge postfeminist discourses, there were also several elements, which were counterintuitive to this goal. Therefore, consistent with other perceived 'safe' spaces, SCLC as a potentially 'safer' space for young women is inherently 'messy' (The Roestone Collective, 2014).

With regards to the limitations identified at SCLC, consistent with previous research it was apparent that in some ways within this setting 'proper' schoolgirl subjectivities were emphasised (Archer et al., 2007; Ohn, 2009). This normative schoolgirl subjectivity, positions the female student to be obedient, sympathetic and self-driven to do well academically (Archer et al., 2007; Youdell, 2006). Young women who were perceived as transgressing such expectations (i.e., being disruptive in class, too animated or eager, not abiding by uniform rules, not academically successful) were monitored and disciplined by both teachers and students. The continued push for the academic excellence, together with the stigma attached to not being a 'smart girl' (e.g., aspiring to attend TAFE instead of university) was identified at SCLC. This effectively reinforces postfeminist and neoliberal connotations, which stipulate that being academically accomplished is fundamental to

'doing' girl in contemporary times (C. Jackson et al., 2010; Ringrose, 2013). In addition, irrespective of the apparent interest in various sports and the traditionally male dominated fields of science and mathematics, which has been generated among the young women at SCLC (particularly by the young women interviewed), there was an absence of non-traditional and skill-based curriculum choices (e.g., woodwork) available to female students. Furthermore, although many young women interviewed were still considering various career options and expressed feeling like they could be whatever they wanted to be, some also reported being encouraged by both the school and their parents to pursue traditional female career paths (e.g., nursing). This therefore is indicative of the limited representations of women or versions of normative femininities, which (some) young women continue to be privy to in key settings like their school and homes.

In addition to these limitations inherent in discourses pertaining to successful schoolgirl femininities, there were other shortcomings identified at SCLC. Regardless of the teachers interviewed in the current inquiry providing a picture of SCLC as a school environment which values student voice; and is committed to assisting their female students to build their critical reflexivity, there were seemingly some caveats attached to this objective. With regards to student voice, despite encouraging students to present their proposal regarding gender-neutral uniforms (e.g., the introduction of trousers), the uniform policy was not altered, thus effectively dismissing the value of student voice. Most ominously, there were critical topics of conversation, which were effectively silenced by some teachers due to the Catholic traditions of the school. As reported by the teachers interviewed, some members of the teaching staff were reluctant to discuss, or address issues such as sexuality including premarital sex and same-sex marriage due to this being contrary to the values of the Catholic Church.

Fortunately, it was apparent that some young women worked to question the status quo by broaching such subjects in class and the reluctance by teachers were not shared among all members of the teaching staff. Although, with reference to safe spaces, it has been suggested that some tension and conflict in opinion within the classroom environment is beneficial to assist young people to challenge and critique issues (Boost Rom, 1998). Thus, this friction introduced into this setting due to the potential discrepancy between the Catholic ethos of the school and the contemporary realities of (some) young women's sociocultural worlds, may present benefits in preparing young women to talk back to repressive (and gendered) discourses.

Further contributing to the school climate and the gendered discourses at SCLC was the role of feminism and feminist values. The response to feminism in this space was multifaceted and complex. This is some ways anticipated as feminism in general both as an ideology and movement continues to come under various levels of support and scrutiny (Budgeon, 2011; Duncan, 2010; Scharff, 2012). With regards to the current inquiry, like previous research, it was evident at SCLC that feminism played a part in young women critically reflecting on their gendered experiences (DiGiovanni, 2004; Martin & Beese, 2016; Mayberry, 1999). However, at times, it was clear that feminism was contested in this space with not all teachers and students adopting a feminist orientation. This diversity in orientations towards feminism was expected; however, there were instances in which male teaching staff and students alike, reiterated negative stereotypes of 'feminists', including stereotypes which position feminists as man-haters (Edley & Wetherell, 2001). Furthermore, the sexist and victim-blaming rhetoric perpetuated by the external male self-defence instructor was irreconcilable with the school's apparent (feminist) values. It was clear from fieldwork activities together with the reflections shared by one of the interviewed

teachers that not all teachers were supportive of such views and planned to address this with students who participated in these classes. Regardless, the promotion of these sexist discourses and views within the school context (even temporarily) further legitimises them and informs young women's ideas surrounding gender expectations. From the interviews conducted with young women in the current study, it was evident that these self-defence lessons had an impact on some participants' views around their safety (or the safety of young women and women) in public spaces.

In addition, irrespective of the importance of generating feminist dialogue and teaching moments in the classroom, criticisms shared by the young women interviewed point to the possibility that at times feminism has been poorly integrated into SCLC's school climate. Although not necessarily diminishing the importance of feminism for young women, many of the young women interviewed often characterised the school's focus on feminism as being excessive or 'preachy'. Thus, whilst the visibility of feminism at SCLC is commended, these shortcomings and contradictions continue to create potential boundaries to young women's engagement and understanding of feminism and what it means to be a 'feminist'.

Further complicating the prospective for a school setting like SCLC to be a 'completely' safe space for young women, is the social and power dynamics which persist amongst female students (Hey, 1997; Ringrose, 2006, 2013; Warrington & Younger, 2011). As highlighted in previous research, it was observed that for the young women in the current study their female friends and broader peer groups were instrumental in informing acceptable ways of being young women (L. M. Brown, 2003; Carrera et al., 2011; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Renold, 2006; Ringrose & Barajas, 2011; Ringrose et al., 2013). Paechter (2003, 2006b) contends that young women collectively cultivate their subjectivities and 'do' gender or young

femininities within communities of practice located within various settings including schools. It is the function of these communities of practice, to enact acceptable ways of doing femininity or girlhood (Paechter, 2003, 2006b). It could be argued that multiple communities of practice were present within SCLC. The young women reflected on various ways they, their friends and peers participated in and performed femininities (e.g., in their explanations of ‘different’ groups of girls); and the peer hierarchy and power dynamics, which operated alongside such communities of practice (Paechter, 2003, 2006b).

However, for young women in the current inquiry it is more likely the judgemental looking and talking, or the ‘postfeminist gaze’ present between young women, which worked to restrict their participation in more diverse (or resistant) forms of femininities (Riley et al., 2016). As observed by Riley et al. (2016) and others (Bailey et al., 2013; Hutton et al., 2016; Ringrose & Coleman, 2013), judgemental looking and talking between young women was found to effectively monitor participants’ and their peers’ compliance to contemporary forms of femininity. The young women in the current study positioned this judgemental looking and talking as a normative part of ‘doing’ girlhood. This is suggestive of postfeminist narratives of the ‘mean girl’, which pathologises young women’s participation in relational forms of aggression; and positions such ‘meanness’ as customary in middle-class forms of femininity (Gonick, 2004; Ringrose, 2006, 2013).

An extension of this judgemental looking and talking, were the peer exclusion practices young women are subjected to if deemed to not be meeting normative expectations of femininity. The young women reflected on the ways in which their peers were mistreated and socially excluded due to transgressing normative femininities, or for being considered as not ‘fitting’ into the communities of practices

established among young women at SCLC. It was evident that the young women in the current research were dissatisfied with such limitations and were critical of the monitoring and surveillance young women simultaneously enact and are subjected to. However, during the current discussions it was evident that these young women have yet to fully appreciate their own role in the monitoring of their friends and peers' performances and negotiations of femininity. Irrespective of this limited awareness, it is not the intention here to place blame with individual young women for this judgemental looking and talking or peer exclusion (Carrera et al., 2011; Ringrose, 2006, 2013). Rather, criticism lies with the broader postfeminist sociocultural context and sensibility, which sets up young women to understand themselves, or how they feel about themselves, and their performances of femininity in comparison to other young women (L. M. Brown, 2003; Riley et al., 2016).

Consequences for the Psychosocial Wellbeing of Young Women

The potential outcomes of normative femininities for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women, was the focus of the current study's final research question. This line of inquiry was pursued not in an effort to further perpetuate restrictive discourses and constructions of young women, which pathologise and position them as 'at risk' (M. Brown, 2011; Pomerantz, 2009). Rather, the objective was to explore the potential impacts of the tensions and contradictions young women negotiate, due to the current postfeminist and neoliberal sociocultural terrain. Tolman et al. (2006) and others (Walkerdine et al., 2001) have emphasised the need to understand young women's (psychosocial) wellbeing in the context of their sociocultural environment. Specifically, the connection between the psychological, cultural and social (Walkerdine et al., 2001). With regards to psychosocial approaches to wellbeing, this refers to an understanding of "the human subject as a

social entity” (Frosh, 2003, p. 1551; Holloway, 2004; Ringrose, 2008b; Tolman et al., 2006; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Thus, wellbeing is considered to be multidimensional and include a consideration of psychological/emotional and social wellbeing, as well as, self-acceptance, and “environmental mastery” (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Ryff, 1989, p. 1071).

As stipulated throughout this discussion, it was evident within the current study that today’s social climate, presents potential challenges for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women (Ringrose, 2008b; Tolman et al., 2006; Walkerdine et al., 2001). As discussed above, underlying contemporary versions of girlhood is the notion that young women are ideal neoliberal subjects, who without restraint experience achievement in all aspects of their lives (Baker, 2008; C. E. Charles, 2010a; Harris, 2004b). Correspondingly, the young women in the current research also demonstrated an orientation or strive towards this subject position of the ‘can-do girl’ (Harris, 2004b). However, it is contended that what made this subject position most injurious for the psychosocial wellbeing of young women in the current study, is that rather than looking to persistent systemic gender-based inequalities, these ‘ideal neoliberal citizens’ are compelled to find cause for their supposed shortcomings solely within one’s self (Baker, 2008; Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015). Gill and Orgad (2015) go as far to say that this premise of neoliberal individualism extends to “locating the blame for gender inequality in women’s psyches and bodies” (p. 304).

Consequently, this obligatory internal rumination pushes (some) young women into a constant state of self-improvement and dissatisfaction (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2015). Within the current research, this orientation towards self-improvement and discontentment was identified in young women’s engagement with

their academic identities and gendered appearance norms. For the young women interviewed, they could be characterised as being in a state of hyper-vigilance, whilst continuing to sift through the numerous contradictions inherent in postfeminist (and neoliberal) representations of girlhood. Together with nominating the rewards of being academically successful, they also reflected on the stress and apprehension, which accompanies the contested identity position of the 'smart girl'. This coincides with findings from Spencer et al. (2018), which indicated such stress and panic concerning academic results was normalised and accepted amongst female students. However, more widely acknowledged has been the damaging effects of restrictive beauty ideals (particularly the desire for thinness) on the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of young women (Calogero & Thompson, 2010; Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2017; Mueller et al., 2010; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010; Tischner & Malson, 2012). Within the current study, the young women reflected on the ways in which their bodies continue to be sights of surveillance and regulation. For some young women this led to unhealthy practices (e.g., restricted eating), and a preoccupation with the thin ideal. As outlined above, many young women participated in emphasised femininity reluctantly; however, appearance related concerns were positioned as an inherent part of 'doing' girlhood. Contemporary pseudo-feminist discourses centring on body acceptance and diversity have also been found to further contribute to the negative psychosocial wellbeing outcomes for young women (Gill & Elias, 2014; Gill & Orgad, 2015). Young women in the current study were also found to be exhibiting self-blame and criticism for trying to live up to the hegemonic and gendered beauty ideals.

Therefore, it is understandable how these negotiations of sociocultural informed femininities could potentially impact young women's psychosocial

wellbeing. However, these complex negotiations were compounded by the peer exclusion and mistreatment of young women who do not 'fit in' and perform 'proper' femininities (Carrera et al., 2011; Renold, 2006; Ringrose, 2006, 2013; Warrington & Younger, 2011). That is, friendships have been nominated as particularly important for young women navigating their subjectivities (Heilman, 1998; Renold, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011). Hence, it is apparent that the risks inherent in transgressing normative femininities have implications for young women maintaining positive social relationships and self-acceptance, both central elements of psychosocial wellbeing (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Ryff, 2004). Consequently, the multifaceted and numerous implications of contemporary normative femininities for the psychosocial wellbeing of the young women in the current study were well noted. However, it is argued that what may be most detrimental on young women's psychosocial wellbeing both now, and in the future, is the limited disruption to patriarchy (L. M. Brown, 2003; McRobbie, 2015). That is, as young women are being steered towards pursuing 'perfect' performances of femininity, self-blame and self-surveillance (as well as the monitoring of other young women); "male privilege [is] actively safe-guarded" and the status quo secured (McRobbie, 2015, p. 15). This is irrespective of prevailing neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies and discourses, which celebrate the 'empowerment' of young women. Accordingly, the unchecking of patriarchy and systemic gender relations, permuted by today's postfeminist and neoliberal condition, effectively limits young women's participation in social life and their access to diverse ways of 'doing' femininity and girlhood – this will inevitably have (negative) consequences for young women's psychosocial wellbeing.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to the ever changing, fragmented and diverse essence of girlhood, any work to develop a better understanding of young women's subjectivity is multifaceted and enduring (M. Brown, 2011). Consequently, limitations inherent in the current research, as well as areas for additional research have been identified for further consideration. For instance, the limited diversity present within the current participant group is considered to be one such limitation. The initial intention of the current study was to recruit a more diverse group of young women. One way it was anticipated that this would be achieved was to conduct the research within two distinct educational settings. The objective was to conduct this inquiry with young women from a single-sex as well as potentially a co-educational school. It was expected that these school settings would have ideally been diverse in terms of sector (public/private/religious), locality and the socioeconomic status of the school cohort and community; accordingly, participation from a more diverse group of young women would have potentially been generated. However, attempts to recruit additional schools were unfortunately unsuccessful. This increased diversity within the participant group could have perhaps extended the insights gained regarding young women's performances of girlhood; and the potentially unique restrictions as well as flexibilities some young women encounter whilst developing their subjectivities. In addition, this participation of multiple schools would have also allowed for further exploration concerning the role educational settings (and the various discourses prioritised within such spaces) play in informing young women's understandings and performance of normative femininities.

In reference to the current study's methodology, it would have been advantageous to have spent more time in the current school setting to allow the

opportunity for more young women to participate. Although ethnographic and qualitative research is traditionally conducted with small participant groups (Willig, 2013), it is accepted that a relatively small group of young women and teachers from SCLC participated in the current research. Regardless, it is contended that this did not notably affect meeting the objectives of the current inquiry. In addition, given the time constraints the young women were not involved in the data analysis process and member checking of themes did not occur. It is acknowledged that incorporating techniques such as member checking would have provided the young participants more agency in the ways in which their voices were represented (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

Together with incorporating more participatory research methods, it is recommended that future research continue to examine the subjectivity development and performances of diverse young women within an Australian context, using a more intersectional lens (Cole, 2009; Dill & Kohlman, 2012; Shields, 2008; Staunæs, 2005). Theories of intersectionality allow for the consideration of “the ways in which categories of identity and structures of inequality are mutually constituted and defy separation into discrete categories of analysis” (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 154). Young women are not a homogenous collective, on the contrary young women’s subjectivity is simultaneously informed and influenced by the intersecting social categories pertaining to one’s class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and ability (M. Brown, 2011; Griffin, 2004; Scharff, 2012). It is maintained that this intersectional lens will allow for a more nuanced understanding of young women’s experiences of contemporary girlhood.

Furthermore, it recommended that future research continue to examine school-aged young women’s understandings and experiences of sexism. This is

particularly pertinent in the current sociocultural landscape, which has seen sexual harassment and gender inequality move to the forefront of the global discourse. In recent times events such as international women's marches, social media campaigns (e.g., #everydaysexism and #MeToo), and the Time's Up movement (www.timesupnow.com) have generated significant attention towards gender inequality and in particular sexual harassment.⁴⁹ These actions and movements have influenced the rhetoric concerning gender inequality across social media and media platforms, as well as in public and political domains.

These collective movements and activities which to date have been witnessed to a lesser extent within Australia than in North America, have attempted to make the systemic sexism and inequality women experience, including those of relative privilege more visible. With the momentum these fluid movements have created among women, allowing them to respond and talk back to sexism, it is necessary to assess in what ways if any these impacts have filtered into the understandings and conversations of young women in Australia. Have such movements made it more possible to resist postfeminist notions that gender inequality is a redundant issue? Has this made some young women more cognisant of the sexism they may have experienced, or potentially validated experiences of sexism for some young women? It is recommended that future research also examine what impact, if any, such collective activities have on young women's willingness to identify as 'a feminist'. If women's marches and online activism have become more 'mainstream', has this worked to dismantle some of the long-held narratives of feminists as man-haters, or

⁴⁹ Although these social media movements and collective activism are positive, it is not the intention here to overlook that these movements are in many ways contested; and that membership or exclusion from these movements can be potentially complicated by a women's intersecting identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, ability, sexuality, and so on), and the relative privilege or lack thereof she may experience.

irrational extremists? Unfortunately, the current research was conducted prior to such movements; hence these questions were unable to be examined within the scope and timeframe of the current research.

Together with addressing such issues, anecdotal evidence has also pointed to feminism moving back into schools in the way of feminist collectives. Therefore, it is recommended that future research consider how this is being done and the response from students both within and external to such feminist groups. Research could examine if these feminist collectives promote more collective forms of activism and ‘empowerment’ (at least at the school level), or do they remain focussed on ‘empowering’ young women at the individual level. It would also be beneficial for further research to take a more longitudinal approach to the feminist identity development of school-aged young women. As pointed out in the current research, an individual’s perceptions of and position towards feminism is not static. Adopting a feminist identity has been discussed as a ‘becoming’ (Bartky, 1975; Marine & Lewis, 2014). Therefore, following young women into their post-secondary life to examine this becoming or disengagement in more depth would further contribute to understanding what makes one engage with or move away from such collective identities.

Conclusion

The current qualitative study explored the ways in which young women understand, negotiate and perform normative femininities and ways of ‘doing’ girl in the complex contemporary sociocultural climate (C. E. Charles, 2010a; Gill & Scharff, 2011; S. Jackson et al., 2013; McRobbie, 2007a, 2009, Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Ringrose, 2013). To further conceptualise the challenges (and opportunities) present for young women in the modern sociocultural context, it was necessary to

take an interdisciplinary approach to the current qualitative research. Therefore, despite being located within psychology and more specifically community psychology, it was necessary to gain insights from several bodies of knowledge including sociology, feminist and gender studies, communication and media studies, cultural studies and education. Feminist community psychologists have advocated for more inclusion and consideration of issues distinct and central to the experiences and lives of women, in particular feminist informed research (Angelique & Culley, 2003; Angelique & Mulvey, 2012; Riger, 2017). It is hoped that this current study can contribute to this consideration of gender (from a feminist poststructuralist lens) within community psychology; and more specifically draw further attention towards the experiences of school-aged young women within the current sociocultural context. Further to this, it was the intention of the current study to more broadly contribute to the current understandings and rhetoric concerning young women's subjectivity and the ways in which they engage with their sociocultural context and popular culture – in particular young women within the Australian context.

The young women who participated in the current research positioned themselves with regards to normative femininities in multiple ways. At times they seemingly were accepting of postfeminist and neoliberal versions of girlhood; and at other times they were able to question and look beyond the “postfeminist masquerade” (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2007a, p. 722;). This is in reference to how they negotiated discourses concerning their academic identities (Allan, 2010; Pomerantz & Raby, 2017; Ringrose, 2013); gendered beauty ideals (Riley et al., 2016; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011; Sur, 2017); and issues regarding sexism, inequality and feminism (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016b). Rather than challenge these inconsistencies, it is necessary to acknowledge and draw meaning

from their fragmented experiences of contemporary girlhood (Griffin, 2004; Pomerantz, 2009). This multifaceted (dis)engagement with the sociocultural (and gendered) discourses accessible to young women, were informed by and performed within numerous settings including online, within their families, peer and friendship groups, in their part-time workplaces and within their school.

With regards to the school setting, like the broader sociocultural context in which young women are maturing in, SCLC provided a context in which diverse representations of femininity and successful girlhood were simultaneously welcomed and repudiated. Despite the number of limitations identified at SCLC, the school did to some extent demonstrate the potential to be a 'safer' (but not entirely safe) space for young women to challenge hegemonic discourses of femininity. Although feminism continued to be contested in this school setting; and the presence of feminist rhetoric in no way resulted in all participants being feminists; it is argued that for at least some of the young women interviewed it may have resulted in feminism being demystified and negative stereotypes questioned. Irrespective of such positive features and the (mostly) affirmative ways in which this girls-only space was experienced by the young women interviewed, it is important to not overlook the restrictive and incongruous elements of this setting. One such element is the judgemental looking and talking which is prevalent among female peers. This 'postfeminist gaze' is further cultivated via the social exclusion of young women who are perceived to be transgressing normative femininities. However, these negative behaviours are not exclusive to the young women interviewed nor limited to SCLC; rather are symptomatic of the patriarchal and postfeminist characteristics of the contemporary sociocultural milieu (L. M. Brown, 2003; Riley et al., 2016; Ringrose, 2006; 2013)

Hence, without overlooking the complex and at times detrimental sociocultural terrain and settings in which young women are developing within (Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2008a; Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2013), it was further confirmed in the current inquiry that young women are active in their negotiations of normative femininities, their subjectivity development and critiques of popular culture. For the most part, the current cohort of young women were aware of the contemporary constraints young women such as themselves and their peers are subjected to. Further to this, it asserted that the young women interviewed demonstrated moments of ‘agency’ with regards to how they performed girlhood – and it is important that these are acknowledged. Whether it is the overt feminist identity adopted by Yen; or Sian making alternative fashion choices; Kate and Louise pursuing competitive sport despite pressure from their peers; or Talia challenging her unequal family dynamics; these young women demonstrate exploration regarding different ways to be young women within their individual contexts. It is acknowledged here that what is considered to be agentic practices is contested (Gonick et al., 2009; Harris & Dobson, 2015), and no leap is being made to label these young women as ‘empowered’ due to these moments of ‘agency’ or perceived ‘choice’ (Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2007b; Riger, 1993; Taft, 2011). As advocated by Harris and Dobson (2015) it is necessary to move beyond the binaries, which locate young women as either victims or empowered agents of change. Harris and Dobson proposed “recasting young women and girls as ‘suffering actors’” with the intent to recognise and appreciate young women’s “struggles for coherence, social acceptance and survival” (p. 153). This therefore allows for a consideration of “unheroic struggle” (Harris & Dobson, 2015, p. 153) or everyday actions as reflected upon in the current inquiry.

This recognition of young women's capacity to talk back to patriarchy even in small ways coincides with Ringrose's (2008b) point that rather than seeking to locate notable narratives and clear acts of resistance in young women's stories, it is the possible "traces' or 'residues' of feminist, anti-oppressive discourses, which jar against the regulative rhythm of normative discourses" (p. 54), that should be acknowledged. Therefore, without minimising the importance of collective feminist action and systemic changes (Ringrose, 2013; Taft, 2011), we cannot foresee how these moments of 'agency' may play out for these young women and what potential they may (or may not) bring to the collective feminist agenda. As articulated throughout the current inquiry, a young woman's negotiations of normative femininities and performances of girlhood are fluid and fragmented. There is no singular or correct way to be a young woman or to be a young feminist. While recognising and critiquing the restrictive and unequal version of girlhood prioritised in the contemporary sociocultural context, we also have to take stock of and appreciate the diverse ways young women can 'do' girlhood; including the diverse ways they may talk back to patriarchy. We do not want to further add to the tensions of girlhood by again labelling young women as "too something and not enough something else" (Walkerdine, 1993, p. 15) – in this case too 'compliant' and not enough 'resistant'.

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Appendix A: Participant Demographics (Pilot Study)

Pseudonym	Age	Year Level	School Type	COB/ Nationality	Religion	Languages (other)
Isabella	16	11	Public Co-ed (Western Suburbs)	Australia/ Italian	Catholic	N/A
Anu	15	10	Public Co-ed (North-Western Suburbs)	Australia/ Sri Lankan	Hindi	Tamil
Shalini	18	12	Private Girls School (Central Melbourne)	Australia/ Sri Lankan	Hindi	Tamil
Mila	15	10	Private Co-ed (South-Eastern Suburbs)	South African /Dutch	Not Specified	Dutch
Salime	14	9	Catholic Co-ed (Regional city North-west Victoria)	Australia/ Turkish	Muslim	Turkish
Meryem	17	12	Catholic Co-ed (Regional city North-west Victoria)	Australia/ Turkish	Muslim	Turkish
Asra	18	12	Public Co-ed (North-Western Suburbs)	Australia/ Cypriot-Turkish	Muslim	Turkish
Tess	15	10	Public Co-ed (Western Suburbs)	Australia/ Pacific Islander	Christian	N/A

Appendix B: VUHREC Approval Memo**MEMO**

29th July 2014

Dear DR JULIE VAN DEN EYNDE,

Your ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

» Application ID: HRE14-065

» Chief Investigator: DR JULIE VAN DEN EYNDE » Other Investigators: MS Linda Chiodo, MS ROMANA MORDA » Application Title: Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship dynamics.

» Form Version: 13-07

The application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the approval date; 29/07/2014.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at:
<http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php>.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).'

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461
Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

Appendix C: CEOM Approval Letter



GE14/0009
17 September 2014

Project #2040 Chiodo

Ms Linda Chiodo
Victoria
University
Ballarat Road
FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011

Dear Ms Chiodo

I am writing with regard to your research application received on 26/08/2014 concerning your forthcoming project titled *Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics*. You have asked approval to involve a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, as you wish to involve teachers and students.

I am pleased to advise that your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the eight standard conditions outlined below.

1. The decision as to whether or not research can proceed in a school rests with the school's principal, so you will need to obtain approval directly from the principal of the school that you wish to involve. You should provide the principal with an outline of your research proposal and indicate what will be asked of the school. A copy of this letter of approval, and a copy of notification of approval from the organisation's/university's Ethics Committee, should also be provided.
2. A copy of the approval notification from your institution's Ethics Committee must be forwarded to this Office, together with any modifications to your research protocol requested by the Committee. You may not start any research in Catholic Schools until this step has been completed.
3. A *Working with Children* (WWC) check – or registration with the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) – is necessary for all researchers visiting schools. Appropriate documentation must be shown to the principal before starting the research in the school.
4. No student is to participate in the research study unless s/he is willing to do

so and informed consent is given in writing by a parent/guardian

Ms Chiodo

17/09/

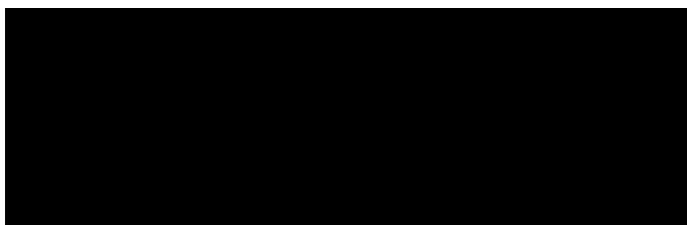
2014

5. Any substantial modifications to the research proposal, or additional research involving use of the data collected, will require a further research approval submission to this Office.
6. Data relating to individuals or the school are to remain confidential.
7. Since participating schools have an interest in research findings, you should consider ways in which the results of the study could be made available for the benefit of the school community.
8. At the conclusion of the study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to the Catholic Education Office Melbourne. It would be appreciated if you could submit your report in an **electronic format** using the email address provided below.

I wish you well with your research study. If you have any queries concerning this matter, please contact Ms Shani Prendergast of this Office.

The email address is apr@ceomelb.catholic.edu.au.

Yours sincerely



Anna Rados
MANAGER ANALYSIS, POLICY & RESEARCH

Appendix D: DEECD Approval Letter



**Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development**

Strategy and Review Group

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000
DX210083
GPO Box 4367
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2014_002471

Ms Linda Chiodo
College of
Arts
(Psychology)
Victoria
University
PO Box 14428
MELBOURNE 8001

Dear Ms Chiodo

Thank you for your application of 26 August 2014 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional

Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

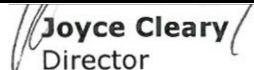
5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.
7. DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department's Research Register.

2

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely




Joyce Cleary
Director
Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch

Lo912014

Appendix E: Initial Contact Email

Dear [Principal Name]

I am currently conducting a study entitled **“Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics”** as part of my PhD study, which I am completing at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda. I would like the opportunity to discuss my research with you and the possibility of me conducting this research at your school with your staff and students.

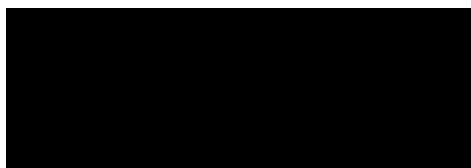
Broadly speaking, this research will examine how young women currently attending secondary schools in Melbourne understand and make sense of what it means to be a young woman in contemporary society and how this may influence the ways in which they experience their friendship groups. The school environment and peer relations (including peer inclusion and exclusion practices) within this context are considered to be fundamental to young women’s understanding of norms and gender role expectations. It is anticipated that the findings of the current research will have positive implications for the ways in which the wellbeing of adolescent girls is approached at the school level.

I appreciate that your time as well as the time of your students and staff is valuable and limited, thus I am committed to ensuring that your school’s involvement in the research is beneficial (and enjoyable) for the participants and broader school community. For instance, at this stage the study has been developed with a broad research focus – this will allow for the scope of the research to be further defined and negotiated to possibly include areas, which you consider a priority for your student body. Furthermore, I would be willing to explore options about how I could assist you with any projects or initiatives during my time at your school.

Please see attached further information regarding this proposed research, including aims and specific research questions to be addressed as well as details concerning the adopted methodology. Also attached is the letter of approval from the Catholic Education Office Melbourne and an approval memo from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) for your information. If requested, I can provide you with proof of my current Working with Children Check.

I would be grateful for the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the possibility of working together. Please feel free to contact me via email [email address] or on [contact number] if you require any further information.

Kind regards,



Linda Chiodo

Appendix F: Information for Principals Letter

RESEARCH INFORMATION FOR PRINCIPAL

Your school has been invited to participate in a research project entitled: 'Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics'. This project is being conducted by Linda Chiodo a student researcher at Victoria University, who is completing this research as part of a PhD study at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda, from the College of Arts.

Project explanation

Together with the broader social context, schools have been found to provide a fundamental environment in which young people engage in identity construction (Eliasson, Isaksson, & Laflamme, 2007). Likewise, peer groups are central to young people's development and negotiation of their identities. Inclusion into peer and friendship groups often mandates behaviour, language and attitudes associated with accepted understandings of what it means to be a boy or a girl (Renold, 2006; Warrington & Younger, 2011).

The aim of the current research is to explore how young women currently attending secondary school in Melbourne understand and make sense of what it means to be a young woman today and how this may influence the ways in which they experience their interpersonal relationships – in particular their peer groups and close friendships. In addition, together with examining the positive aspects of young women's friendships this research aims to examine how young women's understandings of and exposure to peer victimisation is reflective of dominant discussions and ideas surrounding gender and contemporary notions of femininity. Acknowledging the diversity in young women's perceptions and experiences, it is essential to further explore how young women's engagement (or disengagement) in normative young femininities and peer victimisation are impacted by intersecting notions of ethnicity, religion and class along with gender. These aims and subsequent research questions have been developed with the intention to maintain a broad research focus. These objectives and the overall scope of the research will be further refined as the current research progresses and participating schools are identified. The following research questions will be addressed:

1. How do young women interpret and perform socially and culturally informed normative femininities? How do young women negotiate normative femininities within their close friendship groups and more broadly interpersonal relationships?
2. How are young women's possible experiences of and participation in peer victimisation associated with broader group and societal factors?
3. What are the consequences of socially and culturally informed normative femininities for the psychological and social wellbeing of young women?

How will this project be conducted?

It is intended that the research will be conducted in 2 to 3 secondary schools across Melbourne. To assist in exploring the diversity in young women's experiences, it is planned that schools recruited will include all-girls and coeducational settings and be diverse in sector, religious doctrine and the socio-economic status of the local area.

It is intended that the primary participant group in the current research will be young women enrolled in Year 10 at the participating schools. This year level is considered to be symbolic of mid-adolescence (James & Owens, 2005). A minimum of approximately 10 to 15 participants will be recruited from each of the participating schools involved in the research.

A secondary participant group of teachers from the participating schools will also be recruited. The purpose of their recruitment is to gather further contextual information regarding the school environment and teachers' perceptions concerning peer relations. Approximately, 5 participants will be recruited from each of the participating schools involved in the research.

This research will be conducted using a qualitative methodology. More specifically, this research will adopt an ethnographic approach to research. Ethnography "is an approach that requires intensive fieldwork to gain a detailed and comprehensive view of a social group and its setting" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 196). Ethnographic research focuses on the everyday lived experiences of people within a setting or context and gives priority to communicating findings in a way that respects the participants' voice and frameworks of meaning (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). A number of data collection methods will be utilised in the current study including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, archival data and researcher fieldnotes.

Female students participating in the current research will be invited to participate in an individual semi-structured interview and/or focus group with the student researcher (Linda Chiodo). It is intended that the interviews and focus groups will be conducted on school grounds at a suitable time agreed to by all necessary parties. It is anticipated that supervision arrangements for these interviews and focus groups will be confirmed with yourself and/or other appropriate school personnel prior to interviews and focus groups being scheduled with student participants. The interviews and focus groups will be audiotaped with the participants' permission and it will take approximately 45 minutes to complete an interview and approximately 60-90 minutes to complete a focus group (focus groups can be conducted over two sessions). Students (and their consenting parent/caregiver) will have the choice of whether they would like to participate in an individual interview and/or focus group (and can change their mind at any time). Participants will be asked questions which explore a number of topics including their opinions about how young women are represented in the media, who their role models are, as well as discussing their friendships and possible issues concerning peer victimisation.

In regards to the secondary participant group (male and female members of the teaching staff), they will be invited to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be audiotaped with the participants' permission and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. The interview will be conducted at a suitable time at a private and convenient location. Participants will be asked questions that explore their perceptions of peer relations and more broadly their opinions on issues impacting young people.

What will my school gain from participating?

Importantly, it has been advocated that successful school-based wellbeing initiatives need to be informed by and sensitive to young women's diverse perceptions and lived experiences, including the challenges and messages they receive about what it means to be female in contemporary culture (Carey et al., 2011; Brown, 2003; Underwood, 2004). Therefore, it is anticipated that the findings of the current research will have positive implications for the ways

in which the social and emotional wellbeing of adolescent girls and young women is approached at both the school and community levels. Thus, your school's participation will lead to a more informed and in depth understanding of the positive and negatives aspects of girls' social worlds and the possible challenges and opportunities your students may face in contemporary culture. That is, the current research will help provide further knowledge regarding the wellbeing of adolescent girls and young women and how their wellbeing is impacted (if at all) by the messages they receive about what it means to be a young woman in today's society.

You will receive a research report identifying primary themes and findings as well as possible recommendations and implications of the current study.

How will the information I give be used?

In addition to the summary of findings provided to your school, the information gathered in this research will become part of the general findings of a PhD thesis report. Quotes from the interviews and focus groups will be utilised in the final thesis report. However, the identity of students and teachers who participated will not be revealed. Furthermore, the names and locations of the schools involved in the research will remain confidential. Data collected may also be used in future presentations or publications based on the general findings of this report.

Who is conducting the study?

Principal Researcher

Dr. Julie van den Enyde
College of Arts
Victoria University
Ph: [Contact number]
[Email Contact]

Principal Researcher

Dr. Romana Morda
College of Arts
Victoria University
Ph: [Contact number]
[Email Contact]

Student Researcher

Linda Chiodo
College of Arts
Victoria University
Ph: [Contact number]
[Email Contact]

Appendix G: School Profile: St. Cera's Ladies College

St. Cera's Ladies College (SCLC) was the research setting for the primary study. The following description of SCLC highlights important elements of the student cohort (including parental demographics). In addition, the following description aims to detail the school's culture and values as well as any important policies, which contributes to the school's climate at SCLC. The information used to develop this profile was obtained from archival data which was provided by the school provided archival data (e.g., student demographics and policy information), as well as publicly available data sources such as the school's website and the My School website.⁵⁰ It is important to note, throughout this discussion of the research context, any school identifiers have been removed or changed to protect the identity of the participating school.

General description. SCLC is a Catholic girls' secondary college, located on the fringe of the inner-city suburbs of Melbourne Victoria, SCLC has over 1100 students enrolled from years seven to twelve on a single school campus. SCLC offers their senior students both Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and Victorian Certificate of Allied Learning (VCAL) programs together with Victorian Education Training (VET) certificate options. The school campus comprises a number of multiple storey buildings, along with an indoor sports centre, gym, a large sports oval, a theatre and outdoor tennis/basketball courts. Classrooms are well equipped, including science labs and food technology facilities. As would be expected in modern education delivery, technology is well integrated into classroom teaching and all students (and teachers) across all year levels have access to and utilise their

⁵⁰ The My School website is a Government administered website which lists performance scores and other information pertaining to all Australian primary and secondary schools.

individual laptops in class. SCLC employs approximately 100 teaching staff and 40 non-teaching staff.

SCLC operates under the Catholic Education system and therefore is a non-government school. According to Catholic Education Melbourne, the Catholic school system educates one in five Victorian children and young people (www.cem.edu.au). In general, schools within the Catholic Education system, receive funding from both State (16.3%) and Federal governments (55.2%) (this is less than what government schools receive). Further supplementing such funding are school fees and other private funding sources (28.4%) (www.cem.edu.au). In regard to SCLC's funding model, their primary funding source is school fees and other parent contributions. That is, 44 percent of the school's funds are from fees and parent contributions, 42 percent from Australian Government funding (Federal level), ten percent from Victorian Government funding (State level) and three percent from other private sources (www.myschool.edu.au). Most recent data indicates that annual school fees (inclusive of various technology and building levies) are within the range of \$8600 and \$9000 annually per student.⁵¹ This would be considered on the higher end of the fee scale in contrast to other comparative Catholic girls' secondary colleges in the inner-suburbs of Melbourne. However, still significantly less than private education institutions or larger selective entry Catholic girls' schools which some also include boarding facilities for students.

SCLC's Year 7 enrolment policy prioritises applicants who currently have or previously has had a sister attend SCLC as well as students who follow the Catholic faith. The school also gives preference to applicants attending a Catholic primary

⁵¹ To protect the identity of the participating school, their students and staff, any direct quotes cited from the school website and/or policy documentation will not be referenced.

school and whose mother was a previous pupil of SCLC. Following this, preference is given to other applicants who live and attend Catholic primary schools in Priority Parishes, those who reside in Priority Parishes but do not attend a Catholic primary school, Catholic applicants from other parishes, applicants who belong to Eastern Rite churches, other Christian applicants, and other applicants. This enrolment policy together with the fee structure goes some way to shape the student cohort of SCLC.

Student cohort profile. Regarding the student cohort at SCLC, according to the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) values, the school is comprised of students who come from relatively advantaged socio-educational backgrounds. As a whole, SCLC have been assigned an ICSEA value of 1090 with approximately 40 percent of their pupils being placed with the top quartile of socio-educational advantage and only approximately six percent in the bottom quartile (www.myschool.edu.au). A student's socio-educational advantage is determined primarily by their parents' occupation and educational achievement (www.acara.edu.au). Table 1 outlines the occupation groups for parents whose daughters attend SCLC.

Table 1

Parents' Occupation Groups

Occupation Group	Parent 1 (Father)		Parent 2 (Mother)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
A – Senior Management	358	31.77	284	24.65
B – Other Management	399	35.40	262	22.74
C – Trades/Office	258	22.89	310	26.91
D – All Others	83	7.36	97	8.42
Not in paid work	14	1.24	184	15.97
Unknown/Not stated	7	0.62	5	0.43
Not listed	8	0.71	10	0.87
Total	1127	100	1152	100

Note. These are approximate values based on school-supplied data.

With reference to SCLC's student cohort, as outlined in Table 1 the majority of students' fathers are employed within senior management (31.77%) and other management (35.40%) roles. Likewise, students' mothers are well represented across senior management (24.65%), other management (22.74%) as well as trades/office occupations (26.91%). Furthermore, a notable percentage of mothers are also not in paid employment and nominate home duties as their occupation (15.97%).

In addition to this, in SCLC's local area as well as the surrounding suburbs, which students and their families reside,⁵² 14.4 percent to 19.8 percent of households maintain a gross weekly income in excess of \$3000⁵³ (www.abs.gov.au). Such information points to SCLC's school community being one of relative strong socio-educational advantage and secure middle to upper middle class socio-economic status.

In regards to the specific demographic profile of SCLC's student cohort, the vast majority of students are Australian born with only close to seven percent of students being born overseas. Table 2 details current students' countries of birth. As reported in Table 2, despite the small number of students born outside of Australia these students represent a number of diverse countries. For instance, after Australia the majority of students were born in India (N=12) and China (N=11). Also, the South East Asia and the Middle East regions are also represented amongst SCLC's non-Australian born students. None of SCLC's students identify as Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander.

⁵² Both the local area of the school and surrounding suburbs will remain unnamed to protect the identity of the school and their students.

⁵³ This is in comparison to 10.4% of households in Victoria and 11.2% of household Australia wide.

Table 2

Students' Countries of Birth

Country of Birth	Frequency	%	
Australia	1077	93.25	
Other	78	6.75	
Total	1155	100	
Non-Australian Countries of Birth			
	Frequency	% of Non-Australian Countries of Birth	% of total student cohort
Other South East Asian ^a	15	19.23	1.30
India	12	15.38	1.04
Middle Eastern ^b	12	15.38	1.04
China	11	14.10	0.95
Other ^c	7	8.97	0.61
European ^d	6	7.69	0.52
Other South Asian ^e	5	6.41	0.43
United Kingdom	5	6.41	0.43
African ^f	5	6.41	0.43
Total	78	100	6.75

Note. These are approximate values based on school-supplied data.

^a Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand

^b Saudi Arabia, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Egypt, Lebanon and Bahrain

^c New Zealand and USA

^d Portugal, Slovakia, France and Austria

^e Pakistan and Sri Lankan

^f Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe

These demographics are also replicated in countries of birth of students' parents. That is, the majority of fathers (71.87%) and mothers (73.70%) of SCLC students have been born in Australia. Table 3 and Table 4 provide further information regarding the countries of birth for students' fathers and mothers respectively.

Table 3

Parent 1 (Father) Countries of Birth

Country of Birth	Frequency	%	
Australia	810	71.87	
Other	317	28.13	
Total	1127	100	
Non-Australian Countries of Birth			
	Frequency	% of Non-Australian Countries of Birth	% of total Parent 1 (Father)
South East Asian ^a	50	15.77	4.44
Vietnam	36	11.36	3.19
India	33	10.41	2.93
Italy	33	10.41	2.93
United Kingdom ^b	31	9.78	2.75
Other European ^c	30	9.46	2.60
South Asian ^d	23	7.26	2.04
Middle Eastern ^e	20	6.31	1.77
African ^f	18	5.68	1.60
Eastern European ^g	18	5.68	1.60
Unknown (not listed)	12	3.79	1.06
North/South American ^h	8	2.52	0.71
South Pacific ⁱ	5	1.58	0.44
Total	317	100	28.13

Note. These are approximate values based on school-supplied data.

^a Burma, Cambodia, China, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia

^b Ireland, England, Scotland

^c Belgium, France, Greece, Portugal, Malta, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Yugoslavia

^d Sri Lanka, Pakistan

^e Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine

^f Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe

^g Albania, Austria, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Poland; Slovakia

^h USA, Canada, Argentina, Nicaragua, Uruguay

ⁱ Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea

As indicated in the above table, approximately 28 percent of fathers were born overseas, with the majority of non-Australian born fathers originating from Vietnam, India, Italy and more broadly the South Asian region. Similarly, students' mothers born outside of Australia have migrated from Vietnam and India, as well as a range of countries in both South Asia and Europe (see Table 4 for further details).

Table 4

Parent 2 (Mother) Countries of Birth

Country of Birth	Frequency	%	
Australia	849	73.70	
Other	303	26.30	
Total	1152	100	
Non-Australian Countries of Birth			
	Frequency	% of Non-Australian Countries of Birth	% of total Parent 2 (Mothers)
Other South East Asian ^a	42	13.86	3.65
Vietnam	37	12.21	3.21
India	35	11.55	3.04
Other European ^b	33	10.89	2.86
China	29	9.57	2.52
Middle Eastern ^c	22	7.26	1.91
Other South Asian ^d	21	6.93	1.82
United Kingdom ^e	20	6.60	1.74
Central/South Pacific ^f	18	5.94	1.56
Eastern European ^g	17	5.61	1.48
African ^h	15	4.95	1.30
Unknown (not listed)	9	2.97	0.78
North/South American ⁱ	5	1.65	0.43
Total	303	100	26.30

Note. These are approximate values based on school-supplied data.

^a Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand

^b France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Yugoslavia

^c Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria

^d Sri Lanka, Pakistan

^e England, Ireland, Wales

^f Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa

^g Albania, Austria, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Slovakia

^h Kenya, Liberia, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zimbabwe

ⁱ USA, Argentina, Brazil, Chile

From the school data provided, it is estimated that 35 percent of students are second generation Australians having one or both parents born overseas, while approximately 64 percent of students have two Australian born parents. Furthermore, in regards to linguistic diversity, it was reported that over 30 percent of students and

their families speak a language other than English at home (www.myschool.edu.au).

From the school supplied data cited in Table 5, after English, SCLC students nominate Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese and Greek as the languages spoken at home.

Table 5

*Students' Top Five Languages Spoken**

Language	Frequency	%
English	923	79.91
Italian	41	3.55
Vietnamese	34	2.94
Chinese (Hakka, Cantonese, Mandarin)	33	2.86
Greek	20	1.73
Total	1051	90.99

Note. These are approximate values based on school-supplied data.

Note. This table only includes the five most prevalent languages spoken at home by students and their families.

*Total number of students 1155

Furthermore, being a Catholic school as would be expected the majority of SCLC students and their families nominate various forms of Catholicism as their religion (81.90%). However, a small segment of the SCLC school community practice other faith systems (18.10%). See Table 6 for further details.

Table 6

Student Cohort's Religious Nominations

Religion	Frequency	%
Catholic (Latin/Roman Rite, Other)	946	81.90
Orthodox (Greek, Other)	74	6.41
Christian (Baptist, Anglican, Other)	53	4.59
No Religious Denomination	40	3.46
Buddhism	12	1.04
Hinduism	10	0.87
Islam	8	0.69
Unknown (not specified)	8	0.69
Uniting Church/Methodist	4	0.35
Total	1155	100

Note. These are approximate values based on school-supplied data.

School climate, culture and values. In addition to the student cohort, a school's values, ethos and overall climate have significant implications for how it is experienced by students, staff and other school community members. School climate is defined as the attributes and atmosphere of the school at both the social and physical level (Zullig, Koopman, Patton, & Ubbes, 2010). More specifically, school climate is understood as the "norms, values, and expectations that positively promote the social and emotional development of students while concurrently guaranteeing safety in a social and physical sense" (Zullig et al., 2010, p. 141).

The Catholic doctrine of SCLCI significantly informs the school's values and ethos including their mission statement and strategic plans. The school's core values centre on justice, courage, compassion, and joy.⁵⁴ In regards to the delivery of religious education, this is compulsory for students from Years 7-10, with senior students having the option to continue such education into their VCE studies. In addition, throughout the school year various reflection days, retreat programs and Eucharistic (the receiving of communion) liturgies are facilitated. These events further manifest the Catholic ethos of the school as well as the overall practice of the Catholic faith.

An extension of the SCLC's Catholic orientation is their social justice agenda. Senior students are provided with the opportunity to participate in community service activities. However, all students are encouraged to highlight social justice or humanitarian issues, which are of importance to them and more so, consider ways the school community, can contribute and support such causes. Thus, outreach and social justice is regarded as central to the school's overall ethos. SCLC partakes in

⁵⁴ To protect the identity of the participating school, their students and staff, any direct quotes cited from the school website and/or policy documentation will not be referenced.

community-based outreach within the school's local community, including but not limited to assisting in meal delivery and homework and reading clubs at public housing estates within the local area. Consequently, SCLC have established relationships with various community service organisations and are involved in fundraising activities and initiatives to support communities and groups in need. Their outreach program has also extended to include international connections, specifically Jesuit Missions and communities in Cambodia. There is a whole school approach to such fundraising and outreach activities, with the school's Parent Association also participating along with staff and students.

Academic achievement. Zullig et al. (2010) also identifies academic outcomes as well as academic norms and accomplishments as fundamental elements of school climate. At SCLC academic achievement of students appeared to be considered a priority. SCLC's mission and values centre on motivating students to pursue excellence in all that they do and aims to inspire and support students to be determined and enduring learners.

In reference to students' academic performance, recent NAPLAN results indicate that students mostly perform at an average to above average level in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy (www.myschool.edu.au). This would be somewhat expected due to SCLC's relatively high socio-educational advantage and the prioritisation of academic achievement. For instance, in the area of writing students at years seven and nine perform above average and substantially above the average of comparative schools and all Australian schools respectively. Positive performance was also reported in reading, spelling and grammar and punctuation with year nine students performing on average above the Australian school average. However, this same group of students achieved

numeracy scores below the average attained by statistically similar schools (www.myschool.edu.au).

Nevertheless, achievement and opportunities for student success outside the academic realm also forms part of the climate and culture of SCLC. Providing students with the opportunity to participate and challenge themselves in non-academic arenas forms part of the young women's learning experiences at SCLC. Such non-academic areas include, a well-supported and well-resourced sport and co-curricular program. In addition to competitive sports programs, students have the opportunity to be involved in music, dance, drama, public speaking and debating amongst other things. Young women at SCLC are encouraged to participate in these activities during lunchtime and after school activities (or programs), as well as at year level and school wide events and gatherings. SCLC also holds annual student art shows and theatrical performances. SCLC students have the opportunity to attend various year level camps, excursions (including interstate trips), language trips and exchange opportunities to France and Japan.

Policy climate: pastoral care and restorative practices. A school's climate and culture are inherently informed and influenced by the policy agenda developed by school leadership. Two key policy areas that are central to the overall ethos of SCLC is the significance placed on the pastoral care of students and their orientation towards restorative practices. Apart from designated pastoral classes, this focus on the pastoral care of students seemed to be entrenched in the school's culture and way of being. For instance, one way in which this was displayed was in the school's staffing structure. Students entering the school in Year 7 remain under the care of the same year level coordinator for the first three years at SCLC. This allows for the development of a continued connection between the coordinator (who is primarily

responsible for the students' wellbeing together with pastoral leaders), the students and their families. The final three years of secondary school would see students in pastoral groups of peers from years 10-12, again with a continuing senior coordinator and class level pastoral leader. The students also have access to the Director of Student Welfare, a school psychologist and a school nurse on school campus. Furthermore, underpinning the student wellbeing and pastoral care approach to student welfare is the objective of fostering healthy relationships, respect for oneself and others as well as a strong sense of resilience. The pastoral program also aims to tailor such lessons around current sociocultural issues (i.e., health and relationships) that young women negotiate during different stages of adolescence.

In addition to the pastoral program, the behaviour management principles and policies are also fundamental in setting the tone and climate at SCLC. SCLC has adopted a restorative practices approach to behaviour management. This approach to behaviour management is common among Catholic educational settings (www.cem.edu.au). Restorative practices refer to a framework that moves away from notions of discipline and punishment (at least initially), in favour of assisting students (and staff) to consider the effect their actions may have on others and to be accountable for such actions. The framework also promotes the restoring of relationships and assists students to develop self-reflexivity skills (learning from one's own mistakes). The principles and steps of restorative practices are taught to all students and are on display in classrooms and around the school campus. The restorative framework is seemingly utilised at all school levels, including between teachers and at the teacher and student level.

In summary, SCLC is a well-resourced girls' school catering to a student cohort of relatively high socio-educational advantage. In relation to the academic

performance of students, NAPLAN results indicate that overall SCLC students perform at an average to above average level across curriculum domains (reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy). Whilst, valuing high academic achievement, SCLC also provides their students with opportunities to pursue other interest areas and develop skills in the sport, music, visual and performing arts arenas. The school's climate including the school's culture, values and policies are highly informed by the Catholic doctrine of this educational setting. Pertaining to Catholic traditions, SCLC maintains a social justice focus, as well as a strong pastoral program and an orientation towards restorative practices. It is contended that understanding such contextual details of SCLC is essential for further exploration of the discourses (gendered or otherwise) made available to their students and how young women are positioning and locating themselves in relation to such discourses.

Appendix H: Detailed Participant Descriptions

Within the SCLC school setting the current research sought to conduct data collection with two participant groups. The primary participant group consisted of young women completing Year 10 at SCLC and the secondary participant group were members of the teaching staff at the school. The following discussion provides detailed descriptions of each participant across the two participant groups.

Primary Participants: Young Women

Pia. Pia is 15 years old and lives with her younger brother and mother who is a teacher. She feels that her younger brother looks up to her as he always comes to her before seeking advice from their parents. Pia's parents are separated, and she sees her father intermittently on a Sunday. Pia nominates trust, honesty and loyalty as the things that are most important to her. When she is not doing homework or attending dancing lessons, Pia spends a lot of time on social media. She admits that she probably spends too much time online and has started to consider the impact of images of models and certain body types has on her own ideals and self-esteem.

Jacinta. Jacinta is 15 years old and lives with her older brothers and her parents. Both of Jacinta's parents are employed, her dad works in a management role within the IT industry and her mother is a nurse. Jacinta explains that sometimes it is hard to be the only girl in the family, but she is accustomed to it. Jacinta has recently started her first casual job but explains that her participation in competitive sport outside school (and the recovery process) takes up much of her free time. For Jacinta, family is the most important thing, in her opinion unlike friends your family remains the one constant. She enjoys school both in a social and academic sense and feels like it is important to have a balance between taking your education seriously and having fun. Although Jacinta can be loud with her friends, she describes herself as quiet

especially when meeting new people and overall does not consider herself to be a confident person.

Alexis. Alexis is 16 years old and lives with her parents, older brother and sister. Alexis is very close to her family and describes them as “kind people”. Alexis’s dad works within the airline industry and her mother is in education. Alexis has played different sports but currently plays basketball for a team outside of school and has a casual job. She enjoys being around people and describes herself as a positive person and dislikes negativity. Alexis labels herself as non-judgemental and feels as though she is more mature than other girls her age. She enjoys being at school explaining that the learning environment is good and being in an all-girls school is beneficial because you can all relate. Alexis is interested in pursuing a future career in psychology or school counselling.

Antonia. Antonia is 15 years old and is an only child and lives with both her parents, who are both employed in management roles with a corporate context. Antonia identifies as mixed nationality including Spanish, Italian and Filipino. She regards her family life as easy and does not feel like she has the same family issues as some of her friends who have divorced parents. She describes herself as a “boring person”, but enjoys reading and listening to music, she also highlights that she has “an unhealthy obsession with bands”. Antonia values honesty and loyalty and appreciates people who have an open mind – to her narrow-minded people are “missing out of the rest of, you know, what the world has to offer them”. She feels like her school provides a positive environment and that it is more relaxed because it is a girl’s school. Antonia tries to always to be herself and not conform or copy anyone else. Antonia shares that doing well academically is important, but her parents only want her to do her best.

Carissa. Carissa is 16 years of age and lives with both her parents. Carissa's parents work within the human services and education sectors. She describes herself as quiet and considers her family to be the most important thing to her. At school Carissa enjoys art type subjects but also has an interest in the sciences. Carissa explains that she does put a lot of effort into school and wants to be "proud" of her achievements, but she tries to keep a balanced perspective and not get too upset if she does not get the desired result. Unlike her friends, Carissa does not have Facebook and at times feels left out. She does have Instagram but ensures that she only post things that she is "happy to share" and does not post images that might make her subject of other people's judgements.

Louise. Louise is 16 years old and is the older sibling of a younger brother and sister. Both Louise's parents were born in Australia; her dad works in sales and her mother within education. Louise describes herself as very competitive, sporty and strong both physically and emotionally. At times she finds it difficult to balance her sporting and social commitments with friends.

Kate. Kate is 15 years old and lives with both her parents as well as her younger sister. Kate was born in England but grew up in Australia. Kate's mum works in the science field and her dad is not in paid employment. Kate participates in a lot of sport in and outside of school, especially athletics. She considers her friends and family very important to her.

Sian. Sian is 15 years old and lives with her mum and dad and her younger sisters. Both Sian's parents are full-time accountants. Sian likes being the oldest sibling but states "sometimes [it is] annoying to be the most mature". Her family is Catholic and attends church but explains that she is "religious but not full-on". Sain contends that she has different political views than her parents on issues like asylum

seekers and gay marriage. She nominates respect and honesty as central to her values. Sian overall holds a positive sentiment with regards to her school. She feels that she receives a good quality education and that she is warranted many opportunities and experiences, and the school also provides substantial opportunities for girls like her that enjoy science and maths. Sian plays various instruments and participates in netball and athletics. In addition, she has a casual job. She does not have any specific role models but finds elements in people (like her parents and youngest sister) that she admires. However, she does consider Malala Yousafzai as “a massive inspiration for like women’s empowerment and fighting for what she believes in”. After reading Malala’s book, these are qualities that Sian hopes to also emulate.

Talia. Talia is 16 years old and lives with her mother, maternal grandparents and her cat that she describes as “the love of [her] life, possibly married by soul”. Although she is an only child, Talia has cousins who she considers to be like her sisters and because of these relationships she rejects people showing sympathy for her because she is an only child. However, she does explain that she knows her family is different from most girls at school and sometimes it can be difficult to “connect on certain levels”. Talia has been raised in a Catholic family, but explains that she is not sure what she believes in. She does not necessarily believe in Jesus and has some interest in ideas around reincarnation. Talia is really interested in making documentaries and describes herself as “very broad” and states she does not “stick to one thing”, for instance she likes music from different languages. She is very close with her family and considers her Mum her best friend. She also has two best friends outside of school that she can “be in [her] jammies, pigging out and possibly crying through multiple movies” with, but prefers not to have any best friends in school. She likes to get to know everyone but admits it can be hard sometimes when you are

friends with multiple people rather having close friendship because you can miss out of things. However, she is following her Mum's advice to try everything and be friends with different kinds of people as "they give you a broader view of life". She enjoys learning about different cultures and is particularly drawn to the Japanese culture. For instance, she looks up to Hayao Miyazaki because his animated films always have a female heroine and he wants women to feel empowered. During the interview, Talia often describes herself as "weird" claiming that her "personality is a bit over the top" and that she likes to put on accents and often says random things. Talia credits her mum for raising her in a way that ensured that she still had "individuality and like didn't go with [the] mainstream".

Yen. Yen is 15 years old and lives with her parents and younger siblings. Both Yen's parents migrated from Vietnam and are factory workers. Being the oldest sibling in the family, Yen is "basically the nanny" and has to try and be "the ideal role model" for her younger siblings. Yen and her family speak a mixture of Vietnamese and English at home and are practising Catholics attending weekly mass. She feels that her life outside of school is different to that of her friends. That is, she values her family, but they do not do many things together like go out to restaurants. Yen explains that she does not go out much, but she has a casual job. She also describes herself as opinionated and has a clear interest in social justice issues and proudly identifies as a feminist. She is passionate about issues related to refugees and asylum seekers (because her dad was a refugee), feminism and humanitarian issues. She spends time online reading various opinion pieces on these topics. Yen explains that for her having her voice and opinion heard is very important.

Chiara. Chiara is 16 years old and has one younger sibling who is 13 years old. Chiara's mother is Catholic and was born in Australia. Her father was born in Sri

Lanka and is a Buddhist. Chiara identifies with both religions. Her parents are both employed, her mother is a sales consultant and her father is an engineer. Chiara nominates friendship as important to her and she feels as though she cares a lot for others. Chiara explains that she is no longer as sporty as she once was, but she still participates in basketball outside of school.

Secondary Participant Group: Teachers

Lindsey. Lindsey has been teaching for over 10 years, the first half of this teaching experience was gained overseas. Although teaching in co-educational schools and a religious girls' school whilst overseas, since returning to Australia, Lindsey has worked in various leadership and pastoral roles within Catholic all-girls schools. Lindsey has been at SCLC for approximately three years and is currently a Senior Coordinator. This role involves her overseeing students' academic performance, their mental wellbeing and engaging in preventative work through the school's pastoral program. Behaviour management is also part of her role although she considers poor behaviour by students at SCLC to be limited. She sums up her role as basically developing positive relationships with the students and overseeing the other pastoral teachers in her team. Overall, she considers the school environment at SCLC to be much more positive among staff and students than some of her other previous workplaces. It is important for Lindsey to be a good role model for the young women she teaches.

Gina. Gina has been at SCLC for approximately five years and in recent times, along with additional teaching duties she has acted as the Director of Student Welfare. Over her approximate 15 years of teaching experience, Gina has taught at coeducational schools both in Australia and overseas, as well as a private girls college prior to commencing at SCLC. Gina explains that her current leadership role at SCLC

comes with many positives as well as challenges. Positives include getting to know the girls (in particular the ones with higher needs), participating in research and policy activities as well as trying to determine the ways the school can best support students. For Gina, it is important for the young women at the school to be exposed to different role models and different ideas for which they can question and challenge.

Valerie. Valerie is an experienced educator with approximately 20 years teaching experience across co-educational and girls Catholic secondary colleges both in Melbourne and interstate. Valerie is currently a Junior Coordinator and has been employed at SCLC for approximately 10 years. Valerie explains that for her students the first year of secondary school is a significant transition and you have young women that are maturing at different rates. However, the key concern that she is often helping her students negotiate centres on friendship issues. As a teacher of young women, Valerie hopes to be available to her students but also wants to support them to have the confidence to make their own decisions and choices.

Appendix I: Participant Information Pack

Tuesday 21 July 2015

Dear Year 10 Students and Parents,

Year 10 students at [School Name] are invited to participate in a research project entitled **'Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics'**. I am conducting this research as part of my PhD, which I am completing at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda.

Enclosed you will find information for both students and parents outlining details of the research and what participation in this study involves as well as, consent forms for both students and parents. Participation in this research requires both the student's consent and the consent of their parent and/or caregiver.

If you would like to participate/if you consent to your daughter participating please complete the attached consent forms (both the student and parent consent forms) and return to Linda Chiodo in the return envelope provided. A dropbox in the student reception area is available to return these signed consent forms.

Please submit these consent forms to the dropbox by Friday 31 July 2015.

If you have any questions about your daughter's participation in this research, please feel free to email me at [email address] or contact me on [contact number].

Kind regards,



Linda Chiodo
PhD Candidate, Victoria University

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

Young women, identity and friendships

My name is Linda Chiodo, I am a student researcher at Victoria University and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that I am conducting at [School Name]. The project is entitled: 'Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics'.

I am completing this project as part of my PhD study under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda.

If you think you may want to participate then please read the following information. If you have any additional questions or concerns about the project you can call me on [Contact Number] or send me an email at [Email Address]

What is the aim of the project?

The aim of the project is to explore how young women understand and make sense of what it means to be a young woman today and how this may influence the ways they experience their friendships.

If you choose to take part you will have the option to participate in an interview, focus group or both. You can change your mind at any time. The interview and focus groups will take place at your school at a time agreed to by you and where necessary your consenting parent/guardian.

An interview will take about 45 minutes to complete and I will ask you questions about a number of topics including your opinions about how young women are represented in the media, who your role models are, as well as discussing your friendships and the issue of peer victimisation.

Focus groups will take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete and will include a mixture of discussion activities.

If it is okay with you I will be recording our conversations so I can remember what we spoke about at a later time.

What will I be asked to do?

Will things I say be kept private?
How will the information I give be used?

Yes – the information you provide will be kept private. Only I will know what you have said in your interview. If you take part in a focus group only the other students who participated with you and myself will know what was discussed.

The information you provide me will become part of the general findings of my PhD thesis report. I may use things you have said in the interview and/or focus group in my report as well as other future presentations and reports.

Your name as well as the name of your school will not be included in the report. Therefore, in the final report it will be difficult to know who said what.

You may not gain anything directly from participating in this project. But participating in research can be a fun and interesting experience.

Importantly, your participation will lead to a more in depth understanding of the positive and negative aspects of girls' social worlds and the possible challenges and opportunities young women may face. It is anticipated that the findings of the current research will have positive implications for the ways in which the wellbeing of adolescent girls is approached in schools.

What will I gain from participating?

Are there any potential risks with participating in this project?

Participating in this project is very low risk.

You may experience some emotional discomfort or anxiety while responding to interview questions or participating in the focus group. If you feel uncomfortable by any question you have the right not to answer a question or withdraw from the study at any time.

You can discuss your concerns with me, or one of my supervisors (Dr. Romana Morda is a registered psychologist). If you wish to discuss your concerns with a psychologist unrelated to the project, you can contact Dr. Emra Suleyman directly on [contact number] free-of-charge.

Information and contact details of a number of support services have also been provided to you in this information pack.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

Young women, identity and friendships

I, _____ together with my consenting parent/guardian/caregiver, certify that:

- ❖ I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: ' **Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics**' being conducted at Victoria University by Linda Chiodo under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda.
- ❖ I understand the information sheet provided to me and I understand the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures to be carried out in the research, and these have been fully explained to me by Linda Chiodo.

I freely consent to participation involving the procedures mentioned below:

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ❖ Participation in interviews, including explicit consent to be audiotaped for transcription and data analysis processes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ❖ Participation in a focus group, including explicit consent to be audiotaped for transcription and data analysis processes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been advised that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Email: _____

(This information will only be used to contact you regarding interview and focus group times)

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Due to you being under the age of 18 years you will also require the consent of your parent or guardian to participate in this study. Please see attached an additional information letter and consent form for your parent/guardian to sign. If your parent/guardian does not sign this form you will not be able to participate in the research.

Useful Information and Support Services



Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline provides free confidential 24-hour telephone counselling services for 5 to 25 year olds in Australia. On the Kids Helpline website you also have the option to email or chat online with a counsellor. Kids Helpline can provide you with advice and support on just about **ANY** issue or difficulties you may be experiencing. The Kids Helpline website also has lots of useful information about a wide range of topics including – healthy lifestyles, peer pressure, family relationships and anxiety.

Website: <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/>

Helpline: 1800 55 1800



Youth Beyondblue

Beyondblue is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to increase awareness and understanding of **anxiety and depression** in Australia. On the Youth *Beyondblue* website you can learn more about anxiety and depression or how to help a friend who may have anxiety or depression. The website also includes information on other important topics for young people like – cyberbullying, making the most out of studying and dealing with grief and loss to name a few. *Beyondblue* also provides confidential counselling over the phone, online or via email.

Website: <http://www.youthbeyondblue.com>

Helpline: 1300 22 4636

Lifeline

Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour **crisis support and suicide prevention services**. Lifeline has a 24-hour Telephone Crisis Support line to help individuals of all ages to manage suicidal thoughts, self-harming behaviours as well as school related stress and relationship issues among other things. You can also contact a Lifeline counsellor via online chat (7 days a week, 8pm-Midnight). The Lifeline website also provides a number of self-help tools and information.

Website: <http://www.lifeline.org.au/>

Helpline: 13 11 14 (Free if calling from your mobile; of a local call from a landline)

Cost



Headspace



Go to Headspace to find information and support on a range of **mental health topics** such as exam survival, depression and eating disorders to name a few. Headspace offers a very informative website and information on services that are youth-specific and youth-friendly. You can also visit **eheadspace**, which is a confidential, free and secure space where young people can chat, email or speak on the phone with a qualified youth mental health professional. You can contact eheadspace if you need advice, are concerned about your mental health and wellbeing or are feeling alone. eheadspace can help with a broad range of issues like bullying, drug and alcohol issues, depression and anxiety, relationships, concerns about friends, fitting in and isolation.

Website: <http://www.headspace.org.au/>

<https://www.eheadspace.org.au/>

Helpline: 1800 650 890 (eheadspace – 9am – 1am, 7 days a week)



ReachOut.com

ReachOut.com is a web-based service which aims to inspire young people to help themselves through tough times. The ReachOut.com site has information and fact sheets, personal stories and videos as well as tools and apps addressing a **wide range of health and lifestyle issues**. Information can be found concerning social skills and meeting new people, school related issues, relationship and friendship concerns as well as mental and physical health topics and much more.

Website: <http://au.reachout.com/>



Eating Disorders Victoria

Eating Disorders Victoria is the primary source of support, information, community education and advocacy for people with **eating disorders** and their families in Victoria. This website provides information on all types of eating disorders, early warning signs, treatment options, how to support someone with an eating disorder and much more. Eating

Disorders Victoria also has a helpline to assist and support individuals affected by an eating disorder. You can also seek advice and support via email – help@eatingdisorders.org.au

Website: <http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/>

Helpline: 1300 550 236 (9:30am – 5pm, Monday to Friday)

PARENTS INFORMATION: MINORS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

Your daughter has been invited to participate in a research project entitled: 'Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics' which is being conducted at [School Name].

This project is being conducted by Linda Chiodo a student researcher at Victoria University, who is completing this research as part of a PhD study under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda.

Project explanation

The aim of the research is to explore how young women currently attending secondary school in Melbourne understand and make sense of what it means to be a young woman today and how this may influence the ways in which they experience their friendship groups.

What will my daughter be asked to do?

For this study I intend to conduct individual interviews and focus groups with young women in Year 10 at [School Name].

The interviews and focus groups will be conducted at [School Name] on school grounds at a suitable time agreed to by your daughter and the student researcher. When necessary you will also be consulted about the interview time, for instance if the interview was to occur after school on school grounds. The interview and focus groups will be audiotaped with both you and your daughter's permission. It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete an interview and approximately 60-90 minutes to complete a focus group. You have the choice to consent to your daughter's participation in an individual interview and/or focus group.

What will my daughter gain from participating?

The expected benefits of the project include that it will help provide further knowledge regarding the social and emotional wellbeing of adolescent girls and young women and how their wellbeing is impacted (if at all) by the messages they receive about what it means to be a young woman in today's society. It is anticipated that the findings of the current research will have positive implications for the ways in which the social and emotional wellbeing of adolescent girls and young women are approached at both the school and community levels. This area of research has received limited research attention in Australia, thus your daughter's participation will assist in developing a more in depth understanding of the positive and negatives aspects of girls' social worlds and the possible challenges and opportunities young women may be presented with in contemporary culture.

How will the information given be used?

The information your daughter provides in the interview and/or focus group will become part of general findings of a PhD thesis report. I may use quotes from the interviews and from the focus groups in the final thesis report, however, your daughter's identity including the location and name of her school will not be revealed. Interview data may also be used in future presentations or publications based on the general findings of this report.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

This research is relatively low-risk, however participation in this study may involve the following potential psychological and social risks for your daughter. Potential psychological risks include some possible feelings of anxiety or emotional discomfort while responding to the interview questions or participating in the focus group. However, your daughter will be reminded that if during the interview or focus group she becomes uncomfortable she has the right to not answer a question and can withdraw from the study at any time. If your daughter does experience any anxiety as a result of her participation in the research, she will be encouraged to talk to [School Name] school counsellor/psychologist. She will also have the opportunity to discuss her concerns with the student researcher Linda Chiodo or one of her supervisors Dr. Julie van den Enyde or Dr. Romana Morda who is a registered psychologist. Your daughter has also been given the details of a psychologist unrelated to the research process, who she can contact free-of-charge to discuss any issues related to the research.

Potential social risks centre on issues of anonymity and confidentiality. Your daughter's anonymity cannot be assured as she is participating in interviews with the student researcher as well as in a focus group with other participants. However, the information provided through these interviews and focus groups will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will only be available to the student researcher and her supervisors. A pseudonym will be used in place of your daughter's real name, and any other identifying information (including the location and name of her school) will be removed from the report.

If you have any concerns or questions about the research do not hesitate to contact the student researcher Linda Chiodo or one of her supervisor.

How will this project be conducted?

The study will involve interviews and focus groups with young women in Year 10 at [School Name]. Participants will be asked questions exploring a number of topics including their opinions about how young women are represented in the media, who are their role models, as well as discussing their friendships and the issue of peer victimisation. The interviews and focus groups will be conducted on school grounds at a time that is mutually acceptable to you, your daughter and the researcher. The interviews and focus groups will be audiotaped with you and your daughter's permission. The information collected will be collated and qualitatively analysed by the student researcher Linda Chiodo.

If you are willing to consent to your daughter's participation in this research, please complete the attached parental consent form, which indicates that you understand the nature and procedures involved in this study. Please return the consent form along with your daughter's signed consent form in the return envelope provided. After receiving both signed consent forms, I will arrange a time with your daughter for the interview and/or focus group to take place.

Who is conducting the study?

Principal Researcher

Dr. Julie van den Enyde

College of Arts

Victoria University

Ph: [Contact Number]

[Email Address]

Principal Researcher

Dr. Romana Morda

College of Arts

Victoria University

Ph: [Contact Number]

[Email Address]

Student Researcher

Linda Chiodo

College of Arts

Victoria University

Ph: [Contact Number]

[Email Address]

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM: MINORS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARENTS/GUARDIAN:

Your daughter has been invited to be a part of a study exploring how young women understand and make sense of what it means to be a young woman today and how they experience their friendship groups. For the purpose of this research I will need to conduct individual interviews and focus groups with young women in Year 10 at [School Name]. With the permission of you and your daughter the interviews and focus groups will be audiotaped and it will take approximately 45 minutes to complete an interview and approximately 60-90 minutes to complete a focus group. You have the choice of consenting for your daughter to participate in an individual interview and/or focus group. Participants in this study will be asked questions exploring a number of topics including their opinions about how young women are represented in the media, who are their role models, as well as discussing their friendships and the issue of peer victimisation. Throughout the interviews and focus groups your daughter maintains the right to not answer any question that may cause her distress or she can withdraw from the study at any time. Participants' responses will be confidential and any personal details that may identify your daughter including the location and name of her school will be removed from the interview and focus group transcripts and the final report.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, _____ certify that I am voluntarily giving my consent for my daughter _____ to participate in the study:

'Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics' being conducted at Victoria University by Linda Chiodo under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Linda Chiodo, and that I freely consent to my daughter's participation in the procedures mentioned below:

- | | YES | NO |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Participation in interviews, including explicit consent to be audiotaped for transcription and data analysis processes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Participation in a focus group, including explicit consent to be audiotaped for transcription and data analysis processes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that my daughter can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise my daughter or me in anyway.

I have been advised that the information my daughter provides will be kept confidential.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Contact number: _____ Email: _____ (optional)

(Please provide your contact details if you would like to be contacted regarding the arrangements made with your daughter regarding interview and/or focus group times)

Appendix J: Information to Participants and Consent Form (Teachers)**INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED
IN RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: 'Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics' which is being conducted at [School Name].

This project is being conducted by Linda Chiodo a student researcher at Victoria University, who is completing this research as part of a PhD study under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda.

Project explanation

The aim of the research is to explore how young women currently attending secondary school in Melbourne understand and negotiate normative femininities and how this negotiation influences the ways in which they experience their interpersonal relationships, in particular their peer groups and close friendships. Normative femininities refer to the socially and culturally informed expectations and understandings of what it means to be a young woman.

The school environment and the peer relations including peer inclusion and exclusion practices within this context are considered to be fundamental to young women's understanding of norms and gender role expectations. Thus, your perspective as an educator of young people is a necessary element of this research.

What will I be asked to do?

For this research I intend to conduct individual interviews with male and female teachers and/or other teaching support staff at [School Name]. The interviews will be audiotaped with your permission and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. The interview will be conducted at a suitably private and convenient location. You will be asked questions that explore your perceptions of peer relations at [School Name] and more broadly your opinions on issues impacting young people including the matter of peer victimisation.

What will I gain from participating?

You may not gain anything directly from participating in this research. However, it is anticipated that the findings of the current research will have positive implications for the ways in which the social and emotional wellbeing of adolescent girls and young women is approached at both the school and community levels. Thus, your participation will lead to a more informed and in depth understanding of the positive and negative aspects of girls' social worlds and the possible challenges and opportunities young people may face in contemporary culture.

How will the information I give be used?

The information you provide in the interview will become part of the general findings of a PhD thesis report. I may use quotes from your interview in the final thesis report but your identity (including the location and name of your employer) will not be revealed. Your interview data may also be used in future presentations or publications based on the general findings of this report.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

Although the study is relatively low-risk, participation in this study may involve the following potential psychological and social risks. Possible psychological risks include some feelings of anxiety or discomfort while responding to interview questions. However, if during the interview you become uncomfortable you have the right to not answer a question and can withdraw from the study at any time. You can also discuss your concerns with the researcher Linda Chiodo, or one of her supervisors Dr. Julie van den Enyde or Dr. Romana Morda who is a registered psychologist. If you wish to discuss your concerns with a psychologist unrelated to the research process, you can contact Dr. Emra Suleyman directly on [Contact Number] free-of-charge.

Potential social risks centre on issues of anonymity and confidentiality. It is advised that your anonymity cannot be assured as you are participating in interviews with the student researcher. However, the information provided in these interviews will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will only be available to the researcher and her supervisors. A pseudonym will be used in place of your real name, and any other identifying information will be removed from the report including the name and location of your place of employment.

How will this project be conducted?

The study will involve individual interviews with male and female educators from [School Name]. You will be asked questions that explore your perceptions of peer relations at [School Name] and more broadly your opinions on issues impacting young people including the matter of peer victimisation. The interviews will be conducted at a time and place that is mutually acceptable to you and the researcher. The interviews will be audiotaped with your permission. The information collected will be collated and qualitatively analysed by the student researcher Linda Chiodo.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form, which indicates that you understand the nature and procedures involved in this study, and that you agree to participate. Please return the consent form using the return envelope provided or alternatively contact me via email [Email Address] or on [Contact Number] to notify me of your intention to participate.

Who is conducting the study?

Principal Researcher

Dr. Julie van den Enyde
College of Arts
Victoria University
Ph: [Contact Number]
[Email address]

Principal Researcher

Dr. Romana Morda
College of Arts
Victoria University
Ph: [Contact Number]
[Email address]

Student Researcher

Linda Chiodo
College of Arts
Victoria University
Ph: [Contact Number]
[Email address]

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

You are invited to be part of a study exploring how young women currently attending secondary school in Melbourne negotiate contemporary gender roles and expectations and how this may influence the ways in which they experience their interpersonal relationships, in particular their peer groups and close friendships. Together with the perspective of young women, this research also considers the perspective offered by educators regarding peer relations and the current opportunities and challenges presented to young people today. For the purpose of this research I will need to conduct individual interviews with male and female teachers and/or other teaching support staff at [School Name]. You will be asked questions that explore your perceptions of peer relations at [School Name] and more broadly your opinions on issues impacting young people including the matter of peer victimisation. If during the interview you become in any way distressed by the questions, you have the right to choose not to answer or withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses will be confidential and any personal details that may identify you or your place of employment will be removed from the interview transcripts and the final report.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, _____,

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:

'Exploring the impact of sociocultural expectations on young women and their friendship group dynamics' being conducted at Victoria University by Linda Chiodo under the supervision of Dr. Julie van den Eynde and Dr. Romana Morda.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Linda Chiodo, and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Participation in interviews, including explicit consent to be audiotaped for transcription and data analysis processes.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been advised that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Contact number: _____

Email: _____

(This information will only be used to contact you regarding interview times)

Appendix K: Semi-structured Interview Schedule (Young Women)

Demographic information:

1. Age:
2. Country of Birth/Nationality:
3. Religion:
4. Languages spoken other than English:
5. Parents' occupation:
 - Parent 1:
 - Parent 2:
 - Other:
6. Parents' level of education:
 - Parent 1:
 - Parent 2:
 - Other:

Interview questions:

1. Could you tell me about yourself? What is important for me to know about you?
 - Things that are most important to you?
2. Could you tell me about [school name] and what it is like to be a student here?
 - What are the positive aspects about being in an all-girls school?
 - What are the negative aspects about being in an all-girls school?
 - How would you describe your peers?
3. Are there any peers at your school that you would regard as being influential (positive or negative) among your peers or year level? If so, why do you think they are influential?
4. Amongst the peers at your school are there identifiable friendship groups? Could you describe some of these groups?
5. Do you witness a lot of competition between girls? If so, how is this competition demonstrated?
 - Why do you think this may occur?
6. With regards to academic achievement, have you ever been concerned what other students think about your level of achievement? Why/Why not?

- Is there a stigma attached to be considered too smart or not smart enough?
7. Can you tell me about your friends?
 - Things you like to do together
 - Something positive about your friends
 - Instances of conflict – what are these conflicts regarding
 8. This might be a difficult question to answer but could you describe in what ways (if at all) are you similar and/or different to your friends?
 9. Have you ever stopped doing something because of what your friends thought? Or alternatively, have you done something simply because your friends were?
 10. What role does social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc.) play in your friendships?
 11. Do you think that there are any current social issues that specifically impact young women? If so, what are they?
 - Do young women still experience sexism – treated unequal to boys?
 12. What are your thoughts regarding feminism?
 - Do you believe feminism is still relevant for young women?
 13. What are the positives about being a young woman in today's society?
 - What are the negatives about being a young woman in today's society?
 14. Do you think that there are any current stereotypes that may exist about young women today? Could you describe any?
 - Their interests
 - Their behaviour
 - About what they are good at not good at
 - Impacts of such stereotypes?
 15. I am going to read you part of an article taken from Rookie Magazine (an online magazine written by and for teenage girls) the piece is called "The Perfect Girl" (copy will be given to the participant).

I won't pretend I'm anything special. In fact, I'm an almost depressingly normal girl. I get OK grades, I have a pretty awesome family and a sweet boyfriend, I know a lot of cool people I can call my friends, the whole shebang. Normal Girl material. Along with being a Normal Girl I am supposed to be pretty (without trying), skinny (without trying), smart but not too smart (without trying), cool (without trying), funny (without

trying), and perfect (without trying). The minute it looks as if I'm trying to be any of those things I am alternately pitied or ridiculed.

What my point is: society sucks. It's a damned if you do, damned if you don't kind of situation. I'm not allowed to be fat, but I'm not allowed to go on a diet either. I'm not allowed to be dumb, but I'm not allowed to be smarter than a boy. I'm not allowed to do drugs or drink, but I'm considered boring if I don't. I'm supposed to be an empowered woman, but if I ask for respect dudes will just call me annoying....

What are your thoughts on this?

16. We hear a lot about the pressures girls experience to try and satisfy a particular idea of beauty. What are your thoughts on this issue?
17. In your opinion, how are girls and young women represented in the media? What are the messages and expectations communicated about how to be a young woman today?
 - Feelings about the images of young women in the media/on television or in magazines.
18. Do you think that there are consequences for not meeting or satisfying expectations of how young women should look and/or behave? If so, what are these consequences?
19. Other than the media, from who/or where else do you learn about what it means to be a young woman?
 - Parents
 - School
 - Religion
 - Friends
20. Has there ever been a time when you felt restricted, for instance, you could not be 'yourself' or say what you were thinking? If so, can you discuss this further?
 - Dress
 - Attitudes and opinions
 - Behaviour
21. Are there aspects of yourself that you are confident or maybe not so confident about? If so, what are they and why?

22. Is there anyone in particular you look up to or consider to be a role model? If so, who are they and why do you look up to them? (*can be people they know or not know)
23. Is there anyone that you would consider to be a negative role model for young women? Why do you consider them to be a negative role model?
24. There seems to be a lot of discussion about ‘bullying’ and/or violence amongst peers and young people including online bullying. What are your thoughts on this issue?
 - Understanding of bullying – how would you define bullying?
25. Why do you think that peer victimisation occurs in schools?
26. How serious would you say is the issue of peer victimisation or bullying at your school?
27. Could you tell me about an experience in your high school that involved what you regard as bullying?
 - Why did you consider this bullying?
28. In your opinion, who is often the target of peer victimisation? What makes someone vulnerable to peer victimisation?
29. What are the consequences of peer victimisation on young people?
30. Does being in a friendship group protect you from being bullied? Why/why not?
31. I am now going to read you part of a different article taken from Rookie Magazine (an online magazine written by and for teenage girls) the piece called is ‘Getting over girl hate’ – I would like to know what you think? (copy will be given to the participant)

It’s probably someone you don’t know too well—maybe you have mutual friends, or she’s in one of your classes. When you see her or she’s mentioned in conversation, you panic a little on the inside as your mind immediately goes to anything about her that could be at all negative. Find it! Quick! Reassure me of her flaws! Step one is seeing these annoying feelings for what they are: girl hate.

Girl hate is not hating someone who happens to be a girl, it’s hating someone because we’re told that, as girls, we should hate other girls who are as awesome as

or more awesome than ourselves. That there can ever only be ONE cool girl, ONE funny girl, ONE smart girl, etc., in a circle of people.

What are your thoughts – to what extent do you agree or disagree with this idea of ‘girl hate’ discussed in this piece?

32. We have been discussing some negative aspects regarding girls’ relationships. However, could you tell me something positive about girls and female friendships?
- Would you say that having close friendships with other girls is or is not important for girls during high school? Why/Why not?
33. What do you think needs to change (if anything) for girls to maintain more positive relationships?
34. How do you think your school can assist in improving the wellbeing of female students?
35. Finally, we have been talking a lot about you and your experiences at school. However, I was wondering have you thought about what you might want to do after school or what career path you are interested in pursuing? What do you want to do and what/who has influenced your choice?

Appendix L: Semi-structured Interview Schedule (Teachers)**Demographic details**

1. Years of overall teaching experience?
2. Number of years teaching at [School Name]?
3. Primary role/teaching activities?

Interview questions

1. How would you describe the student body and school climate at [School Name]?
2. Are there particular students you consider to be influential or leaders (positive or negative) among the student body (or in particular classes/year levels)?
 - Why do you think these students are influential among their peers?
3. Do you witness a lot of competition among students? If so, how is this competition demonstrated?
 - Why do you think this may occur?
 - Do you consider this competition to be positive or negative for female students?
4. With regards to academic achievement (high or low achievement), do you feel as though young women are concerned what other students think about their level of achievement? Why/Why not?
 - Is there a stigma attached to be considered too smart or not smart enough?
5. Have you found in general that there are particular current social issues topical debates that are being widely report etc. that students are engaging in and what to discuss?
6. Are there particular challenges that you feel your female students are dealing with? If so what are they?
 - Social pressures?

- Other significant issues young people are dealing with today?
7. Previous research indicates that girls' avenues to power and influence are closely linked to their appearance and heterosexual attractiveness rather than their achievements and/or pursuits. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this idea?
 - In your opinion, what other sources of power are available to female students?
 - How are positive avenues to power and influence (e.g. achievements) encouraged amongst students? Is this being done well at [School Name]?
 8. Who do you consider to be some current positive role models for young women? Why do you consider these individuals to be positive role models?
 - Are there people you consider to be negative role models for young women? If so, who are they and why?

(Alternative question – Do you get a sense of who the girls look up to or consider to be their role models? What are your opinions about this – are they positive or negative role models?)
 9. How much of your time is spent dealing with or assisting students in dealing with peer relationship issues?
 - Do you consider this challenging? Why/Why not?
 - What difficulties/challenges have you experienced (in any) when assisting girls with friendship changes?
 10. In your opinion, what effect (if any) has the increased use of social media had on peer relationships?
 11. Peer victimisation and bullying has been described as a prevalent issue in Australian schools. In your opinion, to what extent are such negative peer relations an issue at [School Name]?

12. What would you consider to be an example of peer victimisation that you have witnessed?
 - Why did you consider this to be victimisation?
13. Could you describe the school's approach to peer victimisation? In your opinion to what extent has the school's response been effective?
14. The school's Anti-Bullying policy distinguishes between what is considered bullying and what is not? Do you agree with this distinction? Has it been helpful in your management of peer relations?
 - Difficulties in making a distinction?
 - Can students make the distinction?
 - Is your understanding different from students?
15. Previous research suggests that rather than addressing negative peer relationships with young women, schools should provide students with the opportunities to discuss and critic the contradictory socialization messages that girls receive from larger culture and how this may be related to the social connectedness of girls. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this recommendation?
 - In what ways do you think this is already been done at [School Name]?
 - Is there further opportunity for this?
16. To conclude, what positive impact do you feel that you can have or hope to have as an educator of young women?
 - Is there a message that you hope to leave your students with?

Appendix M: Focus Group Schedule of Questions and Activities

Opening:

- Explain how a focus group works.
- Any questions before starting?

Initial questions

1. Could you tell me about OLMC and what it is like to be a student here?
 - What are the positive aspects about being in an all-girls school?
 - What are the negative aspects about being in an all-girls school?

Activity 1: Vignette Task

Two or three rounds of the vignette task

Questions

1. In your opinion, how are girls and young women represented in the media?
What are the messages and expectations communicated about how to be a young woman today?
2. Do you think that there are any current social issues that specifically impact young women? If so, what are they?
 - Do young women still experience sexism – treated unequal to boys?

Activity 2: Word Association

Go through each slide and then discuss what they think of each image/word and why.....

Depending on how activity progresses – some discussion about positive and negative role models. Who do they regard as positive and negative role models? Why?

Anyone not included here that young people look up to?

Positive and negatives about being a young woman today?

Closing Questions

1. There seems to be a lot of discussion about ‘bullying’ and/or mistreatment amongst girls and young people including online bullying. What are your thoughts on this issue?
2. Understanding of bullying – how would you define bullying?

3. In your opinion, who is often the target of peer victimisation? What makes someone vulnerable to peer victimisation?
4. Could you tell me something positive about girls and female friendships?
5. Would you say that having close friendships with other girls is or is not important for girls during high school? Why/Why not?
6. What do you think needs to change (if anything) for girls to maintain more positive relationships?
7. How do you think your school can assist in improving the wellbeing of female students?

Appendix N: Vignette Task (Focus Group)

Task description

This activity and use of vignettes has been adapted from Khattab and Jones (2007). A number of vignettes and scenarios will be placed in a jar and each participant will be required to select a vignette and discuss what is happening in the scenario. The current vignettes will relate to social situations commonly faced by young women in schools.

Participant instructions

- For this activity we are going to go around the group and each person will select a vignette from the jar.
- Once you have selected your vignette you will read it to the group (or give it to me to read) and respond to the question at the end of each scenario.
- We will discuss each vignette further as a group.
- If you select a vignette that you don't want to read just put it back into the jar and select another one.

Example vignettes

Scenario 1:

Sarah and Lia have been best friends since starting high school. They are always together in class and during lunchtime and spend most weekends together. However, last month Lia joined the school drama team and often has to meet about the upcoming school production during lunchtime or after school. While Lia has been at meetings or rehearsals, Sarah has been spending more time with Casey another girl in their friendship group. At first Lia didn't really think anything of it, as she is friends with Casey anyway but now every time Lia has a conversation with Sarah, Casey seems to interrupt her, and Lia admits that she does feel threatened by Casey. Then last Saturday when Lia asked Sarah to go to the movies, Sarah said she couldn't because Casey was staying at her house. Lia was really surprised, Sarah wasn't rude about it but Lia did feel left out.

What is happening in this scenario?

What advice would you give to Lia?

Scenario 2:

Chloe is in Year 10 and has just moved to Melbourne from Sydney with her family and is starting at a new school. Chloe had many friends at her old school (who she misses heaps!) and is nervous about starting her new school, she is moving from a co-educational school to an all-girls school, so she knows it will be different.

What advice would you give Chloe?

If Chloe was a new student at your school, what would be important for her to know so she could fit in at [School Name]?

Scenario 3:

Abby is in Year 10 and has always really enjoyed school, she is smart, but she works really hard and most of the time gets good marks, but Abby feels embarrassed about her good grades and sometimes lies about her marks to her friends. One day in English class Abby's teacher is returning their essays when another student saw Abby's A grade and yelled out "Oh of course you did Abby, of course you got an A... Always such a good girl", in a very demeaning manner.

Why would Abby possibly be feeling embarrassed about her good grades?

In your opinion, are girls concerned if others think they are too smart or not smart enough?

Scenario 4:

Tiffany is in history class with two of her best friends Claire and Sophie. The teacher sets a group project and instructs the class that they can work in groups of two or three. Tiffany turns to Claire and Sophie and asks, "Did you want to work in a group of three?". Claire and Sophie started to laugh between themselves and told Tiffany that she would probably make them fail. They were laughing like it was a joke but clearly it wasn't because they didn't let her be in their group and Tiffany felt so embarrassed sitting alone in class. This is not the first time Claire and Sophie have made Tiffany feel bad...but they are her friends, so Tiffany just puts up with it.

What is happening this scenario?

Do you think it is common for girls to put up with mistreatment from their friends?

Why/Why not?

Scenario 5:

Lulu is 15 years old and loves anything related to fashion and photography and one day hopes to be a successful fashion designer. Lulu, Delia, Ruby and her sister Olivia were looking through magazines for ideas for their formal dresses. Lulu points out a dress that Cara Delevingne is wearing “Oh my god I would love to wear a dress like that” says Lulu. “Yeah that’s really nice” agrees Ruby, “Yeah it is nice” says Delia “but you have to be really thin to wear a dress like that not saying you can’t but look at her, she is so hot”, comments Delia. That night Lulu went home and looked at herself in the mirror and wondered how much weight she would have to lose to look good in a dress like that.

What is happening in this scenario?

We hear a lot about the pressures girls experience to try and satisfy a particular idea of beauty. What are your thoughts on this issue?

Scenario 6:

Lisa has a big group of friends who hang out most days at school and on the weekends. The group gets along most of the time, but every now and then big arguments start which can go on for days and days. One person accuses another girl of doing or saying something behind her back and the rest of the group take sides. Lisa always feels stuck in the middle and frustrated. She doesn’t want to get involved in all the drama, but she doesn’t want to leave the group either. She’s afraid of saying anything in case she becomes a target for bullying by the rest of the group.

What advice would you give Lisa?

In your opinion how common is this scenario among friendship groups?

Would you consider this to be a healthy or not so healthy friendship group? Why?

Scenario 7:

Holly has started going out with Jack a really cute and fairly popular boy from another school. Holly was really happy when Jack asked her out and she has been

enjoying spending time with him. Her friends however, are not impressed. They accuse Holly of going off and leaving them for a boy and turning her back on them. Holly feels torn between her friends and her boyfriend. She wishes she could have both, but they say they won't talk to her until she dumps him.

What is happening in this scenario?

What advice would you give Holly?

Scenario 8:

Penelope is in Year 10 and she has a good group of friends and has never really had any arguments with anyone in her year level. But lately there have been these girls in her year level (who you might label the popular girls - whatever that means!) who have started to pick on her and annoy her. For instance, the other day they were throwing little rolled up pieces of paper at her in English and when she was giving a class presentation they made her feel uncomfortable. They don't really say anything to her but every time she sees them she feels like they are talking about her and giving her weird looks. Her friends say she is paranoid, but she knows how she feels.

What is happening in this scenario?

If you were Penelope how would you deal with this situation?

Scenario 9:

Tessa, Amelia and Tina were sitting together working on their group assignment after school. Feeling unmotivated Tessa slams her laptop shut "I can't be bothered with this anymore!". Laughing Tina agrees, and she said "I have an idea.... Who don't we like? Who can we mess with?". "Oh, I know how about Jen?" suggests Amelia. For some time, Jen has been trying to be friends with Tessa and her friends, but they just feel like Jen doesn't belong in their group. Amelia finds Jen's Instagram and after creating a fake account starts making nasty comments on her photos, which other girls from their year level will see. Tessa thinks it is funny but does think about how Jen might feel when she sees these comments.

What is happening in this scenario?

Would you consider this a case of online bullying? Why/Why not?

In your opinion, would you say that it is difficult or not difficult to move between friendship groups at school? Why/Why not?

Scenario 10:

Susie is in Year 9 and for her whole life she has been really into sports and she is really good. She plays soccer, basketball and tennis, both on school teams as well as out of school teams. Susie is starting to feel a bit odd about being so athletic as none of her friends are and a lot of the stuff she reads online and in magazines does not relate to her interests in sport. Some of her friends used to play sports but they have recently stopped. Susie's friends often go shopping etc. on Saturdays and although she likes spending time with them she is busy with her sport on the weekend. Her friend Laura has started to call Susie a 'tomboy', which Susie doesn't really mind but Laura says it like there is something wrong with that. Susie is starting to contemplate not trying out for so many teams this year.

What do you think is happening in this scenario?

Why might Susie be questioning her interest in sport even though she enjoys it and has talent?

Do you think that there are any current stereotypes that may exist about young women today? If so, could you explain some of these stereotypes.

Appendix O: Word Association Task (Focus Group)



Participant Instructions

Using the pen and paper provided write the first 3 words that come to mind when you see the following images or hear the following words.

the people in the images are. That's okay there is no right or wrong answer.

- If you can only think of one or two words that's fine.

What 3 words come to mind
when you hear the word:

Equality

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of:

Cara Delevingne



What 3 words come to mind when you hear the word:

Popular

What 3 words come to mind when you think of:



BEYONCE

What 3 words come to mind
when you hear the word:

Girl

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of:



Rebel Wilson

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of: Put later

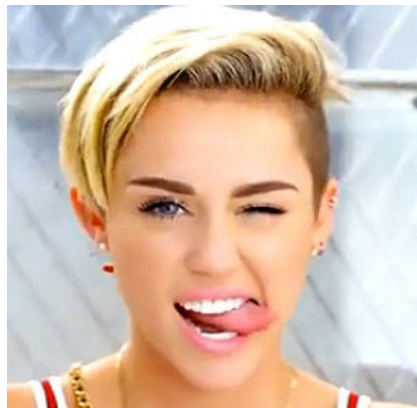


Malala Yousafzai

What 3 words come to mind when
you hear the word:

Strong

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of:



MILEY CYRUS

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of:



Serena Williams

What 3 words come to mind
when you hear the word:

Beautiful

What 3 words come to mind
when you hear the word:

Power

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of:



Julia Gillard

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of:



Taylor Swift

What 3 words come to mind
when you hear the word:

Success

What 3 words come to mind
when you think of:



Kendall and Kylie Jenner

What comes to mind when.....

<p>Slide 1:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 2:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 3:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p>Slide 4:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 5:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 6:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p>Slide 7:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 8:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 9:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p>Slide 10:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 11:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 12:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p>Slide 13:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 14:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 15:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p>Slide 16:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 17:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	<p>Slide 18:</p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>

Appendix P: School Assembly (Field Note Entry)

The two School Captains opened up the assembly with an acknowledgement of country and a prayer. The focus of this afternoon's prayer is related to the theme "Like a Girl" – they start listing all the different 'types' of girls and the contribution they make to the school and beyond. "It takes all girls", sport girls, creative girls, leading girls, nature girls, music girls, justice girls, singing girls, art girls, dancing girls, drama girls, writing girls and so on. A student in the procession represents each of these 'girls'. The prayer continues on to say all girls make a contribution, all girls at [SCLC] have talents. They then discussed two women of significance in the Catholic tradition. They ask students to close their eyes and think about women who have inspired them.

After the prayer was concluded a group of six students talked about their involvement in [a Council] Youth Summit – where young people were able to pitch ideas to council members. The students proposed a lifestyle skills booklet because many of them leave school not knowing how to open a bank account and other life skills. As a result of their proposal, each Year 12 student in [the Council area] will receive one of these booklets. The Mayor of [the Council area] was also in attendance to congratulate the students.

The assembly is handed over to the School Captains. They reflected on the theme of this year's [Celebration] Day "Like a Girl" – they explained they were inspired by the YouTube clip which depicted people running 'like a girl' – this clip is played for the students. They ask their peers to consider, "what does it mean to you to be a strong independent woman?" The assembly continues with a group of Year 7 drama students being introduced. They have been discussing in class what it means to be a girl. They proceeded to do a drama performance based on what it is like being a

girl starting high school and the judgement they experienced. They acted out a number of common concerns for girls that tend to come to the surface in high school including: “Footy – where is it?” No, we sit and talk...; “Need to shave my legs – I can’t be hairy”; “Take off your judgement goggles and look around you”. These junior students are well received with lots of laughs and applause. Following this, two previous students are welcomed to the assembly to discuss their lives after graduating.

The first of the two women discussed a youth led website she created which reviews political and social justice issues. She shares that she had to pitch her idea and compete for funding against people older and more experienced than her. She encourages students to write for her website (some already do). She makes the claim “it has never been a better time to be a girl!” The second young woman explains that since leaving school, she has “travelled Europe twice, got her driver’s license, got fired twice and became a feminist”. She asks the students are you a feminist? She gives a definition and discusses why feminism is polarising and it is not man hating. She talks about her privilege and talks about why it is important for her to be a feminist. She shares her experiences as a woman working in a male dominated area of film and production. She highlights the reactions she sometimes gets from male peers because she is a woman. She makes a statement about women being contradictory and complex – “women are humans – humans are crazy and contradictory”. She informs the students about a short film she has made, which discusses the different experiences that girls and boys have when going through puberty. Her movie focuses on girls’ experiences – she explains that often girls are told to be quiet about their experiences and periods are avoided. She cannot

understand how it is considered acceptable to have violent bloody movies but period blood in film is shocking for most people.

These past students' reflections were followed by another Year 7 drama performance. They sang No Doubt's "I'm Just a Girl" with interludes of conversations they might have with their parents and other significant people. "The world is a dangerous place for a girl...". After their performance they were congratulated, and the teacher highlighted that these were the Year 7 students' own ideas which have been presented. The principal's address followed – she started by commenting on the previous students' talks and then asks girls to raise their hand if they consider themselves a feminist – many raise their hands others are just looking around at each other. She then goes on to ask who thought (I am assuming prior to the past student's speech) to be a feminist you need to be a man hater and have hairy legs? The young women all just looked at each other – one girl was brave enough to put up her hand. The principal talks further about feminism. She then goes on to discuss the female Saint being honoured on their school celebration day. As the assembly ended and the students were waiting on instructions as to when they could leave the gym, a group of Year 10 students that I was sitting next to turned to two male teachers sitting behind them. One of the students stated "I am so not a feminist" – and one of the male teachers asked her why and she responded along the lines that "they say it is not all this man-hating and hairy legs stuff – but it really is!" and the two male teachers looked at each other and seemingly unsure how to respond just said "yeah" without really saying anything at all.