'Having It All'? : Pre-Teen Girls Negotiate Successful Femininity

Sophie Cossens

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ABSTRACT

Depictions of girls and young women as powerful, unconstrained and outshining boys and men characterise the modern postfeminist cultural climate and imbue femininity with wide reaching success. However, research into postfeminist discourse reveals a far more complicated picture than this straightforward ode to success. Previously the focus has been on successful femininity within education or employment, or on the future aspirations of girls and young women. Yet considering the grandiose postfeminist claims of successful femininity it is important to examine specifically what success means to those who are expected to hold it. The current research has done so from the perspective of ethnically diverse pre-adolescent girls, addressing the lack of research with this age group and with girls from minority ethnic backgrounds. Incorporating the latter enabled the thesis to examine how ethnic identities may intersect with understandings of successful femininity. Focus groups and photo-narrative books were used to explore the ways 32 girls between 11- and 13-years old made sense of successful girl/womanhood, including media representations of successful femininity. Participants were recruited from two urban schools within New Zealand. The study used a feminist poststructuralist framework and employed thematic and Foucauldian discourse analysis to analyse the data. Two overarching themes were identified: 'Success as Individual Qualities' and 'Spheres of Success.' Across these themes the girls' drew heavily on postfeminist and neoliberal discourses and constructed success through the competing and contradictory discourses of girl power and traditional femininity. Successful femininity was constructed as a highly individualised endeavour, predicated on the individual qualities of hard work, constant striving towards goals and overcoming adversity. These qualities were required to accomplishing success within three mandatory spheres of success; education, employment and motherhood. The successful female subject was expected to move linearly through these three spheres, engaging in higher education to earn a successful career in order to financially sustain motherhood. Discussions of employment success oscillated between constructions of unbounded possibility for young women in the workforce and recognition of the barriers facing young women and especially Māori women who work. Motherhood, described as the apex of successful femininity, was also shot through with complexity. The girls constructed a narrow scope for success through motherhood: those who had children without planning, had many children or who gave birth while young or single were positioned outside of this successfulness. The ultimate form of successful femininity required a delicate balancing of the three spheres of success in order for women to achieve the contradictory and unobtainable task of 'having it all.' Findings demonstrate girls' lack of access to a language with which to articulate oppression and inequality and emphasise the problematic entanglement of 'new' discourses of equality, empowerment and success with the enduring presence of powerful and regulatory traditional discourses of femininity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Girls in contemporary media are portrayed in vastly different ways to the traditionally feminine, passive subject observed by early feminist work in the 1960s and 70s (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005). Far from this coy femininity that was constructed as a site for ongoing concern (Driscoll, 2008), contemporary New Zealand girls are celebrated as pillars of success, outperforming boys with focussed drive towards a bright future. This narrative of success and power is demonstrated below by three news reports from this year and last:

> "*Girl power to the fore: not only are girls outshining boys in the classroom, they are showing them up on the farm as well*" (Dickson, 2014).
>
> "*It has been a season of girl power at Gisborne athletics club. Multiple records have fallen over the summer, all broken by female athletes*" (Wrigley, 2014).
>
> "*Girl power impressive at superbikes: Canterbury teenager scout fletcher … emerged with a smile on her face and a trophy to show for her troubles*" (McGechan, 2013).

Such representations of feminine success are rife within today's media, constructing an image of girls imbued with limitless potential for success. Media powerfully reproduces discourse, actively making available certain ways of being (Gill, 2007a). This makes girls' current 'success story' especially interesting. If this is what girls are being told through the potent social medium of popular culture then how do they, themselves, make meaning of successful femininity?

Introduction

In contemporary late capitalist society girls and young women are repeatedly told through the media that they 'run the world' (Pomerantz, Raby, & Stefanik, 2013, p. 558). Girls and young women are portrayed as tirelessly succeeding at *everything* such as school, work, extracurricular activities, friendships, romance and family life (Pomerantz et al., 2013). This cultural climate has been described as postfeminist wherein the impression given is that feminism has been outgrown, equality has been reached and girls/women are in a privileged position of success in all areas of their lives (McRobbie, 2004b). Various constructions represent the "unparalleled levels of

success" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 471) that girls are seen to have reached, for example 'can-do' girls (Harris, 2004), 'top girls' (McRobbie, 2007), 'successful girls' (Pomerantz et al., 2013) and 'supergirls' (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011). Girlhood success is frequently seen to translate to successful young womanhood (Allan & Renold, 2006). Within this context, girlhood is constructed as well worth investing in, with a promise of future economic success (McRobbie, 2007). Discussions of feminine success reach to ever younger audiences and pre-adolescent ('tween') girls are now targeted with much of this through postfeminist media that specifically addresses them (Vares, Jackson, & Gill, 2011). Moreover, there is now a 'hyper-visibility' of pre-adolescent girls within the media, which is said to play an increasingly powerful role for this group (McRobbie, 2008). Despite this, examinations of how girls understand contemporary femininity within postfeminist culture have focused almost entirely on adolescent girls and young women (Allan & Renold, 2006).

Seeking to address this knowledge gap, this thesis examines pre-adolescent girls' understandings of successful femininity both in everyday life and in the media. The aim is to explore the 'new femininities' that drive contemporary conceptions of success (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Despite the diversity that can be found within these 'new femininities' there is a powerful convergence around two dominant discourses of success: postfeminism and neoliberalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Within these 'new femininities' the contention of the 'new' will be explored by highlighting the way that the conceptions of novel, exciting, successful femininity are entangled with enduring older gender constructions and binaries.

The study used a qualitative methodology drawing on focus group data to examine pre-adolescent understandings of successful womanhood, supplemented by photo-narrative books centred on media. In this thesis, constructions of successful womanhood will be examined through a feminist poststructuralist lens that assumes 'identity' as fluid and changing, shot through with contradiction and constructed within available cultural discourses (Allen & Mendick, 2013). For this reason, the introduction will first examine four influential discourses that 'set the scene' for language use. These include neoliberalism, girl power, postfeminism and successful girls. The introduction will then examine empirical research concerning how these discourses are taken up by girls and young women, and how this enables and constrains their lives.

Discursive Contexts of Girlhood: 'New Femininities'

Before the gains of second wave feminism and the increasing female roles as labourers and consumers in the modernising society of the 1950s, women were not recognised as valued subjects within cultural discourse (Gonick, 2006). Instead, women were seen as passive, victimised objects characterised by dependency (Gonick, 2006). They were positioned as 'Other' to the contributing, rational, individual male subject, and were positioned outside of dominant definitions of full citizenship (Aapola et al., 2005). Irrespective of age, girls were never seen to achieve autonomy and self-determination and therefore never reach adulthood (Gonick, 2006). This lack of adult status manifested itself in the language used to identify women, where all women, even elderly, were referred to as 'girl' (Aapola et al., 2005). Recognition of women as subjects was gained through the second wave feminist agenda, however this important shift was also aided by the deindustrialisation of late modern societies that shifted the importance from manual production to 'feminised' work in the service sector (Harris, 2004). Women were also privileged through their long-standing conflation with consumption as the emphasis changed from production to consumption (Zaslow, 2009). This mutating cultural landscape feminised emerging neoliberal policies, creating an economy reliant upon women for their labour and consumption (McRobbie, 2009). Through these swift social, economic and political transformations, emerging neoliberalism became increasingly focused on the feminine, and the identifier 'girl' was reclaimed by young feminists to reinvent identification with feminine culture, irrespective of age (Aapola et al., 2005; Gonick, 2006). Examination of neoliberal discourse is central to understanding the processes through which young women became privileged subjects of capacity and social change (McRobbie, 2000, 2009).

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a form of political and economic rationality characterised by state departure from welfare and an embracing of privatisation and deregulation (Gill & Scharff, 2011). The global labour markets created a shift from manufacturing sectors to service, financial, technology and communications sectors (Aapola et al., 2005). This created a greater divide between the earning capabilities of those with the education and skills to excel within professional and managerial roles, and those with few or no qualifications. The latter were forced to enter poorly paid work with little security and often part-time hours (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Welfare and educational

cuts, credential inflation and rising unemployment creates a need for individual responsibility (Gonick, 2006) and continual self-invention in order to cope (Aapola et al., 2005). This rationality has extended its reach globally, and the neoliberal governance entices 'good' subjects to understand themselves as autonomous, self-managing, rational and entrepreneurial (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Rose (1990) claims that neoliberalism depends upon citizens living as if free and unconstrained, no matter how oppressive structural constraints may be. The imperative to be free demands that subjects take responsibility for their own management and regulation in order to demonstrate this apparent freedom; in short, one must become a "biographical project of self-realisation" (Walkerdine, 2005, p. 3). This is not simply a positive widening of choices but the obligation to account for all outcomes through autonomous choice (Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Walkerdine, 2005). Choice obscures the regulatory forces constraining action, becoming a burden for neoliberal subjects to bear as they are governed through our apparent freedom (Baker, 2008). In this way, being successful is constructed through neoliberalism to be available to anyone who has desire and works hard to achieve it (Gonick, 2006). Within this late modern society it is young women in particular who are called to succeed and are now held up as "one of the stakes upon which the future depends" (McRobbie, 2000, p. 201). They are seen as the ideal self-making, resilient and malleable neoliberal subject (Harris, 2004). Young women are imbued with capacity, and their enthusiasm for education and work make them uniquely capable of surviving the new unstable globalised market (Walkerdine et al., 2001). However, female success within this model is not based on feminism and collective achievement but on female individualism, on the governmental call for women to now consider themselves privileged competitors (McRobbie, 2009). Female success, then, is necessarily understood as individual effort and failure as individual lack (Gonick, 2006). The intensively heightened interest in girls and young women created fertile ground for the development of girl power (Zaslow, 2009). This celebratory discourse added "fuel to the fire of neoliberal rhetoric" (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, p. 550) through employment of individualism and unlimited choice (Taft, 2004).

Girl Power

Girl power is one of the most important concepts within discussions of young women as successful, self-reliant, and self-inventing (Taft, 2004). The consumerist form by which it is known today exploded as a mainstream concept in the 1990's with the

success of the pop group The Spice Girls (Gonick, 2006). This movement, however, was preceded by the more politically minded grrrlpower that originated with the punk rock inspired feminist movement of the Riot Grrrls (Harris, 2004). The girl power of the Riot Grrrls challenged patriarchal principles and celebrated girl culture and identity (Zaslow, 2009). Riot Grrrl encouraged girls and young women to avoid passive consumerism and adopt a do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude to production. However, the DIY ethic and individual responsibility for enacting social transformation inherent in this movement was assimilated easily into the non-threatening neoliberal discourse of the girl power espoused by the Spice Girls (Hains, 2007). Media culture began utilising the empowered pro-girl image to sell girl power back to girls and young women, minus the political social content (Zaslow, 2009). The Spice Girls' version forcefully promotes the message that 'girls can do anything'; they can do it by themselves and they can do it better than boys (Gonick, 2006; Taft, 2004). Girl power portrays feminine icons with boundless strength who defy victimhood yet are always, even when fighting vampires and monsters, distinctly (normatively) feminine. This is one of the contradictions of girl power discourse; girls and young women are required to play with femininity by being 'girly', cute and sexy while simultaneously bold, strong and empowered (Hains, 2007).

While messages of empowerment and strength are positive, girl power assists the self-inventing, self-reliance of neoliberalism and silences attempts at social change by constructing all girls to have the power to realise their desires by working hard and having (buying) the right look (Taft, 2004). In this way girl power hides structural constraints to success, such as class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality and silences examinations of oppression or inequality (Taft, 2004). The empowered female subject is, then, constructed as individualised, personally responsible, white and middle class (Gonick, 2006; Pomerantz et al., 2013). This sassy empowerment translates the ideal of equality between all girls and all boys into an assumption that this equality has already been achieved. In doing so, this discourse is located within postfeminism (Griffin, 2004).

Postfeminism

The modern postfeminist landscape actively undermines feminist successes from the 1970s and 80s (McRobbie, 2004c). Feminist scholars' discussions of postfeminism involve an unravelling of transformations in feminism and in media culture (Gill, 2007b). As popular feminism emerged within the media, central feminist issues such as

domestic violence, harassment and pay inequalities became available to a vast readership (McRobbie, 2004c). The success of feminism was hailed, and examples of highly successful women were used to demonstrate this progressive social change. This coincides with the beginning of a denunciation of feminism (Kehily, 2008). McRobbie (2004b) explains this process as feminism being "taken into account" (p. 255), as longer needed in the wake of female success. Postfeminism posits that young women have inherited new freedoms through a feminist movement that, by virtue of its own achievement, has become redundant or "eaten itself" (Kehily, 2008, p. 56). Young women are offered specific forms of freedom, empowerment and agency in exchange for feminist ideologies and politics (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

Gill (2007b) proposes that this cultural climate can be understood as a sensibility characterising an influential trend in contemporary culture. The postfeminist sensibility emphasises the contradictions within postfeminist discourse that entangle both feminist and anti-feminist ideologies (Gill, 2007b, 2008). McRobbie (2004c) refers to this as the 'double entanglement' where traditional values of gender, sexuality and family organisation (for example women as naturally nurturant mothers (Choi, Henshaw, Baker, & Tree, 2005)) exist alongside progressive views of choice and diversity. A salient element of the postfeminist sensibility is the way femininity is constructed as a bodily property. The normative, slim, worked on body is essential for expressing feminine success and is constructed as a window to one's psychological state (Gill, 2007b). Alternatively, working class celebrity bodies that do not conform to 'slim blondeness' (McRobbie, 2000) invoke judgements of laziness, unruliness and excess (Allen & Mendick, 2013). This can be seen as a masquerade, where the hyper-femininity of the postfeminist sensibility is constructed as a matter of choice rather than obligation, while the fashion and beauty systems become regulating authorities of femininity that serve to re-establish traditional patriarchal gender hierarchies through the *choice* of women to wear restrictive 'pencil' skirts and high heels (McRobbie, 2007).

This obligation to choice is intimately tied to requirements of the postfeminist sensibility for self-surveillance, self-monitoring and self-discipline (Baker, 2010a). Self-surveillance has been a requirement of successful femininity for a long time, with instruction in grooming and 'manners' associated with upper-class ideals (Gill, 2008). However, what is new, is the *intensity* of surveillance, requiring constant unwavering vigilance to every minute detail of the self and an extension of this to ever new spheres

of intimate life, including the psychological, internal self (Gill, 2007b, 2008). This self-surveillance demands young women become important to themselves through intensive management; seek out therapy when stress arises and create personal life plans (McRobbie, 2007). Problem solving for young women involves finding individual solutions (McRobbie, 2007), of being individually empowered and taking control (Baker, 2010a). This illuminates a powerful connection between postfeminism, girl power and neoliberalism: individualism (Gill & Scharff, 2011). As with neoliberalism, the postfeminist sensibility almost completely ignores political and cultural influences and inequalities upon success by recasting these as personal problems, focusing instead on the unconstrained choice, autonomy and opportunity now available to women (Jacques & Radtke, 2012). Girls and young women must choose their ideal life then achieve it through strategic planning and decision making (McRobbie, 2008). This call to self-manage is far greater for women than for men, highlighting a commonality between postfeminism and the "always already gendered" neoliberalism that idealises women as privileged subjects (Gill, 2008, p. 443). This suggests that, as well as being a response to feminism, postfeminism is constituted through the omnipotence of neoliberal ideologies (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

The successful individualised postfeminist femininity is summed up by Harris (2004), with the 'can-do' girl used to explain how class and ethnicity influence the pursuit of success within the new global economy. The 'can-do' girl is usually white, middle class and 'can-do' anything she sets her mind to (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011). 'Can-do' girls are ambitious, hardworking, self-driven and flexible and are encouraged to independently make strategic education and employment decision. In stark contrast to the 'can-do' girl is the 'at-risk' girl, who shadows the 'can-do' girl as her failed 'other'. She embodies laziness, poor choices and failure (Harris, 2004). 'At-risk' girls are usually from minority ethnic backgrounds, working class families, or living in poverty, closely monitored with suspicion by the government, media and schools (Swauger, 2009). Despite the structural disadvantage of the 'at-risk' girl, her 'failure' is understood to arise from insufficient personal effort. External impediments upon the 'at-risk' girl are disregarded, paying homage to postfeminist individualism (Harris, 2004).

The misaligned ambition of the 'at-risk' girl is constructed in opposition to the enthusiasm of the 'can-do' girl to "uncomplainingly meet the needs of the marketplace" (Harris, 2004, p.19). This is done by strategically and intensively planning her life along the mainstream success trajectory that moves linearly from education to a good career

(and responsible citizenship) to (delayed) motherhood. This ambition reflects public policy and youth research that reveres education and training as a pathway to employment within the new economy (Harris, 2004). In fact, one of the main arguments used to drive the postfeminist representation of girls' success comes from their superior educational accomplishments as compared to boys (Ringrose, 2007). A study that followed Christchurch children entering primary school to exiting high school found that at every data collection point girls outperformed boys as measured by teacher ratings, standardised tests and qualifications gained at leaving school (Fergusson & Horwood, 1997). Ringrose (2007) terms this discourse 'successful girls' and it is a central and powerful tenet within postfeminism.

Successful Girls

Smart girls are used to demonstrate the "unparralelled levels of success" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 471) of girls in a world beyond sexism (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013). Their power is constructed to extend past the school yard, into the workplace and their relationships (Pomerantz et al., 2013). Educational success comes to signify equality, social change and girl power. However, claims of successful girls are often taken to be won at the expense of failing boys who are struggling to keep up (Ringrose, 2007). This creates a stream of educational resources diverted to 'underachieving' boys, and constructs girls as dominant (Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007). Within the successful girls discourse, girls are required to juggle both masculine and feminine qualities in contradictory ways (Ringrose, 2007). It is through her flexibility, adaptability and hard work within education that the girl subject is constructed to 'win' without support in the shifting global economy and failure is constructed as individual weakness (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011). In recent years there has been a growing body of literature concerning the performance of girlhood within contemporary neoliberal postfeminist societies (Aapola et al., 2005; Allan & Renold, 2006; Gonick, 2004; Harris, 2004; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Each of these texts, although concentrating almost entirely on teenage girls and young women, demonstrate the contradictory nature of girls' success across the many facets of their complex lives (Allan & Renold, 2006). For example, Walkerdine et al. (2001) explain that the accademically successful middle class girls presented an "apparently seamless success but at the same time deep anxieties surfaced, anxieties that increasingly seemed to underpin that very performance" (p. 167). The next section examines the way in which

discourses of neoliberalism, girl power, postfeminism and successful girls enable and constrain the lives and imagined futures of girls and young women within empirical research.

Research with Girls

In the wake of media representations of 'successful girls' many researchers have examined constructions of the exceptional educational success of girls. Demonstrating the individualism inherent within this discourse, Pomerantz and Raby (2011) found teenage 'smart girls' to construct their successes (and failures) as the result of personal effort, invoking hard work, skill and diligence rather than structural privileges or barriers. For the majority of girls, hard work was the vital factor in their successes. This individualism was found to stifle discussions of gender inequality within school by this research and Pomerantz et al.'s (2013) research. Problems that arose through sexism in school were reconstituted by the girls as individual problems, or discounted in order to maintain positioning as having full control over their own lives (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013). Overwhelmingly, participants viewed themselves to live in a world beyond sexism; they located inequality as a thing of the past, or a thing that existed in other parts of the world (Pomerantz et al., 2013). The reliance of these girls upon the postfeminist narratives of equality meant that the girls had no language to express inequality as anything other than an isolated, individual problem (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013).

As well as denouncing inequality in school, girls must also extend their success beyond academic achievement in order to be positioned as successful. In the two studies above the teenage girls felt pressure to not just be academically successful but to have 'street smarts', social ability and to look a certain way, echoing the postfeminist ethos of girls achieving at *everything* simultaneously and with ease (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013). The real success, according to these girls, lay in handling everything while being able to "hide stress well" (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011, p. 558). Hiding the stress of maintaining success in so many facets of life has been paired with a requirement for girls to hide or dumb down their academic achievement in order to be seen as successful and feminine (Allan & Renold, 2006; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Walkerdine et al., 2001). The muting of academic success works to maintain the performance of normative cultural femininity (Pomerantz et al., 2013). It

has been described as a "balancing act in respect of cleverness and femininity" (p. 184), performed to maintain success within both positions (Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Renold and Allan (2006) explored this balancing of 'smart' and 'girlie' within a pre-adolescent population and found that downplaying academic success was required to gain acceptance from peers. By comparing three different approaches of high achieving 10- year old girls it was found that the most success came from a systematic muting of both academic and social success alongside an effort to be 'girlie' and 'nice' without standing out. By contrast, openly celebrating academic success and taking an 'anti-girly' stance resulted in being outcast from peers and diminished by teachers. Equally, embracing a 'supergirl' hybrid identity of hyper-femininity and proudly voicing academic and social successes resulted in frequent undermining as 'bossy' and 'arrogant' by peers. This demonstrates how the drive to "have it all" often does not fit within the realities of girls' cultural environments. Similarly, Reay (2001) found that primary school girls who fully embraced the ideals of girl power were frequently ridiculed and negatively assessed by the adults in the school. These girls, electively named the 'spice girls', were deemed inappropriate and detrimental to the learning environment. Conversely, the 'nice girls' who conformed to more traditional notions of femininity through quiet submissive contentiousness were also outcast socially (Reay, 2001). This highlights the limiting claims of both girl power and successful girls discourses whereby performance of either empowered femininity or academically successful femininity are, on their own, inadequate to gain social capital and positioning within successful girlhood.

As demonstrated above, "embodying excellence and achieving 'femininity' continues to involve a precarious balancing act" for young girls and teenagers (Allan & Renold, 2006, p. 459). This hard work and pressure to be successful in school is frequently taken on by the girls themselves as a way to earn success in young womanhood (Allan & Renold, 2006; Harris, 2004; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013). This direct connection between girls' educational success and future success as women is also present in the media (Ringrose, 2007), with young women being "championed as a metaphor for social change" (McRobbie, 2004b, p. 6). For example, a recent report by *The New Zealand Herald* announced**, "**New Zealand girls want to be doctors, lawyers and politicians but their brothers are lacking ambition." Within this article ambition is linked to educational success, "Girls do better than boys at school from the minute they walk in the doors and that's why they are more ambitious

and driven" *(Edmunds, 2012)*. Such narratives work within the postfeminist discourse of successful girls by tying academic success to becoming skilled flexible workers who can succeed without social support within the global market. Academically successful girls are charged with choosing the kind of life they want to have and making a well-planned strategy to achieve it (McRobbie, 2004b, 2007). Therefore, understanding how pre-adolescent girls make sense of success in young womanhood seems important given the strong connection that is made between girlhood and future success.

Similar to depictions of girls, young women are viewed in postfeminist media as ideal subjects of success (McRobbie, 2007): confident, capable, bold and independent in their relationships, finances and careers (McRobbie, 2000). Tied in with this is a rhetoric of neoliberalism where young women are invited to freely choose their own way of living and being successful (Gonick, 2006). The media calls each young woman to take personal responsibility for her tireless planning, monitoring and chipping away at a perfectible self (McRobbie, 2007). Research to date has not yet examined girls' understandings of successful femininity but has focussed instead on girls' future aspirations, providing information on desirable forms of femininity. Within this literature there is almost a complete exclusion of pre-adolescent girls' voices. What these studies do show is that girls' ambitions for womanhood fit closely with postfeminist neoliberal discourses of female success.

A comparison of three studies examining the imagined futures of teenage girls (Sharpe, 2001; Zaslow, 2009) and young women (Jacques & Radtke, 2012) revealed that desires and expectations for the future were constructed in remarkably similar (postfeminist) ways. These girls and young women highly valued their independence (financial, social and professional) and focussed heavily on achieving successful careers with a 'women can do anything attitude'. Discussions also relied upon narratives of choice, self-determination and self-reliance, irrespective of social or ethnic background. However, despite constructing themselves as freely choosing and empowered, these girls and young women almost unanimously held motherhood as a mandatory and privileged position. Most participants predicted they would get married and have children after obtaining successful higher education and an esteemed career. This trajectory was imagined to be highly linear and uncomplicated. These girls and young women put much effort into positioning themselves as career-oriented, commonly believing they could easily align this with their assumed role as primary caregiver.

Despite this belief, their attempts to explain strategies for 'doing it all' by integrating family and profession were ambiguous, questioning and ultimately unresolved. These three studies demonstrate that, in imagining their futures, both teenage girls and young women embrace neoliberal postfeminist discourse of unbounded female capacity, leaving them with the difficult task of explaining how their choice to be a wife and mother will fit with the drive as women to 'have it all'(Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Sharpe, 2001; Zaslow, 2009). What is omitted from these accounts is how girls and young women understand the postfeminist ideals of successful femininity, and how these interact with their aspirations. This becomes important when considering the potential consequences of failing to succeed in a postfeminist society that sees success as achievable for anyone willing to work for it.

The internalisation of freedom of choice and personal responsibility has been described as problematic for young woman as it can obscure the structural forces that constrain women's 'choice' (e.g. gender, ethnicity and class) (Jacques & Radtke, 2012) and it explains any lack of success through personal failure (Gonick, 2006). This was demonstrated by Baker (2010b) when examining how young women experience educational and career aspirations. Independent of familial, economic, educational or social circumstances, the young women in this study described their current situation and future goals through choice and personal responsibility. In response to difficult life situations postfeminism required participant objections to be replaced with determination and hard work. This reveals how the unbounded success associated with young womanhood is assumed to be universally achievable, even for those in extremely difficult and constricting situations (Baker, 2010b). This becomes a problem for minority ethnic girls and young women because successful femininity usually assumes a white middle-class subject (Baker, 2010b). In the study outlined above by Jacques and Radtke (2012) there was an ethnically diverse range of participants. However, they ignored the relevance of ethnicity to their current and future lives, constructing their hopes, dreams and opportunities as women in remarkably similar ways. Furthermore, Safia-Mirza (1992) found that irrespective of social class, African Caribbean girls in two South London high schools faced various forms of prejudice and racism. The educational attainment of these girls suffered badly as a result of low teacher expectations, substandard career advice and a lack of support through examination periods. Yet the career aspirations of these girls remained high, even higher than their white counterparts (Safia-Mirza, 1992). This leaves such young women vulnerable to

the pain and anxiety arising from attempts to integrate claims that women can be anything and everything that they want, within a social and educational system that restricts their ambition (Walkerdine et al., 2001). In recognition of this incongruence between ambition and opportunity in the New Zealand context, Jones (1991) examined career advice talks in a girls' school and found that Pasifika students were encouraged to carefully consider their futures in ways that emphasised low aspirations. This further evinces the claim that while the doors to success are opening for young women, few are positioned to take advantage of this (Harris, 2004).

The Current Study

Media and popular literature frequently perpetuate the idea that women's success is especially assisted by the new structures of late modernity that are built upon feminine values and conditions designed to advance female success, such as an apparent freeing from family commitments (Baker, 2010b). However "the neoliberal incitement of individualism, rational choice and self-realization bumps up against discourses of femininity creating contradictory and complex positions for girls" (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 7). Indeed, the research presented thus far informs that success in girlhood requires an exhausting act of incorporating competing demands and this effort is often seen as a gateway to success in young womanhood. As girls imagine their futures as young women, the postfeminist drive to be *everything* becomes confusing and contradictory with attempts to reconcile the many roles including the privileged role of motherhood. This can create intense anxiety and pain, especially for girls of minority ethnic backgrounds, through an internalisation of any failure to succeed no matter what constraints exist. Therefore the current neoliberal postfeminist landscape does not simply open up choice and opportunity for girls and young women but creates an environment "shot through with contradictions" (Walkerdine, 2005, p. 25).

Although previous research has examined future aspirations of teenage girls and young women, providing information on the desirability of different forms of femininity, it does not explain *how* they make sense of postfeminist ideals of successful femininity and how such understandings interact with aspirations. Furthermore, within the proliferation of girlhood studies there is a much needed development of the understudied population of pre-adolescent girls (Walkerdine, 1998; Willis, 2009) despite their visibility within the consumerism of postfeminist culture (McRobbie,

2004c). Therefore, the current study sought to extend this line of research by examining how the previously excluded group of pre-adolescent girls make sense of information presented to them on how to 'do' successful femininity. Comparisons are made between the desirability of different forms of successful femininity and the perceived attainability of those. Because girls of minority ethnic backgrounds are minimised within the media, made invisible within dominant discourse and understudied within academic literature (Swauger, 2009) the current study included pre-adolescent girls with different ethnic backgrounds to allow for analysis of how ethnicity may intersect with understandings of successful femininity.

Research Questions

Specifically, the research asks what does successful femininity mean to these pre-teen girls surrounded by glorifying accounts of the success of young women (McRobbie, 2000)? What discourses and discursive practices do pre-adolescent girls draw on to construct successful (new) femininity and how do they position themselves, the women they know and women in the media in relation to these constructions? And how do these girls negotiate and live the contradictory space opened up by available discourses of successful femininity?

In order to address these research questions the current study conducted focus groups with pre-teen girls to gather girls' own understandings of successful femininity. It also used photo-narrative books to document how they interact with and understand media representations of successful femininity. This research aims to contribute knowledge of how girls from diverse ethnicities may take up and resist dominant discourses of female success and how this impacts on their own self-making. It is hoped that these findings will offer valuable information on the way girls draw understandings of success from 'new femininities'.

Organisation of this Thesis

The following chapter outlines the epistemological framework that was used to understand the language used by participants as well as the analytical methodology that informed the exploration of data. The next three chapters' present discursive analyses of focus group data and are organised by three themes; 'Success as Individual Qualities',

'Spheres of Success' and 'Having It All'. The final chapter, Chapter Six, will draw together the key threads of analysis from Chapters Three, Four and Five for a theoretically informed discussion related to the research questions in addition to consideration of the study's limitations, implications and what future research may be fruitful.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Methodological framework

This chapter presents the methodologies used, examines why these are applicable to the current study, and outlines the approach to data collection and how the data was analysed. The first section highlights the central tenets of poststructuralist theory, the Foucauldian contribution to this, and the ways this theory is productively mobilised by feminist analysis within feminist poststructuralism. It will then explore language, discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis before outlining the research design, the ethical considerations, the details of data collection, and the step-by- step process adopted in analysing this data within the methodological framework adopted.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a theoretical framework used to describe an assortment of approaches which claim there is no world outside of language. Instead, experience of the world and of the self occurs within language (Burman & Parker, 1993). This claims that there is no inherent meaning that is fixedly attached to experience; meaning is ascribed through language (Weedon, 1997). This highlights language as plural and meaning as multiple, changeable, contestable and temporary across context and time (Gavey, 1989). We learn to understand, or give meaning to, our thoughts, feelings and behaviour through language. The only way experience can be expressed to the self and to others is through the meaning-laden and changing concepts rooted within language (Burr, 2003).This rejects the traditional humanist assumption that language operates as a transparent vessel revealing inherent fixed meaning and the essential 'self' of the speaker (Gavey, 1989). The contestable nature of meaning within language, then, potentially invites conflict, which is inherently shot through with struggle for power (Burr, 2003). In the current study any variation or conflict in participants' language will be of interest for its relationship to which stories of success seem to hold power.

This poststructuralist conceptualisation of plurality is critical of the structuralist belief in a "pre-existent, fixed universal structure of reality" that can be uncovered through scientific investigation (Gavey, 1989, p. 463). In this way poststructuralism

21

attempts to unpack that which is taken as 'common sense' (Burman & Parker, 1993), rejecting such concepts as 'truth' and 'objectivity' and assuming that knowledge is socially constructed, transient and fundamentally unstable (Davies, 1993). Within poststructuralism, all knowledge is derived from the perspective used to construct it and driven by the interests served by each perspective. No one perspective gets at the 'truth' about a subject or object, but merely represent one socially constructed view amongst many potential others (Burr, 2003). This challenges the realism inherent within mainstream psychology that purports knowledge to be a reflection of reality amenable to quantitative observation (Burr, 2003; Gill, 2007a). Mainstream psychology's "obsession with truth" (p. 160) creates a focus solely on that which is measurable and prizes knowledge obtained by predicting and controlling the laws of behaviour (Burman & Parker, 1993). This is often done without questioning the 'common sense', culturally specific assumptions upon which the theory and research is based (Burr, 2003). In contrast, poststructuralism examines the social construction of multiple realities (Burman & Parker, 1993), resisting the positivist reliance on quantitative approaches. In line with this, the current study will adopt the qualitative research methods favoured by poststructuralist researchers (Willig, 2001). These methods are preferred for their sensitivity to the power driving common sense knowledge (Willig, 2001). Though the majority of theorists who developed poststructuralism are men, and are unsympathetic to feminism (Weedon, 1997), feminist writers in particular see the revolutionary potential for poststructuralism (Davies, 1993). It is for this reason that the interaction between feminist theory and poststructuralism was conceptualised into feminist poststructuralism, a framework that has been especially fruitful (McNay, 1992). Feminist poststructuralist theory allows a focus on power, gender and the gendered experience (Weedon, 1997).

It was Weedon (1997) who first outlined the specific form of poststructuralism known as 'feminist poststructuralism'. This theory is described as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (Weedon, 1997, pp. 40-41). By utilising concepts created by one of the earliest poststructuralists, Michel Foucault, feminist poststructuralists can examine how power and knowledge are mutually constructed and how seemingly 'natural' patterns of desire are implemented and maintained (McNay, 1992) This can facilitate understandings of how old discourses may be challenged

(Davies, 1993) to transform the social power of gender, class and race (Weedon, 1997). Using the concept of discourse, explained in detail below, feminist poststructuralism can elucidate structures of power and to examine potential resistance to them (Weedon, 1997). For this study, feminist poststructuralism is useful to examine the contradictions and complexity of girls' identity work in relation to discourses of successful femininity. Using a feminist poststructuralist lens to examine the mobilisation of discourse allows analysis to delve deeper than these unquestioned common sense perspectives (Gavey, 2011) and the fetishized search for consistency found within positivist psychology that struggles to account for contradictory findings (Burman & Parker, 1993). Attention can then be drawn to cracks and contradictions that exist within, and shape, experience and understanding (Gavey, 2011); these provide more analytical value within discourse analysis than consistency (Burman & Parker, 1993). Considering the highly contradictory meanings entangled together within discourses of successful femininity, the selection of discourse analysis was an especially fruitful framework for the current study (Gonick, 2006; McRobbie, 2011). Indeed, contradiction and conflict are expected from a perspective of feminist poststructuralism (Gavey, 2011).

'The Turn to Language' and Discourse Analysis

The central tenet of poststructuralism is that language is not a reflection of an existing, solid, social reality, but that through language social reality is created (Gill, 2007a); this underpins the discursive psychological approach (Burman & Parker, 1993). Discourse "refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 2003, p. 48). These differing versions of events represent competing ways of making meaning within the world (Weedon, 1997), each constructing people, groups, events and objects in a particular light (Burr, 2003).

Discourse analysis identifies the discourses on offer to women and men within a specific cultural and historical location (Gavey, 1989). This is hugely useful for feminist research into the construction and maintenance of gender power relations (Gill, 1995; McNay, 1992). There are two useful approaches to discourse analysis (Willig, 2001), both of which have informed the methodology of the current study. The first approach draws from language the discourse *practices*, or what is being done with discourse, and how it is performed. The second is Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig, 2001).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Foucault is said to have influenced feminist theorising and research more than any other poststructuralist scholar (McNay, 1992). The Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis emerged during the 1980s and has been profoundly significant in understandings of modern power (Gill, 2007a). This form of analysis questions what discursive resources are accessible and how these constitute subjectivity and power relations. From this perspective, discourses enable and constrain what language is available, who can use it, and where and when this can be done (Willig, 2001).

Foucauldian discourse analysis draws attention to the way discursive resources legitimate power relations, with hegemonic discourse privileging common sense meanings that maintain prevailing power (Willig, 2001). Discourses are bound up with power, and what is especially useful for the current analysis is the way Foucault sees this regulatory power as internalised by the individual (Burr, 2003; Gill, 2007a). Foucault's metaphor of a model prison, the panopticon, graphically illustrated the way regulatory power works through the internalisation of constant surveillance (Burr, 2003). In this way, power is held through self-discipline, producing self-policing subjects who relentlessly monitor themselves towards conceptions of normality (Gill, 2007). This steers away from a negative, dominating power to an invisible, productive power that invites subjects to scrutinise their own selves, controlled and disciplined, yet acting as if freely choosing (Burr, 2003). Ideas of self-discipline and freedom of choice are vitally important to analyses in the current study. As outlined in the introduction, self-discipline and self-surveillance are central to neoliberal and postfeminist constructions of successful femininity and enable the maintenance of impossible expectations of women 'having it all' (Baker, 2010b). Further, discourses of freedom of choice are equally important in maintaining inequalities present in constructions of successful femininity (Aveling, 2002; Baker, 2010a).

Whereas Foucault's earlier work positioned the individual to be a passive, docile victim of dominant discourse and minimised the potential for self-determination, explaining power as purely repressive, his later (incomplete) work conceptualised an agentic subject (McNay, 1992). This is defined by Foucault as technologies of the self, practices and techniques used to actively shape one's own identity (McNay, 1992). Although less powerful discourses which facilitate the challenging of more hegemonic systems of meaning are usually marginalised or dismissed (Gavey, 1989), the conceptualisation of technologies of the self allows an avenue to avoid the

"homogenizing tendencies of power in modern society through the assertion of…autonomy" (McNay, 1992, p. 3). The individual is then understood to actively take up or resist discourse as they come to understand themselves and the world around them. Despite this autonomy, Foucault still recognises that this 'choice' is bound by the available options that exist within and are determined by the social context; that is, the practices of the self are not outside of the pre-existing discursive world. Recognising the potential for individual agency within discursive restrictions holds possibility for feminist analysis to uncover the more complex relationships between gender, discourse and power (McNay, 1992). For the current analysis it allows recognition of compliance as well as resistance to available discourses of successful femininity. Technologies of the self are one area of Foucault's contribution to analytic work around subjectivity (Burman & Parker, 1993), or our sense of self (Weedon, 1997).

Positioning and Subjectivity

Understandings of the subject, subjectivity and positioning are fundamental to feminist poststructuralism (Davies, 1993). Although notions of subjectivity are not addressed by discourse analysis, Foucauldian discourse analysis provides a framework for doing so (Willig, 2001). Subjectivity, or the sense of self, is understood as socially constructed through discourse (Allen & Mendick, 2013). This assumption rejects traditional psychological conceptions of 'identity' as some innate, predetermined essence within the individual (Weedon, 1997). Instead, subjectivity can be seen as the "process of being a subject" (Gavey, 2005, p. 92). This constructs subjectivity as constantly in flux, evolving through interactions guided by the discourses available on a day to day basis (Davies, 1993). Subjects are therefore willingly regulated as they align themselves with specific subject positions (Weedon, 1997). Each discourse creates multiple potential subject positions offering different ways of being and understanding the world. These positions can be taken up, rejected or resisted, impacting upon subjectivity and experience (Gavey, 2005), mobilising the agency within technologies of the self (McNay, 1992). However, the possibilities for subjectivity are constrained by the positions on offer within discourse (Burr, 2003). Therefore, agency is always enacted in a constrained fashion; subjects may assert influence while equally being influenced (Gavey, 2005). Subject positions within dominant discourses, those regarded as common sense, are the most potent in constructing subjectivity. However, their

influence often goes unseen and without resistance; we may be positioned by such discourses outside of our awareness (Gavey, 2005).

The concepts of subjectivity and positioning within discourse are highly relevant to the current study as they allow analysis of how pre-teen girls draw on available discourses of successful femininity to position the self and other girls and women, which constructions of success are desirable and which are resisted or rejected. Of further analytical benefit, the theoretical framework around subjectivity understands the conflict, tension and contradiction that can arise between different subject positions within different discourses, layering the human subject with contradictory meanings (Davies, 1993).

Research Design

Research with young people within psychology has predominantly utilised the scientific method that emphasises rationality, objectivity and fixedness (Jackson, 2010). This assumes a 'truth' that can be accessed with objective (quantitative) research methods administered by objective researchers (Jackson, 2010). As discussed above, feminist poststructuralism resists this scientific model, instead emphasising the fluid and socially constructed nature of subjectivity, knowledge and discourse (Weedon, 1997) and the merit of qualitative research in examining the fluid nature of the self (Jackson, 2010). Qualitative research can also circumvent the quantitative privileging of the researcher as expert and the participant as disempowered subject (Jackson, 2010). The current study drew on qualitative research methods in an attempt to achieve a more balanced power dynamic, acknowledging the knowledge and expertise held by the pre-teen girls involved, and to ensure the research was conducted 'with' as opposed to 'on' the (disempowered) young participants (Jackson, 2010).

Considering the qualitative research methods that are appropriate for young people was key in developing the approach of the current study. For this reason focus groups were selected as the principal technique for collecting data. Focus groups are especially useful in research involving young people as they favour methods that include other similar aged participants (Jackson, 2010). Young people also generally feel more comfortable with the familiar format of group discussion (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005), aligning well with the highly social lives they live (Jackson, 2010). Unlike a one-on-one interview, the focus group allows young people to

express themselves 'in their own words' (Darbyshire et al., 2005, p. 421), directing the conversation to topic areas they deem important instead of the researcher leading discussions through questioning (Jackson, 2010). Allowing young participants autonomy over the content of conversations helps reduce the power and control held by the researcher (Zaslow, 2009), diminishing the status differential of the researcher as the expert and the participant as subordinate (Jackson, 2010). Because focus groups are close to a more natural real life experience, include a social context, and reduce the power differential between researcher and participant, this approach works well within feminist research (Zaslow, 2009), further supporting the use of focus groups in the current study.

Darbyshire et al. (2005) found that it is valuable to complement focus groups with additional data collection techniques to aid young people in expressing themselves within research and allow some control over how they would like to contribute. Consistent with this view, an additional photo-voice method was integrated into the current research to complement the information gained within focus groups. Photo-voice methods are sparsely used in psychological research (Jackson, 2010), yet have been shown to produce information that is interesting in different ways to that generated through verbal or written methods (Darbyshire et al., 2005). Participants are provided with cameras to photograph that which is meaningful to them within the research area. Participants of the current study were also provided with a notebook to reflect on what each photograph means to them in relation to successful femininity (photo-narrative books). This ownership of what to photograph and how to explain it renders photo-voice methods a good example of research 'with' young people as opposed to 'on' them (Jackson, 2010). The idea behind the photo-voice method was to allow any participants who may have been hesitant to contribute within the focus groups a more private avenue to do so (Darbyshire et al., 2005). This approach was also intended to examine how the girls understand media representations of successful womanhood that they encounter on a daily basis as there was little time allowance within focus groups to discuss media. Despite these intentions and the supporting literature for its use, the girls did not engage well with this process in the current study. Very few photographs were taken and limited reflection was offered for those that were. It was reported by one of the school contacts that the girls were a little confused about what to include and felt that the task was similar to homework. This is incongruent with the research by Darbyshire et al. (2005) whose young participants were excited by the photo-voice process and eager to

participate. Because the material provided through the photo-voice process was limited, it was integrated with the focus group material in the three following analysis chapters. To achieve this integration the initial analyses were conducted based upon the focus group data and then any relevant photo-voice data was added to these.

Ethics

All research must be conducted ethically, however ethical considerations are especially important and complex when working with young people (Jackson, 2010). Ethical approval was gained prior to commencement of data collection from the School of Psychology Human Ethics Committee (SOPHEC) under delegated authority of Victoria University of Wellington's Human Ethics Committee. The first ethical question considered the age of participants and providing consent. The pre-adolescent girls were understood as fully capable to process the aims, methods and confidentiality of the current research. Therefore participants were provided with the same information (though slightly adjusted for age appropriateness and presented as a brochure instead of a letter) as their parents and asked to assent to their participation, while parents were asked to consent (see Appendices D, C, F and E respectively)

Another consideration was confidentiality, an issue that is highly important in research with young people because of the potential for disclosure of abuse (Jackson, 2010). It was made clear to parents via an information letter and to participants via an initial meeting and a take home information brochure that, should any issues be raised by a girl in any phase of the project, the researcher would first discuss this with her and allow her to decide who best to talk to next. Participants and parents were also informed that no information or material produced within the focus group or photo-voice phases of the study would be shared with anyone outside of the researcher and her supervisor, and that material would be stored in a locked room and would be destroyed after five years. Giving cameras to any aged participant poses ethical questions (Jackson, 2010). It was stressed to the girls that the cameras and photo-narrative books were private and that they did not have to show this to anyone unless they wanted to. They were encouraged to keep their books and cameras in a secret or locked place. However they were also reminded that the researcher would be viewing these. It was also important for safety and confidentiality that the girls clearly understood that they should only photograph media and not themselves or people they know. Confidentiality was discussed in depth and pseudonyms were used for all participants throughout the

transcribing process. Participants were invited to create their own pseudonyms in an attempt to make salient that none of their personal information would be used in the writing of the research. The girls appeared to clearly understand these issues of confidentiality and occasionally reminded each other that no one would hear what they were saying or know who was speaking, or explained the rules of taking photos if someone was confused.

Schools

Two intermediate schools around Wellington participated in the research project through the facilitation of community contacts. One of these contacts was a teacher at the school who was a friend of the researcher. The second school community contact was also a teacher who was affiliated with Māori studies at Victoria University of Wellington. Through this affiliate an introduction to the community contact was made. These two teachers provided information about how best to proceed within the school and facilitated an initial meeting with each school's principal. Both principals were provided with an information pack containing the principal information sheet, parent information sheet, girls' information brochure, consent form, child assent form, demographics form, focus group interview guide and photo-narrative book guidelines (see Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H and I respectively).

Participants

Following permission from each principal an information session was held with potential participants, at school, during school time, to discuss the research and provide an information pack containing the parent information form, girls' information brochure, and a consent form. In one school, potential participants were arranged by the community contact and in the other the principal did this. The invitation to attend this information session was based on participant age and ethnicity. Participants included 32 girls between the ages of 11- to 13- years old drawn from three different cultural backgrounds including Pacific Island, Māori and Pākehā. The girls were told that if they were interested in participating they should provide the information to their parents and return a signed consent form to the school office. Once an adequate number of consent forms were returned, the time and place for the focus groups were arranged with the help of either the community contact or the principal, depending on the school.

Research process

As mentioned above, the research process involved two parts: focus groups and the production of photo-narrative books with accompanying photographs. Focus groups lasted from 45 minutes to one and a half hours and were held with five to nine girls between the ages of 11- and 13 years old. Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed in full by the researcher. The style of notation used was created by Gail Jefferson (cited in Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Focus groups took place at participants' respective schools, during school time. The rooms used were not regular classrooms and it was hoped that this would help direct discussions away from the formalities of class time. Five initial focus groups were held with two Māori participant groups, two Pākehā participant groups and one Pacific Island participant group. At the beginning of these initial discussions participants' were reminded of the purpose and process of the research and were asked to complete the child assent form and demographics form if they were still happy to participate. They were also reminded that they could pull out of the research at any time up until the end of the photo-narrative phase of data collection. Two of these initial focus groups held at one school were half of the intended length of time because of a planned school trip that the researcher had not been informed about. As a result of this, two additional focus groups were held. These occurred at the other school as communication was made easier by the closer relationship held between the researcher and the community contact there. Additional focus groups ran for 45minutes and contained a mix of Māori, Pākehā and Pacific Island participants from that school.

Discussions were semi-structured (See Appendix H for the interview guide), aiming for as little researcher input as possible. This allows particular topic areas to be covered while also permitting girls to explore their own content and allow a greater emphasis on the participants' points of view (Wilkinson, 1999). Groups were opened with a broad discussion on success and successful womanhood and this took up the majority of focus group time. Following this, participants were presented with between one and three (time allowing) short clips of media popular within this demographic and were then asked to discuss the women within each clip. Media clips were drawn from various sources including the television show '*Jessie'* (Disney Channel, 2011), Nike television advertisement '*Make Yourself'* (Nike Inc., 2010) and Beyoncé's music video '*Run the World (Girls)'* (Columbia, 2011). All items were discussed by the group with a focus on participants' perceptions of successful young womanhood portrayed in each clip. The two additional focus groups focussed entirely on media, in light of the two

shortened focus groups that excluded the media section and because of the limited information provided from the photo-narrative books. The clips viewed in these additional groups included the Nike television advertisement '*voices*' (Nike, Inc., 2012), the television show *The New Zealand X-Factor* (2013) featuring the contestant Jackie Thomas, and the television series *Glee* (Fox, 2009) (See Appendix J for a description of each clip).

Following the focus groups, each participant was provided with a disposable camera and was given printed guidelines to help explain the photo-narrative book process (see Appendix I). Participants were asked to photograph media that they considered representative of successful young womanhood and to write in a photo-narrative book how they thought each photograph related to successful womanhood. The first entry into the photo-narrative book focused on media representations of young women that could be found within each participant's bedroom (e.g. a poster, a magazine, a photograph). For subsequent entries participants were asked to make daily entries surrounding relevant media that was encountered during everyday activities. Participants were instructed to compile the photo-narrative book over a one-week period and then return it, along with the disposable camera, to their respective school office. However, many participants failed to return their book and camera on time and frequent trips to each school were required by the researcher to ensure the return from each participant.

Analytical Process

Thematic Analysis/Decomposition

Thematic analysis is the foundation for qualitative research and is highly compatible with the poststructuralist discourse analytic framework of this study because of its flexibility as a technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis organises and comprehends in detail the collected data and is used for interpretation in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although frequently used, there is disagreement on what it is specifically and how it is done. The current analysis was done following Braun and Clarke's (2006) coherent approach to thematic analysis. Researcher familiarisation with the focus group data began as the seven focus group audio-recordings were transcribed, informing the first stages of analysis. As mentioned

above, there was a lack of data obtained through the photo-narrative book process. Therefore, thematic analyses were based on the focus group data. Any relevant photo-narrative book material was later integrated during more detailed analyses. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend beginning the writing process early. So alongside focus group transcription, notes were made on the emerging talk. The familiarisation process continued as each transcript was carefully read in full. No analysis was made during the first reading, allowing the researcher to experience the data as a *reader*. However, this reading was done *actively*, searching for patterns in the talk and becoming aware of what the talk was *doing*.

Once familiar with the data obtained, coding the data and identifying the themes utilised thematic decomposition, a style of thematic discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that identifies patterns (coherent themes or stories) across all of the collected data (Stenner, 1993). Thematic decomposition works within the feminist poststructuralist assumption that language is not a mirror representation of the world, but is constitutive of meaning (Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2002). In conducting the thematic decomposition, each line of transcript was coded into meaningful and manageable chunks. This approach was driven by the data, meaning that the girls' talk was examined without a pre-fixed idea of what I was looking for (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Instead, the data dictated the coding of successful femininity. These initial codes were gradually reconstituted and refined as the themes of the talk were established. This process was one of close reading and re-reading with reference to relevant literature (see Mooney-Somers & Ussher, 2002). Similar themes were grouped together and patterns of consistency and variability were noted (Stenner, 1993). Initially the emerging themes were too broad and unfocussed, including 'meanings of success', 'pathways to success', 'losing success', 'unsuccessfulness', 'future success' and 'motherhood and success'. The coding process continued until the more cohesive themes of 'Success as Individual Qualities', 'Spheres of Success' and 'Having it All' evolved. Within each theme a number of sub-themes were also developed. This phase of the analysis can be seen as the *description* of the data set. To delve deeper than this, discourse analysis was then used to *interpret* the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis works especially well with feminist poststructuralism because it is an approach that interacts with theories of language (Gavey, 1989). There

are no formulae in conducting discourse analysis (Gavey, 1989). However, the current study followed the guidelines set out by Willig (2001) for the reading and analysis of the main themes identified during the thematic decomposition. To begin the analysis all potentially relevant extracts were collated and examined, including direct, indirect and implicit examples of each theme. This collection of potential extracts was then read and re-read and the final texts were selected upon their ability to illustrate the themes and sub themes.

Mobilising the theoretical framework of discourse analysis outlined earlier in this chapter, the analysis of extracts paid close attention to what discourses of feminine success were available to the girls (e.g. girl power discourse), how these were used to construct successful femininity and what functions this served (Willig, 2001). Analysis examined the consistencies as well as contradictions of the girls' discursive constructions, both within each participant's talk and between their talk. In line with Foucauldian discourse analysis, examinations focused on the subject positions made available through discourse and the way that these were taken up or resisted by the girls as well as the implications of these positions upon subjectivity (Willig, 2001). This discourse analysis was conducted with reference to previous research, both qualitative and quantitative. Discussions also drew from the cultural climate within which the participants were talking. Overall, the analyses sought to colour understandings of the discursive worlds of the pre-adolescent girls and examine the influence of this upon their conceptions of successful femininity.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity on the part of the researcher is an essential element of the theoretical position of both poststructuralism (Burr, 2003) and discourse analysis (Gill, 1995). It acknowledges the influence that the researcher has throughout the research process from the formation of research aims to the collection of data, to the interpretation of that data (Willig, 2001). It requires the researcher make clear the position from which they are understanding participants' language (Gill, 1995). As the facilitator of this research I endeavoured to encourage maximum participation from the pre-teen girls involved so that the majority of talk was in their own 'voice' however I did direct certain discussions through questioning and through prompts for elaboration on specific points. This direction, as influenced by my personal interest in the area of successful femininity, requires unpacking.

I remember in vivid detail my life growing up as a working class girl with disjointed educational participation. Complications in my younger life meant that excelling within education was never on my 'to do list'. For this reason I was moved from school to school, attending the majority of those available in my hometown, and for two years of my youth I did not attend school at all. I felt the weight of my own perceived 'Otherness' to the girls around me, with happy families, money to dress the way I imagined girls 'should' dress, and an ease with teachers and other children that lead them to be liked and to do well educationally. My school attendance lessened and the material circumstance of my family became more obvious as the girls around me focused more upon the 'things' we had or did not have. I observed the gap between myself and these successful girls widen. At home I felt the oppression of a traditional patriarchal system and mulled over the parts of my life that were inherent in my social and familial positioning as working class, as failing educationally and as a daughter with an older, dominant, brother. I could not envisage my life panning out in the same way as the lives of the other girls around me and I wanted to understand exactly why. I frequently thought about the differences between my life, myself, and the girls who seemed destined for successful, happy and conventional lives. I was frustrated and felt that I was positioned as 'Other' to successful femininity in ways that were out of my control.

This careful consideration of success and oppression was certainly present as I re-entered a school environment to hold focus groups. I was potentially influenced in the way I spoke with school aged girls, perhaps transferring some of my anxieties about success and succeeding during our interactions. It may also have coloured the way I later interpreted the girls' talk. Conversely my experience as an outsider to success may have given me insight and compassion into some of the issues that may be facing participants as they construct successful femininity.

CHAPTER THREE

SUCCESS AS INDIVIDUAL QUALITIES

Introduction

Contemporary discourses valorise feminine success and girls and young women have become a mythologised vessel of overarching success (Baker, 2010b; McRobbie, 2000, 2007). While previous examinations of successful femininity have focussed on girls' educational success (Allan & Renold, 2006; Baker, 2010b; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Ringrose, 2007), career aspirations (Baker, 2010b; Sharpe, 2001) or imagined futures (Bulbeck, 2005; Sharpe, 2001) the current chapter attempts to draw out who this successful subject is. Participants' discussions about successful femininity mobilised dominant discourses to construct the individual qualities constituting the successful female subject. This talk drew on three main discourses; girl power, traditional femininity and postfeminist/neoliberal discourse. This chapter will first present analyses of girl power talk used to construct successful femininity as superior to masculine success, sassy, energetic and empowered (Aapola et al., 2005). The way this celebratory discourse masked and stifled accounts of observable inequality will be explored. Analyses will then examine constructions of success through enduring traditional discourses of femininity that countered accounts of empowerment and which functioned to constrain and regulate the girls. The final focus of this chapter will elucidate the way successful femininity was constructed through neoliberal and postfeminist discourses as individual striving. This successful female subject is constructed to do it for herself through hard work, extreme perseverance, high ambition and overcoming any adversity that should get in the way.

Girl Power Discourse: "Women are actually the boss of men" (Mackenzie)

When discussing the individual qualities of successful femininity, many girls drew on girl power discourse to explain the deservedness of success for girls and women. Girl power discourse tells a story about the uninhibited success of girls and women, where there is nothing boys can do that girls can't do better (Pomerantz et al., 2013). This discourse was one of the main resources that the girls drew on, and was relied upon heavily within discussions of the qualities of successful femininity. Below, several participants in the Pacific Island focus group discuss a music video they had just

watched by Beyoncé: '*Run the World (Girls)*' (Columbia, 2011). This song is an ode to female empowerment, indicating women are now in control of men and the world (Pomerantz et al., 2013). Throughout their focus group these girls often expressed the sassy independence of girl power, being unafraid to assert themselves within discussions by interrupting and overpowering each other. However they were also very family minded and discussed strong ties to their immediate and extended family and this can be seen in the extract below.

> Sophie: OK so anyway, in this video Beyoncé is saying like girls can run the world and can do whatever they want and… do you believe that?
>
> Amelia/Alisi/Juliet/Talia: Yeah
>
> Imogen: Girls definitely have the power [Juliet: yeah] they're really strong
>
> Amelia: They're stronger than man
>
> Alisi: They back up, they can like support your family and like they stand up for your family and stuff
>
> Juliet: Yeah
>
> Talia: But guys can't like, guys are very bossy, guys can't reproduce
>
> Amelia: Yeah cause they can just walk away from their family
>
> Sophie: So you're saying part of the woman's power is because they can have children?
>
> Talia: Yeah because the guys can't reproduce so like… [Imogen: guys can't] pretty much without girls there would be no people
>
> Alisi: Yeah guys are like bossy cause like even though if they have a family, even though they're the big man in the family it doesn't mean like
>
> Imogen: That they can boss people around
>
> Alisi: Yeah it doesn't mean they can do whatever they want
>
> Sophie: Yeah so can girls do whatever they want?
>
> Alisi/Imogen/Juliet/Amelia: …Yeah
>
> Talia: Um…no not really
>
> Juliet: Oh no actually no, no, no
>
> Talia: If someone like kills someone…
>
> Sophie: Yeah ok, ok so like well do whatever they want in that can they <u>be</u> whatever they want and can they run the world?
>
> <u>All girls</u>: Yes/yeah
>
> Imogen: All together they can

Within this extract Alisi, Imogen, Juliet and Talia position girls within girl power discourse by aligning them with strength and power, attributes central to the girl power narrative of female empowerment (Zaslow, 2009). Imogen's assertion that '*girls*

definitely have the power' provides strong support to Beyoncé's grandiose lyrics claiming girls 'run the world' and can do whatever they want. This song was used across focus groups when participants were utilising girl power discourse, even in the absence of prompting by viewing the music video. For example, while constructing feminine (girl) power one focus group spontaneously broke out singing together '*We run the world: Girls, who run this world: Girls'*. Amelia takes the strength of girls further by claiming them to be '*stronger than man'*, a typical feature of girl power discourse which loudly broadcasts the dominance of girls and young women over men (Pomerantz et al., 2013). Similarly, in a separate focus group Mackenzie declared that women's success means '*being the boss of men'*. Constructions of male dominance are congruent with the girl power ideals expressed within Beyoncé's song where girls and women are seen to independently outsmart and outshine men (Pomerantz et al., 2013).

Alisi and Talia take the constructed power of girls outlined above and embody this within the family ('*they [girls] can like support your family and like they stand up for your family'*) and within reproduction (*'guys can't reproduce'…'without girls there would be no people').* Zaslow (2009) also found that the girls in her study consistently focussed on motherhood when discussing strength and power in women. The connection between power and motherhood will be explored in the next chapter, however what is interesting here is that when utilising girl power discourse to discuss success in girls and young women it is entangled with a traditional view of femininity, one which highlights a woman's role as mother. Amelia's positioning of men as able to *'just walk away from their family'* perhaps constructs women as more tightly bound to the family, more responsible for, and committed to, the children and therefore less able to leave their domestic role as men may do. Alisi then contends that men are '*the big man in the family',* which positions men as the ultimate power within the family. Imogen and Alisi then agree that despite being the 'big man', men should not boss people around or do whatever they like, demonstrating a recognition of, and resistance to, the patriarchal notions of men's authoritative power and complete freedom. This highlights the instability inherent within postfeminist girl power discourse where the glorified veneer of female freedom maps poorly onto the lives of girls and women who frequently experience inequality (McRobbie, 2008). Despite this narrative of resistance, Talia then reinvests in girl power discourse by setting the limit of girls' empowered, unbounded freedom to be set only at murder.

That discussions of inequality can occur amidst discussions heralding the power and strength of women provides insight into the instability of girl power discourse that is characterised by inconsistency between the claims of equality and the reality of women's lives (Pomerantz et al., 2013). This instability is even more evident in the extract below with the discussions that occur after Sierra spontaneously pronounces her focus group to be the researchers' *'girl power group!'* This group of Māori girls were also confident and assertive however, unlike most of the other focus groups, they undertook several discussions that astutely address some elements of inequality for women.

Sophie: Yeah what do you think about girl power? The idea of girl power

Gemma: It's good

Huia: It's really good because men used to like um or like guys…disadvantaged, like what's the word [Gemma: Get everything] um…under, under [Sierra: Disclude us] underestimate us because they think that we're too weak and we're not strong enough

Ashlee: And then they think that all we're good at is like cooking and then… [Sierra: Cleaning] and house care

Huia: Yeah but really a girl could like just punch a guy in the face

Ashlee: Last year these boys at their high school they're like um "oh girls just don't even need to go to school cause all they're gonna do in the end is cook"

Sierra: "Cook and clean after other people"

Ashlee: "Stay at home"

Sophie: What did you think about that?

Ashlee: And we was like "no, it's not very nice because we're going to be successful people one day"

Sierra: Like if people like me get like a real good job then that's like proving them wrong

Keira: Wrong

Gemma and Huia agree that girl power is *'really good'*. Huia constructs the existence of girl power to have eradicated the disadvantage that '*used to'* be put upon women by men. It is interesting that Huia, Gemma and Sierra struggle together to find a word to express the disadvantage experienced by girls prior to girl power, even landing on a word that does not exist: '*disclude'* (Sierra). Similarly Pomerantz et al. (2013) found teenage girls did not have the language to draw on when talking about inequality because this ran contradictory to postfeminist narratives of equality and empowerment. However, when Huia finds the word that she was looking for ('*underestimate'*), these girls were able to name current day inequality where women are perceived to be *'too*

weak' and *'not strong enough'*. In common with this, Zaslow (2009) found many girls in her research worked hard to distance themselves from weakness, a finding that has been mirrored by several studies with pre-teen and teenage populations of girls (Lowe, 2003; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Willis, 2009).

Discussions then turned from women being underestimated in their strength to a narrative of inequality within the domestic realm: '*they think that all we're good at is like cooking' (*Ashlee*) 'cleaning'* (Sierra), *'and house care'* (Ashlee). These girls resist the construction of women being tied to domestic work. With her statement '*but really a girl could like just punch a guy in the face'* Huia also resists such traditional femininity discourse, rather positioning herself within the 'don't-mess-with-me' spirit of girl power discourse (Gonick, 2006, p. 11), utilising traditionally masculine physical aggression to demonstrate how women can break out of the mould of traditional femininity. Ashlee and Sierra construct together an example of how some high school boys positioned them within the discourse of domesticity by claiming they need not gain an education with a life as housewife as their ultimate calling. In a similar vein, Renold (2002) found that boys' harassment of girls was commonplace within primary school. This invoked (hetero)sexist discourses and was used by the boys to denigrate the girls and to reinstate their dominance over them. Ashlee resists the positioning of herself as bound to domesticity and constructs her own and Sierra's subjectivities as potentially successful women. Through her claim that getting a '*real good job'* would prove these boys wrong, Sierra constructs women's worth outside the domestic sphere as something that is not assumed but must be proven through success in other areas, here in the world of work. Many studies have found that women are overwhelmingly responsible for domestic work (Baker, 2008; Petrassi, 2012; Zaslow, 2009). Therefore the construction of men as viewing women to be in charge of home duties may reflect the observable reality for Sierra, Huia and Ashlee. The construction of domesticity as the antithesis of success, as well as Sierra's construction of employment as a pathway to proving successfulness, conform to the new postfeminist sexual contract. This contract calls girls and young women to postpone domesticity to succeed within education and employment and through participation within these spheres they are enabled to become subjects of capacity (McRobbie, 2007).

Although Ashlee, Sierra, Keira and Huia are critical of, and reject, positioning themselves and other girls/young women within the constraining traditional discourses of feminine domesticity, elsewhere within the focus groups there was compliance with

this positioning. Rosie, for example, offers a counter discourse as she provides a glorifying account of domestic duties by stating men are '*like the real fit ones but like when the women stay home they do a lot of housework which also is strengthening*'. Petrassi (2012) found such compliance with the unequal division of domestic labour as participants recognised the inequality however asserted that the situation was fair. Moments after making this comment, Rosie changed her stance declaring that actually there is no inequality in the home.

Peppered amongst talk on empowerment within girl power discourse was an assumption that inequality was no longer an issue for these girls, that it was a relic that had be eradicated by girl power and powerful women. The following narrative occurred after watching a Nike advertisement '*Voices*' (Nike, Inc., 2012) which depicts successful sports women explaining prejudice from men that they had overcome in order to succeed. This discussion between Pākehā participants occurred immediately following Rosie's claim that women stay in the home cleaning but gain strength from this, demonstrating the girls being drawn back into a postfeminist narrative.

Sophie: You know how these women, they were a bit older and stuff and talking about getting spat on and pushed by men do you think it's different now?

Zoe: Yip, I think

Holly: It's different in this country but some countries it isn't. Like you see, like in India

Rosie: This country everybody's fair

Chloe: But back then people used to be more faithful to others and they, like my grandma said when she went to school they would have, everybody would get a locker each and they wouldn't have to put locks on them because nobody would steal each other's stuff

Zoe: Yeah but then like right back in the day girls couldn't even get jobs

Rosie: Because it was the men that went out to do stuff and the women that stayed home.

Huia: And then Kate Sheppard saved us all

Sophie: So do you think it's different now than it was for these older women? Like if you guys wanted to do your sports do you think you would have issues?

Zoe: Well girls and boys, they give women more respect

Holly constructs the situation for women within New Zealand as being '*different*' than it was for the women in the advertisement who experienced prejudice from men because they were trying to pursue sporting careers. Holly contrasts the

equality that exists in New Zealand with other less fortunate countries '*like in India*', a positioning that is reinforced by Rosie's claim that in '*this country everybody's fair*'. Griffin (2004) argues that representations of the progression available to women in "modern" (Western) cultures are frequently framed in Anglocentric terms by placing this in direct opposition to the restrictive anti-feminist conditions for women in "traditional" (Third World) cultures. This representation, of inequality being a problem of 'other' countries, has been found with girls in Canada (Pomerantz et al., 2013), Britain and America (Jowett, 2004). Zoe also separated femininity from inequality by constructing contemporary women to be in a better position than those '*right back in the day*' who '*couldn't even get jobs*'. The comparison between the relative freedoms of women 'these days' compared to past generations was also a common response found by Jowett (2004) and Baker (2008) when asking women about the idea of equality. Such claims position women within postfeminist discourse by constructing feminism as redundant within a world that is already equal and where the onus is on women to evade any form of victimhood and to take personal responsibility for their own success (Baker, 2008; Jowett, 2004; Pomerantz et al., 2013). This narrative celebrating the past-ness of inequality assumes the patriarchal past to have evaporated. However, as the next section of this chapter will demonstrate, there is still adherence to discourses of conventional femininity that run counter to, and jeopardise the performance of an empowered female subjectivity.

Traditional Femininity Discourse: "Respect everybody in the community, be likable" (Talia)

Alongside the conversational work utilising girl power discourse, with its celebratory postfeminist rhetoric of the successful, individual qualities of girls and women, the girls also engaged a traditional femininity discourse that requires female subjects to mute success and deny the empowered postfeminist qualities outlined above. An example of this comes from the girls constructing what has been described as the 'norm of niceness' (Skeggs, 1997, p. 124). The extract below is located in a discussion amongst several girls in a Pākehā group about the ties of love, attention and time that successful girls and women have to other people, especially those within their close family. This conversation then moved on to how girls and women should 'be' towards others.

Zoe: I was going to say that to be successful you have to be nice and general to everybody, cause if you're like mean to some people, nice to some people then you're gonna get judged for it and then people will like make up like what you really are, they gonna come up with another personality for you, assume things. It's just like you've got to be a nice person in general

Holly: Polite

Zoe: You don't have to be nice to everyone, just in general

Rosie: Like if there's someone that you work with and you really can't stand them, you don't have to be friends with them and be nice but just don't tell them that you're not the best of friends

Zoe: Mum always says to me to always be nice

Holly: Your friends and family are on this level and then you have to be begrudgingly polite, polite to people you kind of know and then you're just gonna have to ignore the people you really really hate unless it's absolutely impossible not to talk to them

Sophie: So say you're a successful woman and you come across someone that you know really annoys you what kind of, what ways can you behave that you girls feel would be consistent with your success?

Marama: Just like be nice even if you don't like them, not disrespecting them but just not really trying to get involved

Rosie: Yeah just try not to get involved with anything

Zoe: It's just if you're nice to everybody they're all gonna say "oh this person's really nice" and then you know they'll like you [laughs nervously]

Zoe constructs a requirement of successful femininity to be '*nice and general to everybody'*. Niceness falls within a 'discourse of conventional femininity' (Reay, 2001, p. 158) which Zoe draws on in the obligation for successful femininity to take up the stereotypically gendered label 'nice' (Katila & Meriläinen, 2002). Like Zoe and Marama here, girls in other studies (e.g. Allan & Renold, 2006; Hey, 1997; Katila & Meriläinen, 2002) have similarly emphasised niceness, linking it to gaining admiration from others, cementing friendships and being the 'ideal' girl. Zoe further constructs the negative repercussions of an inconsistent performance of niceness whereby girls who intersperse this performance with meanness will be '*judged for it'* and others will '*assume things'* about their personality. Zoe constructs a nice/mean binary where any behaviour deviating from nice is positioned as mean, and is punished through the judgement of others. This works within the new pervasive 'mean girl' discourse, which pathologises mean behaviour in girls and women as volatile and untrustworthy (Ringrose, 2006). Conversely, niceness as an important feminine quality is underlined by Zoe's comment that her mother '*always says to me to always be nice'*, highlighting the home as an arena for the reinforcement and regulation of normative discourses of femininity.

On the other hand, Zoe qualifies the constant state of nice by adding that '*you don't have to be nice to everyone'.* However, her attempt to delineate the boundaries of niceness merely repositions successful girls as '*just'* nice '*in general'.* Rosie also constructs the overarching requirements of the nice girl subjectivity by stating that you don't have to be friends with everyone but if there is someone '*you really can't stand'* you must maintain a façade of niceness by not letting on that you are '*not the best of friends'.* This constructs niceness as a mask, an outward performance of normative femininity that must be maintained even when confronted by someone who invokes potent negative feelings. By upholding the façade of niceness and consequently stifling the expression of any emotions incongruent with this façade Rosie constitutes successful women to keep their strong feelings to themselves. Similarly, Holly constructs a debt of niceness owed to family and friends, even if this performance is done '*begrudgingly'* and when encountering '*people you really, really hate,'* the successful girl is '*just going to have to ignore'* them.

Diluting strong emotions mobilises normative discourses of femininity that construct women as passive (Day, Gough, & McFadden, 2003; Skeggs, 1997), avoiding the action involved in addressing those who invoke such feelings as '*hate'* in order to maintain a subjectivity of niceness. When faced with someone disliked, Marama and Rosie suggest successful girls should '*just be nice'* and *'just try not to get involved with anything'.* A similar response was reported by Reay (2001) who noted that within one primary school the 'nice girls' did not challenge bullying directed at themselves but instead took lengthy pathways through their classroom to avoid any space the bullies occupied. Compelled to be nice within the regime of good girl femininity, niceness may be constructed through such accounts as an onerous burden that serves to limit the freedom of girls, silencing emotion and circumscribing the use of space when encountering someone disliked.

Frequently, the girls contrasted the successfulness of niceness with the unsuccessfulness of boasting and aggression. Talia, for example, constructed Beyoncé as successful because of her modesty: '*she's not boasting about it, she has respect'.* Girls regularly positioned Beyoncé within traditional discourses of femininity as humble and modest and many girls described her likeability as a direct result of this. In contrast to this, the sassy outspoken character Roz Washington of the television series *Glee* (Fox, 2009), presented to participants as a media clip, was met with unanimous dislike. Within the media clip Roz, a teacher, talks to several other teachers about how she has

now secured her dream job, won an Olympic medal and is in talks with Oprah Winfrey about creating her own franchise. She also makes fun of the other teachers for being afraid when gunshots went off earlier and positions herself as '*a child of the ghetto*' who is used to such sounds. The girls in this extract were participating in one of the two additional media focus groups made up of a range of ethnicities.

> Sophie: Ok what do you think of her?
>
> Huia: She's very aggressive
>
> Holly: I reckon that
>
> Chloe: The blonde one [Roz] is like botz
>
> Sophie: What does that mean?
>
> Chloe: Think you're all that
>
> Alisi: Think like you're right but you're not
>
> Chloe: Yeah, and think that they're better than the rest and think that they're cool
>
> Alisi: And think that you're all those things, show off
>
> Sophie: Do you think she's a successful woman?
>
> Olivia/Rosie/Alisi/Chloe: No
>
> Holly: I think that she is cause she was from the ghetto which, it must be pretty hard for her to move up like that
>
> Sophie: Mhmm, so do you think that makes her successful?
>
> Zoe/Holly: Yip
>
> Zoe: She's in touch with Oprah

Chloe constructs Roz's subjectivity to be '*botz*' which represents a bragging persona of someone who is a '*show off*' (Alisi). Boasting frequently came up in discussions as an unsuccessful quality for women to possess. It is interesting that despite the strong thread of postfeminist girl power talk throughout the focus groups, which positioned girls and women as '*powerful*' (Olivia) and '*awesome*' (Ruby), any instance of a woman speaking of herself in such a celebratory way was seen as unsuccessful. This concurs with Allen and Renold's (2006) argument that bragging goes against the conventional discourse of 'lack,' which requires girls to minimise, downplay and deny their successes to avoid threatening their femininity through self-promotion. Because she advertises her successes, Roz is positioned by these girls to be outside of this discourse of 'lack' and is consequently constructed to be unsuccessful.

On the other hand, Holly and Zoe counter a positioning of Roz as unsuccessful by constructing her individual qualities of hard work and reaching goals as successful

within neoliberal discourse: '*it must be pretty hard for her to move up like that'* (Holly), '*she's in touch with Oprah'* (Zoe). Roz's subjectivity embodies the autonomous neoliberal woman of postfeminism who came from nothing and worked her way to great heights of success (Gill, 2008). However, for the other girls speaking within this extract her audacity seems to indicate that she is doing femininity *wrong*.

> Huia: Well she's like really aggressive, I mean she could be successful in like her own way, she might think that she's successful but then like other people might have a different perspective for her cause she's real aggressive
>
> Sophie: What do you think about aggressive women?
>
> Huia: If they're like a sporty woman, maybe like if she's sporty then she might be aggressive, like if she's a body builder or something
>
> Sophie: Oh ok, so there's like different kinds of aggression?
>
> Huia: Yup…
>
> Sophie: Are some of them good and some bad?
>
> Huia: It depends what type of like, if it's like real, really aggressive like
>
> Zoe: She's [Roz] bossy. She looks bossy
>
> Holly: She looks like a control freak

Huia quickly contradicts the validity of Roz's performance of femininity by asserting '*well she's like really aggressive'.* However by stating that '*she [Roz] could be successful in like her own way'* Huia is possibly acknowledging that there are elements of Roz that are successful but she then adds '*she might think that she's successful but then like other people might have a different perspective for her'* reiterating that Roz's aggression may taint how other people judge her success. Huia's contradictory construction of Roz's aggression may demonstrate her being torn between Roz's success within neoliberal discourses as hardworking and upwardly mobile and traditional 'proper', 'nice' femininity that is violated by female expression of anger and aggression (Brown, 1999; Ringrose, 2006; Walkerdine, 1990). The girls talked more comfortably and with more agreement when discussing women who embody the hard work and success of girl power discourse but also fit well within traditional discourses of modesty and passivity, for example Beyoncé. However the notion that aggression may be read as successful under certain conditions underlines Huia's construction of aggression as acceptable in women if it is within the traditionally male domain of sports '*like if she's a body builder or something'.* Conversely, she positions Roz within the discourse of 'mean girls' which naturalises direct aggression for boys and men yet

pathologises indirect aggression as repressed and feminine (Ringrose, 2006). In other words Roz's (feminine) aggression is constructed as deviant within the popular discourse of 'mean girls,' which seeks to problematise the aggressive behaviour of the feminine subject (Ringrose, 2006).

Holly and Zoe were willing to celebrate the successes that Roz had made out of being raised in the ghetto however, Huia constructing Roz's behaviour as aggressive and unsuccessful appeared to prompt Zoe and Holly to contradict their earlier admiration for her by now constructing her as '*bossy, She looks bossy*' (Zoe), and '*like a control freak*' (Holly). Assertiveness in women is often interpreted as bossy or confrontational (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004) as it challenges the 'nice' image of women as focussed on pleasing others (Aapola et al., 2005) whereas the same expression in men is seen as assertive or competitive (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004). To be bossy is the antithesis of niceness (Hey, 1997) and further positions Roz as a violator of traditional feminine norms. As well as constructing requirements for successful femininity within traditional feminine discourse, the girls also explored success through the use of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of individualised striving.

Postfeminist and Neoliberal Discourse: Success as Individual Striving

Within discussions of the individual qualities of successful femininity the girls relied heavily on the individualised language of postfeminism and neoliberalism. This section explores the ways that these discourses burden girls and young women with a powerful responsibility to ensure their own successful future.

Succeed Unassisted: "You get more successful if you do something and you achieve it yourself" (Rosie)

Underpinning the hard work inherent within the individualised discourse of neoliberalism, any influence upon successfulness that the girls saw to be outside of personal striving was constructed to undermine successful femininity. This was epitomised by the Pacific Island focus group as the girls considered a young woman whose success in the music industry had been gained with assistance from her parents' connections and money.

Imogen: They'll be successful because they'll get hand me downs

46

Juliet: And they haven't like really like worked for it, they just got it given to them

Sophie: And does that take away from their success?

Juliet: Yeah, kind of I think

Imogen: Well it's not that their successful but like their parents are, yeah. Cause like I think it's not bad using their parents money if they've…worked hard for it [women worked hard for their success]

Sophie: So is it important to being successful to work for what you get?

All girls: Yeah/yip

Alisi: I feel like it's like a really big thing

Imogen: Yeah in order to be successful you have to work for it yourself, cause you don't rely on others to do all the work for you [Amelia: Yeah] because then you won't get any credi…like you'll probably get credit but like…

Juliet: Bike then people might get angry at you [Imogen: Yeah] to be like "oh she didn't even work for anything"

Juliet, Imogen, Alisi and Amelia construct together a lack of authenticity of the success that is achieved with assistance. In this way the girls draw firmly on the ethic of individualism where success must be earned through individual effort, self-reliance and the invention of individual structures to aid success (Jacques & Radtke, 2012; McRobbie, 2004b, 2007). Imogen elaborates on this construction adding that '*it's not bad using their parents' money if they've…worked hard for it'.* However without the additional hard work Imogen constitutes success as non-transferable and any achievement made by the woman within this narrative remains owned by her parents ('*it's not that [she's] successful but like [her] parents are').* This constructs a necessity to make visible the labour involved in successfulness to demonstrate self-reliance. By contrast, in a separate focus group, when discussing a pop star understood to have achieved success '*because of the people her parents know and because of the people she knows'* (Rosie), girls immediately agreed with Olivia that she had '*cheated her way to getting fame'.* The girls constructed this success as improper and undeserving because of the lack of observable hard work. Equally, in an examination of reality television stars Skeggs, Wood, and Thumim (2007) explain that being understood as a 'subject of value' for celebrities requires evidence that they have worked on their own development. Similar to judgements made of reality television stars, the girls in this extract describe the hard work involved in succeeding as being monitored by others. Success without visible labour is constructed to be punished by onlookers through anger, lack of credit and criticism of undeserved-ness ('*"oh she didn't even work for anything"',* Juliet). In fact, participants in another focus group demonstrated this as they

constructed an unsuccessful woman to be *'just a lazy slob'* (Lola) because *'if you're unsuccessful you haven't tried hard enough'* (Poppy).

Within this narrative the girls are unforgiving when success is reached without observable effort, placing requirements of hard work upon the validity of successful femininity. The next section of analysis finds participants elaborating on the perseverance involved in reaching success in the context of pursuing life goals.

Never give up: "If life brings you down, stuff life and stand right back up again" *(Aria)*

Across groups there was a focus on being goal directed and on planning how to achieve goals. This resonates with the postfeminist imperative for successful young women to have a well-planned life and to self-monitor and self-regulate along those personal plans (McRobbie, 2007). Conversely, postfeminist discourse aligns unsuccessfulness with a failure to construct a plan for meeting life goals (Harris, 2004). In the following extract several Māori girls discus how far they believe girls should push themselves in order to reach their goals and attain success. It is notable that the five girls involved in the conversation are from diverse social class backgrounds yet utilise the same postfeminist neoliberal rhetoric to describe perseverance, goal directedness and successful femininity. This underlines the power of the discourse to traverse social background (Harris, 2004).

Sophie: Is that important? To like try something and reach your goal?

Ashlee: To like give it a go and like not back down

Gemma: Like, is it stick-ability or something? Like if you have a goal, stick to the goal

Sierra: Don't give up

Sophie: What happens if you do give up?

Huia: Ruin your life

Sierra: Then you don't achieve your goals and you won't succeed

Ashlee: And you won't be successful

Sophie: You're not successful if you give up on something?

Gemma/Ashlee/Sierra: Yeah

Ashlee: You should just try and things even if you know you're not gonna win. Like so if you're in a race and like

Sierra: You're one of the slowest…

Ashlee: And you're like coming last and then like you're just like walking and like you give up but then I think you should just go

Sierra: Go hard! Give it all you've got!

Ashlee, Gemma, Sierra and Huia work together seamlessly to construct the determination involved in reaching your goals; '*if you have a goal, stick to the goal*' (Gemma). Here these four girls position successful femininity within the hardworking, self-driven discourse of the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004). This discourse imbues young women with boundless potential to achieve anything they set their minds to (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011), a sentiment which is evident as the girls construct success as contingent on perseverance, or '*stick-ability*' (Gemma). Constructions of the 'can-do' girl are placed in stark contrast to those of the 'at-risk' girl, who is seen to fall short of reaching her goals as a result of poor choices and laziness (Harris, 2004). This can be seen in Huia's construction that giving up or backing down will '*ruin your life*', which places all the responsibility to succeed on girls themselves; the only variable between success and '*ruin*', or between the 'can-do' and 'at-risk' girl, is either working hard or giving up. This punishes failure as individual weakness with a disregard for any aid or impediment by external sources, further reifying the use of the 'can-do' girl within this extract (Harris, 2004).

Ashlee, Sierra and Keira jointly develop the metaphor of a race to demonstrate the level of perseverance expected in order to be successful. These girls imagine a girl or woman in a race who is '*one of the slowest*' (Sierra), she knows that she will not win, but still she '*should just go*', she should keep trying. This constructs successful femininity to endure despite the constraints of the actual situation, for instance coming last in a race that you cannot win. Success, therefore, is predicated on successfully navigating difficult and non-linear trajectories towards desired goals, which is inherent in the 'can-do' attitude (Harris, 2004). In a similar vein, Baker (2008) found that even participants in extremely oppressive life situations constructed their difficulties in achieving goals as down to their own lack of personal effort. As well as emphasising the holding of goals and the effortful striving towards those goals as vital to achieving success, participants also explored the kind of goals that befit successful femininity.

Girls dream bigger: "Girls are better at everything than the boys" (Alisi)

It is perhaps unsurprising that, amidst the current postfeminist climate that heralds young women as the prototypes of successfulness, responsible for the future prosperity of modern society (McRobbie, 2000), conversation turned to a heightened ambition of

the goals set by girls above boys. Zoe elaborates on this position while discussing the differences between successful masculinity and successful femininity. Zoe is from a lower middle class family and although respectful of what others had to say she was not afraid to go against the grain of conversation. In contrast to this Daisy, an upper middle class girl, was very quiet and did not contribute often. These two conversational styles produced an interesting discussion of feminine ambition.

> Zoe: Some people think that girls dream bigger
>
> Sophie: What do you mean? Who do you think dreams bigger?
>
> Zoe: I dunno just some people will say "oh when I grow up I'd like to be a famous and cure the world" and some people are like "I wanna be a bus driver" [laughs]
>
> Rosie: Hey I wanna be a bus driver!
>
> Zoe: Okay [sarcastically]
>
> [Laughter]
>
> Sophie: What do you think defines a young woman who has big dreams?
>
> Zoe: Well you've got to work for it to get it
>
> Rosie: You can't be like have a normal life and then when you're like 19 or something try and aim for it. You've got to work towards it to get it
>
> Daisy: I think that you don't exactly have to work towards it cause there are the small successes, like they don't always have to be humongous
>
> Indie: You have to try though you can't just luck it
>
> Daisy: I know, like you can try but it doesn't have to be that you reach the top of your career like there are those small successes, like you might like they'd say like for school like you might have gotten an award for small like things, you might have done better than last time and you might have set a goal and you've succeeded your goal and someone else they might have done like way better than you but like that doesn't mean that you're unsuccessful
>
> Rosie: It's like if you're happy with the person they are

Zoe constructs girls to dream 'bigger' than men. Possibly the example given by Zoe of the high status position of being famous and curing the world belongs to a girl or young woman dreaming big while the lower status position of being a bus driver belongs to a man's smaller dream. Here Rosie jokes about wanting to be a bus driver and gets all the girls laughing at the prospect. The fact that this is funny for the group perpetuates the construction that such a position is not seen by these girls to be fit for a young woman. Consistent with this, Zoe's construction of female ambition as higher than male ambition works within the celebratory discourse of successful girls (Ringrose, 2007). As discussed in Chapter One (p. 13) this discourse was born out of reports of the exceptional educational success of girls and the outperformance of boys. Within this

discourse girls and young women are positioned as the victors of educational and workplace success within late modernity to the detriment of the success of boys and men (Baker, 2010b; Ringrose, 2007). Taking on the "high expectations and acute self-responsibility" (Baker, 2010b, p. 3) of the successful girls narrative, Zoe constructs the expected effort involved in achieving life goals: '*well you've got to work for it to get it*'. Rosie, reinforcing the need for hard work, elaborates that working hard towards your goals will not result in success if you leave it too late, for instance 19 years old, but must begin early in life. This accords with the new postfeminist sexual contract described by McRobbie (2007) which requires girls to have a well-planned life from a young age and to work towards the life they want to live (McRobbie, 2004c).

In contrast to the confidence of Zoe and Rosie, Daisy, who had a more subdued presence in the group, resisted the grandiose ambitions of successful girls discourse by claiming women's dreams '*don't always have to be humongous*'. Daisy qualifies her position as still conforming to the requirement of hard work but constructs a different version of success as dependent on achieving personal goals, even if comparatively small. Therefore, Daisy's account of success still works within postfeminist discourse. The postfeminist sensibility, as described by Gill (2007b), creates gendered expectations within neoliberalism where women need to be actively improving and recreating themselves constantly and in a more vigorous way than men (Baker, 2010a). Daisy appears to constitute success as a constant working towards a goal, to have 'done better than last time' and in doing so constructs the "never good enough girl" of postfeminism (Harris, 2004, p. 33). Goals may not be large but the important point for Daisy seems to be that girls and women do in fact have goals and continue to strive to achieve them and to be in competition with oneself as opposed to others. Chipping away at personal goals is connected by Rosie to being 'happy with the person they are'. This illustrates another important component of Gill's (2007b) postfeminist sensibility: female practices are invariably employed to 'please oneself' and are not tied to the approval of others. Here Daisy and Rosie appear to assert that it is not about the success of other women but about each woman's journey toward satisfying her own specific desires.

The three previous analyses construct a femininity that can achieve great heights of success through hard work, perseverance and being ambitiously goal directed. However, as Baker (2010) asserts, the expectation that women can 'be anything' creates a responsibility upon them to 'get over anything' (p. 192-193). The next section takes up notions of women's successfulness as overcoming adversity in their lives.

Overcoming adversity: "My mum she was successful when she was little…because she had to go through a lot" (Charlotte)

Across each focus group there were accounts of successful women who had overcome adverse circumstances to achieve success. Persistent discourses of female success and individualisation recast life obstacles as a project of self-improvement that must be responded to with dutiful self-development (Baker, 2010a; Rose, 1990). The difficult circumstances that the girls described successful women to have faced and conquered included the death of a parent, death of a partner, being a sole caregiver for younger siblings, troubled home life and behavioural problems, young motherhood, single motherhood, drug addiction, domestic abuse, and mental and physical illness. Such women may be understood as entrepreneurs of the self (Baker, 2010), making good out of bad situations (Zaslow, 2009). Zaslow (2009) similarly found that when the girls in her study spoke about strength and power in women they drew on accounts of mothers who had endured life difficulties and emerged victorious. Illustrating the construction of reward for women who endure hardship, Walkerdine's (1990) analysis of comic book characters demonstrated that bravery in the face of adversity was always rewarded (usually with a man).

It is notable that the circumstances identified to be adverse by girls in this study covered a very wide breadth. Such variability may indicate that, for these girls, it is not overcoming a specific obstacle that affiliates a woman with success but merely the act of overcoming. Another interesting element of the talk around overcoming adverse circumstances is that across focus groups the majority of examples came from Māori girls. In particular, the types of circumstances discussed focussed on death in the family and childcare (both of siblings and of ones own children). Baker (2010) found that when recounting their life stories, young women who had experienced the most difficult circumstances made the most effort to recast their adversity as opportunity to enhance the self and as contributing to their ultimate success. It may be that these girls were aware of the obstacles for Māori women within New Zealand society and this contributed to them placing more emphasis on the success that is achieved through overcoming adversity.

One example of such accounts of overcoming adversity comes from Mouse, a Pākehā participant, as she explains her sister as she journeys from a troubled past into a successful young woman.

Mouse: I think my big sisters successful because she went off to university and then she had a big student loan and so she's studying part time this year and she's got a job and she's going to pay off her student loan. And she used to like steal and stuff like that but she's gotten out of the habit so I think she's successful

Sophie: So you think someone can be um say maybe… down a bad path maybe an unsuccessful path and they can pull themselves out of it?

Mouse: Yeah she's only my half-sister so she spent time with us and time with her mum so I think it as a bit hard for her and her and my mum didn't really get along so it was hard for us as well because they were always arguing but then they got better and so I think that she's successful for getting over all that and for trying to pay off her student loan and getting over her habits and that

Sophie: So what do you think it is about your sister that made her be able to be successful?

Mouse: Well I think she's just sort of, because, she just, she wanted to be a doctor so she went to university but she just decided that it wasn't for her and so she wanted to pay off everything so that she could get a proper, so that she could go back to university and be able to pay off her loans and get a good job and like run a business and have a family and all of that. So I think she's sort of got, she just decided that she wanted to be successful so she wouldn't have any bad habits and she would just get on with her life

Mouse's narrative expresses an understanding of how her sister's childhood would have been difficult and constructs her success as resulting from her ability to overcome her *'bad habits'* and her difficult family life. Mouse's account of her sister *'getting over her habits and that'* positions her as such an 'entrepreneurial actor' (Gill, 2008, p. 436) who has taken responsibility for her life and found solutions to get her back on track. This transformation possibly fits in with a 'bad girl turned good' narrative which, as described by Charlton (2007), would include shaking off misbehaviour positioned as masculine and "bad". In this example Mouse's sister turns away from stealing and 'always arguing', to embrace behaviour considered respectably feminine, becoming a "good" daughter and sister and working towards responsible life goals.

Mouse's sister's decision to study part time and *'pay off everything'* is consistent with the neoliberal requirement to become a responsible, self-managing subject (McRobbie, 2007). Mouse also constructs close self-monitoring as she talks about her sister's awareness that becoming a doctor *'wasn't for her'*. Instead of simply quitting university or continuing studying something that did not fulfil her, Mouse holds that her sister is adaptable and made adjustments in her personal plan to include the new life goals of getting (different) further education, being financially independent, having a good job, a family, *'and all of that'*. Here Mouse constructs her sister's decision to shift career plan from doctor to business owner within the discourse of choice, and her

reasons to stop studying medicine are not discussed. In line with this, the "intensively managed subject" of postfeminism (McRobbie, 2007, p. 237) is required to assimilate unplanned difficulties with paths of preference (Baker, 2010).

Rose (1998) posits that, irrespective of any obstacle, women must construct their life portfolio as if they were free to choose its direction. Drawing on this rhetoric of choice, Mouse identifies the turning point in her sister's transformation from troubled past to successful young woman being when she *"just decided that she wanted to be successful".* This resonates with a postfeminist sensibility, central to which is a drive for self-improvement through choice (Gill, 2008). For Mouse, the autonomous choice to change was itself enough to fade adversity into the background. In explaining what allowed her sister to overcome adversity, Mouse does not highlight some special characteristic specific to her sister, but claims it was simply a choice she had made. In this way Mouse may be constructing success as available to any woman with difficult life circumstances, not just her sister, should they choose it. This could be seen to mirror the 'burden' of choice that positions women to be solely responsible for making the 'right' choices to ensure their own future (Walkerdine, 2005).

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the individual qualities of successful femininity. Of note was a frequent reliance on the sassy, empowered rhetoric of girl power discourse (Griffin, 2004). As participants constructed successful femininity within this discourse they took on the assumption that girls and young women are stronger and more powerful than boys and men and can therefore do and be anything that they want (Griffin, 2004; Hains, 2007; Pomerantz et al., 2013). Existing alongside this celebration of girls and women was a contradictory narrative of traditional discourses of femininity. The deeply inscribed normative discourses were evident in the girls depictions of the "norm of niceness" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 124) that demanded girls and women maintain a façade of niceness to everyone around them, including those who invoke strong negative feelings such as hate. The regime of good girl femininity can be seen as an onerous burden that regulated the girls' emotional expression and appeared to limit their freedom for fear of being positioned as 'mean'. Incongruent with niceness, boasting or aggressive behaviour excluded girls and young women from positioning within

successfulness, irrespective of other qualities deemed successful such as individualised upward mobility.

Individualism was highly revered. The girls constructed the qualities of successful femininity as idealised individual striving through postfeminist and neoliberal discourses. Achieving successful femininity was constructed as a process of setting (adequately successful) goals at a young age and pursuing those, unassisted, with hard work and staggering persistence, even in the face of adversity. To give up was to ruin your life and was viewed as an individual failing, while success was afforded to women who endured, persisted and emerged victorious.

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CHAPTER FOUR
SPHERES OF SUCCESS

</div>

Introduction

During initial analysis of the focus group material it became clear that the girls had firm views about the spheres of life that young women needed to excel within in order to be imbued with successfulness. The successful qualities discussed in the previous chapter were combined with constructions of 'doing' successful femininity within three compulsory spheres: education, career and motherhood. Necessary success within these three arenas resonates with the new postfeminist sexual contract that demands educational striving to gain that advantage needed to become an employed, economically contributing subject, in turn leading to the financial stability required to enact the mandatory role of motherhood (McRobbie, 2007). This chapter will examine the ways in which the girls draw on dominant discourses in constructing the performance of successful femininity within these spheres. It will also examine the tensions, contradictions and resistances that arise as they do so. The girls struggled to navigate the inflexible trajectory of the three spheres and these discussions generated the most resistance to neoliberal postfeminist representations of uncomplicated feminine success.

This chapter will examine these spheres of success in the order at which the successful young woman must perform them. Analyses begin with an exploration of the vital role of education in ensuring successfulness. It will then delve into the implications of realising these educational goals versus failure to do so. Attention will then be drawn to employment and the obvious tensions that arise as the girls work within discourses of freedom of choice while at the same time recognising workplace inequality. Analyses progress to focus on mandatory motherhood and the primacy of this sphere of success.

Education: "I reckon she is [successful] cause she's at university!" (Chloe)

The girls unanimously agreed that education is vital to successful femininity and is the first building block upon which all other forms of successfulness were based. Transformations in the visibility of girls and women in the developed world have been felt strongly within the educational sphere (Harris, 2004). Educational achievement is constructed as one of the major determinants of those who reach success and those who

fail (Ringrose, 2007). As discussed in the introduction chapter of this thesis (p. 13), it was the educational success of girls that was central to developing narratives of unbounded feminine success (Harris, 2004). These views are shared by the Pākehā girls in the extract below as they elaborate on the position of education within successful femininity. All of the girls speaking within this extract are Pākehā except for Marama, who is Māori. Marama had missed her scheduled focus group and therefore participated in this one.

> Sophie: What do you need to be successful?
>
> Zoe: You need education, you need to know how to like do stuff like properly, like actually be nice to people and like…know how to read
>
> Marama: You've got to keep trying
>
> Rosie: Well it kind of sounds mean but you can't be like dumb
>
> Marama: Not, no way cause you need to know, like
>
> Zoe: Be able to concentrate
>
> Rosie: If you can't there are some things where it's like you sort of have to be able to read you sort of have to be able to spell and um, if you can't you're not really making an effort to get what you want and if you want to be a singer you can't sing if you don't know the lyrics

Here Zoe clearly constructs education as necessary to be a successful young woman. Across focus groups, many girls discussed how nothing less than degree level education is required for success (e.g. '*as long as you've got it, like a degree',* Imogen) and several girls spoke of a preference for even more education than this (e.g. '*when you're like finished school you get another degree, then moving on to another degree',* Alisi). For these girls higher education was constructed to be a natural and inevitable progression after high school, a finding that mirrored the talk of the young Australian women in Baker's (2010) study. Overwhelmingly it is girls and young women who are constructed to heed the call to, and succeed within, education (Aapola et al., 2005) because "young women are in effect graded and marked according to their ability to gain qualifications" (McRobbie, 2007, p. 727). The celebration of education positions these girls within the successful girls discourse that promotes the unbounded success of girls and women within the educational arena (Baker, 2010b; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007).

A neoliberal discourse commonly underpinned girls' talk about educational success. Marama's statement that '*you've got to keep trying [to gain an education]'* mobilises the neoliberal ethic of success through perseverance and hard work that was

ever present in analyses of the individual qualities of success outlined in Chapter Three (Harris, 2004; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007). Rosie's comments also draw on a successful girls discourse in positioning girls and young women as personally responsible for their own educational success based on their level of individual intelligence ('*you can't be like dumb')* and motivation ('*if you can't [read and spell] you're not really making an effort to get what you want'). Just as success is individualised within successful girls discourse so too is the blame of educational failure placed upon the individual woman (Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007). Aapola et al. (2005) argue that such narratives of individualisation are generated from restrictive funding cuts and reforms to educational systems that eliminate the ability to rely on traditional support structures, a process that is currently present within New Zealand education (Snook & O'Neill, 2010). As Rosie constructs education as a means of getting what you want, she is also mobilising girl power discourse by constructing girls doing it for themselves and going after what they 'really, really want' (Griffin, 2004).

Marama and Rosie's comments are noteworthy in the context of their backgrounds as Māori and working class respectively. Typically it is girls from minority ethnic backgrounds and economically disadvantaged or poverty stricken homes who are constructed in 'at-risk' discourses (Harris, 2004). But Marama and Rosie position themselves within the discourse of the 'can-do' girl as they embrace the hard work and responsibility that is required of the good postfeminist neoliberal girl subject (Harris, 2004).

However the girls not only construct educational success in terms of a curriculum or a degree. Zoe also constructs learning to '*actually be nice'* as one of the benefits of being educated. Within a separate focus group Sierra echoed this idea by constructing an important element of education to be the '*responsibilities that you get taught at home or by a teacher*', such as being respectable and nice. The girls' view of education in this way supports Harris' (2005) claim that schools play a key role in the creation of normative, 'appropriate' femininity, institutionalising the learning of niceness and constructing these lessons to be equally as important as the educational gains such as learning '*how to read'.*

A common sentiment across focus groups emphasised that the future of an educated woman is brighter than if she were uneducated. Below, several girls discuss

how education can enable and constrain a woman's future. This conversation arose when the girls began deciding what kinds of success they would like to have achieved by the time they were 30 years old. These Pacific Island girls spoke together about the expectation that they would be well educated by then. They then discuss how this education will facilitate their success in other areas of their lives.

> Sophie: OK, what happens…so if you get a good education you can get a good
> Several girls: <u>Job</u>
> Alisi: And a good life [Juliet: yeah] and a, oh one more thing and a um handsome husband
> Amelia: Ewww
> Juliet: Then you can get like a beautiful house and a job and everything

From the outset a quality education is constructed as a pathway to employment with several girls immediately emphasising that education would lead to a good '*job*'*,* a connection that was made consistently across focus groups. This is reminiscent of the unstable labour market of late modern society which requires a highly specialised education in order to compete for employment (Aapola et al., 2005; Harris, 2004). Within New Zealand, rates of participation within tertiary education climb every year (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2013), creating what Harris (2004) refers to as 'credential inflation' where "for youth in general, but young women in particular, academic success has become the key to safeguarding the future" (pp. 27-28). In line with this, at a later point in the focus group Imogen constructed the role of education in remaining flexible within the current climate of insecure employment: '*if you have a job and you get fired or you decide to quit it's, it's pretty simple to get another [job] if you have like a certain degree'.* However, as alluded to by Imogen's use of the words '*certain degree',* success for these girls was seen to require the *right kind* of educational choices.

Alisi and Juliet extend the benefits of a good education beyond employment to include a *'handsome husband'* (Alisi), a *'beautiful house'* and *'everything'* (Juliet). This constructs education as more than merely a pathway to employment but to be a pathway to '*a good life'* (Alisi). For Alisi and Juliet the possibilities opened up by education are more wide reaching than were outlined by the girls in the study by Pomerantz and Raby (2011). Similarly, in McRobbie's (2007) writing on the postfeminist sexual contract, the call for young women to excel in education and employment does not touch on extended rewards of '*house', 'husband'* and *'everything'*. Here, Juliet and Alisi rest a

great deal upon securing a good education and the pathway laid out by these girls, moving from job to husband to beautiful house, follows closely the mainstream success trajectory that is put upon young women today as being the normal experience (Harris, 2004). This success trajectory is a framework that outlines a transition from girlhood to womanhood and reflects a very traditional and linear view of the milestones that successful women should achieve, irrespective of individual situation (Harris, 2005). Without education, constructions of a woman's life trajectory are far bleaker.

> Sophie: Um so what happens then if education means that you can have all these great things like a house and a job and a beautiful husband? What happens if you don't get a good education, what do you reckon?
>
> Alisi: I think you'll still get a home, you'll still get a husband but like your life
>
> Amelia: NO if you, no because if you rent a home, you'd have to still pay
>
> Juliet/Imogen/Talia: Yeah
>
> Juliet: You'd have to live on the streets
>
> Imogen: But just because you have a bad education doesn't mean you would have a bad life in the future [Several girls: Yeah] because if you have a bad education there are still a lot of options,
>
> Talia: Just not as much as if you were going to university
>
> Imogen: Yeah if you had a good education like yeah
>
> Sophie: So what kinds of options do you think you have without an education?
>
> Talia: Working at a supermarket
>
> Juliet: Or working at Mac Donald's
>
> [laughter]
>
> Imogen: Well like, if you have a bad education or you like dropped out at a certain age [Amelia/Juliet: Yeah] then you would only have like two
>
> Juliet: Two choices probably
>
> Sophie: Is that Mac Donald's and the supermarket?
>
> Imogen: No it would be to like change or to stay the same.
>
> Juliet: Or you could like have like no money and you might go rob something and then you'll have to go to prison and you might have nothing else to do so you might get into drugs and then you won't be successful

Amelia, Juliet and Talia perceive women without education to have no money for rent and to be forced to '*live on the streets*' (Juliet). Imogen asserts that there are still a lot of options for the uneducated woman and that it does not mean that she would have a bad life however she was on her own in this. Talia was quick to reiterate that her options would be less. The girls variously constructed these restricted options to be

'*working at a supermarket*' (Talia) '*or working at McDonald's*' (Juliet), both working class outcomes that incurred laughter by the girls. Laughing at the possibility of holding such working class employment reinforces such work to be undesirable and unlikely consistent with the postfeminist sexual contract that disparages young women who take up low paying jobs (McRobbie, 2007). Working within the individualisation of this contract, Imogen constructs the choices open to any woman who should find herself without education and in a working class job as being to '*change or to stay the same'*. This positions the uneducated woman within the discourse of 'at-risk' by constructing her to have all of the right choices before her but opting to choose the wrong ones (Harris, 2004). 'At-risk' girls are frequently perceived to engage in delinquency, with academic success being the way to safeguard against this poor citizenship (Harris, 2004). Constructing the uneducated woman to potentially '*go rob something*' and to be so bored that she '*might get into drugs',* Julia further positions her within the discourse of the 'at-risk' girl by associating her poor education with criminality.

Although having '*dropped* out' is deemed to curtail a woman's employment options, Imogen imbues her with the ability to change her situation should she choose to, implicating the woman in production of her own educational shortcomings. Imogen espouses this neoliberal rhetoric of choice as a girl of Pacific Island descent. Notably, Pacific Islanders experience the worst educational outcomes within New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2011), and Imogen attends a school that other students identified as '*budget'* (Huia). Through the powerful neoliberal rhetoric of choice, however, Imogen can imagine young women to make their own 'choice biography' by bearing the responsibility of their life story as if choices were free and unconstrained by structural disadvantage (Gill, 2008), a position that is exemplified in the 'can-do' girl (Aapola et al., 2005; Harris, 2004). Similarly, Safia-Mirza (1992) found that young African Caribbean women in a South London high school held high career aspirations despite poor educational support within their school and the employment and income status of their parents.

As mentioned throughout this section, education was strongly bound to securing successful future employment, and the next section turns to the kinds of constructions made by the girls as they discuss employment.

Employment: "I think my mum's successful because she works for [the government] but sometimes she says it's really hard" (Pania)

Young women are hailed as the newest version of overachieving professionals and are essential to the restructured labour force (Harris, 2004, p. 37). They have been consistently found to place high importance on obtaining a successful career (Allan & Renold, 2006; Harris, 2004; Sharpe, 2001), and the commitment to planning this career is one defining feature of the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004). A successful job has become so ingrained within the discourse of success for women that primary and secondary school girls have been shown to view their chosen profession as central to their sense of self (Francis, 2002). It is therefore unsurprising that across focus groups the girls uniformly identified having a *'big career'* (Chloe) as vital to success for women. Moreover, the girls revered the ability to keep a job, or bounce back after losing one, as a sign of success. Conversely having *'no job'* (Ashlee) or for women to *'lose their jobs all the time'* (Huia) were constructed as elements of unsuccessfulness that appeared especially salient to many of the girls. This emphasis on employment as a pre-requisite for success is translated by some of the girls in the next extract into pressure and expectation to succeed within the workplace. The girls within this group were especially focussed on themselves as future workers. For example, within their discussions Holly suggested that they take turns explaining what they would like to do for a profession when they were older. These girls had closely considered women in the workplace and held a well formulated discussion of the difficulties that may be faced.

Sophie: Do you girls think that there is a lot of pressure on young women to be successful?

Several girls: Yes

Lexie: There's just lots of expectations

Indie: Yeah I don't think there's any pressure, I just think like, not people being like "you should be successful" but people, I don't know I guess people more expect men to be successful sometimes

Holly: Yeah I feel that

Indie: I think women are like, are expected to be successful in like singing and the media and things like that [Holly: Not like business and…] yeah but then IT and politics and stuff like that it's more expected for men to be successful

Sophie: Do you think that that would make it hard for you girls to be successful

Indie: Yeah sometimes

Rosie: I think men have more to work up to…um like women have more to work up to like there are more women out there that are trying to look for like men or something to work with than men are trying to look for women, like more women like want to work, have work as men as

partners whereas it's harder for women to get jobs if the man's like the boss because they're sort of like, they don't want them and they don't…

Indie: Woah, that's a bit… I think sometimes people expect less from women and that they don't

Holly: Listen to them

Sophie: In what ways?

Indie: Well just like, some people will like think that, like say there's two people at work and one of them's a man and one of them's a woman

Olivia: They might pay the man better

Indie: Yeah give the man more attention or more money or more like expect him to do more

Here, several girls construct the pressure that is on women to be successful workers, and Lexie constructs this pressure as comprised of *'lots of expectations'*. These girls may be working within the 'great expectations' of postfeminist discourses, including successful girls (Baker, 2010b), girl power (Gonick, 2006), and the postfeminist sexual contract (McRobbie, 2007), where women are pressured to live up to claims of unparalleled career success (Gonick, 2006). Within the current extract, discussions of the expectation to succeed professionally conform to the high hopes placed on young women through postfeminism, but by highlighting the pressure that these expectations create, these girls resist the effortlessness of female success that is constructed within postfeminist discourse (McRobbie, 2007). Indie resists constructions of employment pressure and instead positions young women to be the subject of lower expectations for career success than men, a position supported by Holly ('*yeah I feel that'*). When asked if such lower expectations would hinder success, the girls in this extract express an acute awareness of workplace inequalities around lower wages (Olivia and Indie), more difficulty finding employment, especially '*if the man's like the boss because ... they don't want them' (*Rosie), and more difficulty getting noticed and listened to within a job (Indie and Holly). These girls clearly position women to have a more difficult employment ladder to climb than men, with more barriers along the way.

Although it was Indie who initiated discussions of lower employment expectations for women she appears to become uncomfortable with constructions of workplace inequality and slows this line of talk ('*whoa, that's a bit…'*). Here Indie may be caught between expressing the actual inequalities that she observes for women within employment and a neoliberal subjectivity that requires a denial of any structural disadvantage. However, as she reworks the positioning of women within employment Indie ultimately reinforces earlier constructions of inequality by restating that men get '*more attention', 'more money'* and people '*expect [them] to do more'*. This narrative

stands in stark contrast to the neoliberal postfeminist discourse of successful girls, which claims that women are surpassing men in employment (Pomerantz et al., 2013). It is also incongruent with the majority of current research that finds girls and young women to gloss over inequality within the workplace and instead align women with the unconstrained ability (Baker, 2008, 2010b; Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Sharpe, 2001) to "be anything [they] want now" (Baker, 2010a, p. 193).

Another way that girls in this extract construct women to be constrained within the workforce is through limited expectations regarding vocation. Indie and Holly identify an expectation for women to enter into gender-typical employment including *'singing'* and *'the media' (*Indie), and to avoid the *'business'* sector (Holly), while men are expected to work in *'IT'* and *'politics'*. These perceived social expectations resist girl power and successful girls discourses, denying the claim that women are the victors within the workplace and the new economy (Baker, 2010b; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007). However, the majority of girls within the current study, as well as those participating in other research, construct their career options as influenced by nothing but their own personal drive rather than expectations (Baker, 2010a, 2010b; Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Zaslow, 2009). Despite this view of unconstrained professional lives for women, when the girls in the current study were asked about their own career aspirations there was a clear preference for traditionally feminine caring and creative roles. Such professions were almost unanimously chosen, with the two most frequent career aspirations being a teacher or working in the entertainment industry (e.g. being a singer or an actress). Consistent with this, Judge and Livingston (2008) found that, although claiming limitless career potential, girls still aspired to feminised careers that focus on altruism and creativity. Following this discussion of gendered career path expectations Zoe resists constructions of workplace disadvantage.

> Zoe: That's in the past
>
> Sophie: Yeah? What do you think it's like now?
>
> Zoe: Ahh, um, we're a bit more equal than we were in the past, because like women, I don't think they were allowed to get jobs and stuff
>
> Marama: They weren't
>
> Zoe: Um…men always got the good jobs and stuff

Zoe positions herself as compliant with postfeminism as she asserts the past-ness of workplace inequality for women. As discussed in Chapter Three (p. 41) locating

inequality as an issue only relevant for previous generations of women is a common feature of postfeminist discourse (Baker, 2008; Jowett, 2004), allowing an avoidance of any narrative of exploitation in the workforce (Walkerdine, 2005). Later in this focus group Indie, Holly, Rosie and Olivia contradicted their examination of workplace gender inequality by aligning themselves once more with notions of postfeminist girl power, uniformly agreeing that girls could do anything, *'yes! Anything'* (Rosie). However Holly then qualified that women are able to do any job '*except male jobs…cause there are some jobs that are specifically for males and then girls don't want to do that'*. Constructing girls to avoid male jobs of their own volition utilises the postfeminist discourse of free choice to explain away the uptake of traditionally gendered occupations. This once again demonstrates the girls being pulled between dominant postfeminist discourses espousing uninhibited capacity, and the complexity of women's lives in the real world (Walkerdine, 2005). Within the next extract, one of the Māori girls' focus groups clearly articulates the way the complexity of women in the workforce is further compounded by ethnicity.

Across focus groups these were the only participants who were able to discuss the racist inequality and disparaging treatment of Māori women within the New Zealand labour market. They were also the only participants to speak of ethnicity at all outside of the Western progressive vs. Eastern restrictive binary (Griffin, 2004). The driving force behind the discussions of racism for Māori in New Zealand appeared to be Huia and Gemma. Notably, both these girls discussed having conversations between themselves, and the women in their lives about the difficulties facing Māori, and Māori women in particular. Gemma referred to discussions with her Nan on the Marae and Huia talking about information she had been given from her mother about the political position of Māori people. Within this context, the following extract draws attention to the way the physical body of Māori women are positioned within the job market.

> Chloe: You'll have to work like <u>really</u> hard to get like, if you have to like, cause you have to work hard to get in the, that certain place you are, so like trying really hard
>
> Sierra: You don't like wear hori clothes like, you don't look like really hori
>
> Sophie: What does it mean to look hori?
>
> Ashlee: Like track pants and
>
> Sierra: Socks over jandals
>
> Ashlee: Are you calling me hori? I was wearing that yesterday
>
> Sierra: No those were sandals not jandals

Chloe: Like ripped tops

Huia: Cause you don't want to look like, you don't want to wear like track pants if you're like the prime minister or something, you have to wear like a suit or something

Sophie: And what if you're like a business woman?

Huia: Then you need to wear like a suit with a skirt

Sierra: Just wear suitable clothing, like something that makes you look successful

Sarah: Suitable for work, neat

Chloe: High heels

Gemma: Like tidy

Ashlee: Yeah, and not hori

Sophie: hmm ok, well what about unsuccessful women?

Ashlee: No job

Huia: Losing their jobs all the time, like trying out for jobs and then they'll like, wearing hori stuff to work and stuff

Chloe: Cause you have to look nice,

Huia: Otherwise you'll like get fired

Chloe: If you do, people will be like "it doesn't look like she has a job" but she actually does

Gemma: Yeah like if you have, if you have a successful job and you look crap it's just like not suitable, it's like not matching with your job

In the context of Chloe emphasising the hard work involved in success (discussed in Chapter Three, p. 47), Sierra constructs another element of successfulness through a specific look resonant with the constant scrutiny of women's physical appearance (Lazar, 2011). Embedded within the significant regulation of young womanhood that occurs in the workplace (Harris, 2004), constructions of the appearance of a competent women worker are created (Trethewey, 1999). For the girls within this extract, successful working women should avoid wearing '*hori clothes*' and looking '*really hori*'. Several girls define this as a certain way of dressing that includes '*track pants*' (Ashlee), '*socks over jandals*' (Sierra) and '*ripped tops*' (Chloe). 'Hori' is a racist term used to describe Māori people (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Accordingly all constructions of 'hori' within the extract are negative and these girls appear to position themselves in resistance to this concept. For example, Ashlee had worn something similar to the descriptions of hori and is angered by the potential positioning ('*are you calling me hori?*'). Sierra reassures Ashlee that her appearance does not conform to the image of hori, further constructing opposition to the construction of Māori as hori. As these girls construct the successfulness of working women as predicated on physical appearance and specifically being '*not hori*' (Ashlee) the success of the professional

woman is located within the body and, as Māori women, great care has to be taken to avoid being (mis)recognised as untidy Māori.

Constructions that exclude the hori woman's body, and therefore the Māori woman's body, from professional success occur within postfeminist discourses of success that are intrinsically bound to whiteness (Dellinger & Williams, 1997; Harris, 2004). Under the terms of this discourse, the Māori woman's body cannot be read as successful. Disassociating with anything deemed 'hori' in order to obtain success may be viewed as performing what Fordham (2008) describes as 'acting white' in her account of the requirement for African Americans within the school to renounce their ethnicity and enact compulsory whiteness in order to be positioned inside discourses of success. Within the New Zealand context, Fitzpatrick (2013) found that successfulness for Māori women at university required a shifting of attitudes, beliefs and language to perform a "Palagi" (white) subjectivity and avoid being stigmatised with the label 'hori'. For participants within the analysis extract, it is the clothed body that is the focus for regulation when trying to achieve success in the workplace.

Three participants (Sierra, Sarah and Gemma) used the word '*suitable*' when constructing the successful clothed body. This woman who is suitable for the workplace is constructed as someone who is '*neat*' (Sarah), '*tidy*' (Gemma) and '*nice*' (Chloe), wearing '*high heels*' and who is '*not hori*' (Ashlee). This construction of the '*suitable*' woman represents a female body that is controlled and constrained, and runs in stark contrast to the oppositional constructions of the unconstrained hori woman (e.g. '*ripped tops*'). Similar imagery was drawn on by participants in Tretheway's (1999) research when describing the successful working woman as "groomed, conservative, um no dirty fingernails" (p. 431). These constructions work within the discourse of respectability where clothing and appearance are used as a marker of respectability for women who are usually positioned outside of this discourse by society, such as working class women (both white and minority ethnic working class women) (Skeggs, 1997). Becoming a suitable woman is positioned by Ashlee to be in opposition to being hori and may be an imagined strategy to 'act white', to shake off constructions of Māori women as hori and to gain acceptance within the predominantly white workforce found in New Zealand.

For Chloe, Huia and Gemma the consequences of not making an effort to look nice and '*wearing hori stuff to work*' means getting '*fired*' (Huia). Chloe constructs this

performance as a mandatory demonstration of on the job success, without which a woman will be judged by others to be unemployed because '*it doesn't look like she has a job'*. This is consistent with the notion described by Skeggs (2001) that a woman's appearance equates to her work conduct, i.e. "to look was to be" (p. 297). This works within the postfeminist masquerade which employs fashion and beauty as a regulatory authority of the 'doing up' of successful young women in the workplace, policing women's physical appearance through the threat of unemployment (McRobbie, 2007). When participants were asked later in the focus group whether they thought it would be harder to reach success as Māori women Sierra, Ashlee, Huia and Gemma clearly constructed occupational obstacles complicating their pathway to career success as Māori women.

Sophie: Yeah totally, do you think being Māori women that will make it harder for you to be successful?

Ashlee /Sierra: Yip

Gemma/Huia: Yeah

Ashlee: Cause people won't accept us like

Sierra: Yeah, they treat us differently

Huia: They think "oh one day they're gonna do something bad", yeah "they're not gonna dress properly for one and then they'll be lazy"

Sierra: I saw this, I reckon they wouldn't hire Māori for like, to be a Prime Minster cause like they think like "oh she won't know what to say, she's not smart enough"

All of the girls within this extract recognise racial discrimination and agree that career success will be harder for them because of their Māori heritage. Ashlee and Sierra envisage their adult selves as unaccepted and treated differently in the workplace, a position that was reiterated several times by different participants within this discussion (e.g. '*they don't accept who the Māoris are and like they treat us differently'*, Gemma). Huia constitutes this lack of acceptance and differential treatment as a pre-judgement upon Māori women that, no matter how they present themselves, the expectation is that '*one day they're gonna do something bad'*. Both McKinley (2002) and Fitzpatrick (2013) found that the Māori women in their research felt pre-judged and underestimated by their peers both at university and in the workplace based on their physical Māori markers (McKinley, 2002, p. 113). In the above extract the first negative expectation upon Māori women in the workplace is that '*they're not gonna dress properly'* (Huia). Constructions of Māori women dressing improperly mirror

constructions of hori women dressing unsuitably. This supports the idea that participants in the previous extract were positioning the physically suitable working woman in opposition to the physically unsuitable (or improper) Māori woman. Pakistani Muslim women in Britain have also expressed feelings that "Asian girls don't fit" with the expectations held by employers on how future employees should look and dress (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p. 71). The second way Huia constructs the negative expectations upon Māori women in the workplace is that '*they'll be lazy'*. From a young age Māori girls have been labelled as lazy within New Zealand society (Arnot & Weiler, 1993), a construction which works within the discourse of the 'at-risk' girl, whose structural disadvantage is often reconstituted as individual laziness inherited through lazy communities (Harris, 2004). Huia constructs this enduring stereotype as a barrier to her future employment success.

Touching more specifically on limits to Māori women's employment options, Sierra resists postfeminist discourse that, as discussed earlier in the chapter, claims girls can be anything they want to be in the workforce (Baker, 2010b) in her assertion '*I reckon they wouldn't hire Māori …to be a Prime Minister'*. Though being inhibited from becoming Prime Minister may not appear to leave much unavailable, what is important here may be the construction that not everything is equally available to Māori women workers. Sierra constructs the reasons for this glass ceiling (Liff & Ward, 2001) as a perception that Māori women '*won't know what to say'* and are '*not smart enough'*. Sierra was one of three participants in this focus group to touch on speech and language as a component of the prejudice against Māori women. Discussing language as a barrier echoes the findings of McKinley (2002) and Fitzpatrick (2013) whose female Māori participants were required to alter their language and communication styles in order to 'talk white' and gain acceptance and understanding from their Pākehā peers. Equally negative assumptions on intellectual ability were felt for participants within these two studies as well as for other Māori girls in the current study. Chloe, for example, felt Māori were treated as if they were '*dumber'*.

Motherhood: "Lots of ladies are or hope to be successful mums"
(Mouse, photo-narrative book)

Without exception all participants constructed motherhood as vital to the successfulness of women. Time and time again discussions of success were steered back to becoming a mother and performing motherhood, positioning successful women within the dominant discourse of motherhood (Weaver & Ussher, 1997, p. 58). This mobilises the motherhood mandate first described by Russo (1976) that is continually found to be a powerful discourse for contemporary women, so much so that "disentangling ideals of womanhood from ideals of motherhood is virtually impossible" (Jacques & Radtke, 2012, p. 444). When asking several participants about the possibility of success for a woman who has a good job but who is not a mother the response was one of confusion. Positioning of such a woman was especially difficult for Imogen whose contradictory narrative was caught between mobilising girl power discourse to affirm this woman's right to choose against having children ('*it probably wouldn't like matter cause it's like what they chose to do*'), and dominant discourses on motherhood to construct children as necessary for female success, diminishing the validity of this woman's desire for a childless life ('*but then she'll probably feel lonely and she like probably thinks it's time to start a new family*'). Ultimately Imogen constructed this fictional woman as successful without children, however proclaimed that '*[she'll] feel like something's missing, which is a child or a man*'. This narrative works within the powerful discourse of motherhood as the 'natural' state (Choi et al., 2005; Weatherall & Ulrich, 2000; Weaver & Ussher, 1997) which incorporates the expectation that all women desire children of their own and this desire is out of their control (Weaver & Ussher, 1997). In line with this, my own situation as a childless woman of 29 years of age was a cause for concern for the girls. Upon discovering my age invariably the first question was '*do you have children*?' (Sierra). The girls spent considerable time mulling over my childlessness, trying to decide if I could still become a mother, considering my age ('*will you not have any children cause you're like…middle age*?' Sierra).

Within this discourse of required motherhood there are scarce alternatives outside of the binary of 'good' mother versus 'bad' mother (Choi et al., 2005). Judgement of the 'bad' mother as unsuccessful versus the veneration of successful 'good' mothers was peppered throughout the current study. Below one of the Māori groups construct one version of 'bad' motherhood in the context of discussing the

successfulness of Beyoncé as a mother versus the unsuccessfulness of Kim Kardashian, a wealthy heiress who stars in a reality television show called '*Keeping up with the Kardashians'* (E!, 2007). Each time participants talk about Beyoncé her success is conflated with her being a mother, however the girls do not similarly afford Kim Kardashian success through motherhood.

Sophie: So do you think that um Kim Kardashian and her being a mother is the same as Beyoncé

Rosalie: [No
Ruby: [I don't think
Charlotte: [No because

Mackenzie: I think their one [Kanye West and Kim Kardashian's pregnancy] was an accident

Sophie: What do you think it means that her baby was an accident?

Charlotte: Well because she didn't mean to have a baby, like they weren't planning, like Beyoncé like actually planned they [Kim and Kanye] weren't actually planning to have a baby cause yeah, they just weren't. Then she had a baby and it was all in the magazines and then all you can see is this fat stomach! [Laughs]

Sophie: So what do you think about mothers who have babies by accident?

Charlotte: They're just dumb

Mackenzie: They do get a lot of pressure on them. Like how are they gonna support their baby, what if they want to keep it but they can't like give it a good life?

Sophie: Do you think so? What's that pressure that gets put on them?

Ruby: I wouldn't say that the women who like get pregnant are dumb I would just say they did a really dumb mistake

The difference in the enactment of motherhood between these two women orients around responsibility, planned versus accidental pregnancy. Charlotte highlights twice in one sentence that Kim's pregnancy was not planned. Accidental pregnancy defies the requirement of postfeminism that successful women have a well-planned life from a young age. It specifically breaks the new postfeminist sexual contract that allows women to be sexually active and desiring, but requires in return for this new freedom that women maintain tight control of fertility and carefully plan eventual motherhood (McRobbie, 2007).

Celebrity operates within dominant cultural discourses to create hierarchies of the 'proper' and the 'improper' celebrity (Allen & Mendick, 2013). Within this extract Kim is used as an example of 'improper celebrity' and is contrasted to the 'proper

celebrity' of Beyoncé. Kim's 'improper' celebrity is constructed in two ways. Firstly, her pregnant body is positioned as troublesome through Charlottes' depiction of her '*fat stomach*', which resonates with the frequent problematisation of 'improper' celebrities' bodily excess. Secondly, Kim is positioned as 'improper' through her failure to self-regulate her fecundity, having a child without '*actually planning*', and thereby denying the postfeminist imperative to exercise reproductive control (Baker, 2009). This is constructed in contrast to Beyoncé according 'proper' celebrity status because she '*like actually planned*' her pregnancy.

Responsibility for, and management of one's own life situation is so fundamental within neoliberalism (Baker, 2010a) that life difficulties are often reinterpreted in psychological terms, placing emphasis on personal failing (Walkerdine et al., 2001). This manifests itself here as a judgement upon the intelligence of women who fail to adequately police their fecundity; Charlotte constitutes women who get pregnant by accident to be '*just dumb*'. Such positioning continues to work within neoliberal discourse by emphasising failed self-responsibility. Whereas Charlotte personalises the failure to control fertility, Mackenzie seems to be aware of some structural constraints.

Mackenzie describes the difficult position women are in when they have children by accident, highlighting the '*pressure on them*' to be able to '*support their baby*'. This highlights the social pressures upon the pregnant woman and constructs the decision to keep her child as predicated on her ability to '*give it a good life*', placing the full responsibility and accountability for the child upon the woman's shoulders, with no mention of the father. Aronson (2008) similarly found that all of the women in her study took sole responsibility for their unplanned pregnancies and resultant children. McRobbie (2000) explains this skewed burden of unplanned pregnancy and childbirth as borne out of traditional discourses of sexual reproduction which hold women accountable. Mackenzie also ties the pressure felt by women who get pregnant accidentally to the difficulty of financially supporting that child. Constructions of the 'accidental' mother having few economic resources arguably constitutes them as working class. Conflating unplanned pregnancy with working class girls underpins the incompatibility of accidental pregnancy and middle class young women as subjects of academic and economic capability (Walkerdine et al., 2001). Conversely, working class girls are constructed as the dangerously fecund 'Other' who must be constantly resist inevitable pregnancy if they are to ever achieve an education and a career (Walkerdine

et al., 2001). In the extract to follow participants discuss another version of unsuccessful motherhood that is frequently tied to working class girls; young motherhood.

Sophie: Yeah, and what about women who get pregnant and they're young, what do you think about them and success?

Charlotte: They're not successful at all

Rosalie: No

Mackenzie: If they did it by accident then that's pretty dumb they should have used protection

Ruby: Yeah, but if um say like after the baby's born if they, they should try to like make a life again. So try like, I don't know, go back to school or something, because some people do that. If they actually get a degree then they end up…

Sophie: So they could become successful again after they had a baby

Ruby: But it would be during the baby's life

Sophie: What do you think they need to do to like become successful after they've, after that?

Ruby: Pull themselves together for one and like, I'd say get help with family if you're like a single mum and say the father's like left or something and then try go back to school or something

When asked about women who get pregnant when they are young Charlotte's response is clear: '*they're not successful at all',* a statement that is affirmed by Rosalie. This works within pervasive contemporary discourses that vilify young motherhood as inherently problematic (Baker, 2009; Harris, 2004; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Mackenzie asserts that if a young woman should become pregnant by accident then it is '*pretty dumb'.* It is not clear here how Mackenzie would read the pregnancy of a young woman if it were planned, however Harris (2004) has claimed that the subjectivity of the young mother is so fraught that even if planned the pregnancy is always constructed as a mistake. The construction that unplanned pregnancy occurs in unintelligent young women mirrors Charlotte's claims in the previous extract about the intellectual capacity of accidental mothers, and it also illustrates a derogatory assumption frequently made of teenagers who fall pregnant (Walkerdine et al., 2001). Mackenzie then asserts that pregnant young women are dumb because they '*should have used protection'.* This puts the onus of contraception upon young women and typifies the way birth control is treated as a female concern (McRobbie, 2000). The issue here is not constructed to be sexual activity at a young age, but the failing of young women to utilise contraception. Mackenzie draws on postfeminist discourse to position young women within the new sexual contract which allows sexual activity on the condition that young women are responsible for preventing pregnancy (McRobbie, 2007). At the same time, Mackenzie's statement is a testament to her sexuality education.

Asserting that young mothers '*should try to like make a life again'* by going '*back to school'* to *'actually get a degree',* Ruby is perhaps suggesting these women reclaim a contributing life through the aforementioned requirement of education. Utilising education may be a way for young mothers to be re-positioned within the mainstream success trajectory which becomes disrupted by young women having children before they have moved through the linear pathway: from higher education, to a fulfilling career, to carefully planned motherhood (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2007). Harris (2004) explains that young mothers are frequently pushed by modern day governments to stop breeding and start earning, an initiative that marks a shift from welfare to *workfare.* Ruby implies an urgency for these women to start remaking their lives by stating that they should get into education '*during the baby's life'.*

While the girls in the current study consistently constructed young mothers as unsuccessful, single motherhood offered a more complex construction of when being a mother is and is not successful. In the extract to follow, several girls discuss an unsuccessful manifestation of single motherhood.

Sophie: What is an unsuccessful woman?

Zoe: Unsuccessful's like I mean having a lot of kids being real like slutty, and like living alone being a single mother, tons of kids, no job, in a grotty house

Olivia: Yeah, like a flat

Holly: Slutty

Zoe: Yeah like if you were a prostitute or something

Sophie: So how does it work that like family and having children is really important but having too many children and not having a partner is unsuccessful?

Indie: If you're happy with that choice then well like choosing to like have children, have, I mean like choosing to have lots of children and choosing not to have a partner or, I don't know it guess some times it isn't a choice but if you're happy,

Lexie: Yeah but then if you don't choose,

Zoe: Yeah like if it was accidental

Lexie: Then you're all like you've got like 70 kids and you're just like, you are like a prostitute and you have like a one night stand with this guy and you end up having a kid, like what are you going to do with it

Olivia: Every single time

When asked to describe an unsuccessful woman Zoe constructs an unflattering image of a '*slutty'* single mother '*living alone'* with '*lots of kids'* and *'no job'.* This construction aligns closely with the denigrating discourse of the 'welfare queen'

(Zaslow, 2009). Welfare queens (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001), welfare mothers (Baker, 2009) or 'pramface' (Kehily, 2008) are "quintessential bad mothers" (p. 108) found within the media of many industrialised societies. This woman is constructed as an irresponsible mother that is too lazy to work, often drug-dependent, and who bears many children simply to receive extra money through welfare (Zaslow, 2009). The construction of the single mother living in a '*grotty house*' (Zoe) that is '*like a flat*' (Olivia)*,* works especially within the representation from the United Kingdom of 'pramface'; the slovenly, working class single mother living on a housing estate (Kehily, 2008; McRobbie, 2013).

Another important element positioning this single mother within the 'bad mother' discourse is the number of children she has reproduced. Twice within the opening sentence Zoe asserts that the abject single mother has many children, a claim that is embellished by Lexie who constructs her to have '*like 70 kids'.* This resonates with McRobbie's (2007, 2013) assertion that the single mothers of several children are constructed as especially feckless. Many researchers have claimed that such condemnation is driven by neoliberal discourse that works to justify and normalise reductions and changes to welfare entitlements for single mothers (Baker, 2009; Lessa, 2006; Zaslow, 2009).

Indie attempts to address the contradictory narrative that constructs motherhood as mandatory for success yet un-partnered mothers with many children as unsuccessful. The difference between these two versions of motherhood is tied once again to choice, with the successful mother '*choosing to have lots of children and choosing not to have a partner'*. However Indie appears to struggle with this neoliberal narrative as she recognises that '*sometimes it isn't a choice',* resisting assumptions within the discourse of choice that women in disadvantaged situations are compliant with, and personally responsible for, those situations (Baker, 2008). Indie concludes that sometimes motherhood is not freely chosen but '*if you're happy'* with the outcome then it can be alright. This may be seen as a claiming of volition through the *choosing* of solo motherhood, a strategy frequently used by young mothers to avoid victimhood when discussing their unplanned pregnancies (Baker, 2009, 2010a).

Lexie, Zoe and Olivia appear less willing to forgive a woman should she accidentally become a single mother of many children. Lexie conflates this lack of planning for motherhood with sexual irresponsibility, locating the '*accidental'* (Zoe)

single mother of many children to be '*like a prostitute*' who gets pregnant through a '*one night stand*', echoing the earlier constructions of such a woman as a '*prostitute*' (Zoe) and as '*slutty*' (Holly; Zoe). Olivia constructs an unrelenting disregard for sexual responsibility as she adds that the single mother falls pregnant '*every single time*' she has a one-night stand. Constructing single mothers to be promiscuous further positions the girls' talk within the welfare queen discourse that assumes these women to be "sexually irresponsible scroungers" (Fraser, 2007, p. 31). Lexie takes this further as she questions what this woman will do with her children, raising moral concern for the welfare of the children, a tactic often used to generate anxiety around unemployed single mothers who have several children (McRobbie, 2013).

The language used by Zoe and Holly is noteworthy for its deployment of the derogatory designation 'slut'. This concurs with Attwood's (2007) observation that the term 'slut' and its associated meanings are being used with increasing frequency in today's society, most notably within preteen and teenage girls. Skeggs (1997) and Attwood (2007) have demonstrated how 'slut' is inscribed with classed meanings, marking working class girls/women as overly sexual and therefore incompatible with 'classy'. Through the use of the term 'slut' Zoe and Holly invest the single mother with a working class subjectivity, further constructing this version of motherhood within the discourse of the working class welfare mother (McRobbie, 2013). The discourse of 'slut' is used to police and regulate the sexuality of girls and women (McRobbie, 2000; Ringrose & Renold, 2012) through branding and exclusion (Attwood, 2007). Zoe and Holly appropriate this discourse to brand single mothers with many children as 'slutty', thereby excluding them from the successful 'good' mother discourse. While the 'slutty' single mother with lots of children is unanimously constructed as an unsuccessful woman, when these same girls were asked what circumstance makes having children successful Lexie and Holly drew on an entirely different discourse of the single mother.

> Lexie: I think my mum's successful cause she went 12 years being a single mother
>
> Sophie: 12 years, yeah that is hard. So what is the difference between your mother being a successful single mum and these other women being unsuccessful cause they're single mums
>
> Holly: Cause they reject their children
>
> Lexie: I was planned
>
> Holly: But um, my parents weren't married and they split up and my mum's really poor now and she's been looking for a house and she used to come home really tired because she said she was doing this bum's job who wasn't doing his job properly but she would probably get a bad um

report and stuff if he didn't do his job properly so she was basically doing two jobs and she still pulled it together and I think that's really successful even though we live in an apartment

Marama: Um unsuccessful woman that's got kids she won't spend the money on children and she'll spend the money on drugs or alcohol

Holly: Or other things that don't help her kids

Sophie: So is there a certain type of way you should behave when you're a mum?

Several girls: Yeah

Holly: Responsible

Incongruent with the earlier construction of single mothers as unsuccessful, Lexie contributes her mother's success to managing *'12 years being a single mother'*. When asked about this contradiction Holly and Lexie, both daughters of single mothers, work to dissociate their own mothers' version of single motherhood from the deviant 'slutty' single mother who has several children. This may be reminiscent of the drive to embody respectability observed in the young working class women in Skeggs' (1997) research. Lexie reiterates that the unsuccessful single mother has children without the requisite choosing, as she highlights that her own successful single mother *'planned'* to have children, using the neoliberal imperative of choice to gain access to respectability in her mother's single-ness.

Holly takes a different tact, positioning 'other' unsuccessful single mothers within the 'bad' mother discourse by constructing them to '*reject their children',* thus denying the selfless, naturally nurturant subjectivity of the 'good' mother (Choi et al., 2005). Holly then positions her own mother outside of the dependent welfare queen discourse through her highly neoliberal approach to motherhood, '*basically doing two jobs'*. Holly's construction of the success of her own single mother works within neoliberal postfeminist media representations that celebrate mothers who negotiate demands through personal resilience instead of reliance on welfare (Zaslow, 2009). However, investment in individualism compels Holly to constitute her mother working two jobs while being a single mother as a position of empowerment, instead of being the only option available to her. Although the image painted of Holly's single mother as *'really poor'* and *'really tired'* defies representations of the new glamorous, easy maternity (Baker, 2009; McRobbie, 2013) she embodies the successful individual characteristics discussed in Chapter Three of overcoming adversity and utilising hard work to become a good neoliberal subject.

Across ethnicity many girls admire an approach to motherhood that is steeped in individualism, where the women carry the weight of the childcare and strength is associated with managing everything alone. However when discussing actual accounts of their mothers' managing, many of the Māori and Pacific Island participants referred to help from themselves, older siblings and extended family. For example, Charlotte from the Pacific Island group explained the help her mother receives: *'me and my dad and some of my mums and dads family we all do [help mum], we've got this big group'*. Similarly Gemma positioned her mother as successful for bringing up eight children alone as a single woman yet when asked how she manages to sustain this, both Zara and Chloe interjected to explain that *'you help her a lot'* prompting Gemma to acknowledge her own contribution: *'yeah and with the help of me...and Bailey, my brother'*. It is commonly reported that in Māori (Edwards, McCreanor, & Moewaka-Barnes, 2007) and Pacific Island families (Fa'alau & Jensen, 2006) childcare and support includes older siblings and extended family members. Therefore, despite what some girls knew to be true of communal childcare in their own mothers' lives, successful motherhood was constructed within neoliberal discourse as an individualistic endeavour. Zaslow (2009) also found teenage girls to describe strong mothers as independent mothers while contradictorily explaining the support received by the mothers in their lives from older siblings, extended family and community support, especially in African-American and Caribbean communities. In the current study Pākehā participants also utilise this neoliberal rhetoric of individualism, however none referred to helping with the childcare of younger siblings or maintaining the household.

Chapter Summary

This chapter chronicled the girls' discursive journey through three mandatory spheres of success. The first step in achieving feminine success was clearly constructed to require higher education. Reminiscent of neoliberal discourse, succeeding within education was constructed to hinge on the deployment of hard work and motivation. The choice to pursue higher education was constructed as a pathway to a successful future, most prominently a successful job. Employment as a compulsory sphere of success received even more discussion than education, however this was inscribed with more contention. Although all participants reinforced the construction of employement as vital to success, and most did so within the postfeminist narrative of young women as unconstrained within the workforce (Walkerdine, 2005). Peppered throughout these discussions was an

astute recognition of the barriers that face women and also, more specifically, Māori women.

While several girls critiqued the existence of workforce inequality for women, and especially Māori women, discussions of motherhood were met with little resistance. In fact, the girls constructed motherhood to win primacy over all other elements of successful femininity, utilising the powerful discourse of motherhood as 'natural' (Choi et al., 2005). They held strict guidelines for the successful performance of motherhood; should a woman defy these, they were no longer afforded success through having children. These guidelines required a careful control of fecundity until fully ready for motherhood, meaning young women should have already succeeded within education and employment, and ensured financial security before they *choose* to have children. In accordance with this, women who have children without planning, when young or single, or who have borne many children, were clearly constructed as unsuccessful. The three spheres of success analysed within this chapter each, in their own way, present highly complicated and contradictory requirements of successful femininity. However, the ultimate goal of successful femininity requires women to combine each of these spheres in the ever more confusing and tiresome task of 'having it all'.

CHAPTER FIVE

HAVING IT ALL

Introduction

Contemporary young women consistently demonstrate a 'have it all' approach to life (Aronson, 2008). However Germaine Greer (1999) claims that for women 'having it all' means having all the work. Consistent with Greer's view, Choi et al. (2005) found women place themselves under a lot of pressure to uncomplainingly perform "supermum, superwife, supereverything" (p.176). In their silence these women evince to others the achievability of coping with everything (Choi et al., 2005). This perpetuates constructions of 'having it all' as achievable, "this heady normality, this utopian success, hides the opposite: a defence against failure, a terrible defence against the impossibility that the supergirl identity represents" (Walkerdine et al., 2001, p. 186). Underpinning the effort involved in 'having it all', the girls in the current study uniformly constructed the ultimate performance of successful femininity to be a skilful, delicate and mandatory alignment of all of the elements of successful womanhood outlined thus far: utilising the successful individual qualities of hard work, perseverance and individualism (outlined in Chapter Three) to succeed in education, employment and finally motherhood (outlined in Chapter Four). Admiration was bestowed upon women who were stretched by ever expanding responsibilities yet knew '*how to like manage everything*' (Ashlee).

Having it all: "My mum is successful cause she does her job <u>and</u> looks after us and she takes me to ballet everyday" (Poppy)

As seen in the previous chapter, motherhood was constructed as a necessary milestone for successfulness, however there was a rigid timeline for this success. Motherhood was only successful if it was earned through first participating in the other arenas of idealised femininity. Marama explained that becoming a mother is '*successful once you've like settled down I guess, like um, have done what you wanted and like achieved something'*. Having children was constructed as detrimental to success if a woman was not properly prepared. For example, several girls succinctly explained that having children gets in the way of success *'if you're in university'* (Gemma*)* or *'if you*

want a good job' (Sierra). Aronson (2008) similarly found that although female participants viewed motherhood as one of the most important indicators of adulthood, young women placed high importance on being 'ready' as measured by an education, a stable career and a secure relationship. This positions the imperative to 'have it all' within neoliberal discourse by constructing motherhood as a privilege earned through delaying childbirth until higher education and gainful employment has been achieved (Harris, 2004; Lessa, 2006).

The rigid timeline for 'having it all' alludes to a complex engagement with motherhood as a performance of successfulness. This is further complicated when considering the inevitable co-existence of having a (good) career. In fact, this dual role was the subject of the majority of talk surrounding either employment or motherhood. This taps into the central question for postfeminist discourse: how do successful 'have it all' women integrate a family and a career (Zaslow, 2009)? The choice for contemporary women is not whether they will have one or the other, as it may have been for women in the past, but instead how best to combine the two (Aveling, 2002). This postfeminist 'superwoman' ideal (Jacques & Radtke, 2012) was expressed by Ashlee when explaining how her mother managed to raise five children while working: '*um, she's got super powers'.* However when participants attempt to imagine the reality of maintaining the necessary elements of successful womanhood it is far more complicated and unresolved. This can be seen in the extract to follow, as participants discuss a television character, Christina Ross, from the Disney Channel series '*Jessie'* (2011). This character depicts a supermodel turned business tycoon who is the mother of one biological child and three adoptive children from India, Uganda and Detroit.

Sophie: Cool, so what do you think about Jessie and the mum?

Indie: Well the mum, the mum, has like got a family and she's like successful like that way and she's like really high up in like business ranking

Marama: But her family's separate

Imogen: But the good thing is they adopt children

Juliet: But they're never like, they're barely ever with their children and they just got Jessie and Bertram looking after her children

Imogen: That's what a nanny's for

Juliet: I know but like she never sees her children

Marama: And so then when they grow up they're gonna be like…

Juliet: "You were never there for me" and stuff [Marama: Yeah] and then um…like she just let's Jessie just look after them, she barely knows her [Imogen: Yeah] I wouldn't do that, it's not very good. She could be like, a paedophile or something

From the outside this performance of womanhood meets the requirements of successfulness, with Indie constructing Christina ('*the mum')* as successful because she has '*got a family … and she's like really high up in like the business ranking'*. However Marama is quick to take issue with Christina's version of motherhood, highlighting a separation between her family and her career. This works within the good mother/bad mother discourse where the good mother is put into a restrictive double bind; she must have a high status job and be immaculately presented, but must never forget that she is a mother (Zaslow, 2009). Christina is constructed as having a professional space outside of motherhood, allowing her to operate independently from this role, thereby positioning her within the discourse of the 'bad' mother (Zaslow, 2009).

The opening disagreement between Marama and Indie is typical of girlhood conversations which are frequently conflicting (Aapola et al., 2005). This is also representative of the way the girls in the current study contradict one another as they try to imagine the reality of managing the competing responsibilities of the workplace and the home. For example, within the first six sentences Christina's positioning within successful womanhood is changed with each new speaker. She is constructed in a positive way by Imogen who highlights the '*good'* in Christina through her child adoption, repositioning her within the pervasive humanitarian discourse of international adoption (Saunders, 2006). Imogen also defends Christina's use of a nanny in the face of Juliet's criticism that she relies too heavily on this hired childcare. Juliet questions the use of nannies by working women but also constructs this as unsafe, emphasising the way Christina employed Jessie (the family nanny) without knowing much about her; '*[Jessie] could be like, a paedophile or something'*. Similar reluctance to access external childcare and concerns over the safety of this outside help have been shown in other studies with girls and young women (Aveling, 2002; Zaslow, 2009).

Within these discussions Juliet constructs an imagined future where Christina's children are resentful of her absence. This mobilises traditional narratives of the 'family in crisis', which blame professional women for forsaking their children to the detriment of their wellbeing (Aapola et al., 2005). It also mirrors media representations of negative outcomes for children who are put into day care by their working mothers (Guendouzi, 2006). Within this moral panic about women 'abandoning' their children in

favour of their career it is mothers - far more than fathers - who are bearing the brunt of this outrage (Aapola et al., 2005). Although the girls were asked to discuss the mother, later within this focus group Imogen independently brings up the father by asking '*but doesn't she work with her husband?*' as if remembering something forgotten. Indeed as participants across focus groups struggled to unpack the dilemma of competing discourses of female success that construct womanhood in terms of both motherhood and employment (Aveling, 2002), talk of the male contribution is almost completely absent. This was also the case for the young women studied by Jacques and Radtke (2012) who, while imagining future childcare, did not include the potential role of fathers and glossed over unequal parenting workloads. Because Christina holds a high-powered job that takes her away from what 'should' be her primary role as mother, Juliet, Marama, and Indie ultimately decide that she does not deserve motherhood.

> Juliet: Like maybe she shouldn't of adopted them
>
> Marama: She didn't have the time
>
> Juliet: Yeah cause another set of parents could have like been with them more often
>
> Indie: Yeah true
>
> Juliet: Yeah, and they might have like a better life cause they might be with their parents more and they might be more disciplined
>
> Indie: And like brought up, raised more
>
> Imogen: It's kind of not her fault though, cause she does have a good job
>
> Juliet: Yeah
>
> Marama: But she's putting her career first
>
> Imogen: Yeah and she can't stay at home and like quit her like, quit her job and then not getting the money that she needs to like raise her children

This group of girls previously constructed the 'good' mother as one who holds the family together and who is constantly available, in line with the intensive mothering discourse (Guendouzi, 2006). In this extract it is explained that Christina does not '*have the time*' (Marama) to be constantly accessible to her children, and her right to motherhood is questioned by Juliet: '*maybe she shouldn't of adopted*.' Juliet and Indie then construct the potential for these children to have a '*better life*' with different parents who have more time. This articulates the intensive mothering narrative that positions children who are denied constant maternal access as having jeopardised wellbeing (Guendouzi, 2006). Imogen, highlights that '*it's kind of not her fault'…'she does have a good job*' constructing the difficulty of the situation for Christina. This statement addresses the impossibility of combining intensive mothering, which leaves

little space for anything else (Jacques & Radtke, 2012), with requirements to engage in a challenging lifelong career (Aveling, 2002). However Marama takes issue with the way Christina prioritises these two necessary elements of success as she explains her transgression of '*putting her career first*', further positioning Christina outside of intensive motherhood for failing to put her children above everything else in her life (Guendouzi, 2006).

Privileging motherhood over employment was hailed as successful by girls across focus groups (e.g. '*love your family more than you love your work*', Holly) and has also been a common sentiment from young women in other research (Baker, 2009; Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Kirkman, 2003; Petrassi, 2012). It is this privileging of motherhood that ensures women 'scale back' their careers to accommodate for their family responsibilities (Aronson, 2008). This is the double bind: mothers have to work but should not work too much and are therefore prevented from peaking professionally (Zaslow, 2009). For the majority of girls the curtailing of profession was unspoken. However, later within this focus group, as Imogen discussed teaching as a good career for accommodating inevitable motherhood, Talia clearly positioned herself as restricted by the demands of childcare by claiming that if she '*could have a husband to look after the kids*' then she would have the opportunity to pursue '*like a really good job*', instead of teaching. While this short snippet of conversation is very interesting, discussions almost immediately moved back to motherhood and the contribution of a father was examined no further.

Constructions privileging motherhood and vilifying women who spend a lot of time working constitutes the dilemma at the core of discussions around Christina; she '*can't stay at home and…quit her job*' because she needs to get '*the money that she needs to raise her children*'. Although motherhood often wins primacy over a career in constituting female successfulness, it is still the pervasive new norm for women to work while mothering in order to financially support their family (Baker, 2009). Women who raise their children and do not work feel judged as lazy (Baker, 2009; Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001). Accordingly, whenever participants were asked whether it was more important for successful women to work or to be mothers the answer was always that both were important. The next extract explores this bind, as participants construct their ideal successful woman. The girls imagine this woman to have seven children but although they could assemble her (imaginary) life in any way they see fit, they struggle to conceptualise how she can 'have it all.'

Sophie: And what kind of mother is she to these 7 children?

Aria: She always has time for them and she always pays attention to them and listens to their problems

Lola: Nuh uh [no] if she would stay with them and care for them then she wouldn't be going to her job which means that she wouldn't have enough <u>money</u>!

Aria: But she's a writer! She brings inspiration from her kids. She recently wrote a book called "cat on the windowsill" where the main character was based on her youngest daughter

Sophie: So if she works and makes heaps of money, she's not going to be able to take care of her children enough?

Mouse: Yeah but if you take care of your children too much, you have to like have half the day off and half the day at work.

Lola: She might work at home if she's a writer so she can work there

Mouse: You can't have the whole week, you can't have all day everyday working if you have children

Poppy: You have to balance it out! So sometimes you have days when you just work and then other days you have days where you are looking after your kids

Balance cannot be found as these participants struggle with the impossibility of imagining a life that meets the requirements of motherhood, where the woman '*always has time for'* her children (Aria)*,* while earning enough money through employment. This underpins the individualistic approach to motherhood outlined in Chapter Four (p. 78), where mothers need to make the money to support their family on their own, and financial assistance is tied in with the negative discourse of welfare dependency. The girls are unable to address the dilemma outside of the individualistic solutions made available through the neoliberal framework of postfeminist discourse (Gill & Scharff, 2011). The solutions for 'having it all' include working part time, working from home, dividing time evenly between work and mothering, and incorporating childcare with work ('*she's a writer! She brings inspiration from her kids'* Aria). These 'solutions' construct a future where 'having it all' will require personal sacrifice of career aspirations through necessarily reducing time spent in paid employment. Similarly, in a two-part study Aveling (2002) found that young women experience the reality of motherhood as incompatible with the professional aspirations they had held when first spoken to during university; this incompatibility required a curtailing of those aspirations to cope with parental responsibilities. Peppered throughout the current study was evidence of the interpellation of participants into postfeminist discourses of empowerment and entitlement; however, they appropriate a very traditional response to the double bind that depends upon women restricting labour force participation. This is

exemplified by a quote from Mouse, as she muses over whether a mother and a father could do equal amounts of childcare:

> *It should be like my mum and dad! Cause my dad can't really take days of work but my mum's boss is quite relaxed so she can take days off work if it's our birthdays or if we're sick or something and her job's so that she's still at home when we come home from school but she's, my dad can't really take off days to look after us because he's got big business, I don't know what he does.*

Mouse is proud of the way her mother and father combine work with parenting but what she actually constructs is her mother working within flexible employment so that she is easily accessible to her children while her father pursues '*big business.*'

Chapter Summary

'Having it all' within the three spheres of success was constructed as the ultimate form of successful femininity and there was a rigid timeline for the successful performance within each sphere. The combination of employment and motherhood proved especially contradictory and unresolved. While the girls expected successful women to prioritise motherhood over employment, whenever they were asked if a woman could do one or the other the response was always that she should do both. This was complicated by a view that a mother should take sole responsibility for the children, should always be available to them, and should avoid the use of external childcare, yet at the same time must earn a good salary to support her family. Solutions to this perplexing situation were confusing for the girls and, by the pull of the powerful motherhood mandate, necessarily put the onus on women to curtail their professional career in favour of the traditional role of mother. The girls' complicated narratives around successful femininity and 'having it all' require a deeper unpacking to examine the importance and implications of these, this will be done in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER SIX
ENTANGLED SUCCESS:
THE *"THIN LINE BETWEEN COERCION AND CONSENT"*
(McRobbie, 2007, p. 726)

This qualitative focus group study investigated the way pre-teen girls negotiate discourses of successful femininity. Focus group discussions were analysed using discourse analysis with attention given to positioning and subjectivity (presented in Chapters Three, Four and Five). Following the detailed analysis presented in the previous three chapters this final chapter brings together three elements of the research for discussion. The first section considers the way girls' constructions of successful femininity mobilise dominant discourses of both empowered and traditional ideologies. It will also examine how these are manifest within constructions of the individual characteristics of successful female subjects and in the spheres within which girls and young women must achieve success. The second section of this chapter will reflexively consider the epistemology and methodologies used, as well as limitations to the study and reflexivity. The final section will discuss possible implications of the study and future directions for researching girls' understandings of success in a postfeminist culture.

As the preceding chapters demonstrate, contemporary ideologies valorising feminine success are the new pervasive norm replacing conceptions of passive and submissive femininity (McRobbie, 2000, 2004b, 2007). Of particular note within discourses of successful femininity are narratives of unbounded freedom, of women unshackled from the patriarchal past (Kehily, 2008). However, previous research with girls, teenagers and young women presents a far more complicated and contradictory story than this straightforward ode to success (Kehily, 2008; Pomerantz et al., 2013). Examinations of successful femininity have usually focused on success within a specific realm, predominantly educational success (Allan & Renold, 2006; Baker, 2010b; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Ringrose, 2007). Other literature has obtained information on desirable forms of femininity by investigating career aspirations (Baker, 2010b; Sharpe, 2001), or imagined futures (Bulbeck, 2005; Sharpe, 2001). However within the current cultural climate where girls and young women are held to be the prototypes of successfulness (Ringrose, 2007), it is pertinent to examine specifically what successful femininity means to those who are expected to hold it. The current research has done so

from the perspective of pre-teen girls. The focus on this specific population contributes to the much needed development of writing and research examining the lives of girls this age (Walkerdine, 1998; Willis, 2009) and heeds the call for further research into the experience of girls' diverse self-making within changing cultural conditions (Aapola et al., 2005; Zaslow, 2009). What does successful femininity mean to pre-teen girls surrounded by exalting accounts of the success of young women (McRobbie, 2000)? What discourses and discursive practices do pre-adolescent girls draw on to construct successful (new) femininity and how do they position themselves, the women they know and women in the media in relation to these constructions? And how do these girls negotiate and live the contradictory space opened up by available discourses of successful femininity? These are the questions central to the current study that will be explored.

Success as 'Kick Butt' Girl Power

"*Wonder Woman = die hard feminist. Wonder Woman may have been not real but she introduced the concept that the woman can do anything and they don't need men to do that*" (Holly, photo-narrative book)

As demonstrated above, many girls within this study drew on elements of feminism, conceptualised as the sassy, energetic assertiveness of girl power discourse (Aapola et al., 2005). Girls' constructions of successful femininity commonly assumed that girls and women now have the strength and power to be anything that they want (Griffin, 2004). Such girl power, for example, was evident in Imogen's claim that '*girls definitely have the power*'. This is consistent with other research findings where girls and young women mobilise girl power discourse to construct themselves as independent, empowered feminine subjects (Lowe, 2003; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Reay, 2001; Zaslow, 2009). Moreover, girls in the current study constructed girls and women to be dominant over boys and men, a central claim within girl power discourse (Hains, 2007). Peppered throughout participants' narratives within girl power discourse was an understanding consistent with the notion that inequality was no longer a concern, that it had been eradicated by the new found female freedoms. As with other research on girl power, participants confined inequality to other (non-Western) cultures (Griffin, 2004; Jowett, 2004; Pomerantz et al., 2013) and to earlier periods in history (Baker, 2008; Jowett, 2004; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Taft, 2004). Inherent within girl power discourse are strong narratives of individualism (Taft, 2004), and throughout discussions of the

individual qualities of success, participants clearly aligned with this neoliberal imperative.

Success as Individual Striving: '*If you're unsuccessful you haven't tried hard enough*' (Poppy)

Who is the successful female subject as constructed by participants? When outlining the individual qualities that successful girls and young women possess, the girls drew heavily on postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of individualism, striving, and self-responsibility (Gonick, 2006; McRobbie, 2009; Walkerdine, 2005). The ambition for successfulness was constructed as bigger for girls than for boys and lowly aspirations in girls and young women were treated as a joke. Such ideas underpin the successful girls' discourse that hails girls and young women as victors within education and employment (Baker, 2010b; Ringrose, 2007). Highlighting the acute self-responsibility of this postfeminist discourse, participants across focus groups understood success as predicated upon extreme levels of hard work. It is through this hard work that girls deemed success to be earned. In the absence of observable labour, success was constructed to be improper and invalid. Through this powerful discourse of individualism, success that was achieved with assistance from others was seen as a way of cheating at successfulness, evincing requirements of self-reliance.

The successful female subject was required to begin working hard toward delineated life goals from a young age. This echoes the call within the new postfeminist sexual contract for girls to start planning the life they want to live early (McRobbie, 2004c, 2007). Girls' discussions of striving towards goals worked alongside the "never good enough girl" of postfeminism (Harris, 2004, p. 33) whose success is dependent upon constant self-monitoring and self-improvement, striving for the perfectible self and the actualisation of personal goals (McRobbie, 2007). Giving up on life goals was understood as a deal breaker in achieving success and, congruent with other research on young women (Baker, 2010a, 2010b; Jacques & Radtke, 2012), the individual was held as fully responsible to persevere and succeed at those goals. Participants celebrated girls and young women who navigated challenging and non-linear trajectories to reach life goals, a skill inherent in the success of the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004). It is therefore unsurprising that another revered trait of successful femininity was overcoming adversity.

The individualism inherent within discourses of female success demand that life obstacles are tackled as a project of self-improvement and an opportunity for self-development (Baker, 2010a; Rose, 1990). The girls discussed a wide variety of difficult circumstances that women in their lives had overcome. The success of these women focussed on their autonomous choosing to make good out of a bad situation. This constructs successful women as entrepreneurs of the self (Baker, 2010a), taking responsibility for their own lives and finding solutions to get back on track. It was envisaged that, for the successful feminine subject, the choice to change was enough to overcome adversity, as is evident in the commitment to ideologies of free choice within the postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2008). Throughout focus groups there was a strong thread of commitment to the discourse of choice, constructing successful girls and young women as autonomous agents with the ability, and obligation, to make the right choices (Walkerdine, 2005).

Under this discourse of neoliberal individualism characterised by self-responsibility, self-monitoring, and self-regulation, the individual female subject is constructed as solely responsible for her own successes and failures, and there is little space for narratives of inequality (Baker, 2008; Jacques & Radtke, 2012; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Walkerdine, 2005). But what happens when the freedoms promised by new discourses of feminine success, or the 'new' femininities (Aapola et al., 2005), bump up against the same old gender norms and the same old inequalities that never really went away? The next section will consider this question with particular reference to McRobbie's (2004b) double entanglement in an attempt to make sense of the contradictory ways the girls engage with discourses of successful femininity. This will be explored firstly in terms of the entanglement of empowered successful femininity and the undercurrent of traditional femininity that were simultaneously held as successful by the girls. The double entanglement will then be mobilised in an examination of the girls' resistance to and compliance with discourses binding women to domesticity. Lastly, the double entanglement will be used to explore discussions around two of the compulsory spheres of success: employment and motherhood.

The 'Double Entanglement'

Performing gender is a complex act (Reay, 2001) and therefore the simplistic picture of equality painted by postfeminist discourse inaccurately represents the reality of girls' lives (Pomerantz et al., 2013). However, the freedoms promised within

postfeminist discourse are conditional upon withholding critique of these inaccuracies and contradictions (McRobbie, 2009). Therefore, as several scholars argue (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2004a, 2007, 2009; Pomerantz et al., 2013), in exchange for apparent access to empowerment and new freedoms, girls and women must renounce feminist ideologies and politics. McRobbie (2004c) refers to this as feminism being "taken into account" (p. 255). She proposes that the contradictions experienced within postfeminist culture are illuminated through the concept of the 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2004c, p. 255). This represents two processes of entanglement; firstly, the entanglement of traditional values of gender, sexuality and family organisation with progressive values of empowerment, equality and choice (McRobbie, 2004c) and secondly, the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideologies (Gill, 2007b, 2008), where some elements of feminism are taken as common sense, such as the idea that women deserve to be treated as equals, while others are forgone, such as collective responses to observable prejudice (McRobbie, 2004c). In the current study, the double entanglement can be seen as embedded within the contradictory space that the girls must navigate in order to 'do' successful femininity. While discussing the individual qualities of successful femininity there was an intricate entanglement of discourses of traditional femininity and empowered girl power as well as an entangled resistance to traditional discourses of women as responsible for domestic duties and compliance with this unequal division of labour. The double entanglement will also be explored within the complex act of succeeding within employment and motherhood

Entangled Traditional Femininity: 'She isn't successful I don't think' (Marama), 'yeah because she isn't nice' (Juliet)

Although participants frequently drew on the powerful independence of girl power (Griffin, 2004) when constructing the deservedness of success for girls and young women, they also engaged with a contradictory traditional femininity discourse. The new freedoms offered by postfeminist girl power have not derailed conventional discourses of respectable femininity (Jackson, 2006). Instead, one is mapped onto the other and this complex entanglement draws ever more subtle lines between acceptably empowered and respectably traditional (Jackson, 2006; McRobbie, 2004a). For example, Reay (2001) found that primary school girls who embodied the sassy freedom of girl power were positioned outside of respectable 'good' girl discourses and their behaviour saw them denigrated by classmates and teachers. The good "postfeminist girl" (Jackson, 2006, p. 470) must therefore navigate this contradictory entanglement of

traditional femininity and the 'new' femininity complete with a feminist flair. Griffin (2004, p. 42) sums this up well by explaining modern day girlhood to be "an impossible project, caught between competing forces in a permanent state of dissatisfaction or desire". The girls in the current study typified this tension as they discussed the kind of personality that is required for successful femininity, oscillating between hardness and softness, femininity and feminism.

Much of the conversational work that utilised discourses of conventional femininity centred around the "norm of niceness" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 124). Brown (1999) has theorised that the desire to be seen as nice is an integral element in learning how to perform femininity, a performance that excludes anger or rebellion. Congruently, participants constructed niceness as a façade, an outward performance of normative femininity, and any feelings that contradicted this performance required concealing. The façade of niceness was something the girls understood to be owed to others, even if confronted by someone who invoked potent negative feelings such as hate. For the girls, maintaining a successful subjectivity of niceness necessitated a dilution of strong emotions so as not to cause any conflict. This denying of strong emotions mobilises normative discourses of passive femininity (Day et al., 2003; Skeggs, 1997). The regime of good girl femininity, then, may compel participants to bear the burden of niceness that serves to limit their freedom and silence their emotion when in the company of someone disliked. This burden of niceness was entangled with postfeminist girl power discourse, creating a contradictory requirement to be both empowered and assertive, but also nice and constrained. This was evident, for example, as the girls discussed the character Roz from the television show *Glee* (Fox, 2009). Although Roz represents the girl power ethos of female individualism and success, participants vilified her because she was seen as boasting, bossy and aggressive - traits that violate conventional nice girl femininity a (Brown, 1999; Ringrose, 2006; Walkerdine, 1990). The girls appeared more comfortable with the success of Beyoncé, who they described as strong and hardworking yet still nice and modest, an embodiment of the double entanglement. The entanglement of girl power assertiveness with passive traditional femininity sets limits upon feminine expression, creating the ideal neoliberal female subject who does what she is told and never protests (Pomerantz et al., 2013). The entanglement can be seen as the girls are compelled by contemporary girl power discourse yet are still regulated within traditional discourse, setting limits on the expression of female empowerment within the confines of the regulatory mechanism of "nice girl" femininity. This

compliant nice girl, produced through the power of traditional discourses, can also be seen in discussions of the enduring bind of women to domestic work.

Entangled Housework: 'There's nothing really bad about looking after your house'
(Daisy)

Women are still overwhelmingly responsible for housework (Baker, 2008; Gibb, Fergusson, & Boden, 2013; Petrassi, 2012) and it is likely that this unequal division of domestic labour is observable within the girls' homes. However, as mentioned above, the dominance of postfeminist narratives can obscure conversations around inequality and this appears to be the case in the current study. The girls struggled within the double entanglement of available narratives around women and domestic duties. The conflict presented itself as various girls moved fluidly between postfeminist discourses denying inequality in domestic work (constructing this as a thing of the past); traditional discourses (constructing this present day inequality as acceptable - even constructing women's role in house work as strengthening in one instance); and an identification of, and firm resistance to, unequal divisions of housework. This entanglement was so tight that some participants moved between these positions of empowerment, compliance and resistance within the same conversation. It was clear that the girls were confused by postfeminist claims of equality as they considered the division of housework. However, their strong reliance upon this discourse made it difficult to sustain discussions regarding any domestic unfairness. Pomerantz et al. (2013) found that the girls in their study went to great lengths to avoid constructing themselves as disempowered and this often lead to them diminishing instances of sexism within their school. In the current study it may have been be that the postfeminist imperative of individualism required participants to deny inequality in domestic labour in order to maintain the empowered position of equality and control. This demonstrates the inhibiting effect of postfeminist discourse on any challenge to the gendered status quo (McRobbie, 2011). The double entanglement of traditional and postfeminist discourses left the girls with limited access to a language of resistance to inequality, such as unfair divisions of labour, and the girls were pulled into positioning within powerful and enduring discourses of conventional femininity. Through this process feminism is taken into account, a feminist response to having to bear the majority of domestic work is explained away. A silent undermining of feminist politics through the double entanglement also permeated discussions of 'having it all' within the spheres of successful femininity (as outlined in Chapter Four

and Five), complicating postfeminist narratives of unbounded employment success, and limiting the freedom of successful women through mandatory motherhood.

Entangled Employment: "It's harder for women to get jobs" (Rosie)

The girls chronicled three spheres of success that were compulsory for full participation in successful femininity: education, employment and motherhood. The individualised qualities of successful femininity were mobilised wherein constructions of success in education hinged solely on the deployment of sufficient effort. Accordingly, every girl and young woman was instilled with the ability to choose to succeed educationally, and failing to do so was seen as a gateway to failure and delinquency. The main tenet of the girls' discussions around education constructed success within this arena as a way to facilitate a successful future, especially successful future employment. Success in employment and motherhood were each discussed in more depth than was education and were equally entangled in more contradictory and complex ways.

Within contemporary culture young women are seen as ideal subjects of workplace success (McRobbie, 2007). Within this context young women, with their exceptional qualifications, are expected to flourish (McRobbie, 2007). However, while postfeminism promises a simplistic opening up of opportunity for young women within an equal marketplace (Walkerdine, 2005), in reality they encounter enduring wage gaps between men and women (Papps, 2010), they predominantly take up traditional feminised roles (Aapola et al., 2005), and they are required to remain flexible to adapt to their mandatory dual role of motherhood (McRobbie, 2007). Within this context the girls' discussions of employment were steeped with contradiction. The majority of girls in the current study aligned themselves with neoliberal postfeminist constructions of unconstrained female professional ambition however some were able to address several of the key barriers faced by women who work. These particular girls discussed the pressure put upon them to succeed within employment while also expressing a clear understanding that men are expected to reach greater heights of success in this sphere. They held an astute awareness that women receive lower wages, have more difficulty finding employment and more difficulty getting noticed and listened to within the workforce. These girls also critiqued expectations upon young women to enter traditionally feminine careers while men enter more masculine (and well paid) positions. It is encouraging that these girls could unpack postfeminist claims of equality,

and identify gendered prejudice within the workplace. However, the voicing of such ideologies is inevitably discredited through the postfeminist dismantling of feminist politics (McRobbie, 2004). Outcries of inequality are reformulated as unfounded, so that the neoliberal strategy of independent self-determination is internalised. Subjects are coerced uncomplainingly into the workforce (Pomerantz et al., 2013) in accordance with the new sexual contract (McRobbie, 2007). In the current study, the operation of this postfeminist contract could be seen as the girls reminded each other of the past-ness of sexism when discussions of employment turned to workplace inequality. This denied the weight and relevance of these narratives of resistance. Within this denial lay the double entanglement, as feminist gains in female workforce participation were used to quieten conversations about the feminist agenda of inequality and to re-position talk along postfeminist lines.

Another strategy that appeared to appropriate notions of the new sexual contract was to offset the acknowledgement that some jobs are specifically for men by repositioning the uptake of feminised careers as an autonomous choice. Here neoliberal postfeminist discourses did not derail traditional ones, but were instead entangled with enduring conceptions of conventional femininity. Positioning women to avoid masculine occupations by choice reproduces the status quo and may lessen the potential for girls and young women to resist the pull of traditional feminine occupations. Furthermore, utilising the discourse of choice obscures the obstacles preventing unlimited participation in all sectors of the workforce (Baker, 2008). This can be seen in the way almost all participants aspired to careers within traditionally feminine sectors while simultaneously espousing postfeminist ideals of unconstrained freedom of choice. These aspirations may be regulated by the pull of a culturally anchored traditional femininity discourse that exists in a gendered workforce (Jacques & Radtke, 2012), channelling women into less challenging, exciting and lucrative careers than men (Hughes-Bond, 1998). This reproduction through the double entanglement of the existing gender order could also be seen in the discourses of motherhood available to the girls.

Entangled Motherhood: 'I think my aunty is successful because she just had a kid' (Sierra)

Within the spheres of success, narratives around motherhood were the least challenged, yet the most embedded within the double entanglement. In fact, motherhood

was the most consistently assumed and prioritised element of successful femininity for the girls. This constructs success within the dominant discourse of motherhood (Weaver & Ussher, 1997) and demonstrates the continuing applicability of the motherhood mandate first outlined by Russo in 1976. Again, the ambitious 'new femininity' is entangled with traditional femininity in the maintenance of traditional narratives such as a woman's ultimate desire to find the right man and have children; and postfeminism invites the well-educated, professionally minded postfeminist female subject to take pleasure in servicing husband and children, free from the wrath of feminism (McRobbie, 2004a). In the current study, entangled sentiments were present in the struggle to conceptualise a successful woman who was focused on her career but who was childless. The girls were caught within the double entanglement of neoliberal discourse that privileges personal choice and the dominant discourse of motherhood as the 'natural' state for women (Choi et al., 2005; Weaver & Ussher, 1997). This natural discourse diminishes the validity of a woman's decision to remain childless. It also represents the frequently expressed belief that all girls and young women yearn for motherhood, highlighting the absence of available non-mother discourses (Kirkman, 2003). While it was expected across focus groups that successful women hold motherhood over employment, whenever the girls were asked if it was more important for successful young women to be a mother or to have a good career, the answer was always that they should be both. The entangled requirements of traditional motherhood discourses with liberal discourses of female employment created tensions for the girls in two ways; firstly, by creating strict guidelines about when and how motherhood is successful and secondly, by feeding into the contradictory drive to 'have it all' (Whelehan, 2004).

Discourses of young women's heightened success and capacity now see them judged more harshly than ever before for failing to enact motherhood in acceptable ways (McRobbie, 2007). In accordance with the previously discussed new postfeminist sexual contract (McRobbie, 2007), young women must closely control their fertility in order to make full use of the new opportunities within education and employment (Baker, 2009; McRobbie, 2007). Emerging from the entanglement of enduring traditional discourses of motherhood and the postfeminist requirement to achieve success, is a thin line between when motherhood is respectable and when it is unacceptable (McRobbie, 2007). Congruent with this, the girls in the current research constructed motherhood as successful only once educational and employment goals had

been achieved. Accordingly, both young mothers and single unemployed mothers violated the postfeminist contract and were commonly vilified as unsuccessful. Young mothers were constructed as having failed to control their fertility and as needing to get their lives back on track. Additionally, single, unemployed mothers were frequently positioned within the discourse of the welfare queen, which focuses on dependence, lack of responsibility, and lack of sexual self-control (Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001). Concentrating on redirecting young and single mothers to become contributing citizens through up-skilling and getting back into the workforce is a common concern within governmental policies that demonise these forms of motherhood for their dependence on welfare and their failure under neoliberal discourses of standing on one's own two feet (Lessa, 2006; McRobbie, 2000, 2007). The strength of such rhetoric coloured girls' negative constructions of the young mother and the unemployed single mother as unable to support their children financially and as 'doing' motherhood wrong.

However, not all girls vilified the single mother; personal experience contested these negative discourses in the case of girls with single mothers. These girls recuperated their mothers as successful through neoliberal discourse, specifically the ethic of hard work. When the girls were asked how their own single mothers were successful while other single mothers were not, they explained that this was because their mothers had planned to have children and incorporated hard working employment alongside motherhood. Thus, these girls were able to negotiate the entangled requirements of employment and motherhood through constructing the performance of single motherhood in highly individualised ways. This demonstrates the 'have it all' approach that permeates contemporary femininity (Aronson, 2008) but also the way 'having it all' for women means having all the work (Greer, 1999). Herein lies the central tension for the majority of participants and the ultimate double entanglement; how can a young woman accomplish both the traditional motherhood mandate and new postfeminist goals of fulfilling employment? Successful mothers were expected to have high status jobs but were denied successfulness should they work too much and violate the primacy of motherhood. Complicating the performance of 'having it all' several girls even questioned a mother's right to have children should her workload be considered too high, many disavowed the use of nannies and the involvement of fatherhood was rarely discussed. The girls adhered closely to the new norm for women to financially support their family (Baker, 2009), despite the expectation that mothers should be constantly accessible to their children, leaving little space for anything else in

their lives. Girls struggled with the impossibility of negotiating these entangled requirements with the individualistic solutions of personal choice available within a neoliberal framework. Some potential solutions included working part time, working from home, dividing time evenly between work and mothering, and incorporating childcare with work (e.g. by using children as inspiration for a book). These solutions necessarily construct a future where 'having it all' is transformed into a personal sacrifice of career aspirations, 'scaling back' the time spent in paid employment. With the close tie between successful femininity and motherhood, young women are commonly found to curtail professional advancement to privilege motherhood (Aveling, 2002). However, this response to the double entanglement is incongruent with discourses of empowerment that permeate girls' talk in the current study. The absence of discursive resources to challenge the entangled narratives around 'having it all' means that the unequal division of domestic labour and childcare and work-family policies go unexamined (Aronson, 2008). Instead, the powerful discourses of motherhood ensure the replication of traditional patterns of discontinuous female employment (Baker, 2010b) that prevent women from peaking professionally (Zaslow, 2009). Discussions of success related to motherhood, education and individual qualities were strikingly similar across girls' ethnic backgrounds. However, when discussing employment, several Māori girls began critiquing the way their identity as Māori could constrain their success differently to other women in the workforce.

Conversing Ethnicity: *'There isn't that much um successful…dark women'* (Sierra)

The most prominently used discourses by girls in the current study, including neoliberalism, postfeminism, and the celebratory postfeminist narratives of successful girls and girl power, each hold a focus on choice and self-reliance that was clearly articulated throughout girls' discussions. This produces a girlhood and womanhood that no longer needs help, collective solutions or a language of opposition (Pomerantz et al., 2013). Female success within this model is based on female individualism, and understandings of any inequality are necessarily recast as individual problems and isolated occurrences (Walkerdine, 2005; Walkerdine et al., 2001). The ideal feminine subject is obligated to avoid victimhood, found by Baker (2010a, 2010b) and Pomerantz et al. (2013) to be associated with lack of personal motivation, self-responsibility and hard work. In this way, neoliberal and postfeminist discourses silence examination of racial discrimination on the grounds that success is equally attainable to all who possess

the adequate drive (Ringrose, 2007; Swauger, 2010). All narratives must then inevitably focus on personal agency (Pomerantz et al., 2013). Within this cultural landscape it is unsurprising that successful femininity was constructed in remarkably similar ways across ethnicity. The focus on the personal appeared to make it very difficult for most of the girls in this study to address racial discrimination, despite its prevalence within New Zealand society (McKinley, 2002). However, there was one group of Māori participants who were able to discuss the discrimination of Māori women that they saw in their daily lives as well as the discrimination of Māori people more widely within New Zealand politics. These girls highlighted the disparity between the number of successful Māori women and successful Pākehā women; they discussed the discrimination in people's perception and acceptance of Māori women and their physical appearance within wider society, and they also asserted that it would be more difficult for them to attain high powered professional positions. These discussions appeared to be driven by two girls in particular, both of whom referenced discussions with important Māori women in their lives. The ability of these girls to discuss this inequality is promising and may highlight the utility of conversations around discrimination between pre-teen girls and women whom they respect. In support of this, examinations of women's weighted role in domestic work were facilitated by the girls' landing on the right word to express this inequality, providing a language to conceptualise oppression (see Chapter Three, p. 38). This could help reconstitute experiences of sexism and racism as a collective rather than individual problem, and be useful to break the silence required of the new postfeminist sexual contract (McRobbie, 2009), helping both girls of minority ethnic backgrounds and Pākehā girls critique the discrimination and inequality facing them and their futures.

Reflections on the Research

The picture painted by the preceding discussion represents successful femininity as a highly (neoliberal) individualistic endeavour, calling on postfeminist narratives to situate this unrestrained success as equally attainable to all girls who are willing to work for it. Although I recognise that some good can be said of the feminine pride that accompanied narratives of girl power, the rhetoric of equality muted most attempts to analyse the way successful femininity intersects with class, ethnicity and gender. The glorification of female success appeared to me to be deeply contradictory. Through the double entanglement of normative discourses of femininity with the empowered discourses of the 'new' femininities, discussions were able to occupy a postfeminist

position of progressive female freedom, while silently and simultaneously entrenching conventional gender norms. I would argue that this saw women left with the impossible, tiresome role of 'having it all' within education, employment, motherhood and house care. Equally, the double entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist sentiments seemed to me to make it difficult to formulate a collective response to observable prejudice. The powerful postfeminist rhetoric that insists boys and girls are equal leaves girls and young women voiceless within their lived experiences of sexism and prejudice.

Reflecting on my methodology, I found feminist poststructuralism to be an especially useful framework for examining this contradictory discursive field that girls navigated in exploring the topic of successful femininity. Furthermore, the analytical approach of discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis proved well suited to understanding the fluid ways that the girls took up and resisted the available discourses of success. However, within the feminist poststructuralist framework adopted here it must be noted that the analysis within the current study is only one way to read the language used by the girls to construct successful femininity. As discussed in the methodology, I had spent significant time considering what constitutes successful femininity and went into the analysis with a theoretical conception of several discourses of female success. This may have swayed discussions during focus groups and influenced my selection and interpretation of the extracts used in the analyses. Attempting to present a fair representation of the data, I made sure that I paid attention to my own participation in the focus groups and learned to read the extracts from multiple perspectives so as to get at the potential functions of the girls' language. These processes should be observable within the two analysis chapters.

Further, reflexivity calls for the acknowledgement that three focus groups held a discussion about me and my age (29 years old at the time) and the fact that I am childless and not married. This could potentially have curbed the girls' explanations about what they would like as adults, and the age at which they would like them for fear of offending me. However, closer examination of the conversations revealed that the girls did not appear concerned about offending me with their expectations of a 29 year old woman, with one girl proclaiming '*woah! Nearly 30!*' (Alisi), and another stating '*29! That's quite old!*' (Ashlee). Equally, the descriptions of marriage and children were similar across focus groups, irrespective of whether the girls had enquired about my age and life circumstances. It is notable, however, that when the girls were asked immediately following discussions of my age what they would like for their lives by the

time they were 29 years old, the focus was almost exclusively on a career, despite fervent discussion of motherhood elsewhere in the focus group. My identity as a Pākehā woman may also have impacted discussions. Ethnically diverse girls may have been less open to explore issues bound to their experience and understanding of being girls of minority ethnic backgrounds, or may have perceived such conversations as irrelevant to me.

In addition to the analysis representing only one potential reading of the transcripts, it is acknowledged that the findings of the current study do not speak to all pre-adolescent girls in New Zealand, but are isolated to the specific girls in each focus group, as well as to the context within which they are speaking. Both schools included were low decile and conceptions of success may have varied in higher decile schools, as high achieving schools are often higher in decile (Meyer, McClure, Walkey, Weir, & McKenzie, 2009). Furthermore, participants were made aware of the focus on successful femininity and were given the example of girl power during the information meeting that occurred prior to the focus groups. It is possible that this may have influenced their use of this celebratory discourse.

Finally, it must be highlighted that one of the two schools held only two out of seven focus groups and, because the principal of that school had booked the focus groups on the same day as a school outing, each group had only 45 minutes instead of 1.5 hours. This made the focus groups rushed and left little time for watching and discussing the media clips. It was noted that within these two focus groups there was less elaboration upon threads of conversation and fewer extracts were selected for analysis from these transcripts. This means that the majority of information comes from girls within one school only, narrowing the diversity of the participant pool. The hasty nature of these two focus groups also left limited time for explaining the use of the photo-narrative books and consequently there was almost no useful material from these girls' books. There was also trouble with the photo-narrative books from the second school as few girls engaged with the task. Feedback provided from one teacher informed me that the girls were not entirely sure what to do with their camera and book and expressed feeling that the task was similar to homework. Despite this limited engagement, the material that was obtained from the photo-narrative books was highly interesting, validating the use of the photo-voice method with pre-teen girls (Jackson, 2010). Vares et al. (2011) found that the pre-teen girls in their study enjoyed the use of handycam video cameras and that this data collection method produced much valuable

material. It may have been that the disposable cameras were not of adequate interest to the technologically capable pre-teen sample. Furthermore, the girls in the current study had their photo-narrative books for only one week (although longer in the instances where the girls failed to return them on time), while the majority of participants in Vares et al. (2011) kept their video cameras for one month. Vares et al. (2011) found that participants frequently reported being very busy and there were long periods of time where no recording had been made. This suggests that in future research, allowing participants longer to record their media use may have resulted in a higher yield of data as well as utilising newer video technologies to collect that data.

Future Directions

Despite these limitations, the thesis contributes to the literature on successful femininity with neoliberal and postfeminist times and allows some understanding in the ways pre-teen girls in New Zealand engage with discourses of success. However, this area of analysis would benefit from further examination into, and theorising of, girls' understandings of successful femininity and how they negotiate the competing demands encompassed within this. Theoretically, McRobbie's notion of the double entanglement (2004a) was able to illuminate the way postfeminist narratives mask the entrenched undercurrent traditional ways of 'doing' femininity in the current study. While there is a growing body of literature examining the way girls and young women navigate the contradictory space of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses (Allan & Renold, 2006; Baker, 2010b; Harris, 2004; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Zaslow, 2009), it would be useful to explore in more depth the way girls engage with these traditional discourses of successful femininity. This would be especially interesting when considering the lack of resistance by the girls to powerful narratives of nice, passive femininity, as well as to discourses of intensive and mandatory motherhood. Equally, while the broad analysis of pre-teen girls' conceptions of successful femininity is a useful starting point it, would be interesting for future research to sharpen the focus upon each of the identified spheres of success. This would allow a more intricate unpacking of the perceived requirements and contradictions of successful femininity within education, employment and motherhood.

Another area that would benefit from a deeper analysis concerns pre-teen girls' engagement with media representations of successful femininity. Because girls live in a world saturated by media that acts as a regulatory mechanism upon social power

(Durham, 1999) and young people are positioned, and position themselves, in relation to the subjectivities made available through media (Allen & Mendick, 2013), it is a vital avenue of analysis when considering successful femininity. This is especially true considering the finding that pre-teen girls can be highly discerning and critical consumers of media (Vares et al., 2011). The current study spent considerable time during focus groups to explore what success actually 'is' to the pre-teen participants because there was limited literature examining girls' conceptualisation of success. However, this restricted the time available to examine and discuss media clips and, in combination with the limited engagement of the photo-narrative books, the information pertaining to successful femininity and media was lacking. It is important for future research to devote more time gathering data on the ways pre-teen girls understand, take up, and resist representations of successful femininity within the media.

Lastly, there was considerable confusion among the girls as they attempted to conceptualise actual strategies for combining domestic duties, motherhood and employment, despite a belief that their future lives would look different to the more traditional formulations of their mothers' lives. Given these expectations it is important to examine the lives of new mothers who had been succeeding within a career at the time of childbirth as they begin to occupy the conflicting domain of 'having it all'. Do these young women continue to engage with postfeminist claims of equal opportunity, or is there more explicit dissatisfaction with this narrative as they potentially experience first-hand the gendered expectations that surround childcare and domestic work, and how this work can be realistically incorporated with gainful employment?

The findings of the present study demonstrate that it is not enough for girls to be exposed to celebratory discourses of feminine success and equality when inequality is still observable in their lives, in the same way that it is not helpful to tell girls that it is not raining as they stand outside getting wet; we must educate them about the rain. Pre-adolescence has been a valuable age to help develop girls understandings of and resistance to patriarchal discourses in the world around them (Durham, 1999). As school was isolated by several girls as one arena for the 'learning' of successful femininity it could be an influential place to educate beyond messages of equality, and to attempt to deconstruct the contradictory space occupied by dominant discourses of success. The current findings could be helpful to inform educators in the ways that girls are constrained by straight forward celebration of girl power and to highlight the enduring boundaries, inequality and traditionalism faced by girls and young women. The goal of

this education would be to reconceptualise these difficulties as collective, social and political issues instead of personal, individualised understandings of failure. Similarly, the findings could be useful in developing feminist workshops for girls this age to make more available an oppositional language outside of postfeminist discourse, and to address some of the assumptions around feminine success. For example, this could be used also to facilitate discussions around alternative avenues for girls outside of the intensive motherhood mandate. Pre-teen girls have been found to be fully capable of critiquing media representations of femininity and therefore using popular culture would be a useful way to open up discussions around gendered limitations and constraints for girls and young women in the pursuit of success. Such discussions are essential in order to make visible the holes in the façade of boundless female success.

> Joan of Arc convinced the King of France to send her on a mission to beat the English. So she went, she saw, she kicked butt!! Girl Power!
>
> (Holly, Photo-Narrative Book)

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

School A Information Sheet

Research Project: "Having it all?" 'Tween' girls' understandings of successful young womanhood

Sophie Cossens

Email: sophie.cossens@vuw.ac.nz

Tel. (04) 463-5233 ext 8232

Dr Sue Jackson (Senior Lecturer)

Email: sue.jackson@vuw.ac.nz

Tel. (04) 463-5233 ext 6729

This information sheet describes to you a Masters Research project being undertaken in Wellington by Sophie Cossens in the Victoria University School of Psychology. Sophie has appropriate skills for working with children and will work under the direct supervision of Dr Sue Jackson. Sue is very experienced in working with children and young people as a researcher and as a former teacher and Clinical Psychologist.

This research has been approved by the School of Psychology Human Ethics Committee under delegated authority of Victoria University of Wellington's Human Ethics Committee. If the research described is of interest to yourself and your school we would be grateful for you to consider participation.

What is the purpose of this research?

In recent times there has been considerable public and academic interest in media images portraying young women as highly successful in all arenas of life, including educational, professional, social, familial, physical and emotional life. Young women are consistently depicted as over achievers who "have it all" and are fuelled by 'girl power'. Discussions on the saturation of this type of media centre around what such imagery may say about the culture that produces it and what effect this may be having on women in their everyday lives as they negotiate their identities and the pressures to rise to these forms of success. To date however, we know very little about the impact of media imagery of successful young womanhood on pre-teen or 'tween' girls of different cultural backgrounds. This is an important issue, as tween girls are increasingly becoming a marketing target with a large volume of media addressing them, from movies and television, to magazines and popular music. As far as we are aware this research project is the first to investigate how New Zealand girls respond to, and understand, various media images of successful young women.

What happens if you agree to your school taking part?

Participation would involve three school-based focus groups, one Māori, one Pacific Island and one Pākehā, each consisting of 6-8 girls aged between 11- and 13- years. These would be audio-recorded and organised at a time and place suitable to your teachers and programme. The groups would involve approximately one to one and a half hours of student time. Within each focus group students would be shown short clips/excerpts of media popular with tween girls. Media clips/excerpts will be drawn from various sources including television, music videos, and magazine articles. Group discussion will focus on what 'success' means, what the clips/excerpts say about successful young women, whether this is desirable and realistic and how real life women (e.g. mothers, aunties, sisters) compare to these images of womanhood. After group discussions students would be given a disposable camera and asked to photograph media that they feel represents successful young womanhood and write a little about this in a photo book. This phase of the project would be done in the girls' own time. The photo book, similar to a written diary, would be kept for a week and involve a small amount of time (e.g. 5-10 mins) each day (when possible). Student entries in the photo book would include a short description of the photo, what this says about female success, and any thoughts they have about this. For the first entry into the photo book

105

students would be asked to photograph and describe any representations of young women they have in their rooms. Following this, students would be asked to keep an eye out for any related media (e.g. a poster, a magazine, a television show) that they come across during everyday activities and photograph these where appropriate. Once all the photo books have been completed we would return to your school to collect these and answer any questions they may have.

We would ask all students to be careful with the cameras provided however if they are lost, stolen or damaged students will not be liable for the cost of replacement.

Sophie will keep in touch with your students and their parents to ensure everyone is up to date with the project and provide a summary to the school, students and parents of the main themes that came up across all of the girls taking part. To show our appreciation for time spent on the project each student would receive a $5 iTunes voucher.

Your students or their parents may withdraw from the project at two different points of the project: immediately after the focus group and any time during or immediately after the photo book completion. In these cases we would not transcribe student's talk and the photo book(s) would be destroyed. If in any phase of the project a student expresses worries or problems in a group or photo book entry that we considered needed to be shared with parents we would discuss the best way of doing so with that student personally.

What happens to the information your students provide?
➢ Student's privacy would be protected in several ways:
➢ Only the researchers would have access to the audio recordings, photo books, digital photographs and consent forms, all of which would be stored in locked files in the researcher's research room. Audio recordings and photo books would be kept for five years after completion of the project.
➢ During transcription of audio recordings, student's actual name would not be used so that transcripts would contain no identifying information.
➢ We plan to produce findings in the form of a Master's Thesis. Should we use any student material in this way no identifying information would be included (e.g., names, locations, images).
➢ If you wish, we can provide you with a general written summary of findings in different phases of the project; these summaries would take care not to identify any individual participants.
➢ As is the case with all professional people who hold confidential information provided by others, confidentiality of information in this project can only be breached if legally required.

What is the next step?

If you agree to your school participating in the project we would then be guided by you as to the process we might use for discussing the project with girls and then providing them with information packs to take home. Information packs include: parent information sheet, girl's information brochure and a consent form (all of which are included with this letter). Pending advice from your school, translations of the Information Sheets, Consent/Assent and Demographic forms into te reo Māori may be required. If parents are happy for their daughters to participate we would ask for the Consent Form to be returned in whatever manner is appropriate to your school. Once we have those forms with contact details we would be in touch with parents to ask if they would like to meet us prior to their daughter's participation in the Focus Group and/or doing the photo book.

If , subsequent to our meeting there are any further questions or matters you would like to discuss about the project you can contact either Sophie Cossens on 04 463 5233 ext. 6729 or Sophie.Cossens@vuw.ac.nz or Sue Jackson, project supervisor, on 04 463 5233 x8232 or email sue.jackson@vuw.ac.nz.

Appendix B

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

School B Information Sheet

Research Project: "Having it all?" 'Tween' girls' understandings of successful young womanhood

Sophie Cossens   Dr Sue Jackson (Senior Lecturer)

Email: sophie.cossens@vuw.ac.nz   Email: sue.jackson@vuw.ac.nz

Tel. (04) 463-5233 ext 8232   Tel. (04) 463-5233 ext 6729

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107

thoughts they have about this. For the first entry into the photo book students would be asked to photograph and describe any representations of young women they have in their rooms. Following this, students would be asked to keep an eye out for any related media (e.g. a poster, a magazine, a television show) that they come across during everyday activities and photograph these where appropriate. Once all the photo books have been completed we would return to your school to collect these and answer any questions they may have.

We would ask all students to be careful with the cameras provided however if they are lost, stolen or damaged students will not be liable for the cost of replacement

Sophie will keep in touch with your students and their parents to ensure everyone is up to date with the project and provide a summary to the school, students and parents of the main themes that came up across all of the girls taking part. To show our appreciation for time spent on the project each student would receive a $5 iTunes voucher.

Your students or their parents may withdraw from the project at two different points of the project: immediately after the focus group and any time during or immediately after the photo book completion. In these cases we would not transcribe student's talk and the photo book(s) would be destroyed. If in any phase of the project a student expresses worries or problems in a group or photo book entry that we considered needed to be shared with parents we would discuss the best way of doing so with that student personally.

What happens to the information your students provide?
- Student's privacy would be protected in several ways:
- Only the researchers would have access to the audio recordings, photo books, digital photographs and consent forms, all of which would be stored in locked files in the researcher's research room. Audio recordings and photo books would be kept for five years after completion of the project.
- During transcription of audio recordings, student's actual name would not be used so that transcripts would contain no identifying information.
- We plan to produce findings in the form of a Master's Thesis. Should we use any student material in this way no identifying information would be included (e.g., names, locations, images).
- If you wish, we can provide you with a general written summary of findings in different phases of the project; these summaries would take care not to identify any individual participants.
- As is the case with all professional people who hold confidential information provided by others, confidentiality of information in this project can only be breached if legally required.

What is the next step?

If you agree to your school participating in the project we would then be guided by you as to the process we might use for discussing the project with girls and then providing them with information packs to take home. Information packs include: parent information sheet, girl's information brochure and a consent form (all of which are included with this letter). If parents are happy for their daughters to participate we would ask for the Consent Form to be returned in whatever manner is appropriate to your school. Once we have those forms with contact details we would be in touch with parents to ask if they would like to meet us prior to their daughter's participation in the Focus Group and/or doing the photo book.

If , subsequent to our meeting there are any further questions or matters you would like to discuss about the project you can contact either Sophie Cossens on 04 463 5233 ext. 6729 or Sophie.Cossens@vuw.ac.nz or Sue Jackson, project supervisor, on 04 463 5233 x8232 or email sue.jackson@vuw.ac.nz.

Appendix C

Parent Information Sheet

Research Project: "Having it all?" 'Tween' girls' understandings of successful young womanhood

Sophie Cossens   Dr Sue Jackson (Senior Lecturer)

Email: sophie.cossens@vuw.ac.nz   Email: sue.jackson@vuw.ac.nz

Tel. (04) 463-5233 ext 8232   Tel. (04) 463-5233 ext 6729

This information sheet describes to you a Masters Research project being undertaken in Wellington by Sophie Cossens in the Victoria University School of Psychology. Sophie has appropriate skills for working with children and will work under the direct supervision of Dr Sue Jackson. Sue is very experienced in working with children and young people as a researcher and as a former teacher and Clinical Psychologist.

This research has been approved by the School of Psychology Human Ethics Committee under delegated authority of Victoria University of Wellington's Human Ethics Committee. On the basis of the information we provide, we invite you to consider your daughter participating in the project if she would like to.

What is the purpose of this research?

In recent times there has been considerable public and academic interest in media images portraying young women as highly successful in all arenas of life, including educational, professional, social, familial, physical and emotional life. Young women are consistently depicted as over achievers who "have it all" and are fuelled by 'girl power'. Discussions on the saturation of this type of media centre around what such imagery may say about the culture that produces it and what effect this may be having on women in their everyday lives as they negotiate their identities and the pressures to rise to these forms of success. To date however, we know very little about the impact of media imagery of successful young womanhood on pre-teen or 'tween' girls of different cultural backgrounds. This is an important issue, as tween girls are increasingly becoming a marketing target with a large volume of media addressing them, from movies and television, to magazines and popular music. As far as we are aware this research project is the first to investigate how New Zealand girls respond to, and understand, various media images of successful young women.

What happens if you agree to your child taking part?

Your daughter would take part in a school-based focus group with 6-8 other girls her age. This would be audio-recorded and take place at school. It would involve approximately one to one and a half hours of your daughter's time. Within the focus group your daughter would be shown short clips/excerpts of media popular with tween girls. Media clips/excerpts will be drawn from various sources including television, music videos, and magazine articles. Group discussion will focus on what 'success' means to girls, what the clips/excerpts say about successful young women, whether this is desirable and realistic and how real life women (e.g. mothers, aunties, sisters) compare to these images of womanhood. After group discussions your daughter would be given a disposable camera and asked to photograph media that she feels represents successful young womanhood and write a little about this in a photo book. The photo book, similar to a written diary, would be kept for a week and involve a small amount of time (e.g. 5-10 mins) each day (when possible). Entries in the photo book would include a short description of the photo, what this says about female success, and any thoughts your daughter has about this. For the first entry into the photo book girls would be asked to photograph and describe any representations of young women they have in their rooms. Following this the girls would

be asked to keep an eye out for any related media (e.g. a poster, a magazine, a television show) that they come across during everyday activities and photograph these where appropriate.

We will provide girls with clear photograph and photo book guidelines to take home and we will be available to talk with you to address any queries before, during or after the photo book phase of the project. We would ask your daughter to be careful with the camera provided however should it be lost, stolen or damaged you would not have to cover the cost of replacement. Once all the photo books have been completed we would return to your daughter's school to collect these and answer any questions she may have.

Sophie will keep in touch with you and your daughter to ensure you are up to date with the project and she will provide a summary of the main themes that came up across all of the girls taking part if you wish. To show our appreciation for your daughter's time spent on the project she would receive a $5 iTunes voucher.

Your daughter, or you on her behalf, may withdraw from the project at two different points of the project: immediately after the focus group and any time during or immediately after the photo book completion. In these cases we would not transcribe your daughter's talk and the photo book would be destroyed. If in any phase of the project your daughter expressed worries or problems in a group or photo book entry that we considered needed to be shared with you we would discuss the best way of doing so with your daughter.

What happens to the information your daughter provides?
Your daughter's privacy would be protected in several ways:

- Only the researchers would have access to the audio recordings, photo books, digital photographs and consent forms, all of which would be stored in locked files in the researcher's research room. Audio recordings and photo books would be kept for five years after completion of the project.
- During transcription of audio recordings your daughter's actual name would not be used so that transcripts would contain no identifying information.
- We plan to produce findings in the form of a Master's Thesis. Should we use any of your child's material in this way no identifying information would be included (e.g., names, locations, images).
- If you wish, we can provide you with a general written summary of findings in different phases of the project; these parent and child summaries would take care not to identify any individual participants.
- As is the case with all professional people who hold confidential information provided by others, confidentiality of information in this project can only be breached if legally required.
-

What is the next step?

If you agree to your daughter participating in the project please complete a Consent Form and ask your daughter to return it to your school office. Once we have your form with your contact details we will be in touch with you to ask if you would like to meet us prior to your daughter's participation in the Focus Group and/or doing the photo book.

If you are considering agreeing to your daughter's participation but wish to ask questions or discuss the project further before deciding, please contact Sophie Cossens on 04 463 5233 ext. 6729 or sophie.cossens@vuw.ac.nz. You may also contact Sue Jackson, project supervisor, on 463 5233 x8232 or sue.jackson@vuw.ac.nz.

Privacy & Confidentiality

To protect your privacy:

★ The information that you and the other group members give will not be discussed by anyone outside of the group discussion room. We will not show your photo book to others. You can show it to your parents if you want to. This means that what you say in the group or write in the photo book will not be passed onto family. If we're worried about you because you seem upset in the group or in your photo book writing we'll talk with you on your own and check with you whether it's something that a parent could help with.

★ The consent and assent forms, the group audio recordings, the photo books and the photographs will be kept in a specially designed research room at the university where only the researchers will have access to them. We will store them there until five years after we have finished doing our project. After that the forms and all recordings will be destroyed.

★ You will not be identified in anything that is written or presented about the project. When we transcribe (write down) the audio recording talk and your photo book writing we will not use your real name.

How to contact us:

If you have any further questions regarding this research, please contact:

Sophie Cossens (Researcher)
Email: Sophie.Cossens@vuw.ac.nz

Phone: (04) 463 5233 ext 8059

Sue Jackson (Project Supervisor)
Senior Lecturer
Email: sue.jackson@vuw.ac.nz
Phone: (04) 463 5233 ext 8232

We are in the School of Psychology at Victoria University.

What to do if you want to take part:
➢ Take home an Information Sheet and Consent Form
➢ Talk about the project with your parent/s or your care-giver
➢ If your parent/s or caregiver agrees they need to sign the Consent Form
➢ Bring the Consent Form back to school and take it to the school office.

'Tween' talk on media and successful young women

Appendix D

Hello!

This brochure is to tell you about a research project so you can decide whether you would like to take part.

The Research…

Does your favourite TV show, book, magazine, music video, movie or video game have a young woman as one of the characters?

…………………………………………………………….

......These are just some of the types of media that show us images of young women being successful in different ways. For example, successful at university, at sports, at work, at home or successful at looking a certain way. Girls your age have more and more access to the types of media that show successful young women.

Although we know girls your age like to use media we don't yet know what they think about how young women are being shown in that media. We also don't know much about how different cultural backgrounds may influence how girls your age are thinking about these kinds of things. So we are doing a research project to find out more about all of this.

If you wanted to take part this is who is working on the project and what we would ask you to do......

Who is doing the research?
My name is Sophie Cossens and I will be doing the research with you. My supervisor for the project is Sue Jackson. We are both researchers are in the School of Psychology at Victoria University in Wellington.

What is involved if you decide to participate?
...... You would take part in a discussion group about the media with up to 8 other girls from your school and Sophie, the researcher. The group would be at school for 1-1.5 hours and be audio-recorded.

...... You would make entries into a photo book each day, when possible, for one week using a camera we would give you to use. In the photo book you can write about photographs you have taken of any kind of media you see, read or use during the day that makes you think of successful young women. We would ask your first photo book entry to focus on any media of young women you have in your room e.g. a poster of your favourite pop star, a magazine article about a celebrity you like or a book cover of a novel you're into. This would be your way of sharing with the researchers the media you like and use that says something about successful young women. We would give you more ideas and information in the group discussion meeting.

What if I took part then wanted to pull out?
No problem! There are two times when you could pull out:

1. Right after the focus group

2. Any time while making your photo book before you give it to the researchers

If you pull out we will not use any of your recordings in writing about our project.

What happens to your talk, writing and photos?
★ First all of the talk gets written down so we have a hard copy of it. Next we put this together with the writing and photos. We will use this information to find out what the main things are that the girls taking part think about the images and ideas of successful young women that are in the media.

★ It's the main ideas or themes across all of our groups and the photo books that we focus on in writing up the project.

★ Sophie will talk and write about the research, which will then be examined as part of completing her university study. She won't identify you in the things she will write.

★ Sophie will keep in touch with you and your family throughout the project. This means you can easily ask her for information at any time and it also means she can give you a summary about the main themes that come up across all of the girls taking part.

Appendix E

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI

VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

CONSENT FORM

"Having it all?" 'Tween' girls' understandings of successful young womanhood

If you consent to your daughter participating in the proposed project, please read the following carefully and sign in the space provided.

I have read the information concerning the proposed project and I understand what my daughter would be asked to do if I agree to her participation.

I agree that the group discussion will be audio-recorded.

I agree to my daughter making a photo book using the Guidelines given to her

I understand that participation is voluntary and that my daughter does not have to take part in it.

I understand that my daughter, or myself on her behalf, may withdraw from the project at any time before the end of the group discussion or at any time before completing the photo book or giving it to the researcher. I understand that upon withdrawal from the project my daughter's talk would not be transcribed and her photo book would be destroyed.

I understand that the information my daughter gives is confidential, the researchers will never use her name in anything written about the project and only those doing the research will have access to her talk, photographs and writing.

I have had the chance to ask questions about the research and have those questions answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to my daughter taking part in this study.

Name

Signature

I would like a copy of the summary of the results of this study   YES / NO

Please send the summary to the following address (please write address below):

ASSENT FORM

'Tween' talk on media and successful young women

I have been told what the research is about and I know what I would be asked to do if I agree to take part.

I agree that the group discussion will be audio-recorded.

I agree to make a photo book using the Guidelines given to me.

I know that I can pull out of the project at any time before the end of the group discussion or at any time before completing the photo book or giving it to the researcher.

I know that the researchers will never use my name in anything written about the project and that only those doing the project will hear and see what I say, photograph and write.

Name: _____

Signed: _____

☐ Tick here if you would like a copy of your photo book at the end of the study.

Demographics Form

ABOUT ME

We would like you to help us get to know you a bit better by telling us a few things about yourself.

My name: _____

Date I was born: _ _ (date) _ _ (month) _ _ _ _(year)

My school year: _____

My class: teacher: _____

Where I live:

_____

_____

_____

Best way to keep in touch with me:

_____ (give details)

My family:

_____

_____

_____

What my mum's work is: _____

What my dad's work is: _____

How I describe my ethnicity: _____

Favourite things to do in my spare time:

_____

_____

Appendix H

Focus Group Interview Guide

1. **Introductions**
   - ❖ Group introductions researchers and girls
   - ❖ Reviewing the project and answering questions
   - ❖ Assent Forms
   - ❖ Group confidentiality and turn taking
   - ❖ Ethics (confidentiality of information, exceptions)
   - ❖ Demographic Form: About Me
2. **Success**
   - ❖ What does success mean to them
   - ❖ What is/is not a successful young woman to them
   - ❖ Why do they think they see this as successful
   - ❖ What types of media shows examples of this- e.g. TV shows, books, magazines, websites, ads, video games
   - ❖ Media favourites (as above)
3. **Media clips/excerpts**
   - ❖ What about the young woman is seen as (un)successful
     - What different elements of success does she represent
   - ❖ What is (un)appealing about this form of success/would they want to be like this
   - ❖ How do girls feel about the likelihood of achieving these forms of success when they are older
   - ❖ Could other girls they know be successful like this when they are older and why is this
   - ❖ How do these clips make the girls feel about their future
4. **Real life**
   - ❖ How do these ideas of successful young womanhood influence the kinds of things the girls do currently
   - ❖ How do these ideas of success compare to other women in the girls lives e.g. mothers, sisters, cousins, aunties, teachers
   - ❖ Why are these women similar/why are they dissimilar
   - ❖ How do the girls imagine these women would feel about being successful in this way
3. **Photo Book**
   - ❖ Description of the photo book process
   - ❖ Technical details of the camera
   - ❖ Discussion of what's okay and not okay to take photos of (Guidelines)
   - ❖ Confidentiality and ethics of photo books (Guidelines)
   - ❖ Sophie support throughout the process
4. **Closing**
   - ❖ Last words- anything they would like to ask about
   - ❖ Ensuring girls have ways of contacting researchers (means and contact details)
   - ❖ Giving girls cameras and photo book guidelines

Appendix I

PHOTO BOOK GUIDELINES FOR GIRLS

A photo book is rather like a personal diary where you might write down things that happen in your day and what you think about them. The photo book we are asking you to keep for this project is a little bit the same except we would like you to take photos of media that you think shows a young woman being successful or unsuccessful and write a little about what you think of these. In the group discussion we talked about the kinds of things you might take photos of and write about and we have put some reminders of those things here. Remember if you're not sure whether it's okay to take a photo of something for your photo book you can phone, or email Sophie. We have also written down some reminders about things to be careful about in keeping your diary.

Ideas about what and what not to put in the photo book

- ❖ In your first entry we would like you to take a photo of each piece of media in your room that you feel shows successful or unsuccessful young women (e.g. you may have posters, books, girls' magazines, a favourite web-page or your own web-page, a DVD or CD, a video-game).
- ❖ Write in your photo book a little description of the photo (so we know which one you mean) and then tell us what you think about this media and how it makes you feel.
- ❖ Next we would like you to carry your camera with you and take snaps of whatever media you come across throughout your day that you think is of successful or unsuccessful women e.g. you may see a poster while out walking or notice a character in a television show. Please remember to write a little bit about this in your photo book as well as taking a picture.
- ❖ We just want you to take photos of media things for your photo book so remember not to take photos of and write about all kinds of other stuff.

Protecting your photo book camera and protecting other people

- ❖ The photo book and photographs are personal to you and should be kept in a safe place in your room. You don't have to show it to anyone else unless you want to. But remember that there is always a risk that someone might try to sneak a peek if you leave it around. Keeping it in a locked box will help avoid this if you want. And unlike private writing, we will be reading it later.
- ❖ The photo book is for and about you and your media. In this project the focus is on media images and not images of your friends or family. Writing about how media affects yourself, friends or family is great but photos should only be of the media you want to write about.

And last but not least, we hope that you will enjoy making this photo book. If you would like a copy of your photo book just tick the box on the assent form and we'll send it to you once the study is finished.

Appendix J

Media Clip Descriptions

Title of Media	Type of Media	Description
'*Run the World (Girls)*' (Columbia, 2011)	Music Video	This music video features Beyoncé and a group of other women dancing in front of a group of men. All of the women dance in high heels and revealing clothing as Beyoncé sings about female empowerment and how girls '*run the world.*'
'*Make Yourself*' (Nike Inc., 2010)	Television Advertisement	This advertisement features seven attractive and successful female athletes as they discuss the hard work that they put in to 'make themselves'. Each woman has a slogan, for instance "I'm making myself hot", or "I'm making myself shine".
'*Voices*' (Nike, Inc., 2012)	Television Advertisement	This advertisement features successful female athletes of all ages explaining prejudice from men that they had overcome in order to succeed.
'*Jessie*' (Disney Channel, 2011)	Television Show	This scene features the main character, Jessie, as she is introduced for the first time to the mother of the children for whom she nannies. This character, Christina Ross, depicts a supermodel turned business tycoon who is the mother of one biological child and three adoptive children.
'*Glee*' (Fox, 2009)	Television Show	This scene features Roz Washington, a teacher, as she talks to several other teachers about how she has now secured her dream job, won an Olympic medal and is in talks with Oprah Winfrey about creating her own franchise. She also makes fun of the other teachers for being afraid when gunshots went off earlier and positions herself as '*a child of the ghetto*' who is used to such sounds.
'*The New Zealand X-Factor*' (MediaWorks, 2013)	Television Show	This clip features the contestant Jackie Thomas, who was doing very well in the competition at the time of filming. Jackie explains that she is a small town girl who loves her family and has just moved to Auckland to pursue her dreams, despite being currently unemployed. She then sings for the judges and is praised for her performance.

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