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**(RE)THINKING THE GIRL EFFECT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GIRLS'
POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY AND AGENCY AT THE UNITED NATIONS 54TH
SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW 54)**

**BY
EMILY CHRISTINE BENT
STUDENT ID# 08231951**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY
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RESEARCH ABSTRACT

This study is a feminist poststructuralist analysis of the Girl Effect informed by girls' experiences at the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 54). Based on a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with eleven girl delegates, I interrogate the regulatory effects of the Girl Effect paradigm and examine how girls understand the 'invest in girls' message. The Girl Effect logic, I suggest discursively (re)produces oppositional girlhoods and neoliberal girl power, which problematically displace girls' human rights in favor of the missionary girl power logic (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). Using the tools of discursive deconstruction and voice-centered research (VCR), I investigate how girl delegates bring meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s); and reveal the normative and transformative (Taft 2010) possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Rise of the Girl Effect¹ Paradigm: Research Introduction, Origins and Structure

In November of 2007, I was asked to assist a group of adolescent girls in preparing a statement for the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 52) at the United Nations (UN). At the time, my professional responsibilities included representing girls' rights, interests and concerns at the UN through a New York City-based collective for international NGOs called the *Working Group on Girls, NGO Committee of UNICEF* (WGG).² Historically, members of the WGG advocated for the inclusion of girls' human rights in the UN system, and called attention to the roles girls can and should play in international, regional, and local politics. In the prior year, the 51st Session of the CSW (CSW 51) had considered the specific obstacles and challenges related to the realization of girls' human rights. This session included the participation of over two hundred girl delegates in high-level plenary meetings, parallel events, and roundtable discussions related to the CSW 51 theme: *The Elimination of All Forms of Violence and Discrimination Against the Girl Child*.³ During CSW 51, girl delegates drafted the first-ever *Girls Statement* and pressed member states, delegations and civil society organizations to "please remember that we are more than just a theme" (CSW: 9 March 2007). This statement inspired members of the WGG to engage in more concerted efforts to promote the equitable participation of girls in future CSW sessions. Toward this end, they proposed to facilitate the drafting and submission of the *Girls Statement* to the Commission each year.

Because I had worked with American girls for a number of years on the topics of universal girls' education, political advocacy, and community-engaged leadership, the WGG believed it a natural fit for me to engage girl delegates in drafting a series of comments and demands around the CSW 52 theme: *Financing for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women* (CSW 2008). In February of that year, I met with a group of forty adolescent girl delegates to prepare and submit the *Girls Statement* to the 52nd Commission. I now credit this assignment with the beginning of my dissertation process – both in terms of solidifying my involvement with the WGG and CSW, and in the clarification of my academic interest in girls' politics and human rights.

Women's human rights scholar, Sally Engle-Merry (2006) characterizes the CSW as "a transnational social space where actors come together simultaneously as locally embedded people and as participants in a transnational setting that has its own norms, values, and cultural practices" – the bulk of which, reflect adult women's interests and concerns (p.37). Because of girls' historical exclusion from CSW

¹ To assist in the reader's understanding of the Girl Effect paradigm, it is recommended to view the video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlvmE4_KMNw

² As of August 2011, the WGG separated from UNICEF to become a registered 501(c)3 and was renamed *The Working Group on Girls* (WGG 2011). I provide a more detailed description of the WGG, its political foundation and involvement in the girls' rights movement in the next chapter.

³ Chapter Three provides additional background information on CSW 51 including the involvement of adolescent girls in parallel events and high-level meetings.

proceedings, their current inclusion is fraught with the logistical and conceptual limitations produced by years of participatory disadvantage and generational inequality. WGG members, for example regularly experience resistance from member states and NGOs regarding the inclusion of girls in their CSW delegations. Girls, it is said, require too much supervision, training, and preparation; and their participation is difficult, time consuming, and expensive. Delegates assume girls will disrupt meetings and roundtable sessions on account of being bored, distracted, loud, and 'unable to sit still.' They further question whether the insights provided by girls is in fact *new* information.

The inclusion of girls in CSW proceedings also brings attention to the unstated fear that girls might challenge 'accepted' human rights practices. Children's rights scholar, Marc Jans (2004) attests "system-controlled participation models" like that of the CSW "often become training grounds for children, who, due to their lack of political rights, cannot fully participate" but can *learn* to be successful citizens in accordance with adult interests, values, and norms (p.31). In my early experiences working with the WGG, I encountered this demand for training and supervision in almost every Commission meeting. WGG members were routinely asked to review and even draft girls' statements in order to ensure that they spoke to previously specified items and areas of concern. Adult delegates similarly demanded access to girl-only spaces during the Commission sessions, so that they could monitor and direct girls' conversations 'appropriately.'

Collectively, these experiences contributed much to the original scope of this research project. I began this work looking to address the structural barriers to girls' political participation in highly politicized spaces, like the CSW. And I sought to explore the conceptual gaps in our understanding of girls' human rights as everyday practice. I wanted to disrupt the patronizing characterizations of girls as apolitical or future subjects, and proposed to alternatively illustrate how girls articulate and experience human rights in their everyday lives. Given these goals, I was initially interested in how girls lived experiences as politically marginalized subjects might offer a different understanding of the mainstream human rights project. I hypothesized that their understanding of human rights might lend itself to a more emancipatory human rights framework. Consequently, I asked: how do girls experience themselves as human rights subjects? How do they define and bring meaning to human rights in the everyday? And what do their perspectives tell us about the realization of human rights for *differently* located subjects?

Traditionally, human rights are conceptualized in alignment with a liberal agenda that prioritizes first generation rights over economic, social, and cultural rights, and which privileges the autonomous adult male subject as norm.⁴ Because girls are uniquely positioned at the intersections of gender and age, generational and gender-based biases make difficult the project of human rights in girls' everyday lives (Croll 2006, Taefi 2009). In order to attend to the structural and conceptual marginalization of *girl* as a human rights subject, I initially decided to couple Axel Honneth's (1995) recognition theory with Nancy Fraser's (2000, 2001)

⁴ See Benhabib 1992, Bunch 1990, Charlesworth and Chinkin 2000, Johnstone 2006, Lacey 2004, Reilly 2007, and Romany 1994.

participatory parity model in order to examine human rights from the perspective of girls. Honneth's (1995) themes of love, rights, and solidarity as inter-subjective and essential components of primary, legal, and community-based relationships allowed me to prioritize girls' subjective dependencies as essential to their relative human rights status. Contrastingly, Fraser's (2000) participatory parity model allowed me to explore the extent to which girls could *be* rights-bearing subjects, given the socio-cultural and economic complexities of their everyday lives. In combining these approaches, I sought to make more visible and manageable the relational, symbolic, and socio-material intersections of girls' lives in ways that questioned the limitations of mainstream understandings of human rights and suggested revised accounts that better captured girls' diverse experiences and locations.

In conducting my interviews at the 54th Session of the Commission of the Status of Women however, I found that the small group of eleven adolescent girls delegates did not talk about their experiences with human rights. Rather, they spoke about the Girl Effect and the ways this discursive paradigm had impacted their CSW experience, and understanding of themselves as political subjects. Because of the tangible omnipresence of the Girl Effect in my research findings, I chose to re-define the conceptual parameters of the study; and while my earlier interest in girls' human rights continues to inform my approach to girls as political subjects, this thesis is primarily concerned with discourse and the production of meaning. It is a feminist poststructuralist analysis of the Girl Effect paradigm informed by girls' experiences as politically marginalized subjects. In this work, I propose the Girl Effect problematically limits the possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency; I investigate how girl delegates navigate the discursive logic of the Girl Effect to bring meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s).

This thesis draws from and contributes to the growing disciplinary field of Girls' Studies. Central research questions include: what is made (im)possible for differently situated girls within this discursive paradigm? How does the Girl Effect shape and inform girls' political subjectivity and agency? And in what ways, do girls accommodate or subvert its regulatory effects to make sense of their political selves and girlhood(s)? To interpret the delegates' responses, I adopt Jessica Taft's (2010) civic engagement spectrum to help reveal how girls (re)produce and contest the discursive parameters of this contemporary paradigm.

In the next section, I situate the Girl Effect paradigm within the international development community.

1.1: Framing the Girl Effect Paradigm

Prior to my conversations with CSW 54 girl delegates, I had seen the Girl Effect video a handful of times. A friend had forwarded the link in early October of 2008, explaining that she 'thought of me' when she saw it; and at the time, I remember thinking that it was certainly well crafted and engaging, but there was something about the message that I found troubling. In an effort to discover exactly what that was; I introduced the video to undergraduate and graduate level Women's Studies students at NUI, Galway during two different class discussions. As a group, we deconstructed the narrative, talked about the simplicity of the story line, and

commented on the irony of it being produced by the Nike Foundation.⁵ We identified the rather overt messages of rescue directed at a presumably benevolent Western viewer. Yet beyond these initial discussions, I did not think much more about the Girl Effect until CSW 54 - assuming that it, like many other social media campaigns, would disappear into the never-lands of a digitized world. In hindsight, I could not have been more wrong. Indeed, by the time I interviewed the CSW 54 girl delegates, the Girl Effect had not only gone viral, but it was also increasingly referenced by the mainstream human rights community.

The Girl Effect is, in essence, a marketing campaign created by the Nike and NoVo Foundations to generate funding for girl specific development initiatives in the Global South.⁶ Over the last several years, adolescent girls have increasingly become the focus of international development campaigns, resulting in what some scholars call the 'girling' of international development policy (Hayhurst 2011). International development originated in the post-WWII era with the expressed goals of "economic transformation, social modernization, and technological progress" in previously colonized countries (Fukuda-Parr 2011). However since its inception, the theoretical debates and policies have changed significantly. The 1950's through 1970's emphasized public investments and modernization (Toye 2003), while the 1970's and early 1980's adopted neoliberal ideas that promoted neoclassic economics and free market mechanisms (Fukuda-Parr 2011). By the mid-1990's, thinking shifted in response to Amaryta Sen's (1999) publication on the capabilities approach or what human beings are able / capable of doing in a given context. The capabilities approach prioritizes human agency, "beings and doings" (or functioning) and the opportunities (or capabilities) available to human rights subjects (Sen 1999). Both Sen and feminist political philosopher Martha Nussbaum helped to solidify the capabilities approach as the pre-eminent conceptual paradigm for international development work - inspiring the creation of the UN's Human Development Index and later, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

According to international relations scholar, Sakiko Fakuda-Parr (2011), global consensus around the capabilities approach and MDGs "reflect an important evolution in acknowledging poverty as a multidimensional concept that is broader than low incomes" (p.126). This approach (re)defines the purpose of international development as about "helping people, or individuals, out of dire poverty" rather than working through the challenges of decolonization (Fakuda-Parr 2011:126).

⁵ Nike, Inc. is historically remembered as having produced products via sweatshop labor. Throughout the 1990's, Nike was repeatedly accused of utilizing sweatshop labor; however, it was not until the early to mid-2000's that the *Nike Anti-Sweatshop Campaign* and specifically, *Team Sweat* began to track and expose the labor conditions for workers in developing nations. For more information see: *Nike Anti-Sweatshop Campaign*. Center for Communication & Civic Engagement. Retrieved November 5, 2011 (<http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/Nike.htm>).

⁶ In this thesis, I adopt the terms Global North / Global South, Western, non-Western, First World, and Third World and use the terms interchangeably. Building from Mohanty's (2003) theorization of North/South, I look to distinguish between communities and nations of economic and political privilege and disadvantage. The terms Western, non-Western, First World, and Third World likewise "retain a political and explanatory value in a world that appropriates and assimilates multiculturalism and "difference" through commodification and consumption" (Mohanty 2003:226).

Consequently, the narrative of international development, she asserts, “has been reformulated around the moral imperative of eliminating dehumanizing poverty, as an unacceptable condition for a world of immense financial and technological means” (Fakuda-Parr 2011:129). The MDGs offer eight pillars of deliberate intervention in the economies and societies of the Global South. With the goals of eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, as well as achieving universal education, combatting HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing global partnerships for aid, scholars have argued that the MDGs encourage civil society actors (and not necessarily governments) to personally invest in international development projects (Hayhurst 2011, Naylor 2011, Ziai 2011). Critically, international relations scholar Tristen Naylor (2011) remarks, “what has remained consistent throughout such conceptual changes is the notion that there are certain actors with needs and that there are other actors with the resources to meet those needs” (p.177). At the most basic level, international development is about improving people’s lives; the Girl Effect, like the MDGs, works to mainstream international development policies and debate for civil society audiences.

The Girl Effect is characterized by gender and development scholar Lyndsay Hayhurst (2011) as “a growing but understudied movement that assumes girls are catalysts capable of bringing social and economic change for their families, communities and countries” (p.531). Since its launch in 2008, the Nike and NoVo Foundations have committed over \$90 million to support the production and promotion of the Girl Effect in mainstream Western civil society and the United Nations system (Roberts 2010). The Girl Effect features two viral videos,⁷ which examine the impact of education, nutrition, health care, and reproductive rights on adolescent girls in the developing world. The first self-titled video, *The Girl Effect* draws upon the power of adolescent girls to transform their communities and nations when afforded with the ‘right’ investments. It concludes with the message “invest in a girl and she will do the rest” (Girl Effect 2008). The second video titled, *The Clock is Ticking* illustrates the dangers of delaying an investment in girls and presses viewers to consider that, “a 12-year-old girl could be the solution the world needs right now” (Girl Effect 2010). To date, the Girl Effect videos have been viewed well-over 10 million times and boast a following of over 280,000 people on Twitter and Facebook with friends posting articles and videos, hosting online discussion groups, participating in blogging campaigns, and donating funds for Girl Effect projects (Girl Effect 2011, Kristof 2010). Since 2008, the Girl Effect Fund has raised over \$1 million from 14,500+ individual donations through their Global Giving campaign (Global Giving 2012).

The Girl Effect is also widely popular in the mainstream international development community where its narrative and symbols serve as umbrella terms for targeted development strategies funded by multinational corporations. One of the best

⁷ Prior to the branding of the Girl Effect, the Nike Foundation (2008) produced another video titled “I Dare You.” This video did not go ‘viral’ in the same way as the Girl Effect, nor is it part of the official Girl Effect brand; yet it may reflect the ‘testing’ phase of the Foundation’s marketing strategy for the Girl Effect message (Switzer 2011). For the purposes of this project, I focus exclusively on the first branded Girl Effect video.

examples of the Girl Effect's visibility is found in the continued prioritization of the Girl Effect agenda in economic development policy at the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI). Founded in 2005, CGI hosts an annual meeting in September with heads of state, government, business leaders, scholars, and NGO directors to analyze pressing global concerns, discuss effective solutions, and build strategic partnerships between donors and project organizers (CGI 2010). During his opening remarks at the 2008 annual meeting, former U.S. President Bill Clinton declared "the only thing that has been done that seems to find warm embrace across all religious faiths and all regions of the world that slows population growth, is to put every single girl in the world in school and give every single young woman adequate, equal access to the labor markets of the world" (CGI 26 September 2008).

The following year in 2009, CGI considered a special programmatic topic of *Investing in Girls and Women* during its annual meeting, and attendees "examined how solutions that support girls and women around the world can improve entire communities and drive economic progress" (CGI, Meeting Notes 2009). Representatives of the Girl Effect including NoVo Foundation Co-Chair, Peter Buffet participated in program events and networking meetings to promote the campaign and the "ripple effect" of investing in girls (Buffet, CGI Plenary 23 September 2009). Again in 2010, CGI identified the empowerment of girls as a priority action agenda with the Girl Effect taking center stage in plenary sessions and breakout events. The first breakout session of the annual meeting titled, *Preparing Girls for the World* premiered the Girl Effect's second video, *The Clock is Ticking* and was followed by small group discussion facilitated by members of the Girl Effect campaign (CGI 2010). Nike Foundation President, Maria Eitel said of the Girl Effect's presence at CGI,

This is the most attention that adolescent girls and poverty have ever gotten and the Girl Effect is clear; the economic case for it is very profound... whatever the focus of your philanthropy may be, you can amplify its impact, make it more effective by making sure adolescent girls are included. It's smart philanthropy to invest in a girl. She becomes your partner for impact" (quoted in Dempsey 2010).

The mainstream human rights community similarly engages the Girl Effect agenda through a series of partnerships with the Nike Foundation. The Nike Foundation was founded in 2004 as the philanthropic arm of its own self-titled multinational corporation. Focused exclusively on adolescent girls, the Nike Foundation conducts research on girls living in the Global South and supports girl-centered development initiatives under the purview of the Girl Effect campaign (Nike Foundation 2011). In 2005 alongside the United Nations Foundation, Nike established the Coalition for Adolescent Girls, which brings together more than 30 international organizations, UN agencies, and corporate funders to "share information, experiences, tools, and resources, to strengthen the network of adolescent girl experts and advocates, and to identify shared priorities" (CAG 2011). Members of the Coalition meet four times a year in Washington, D.C. to discuss common interests and strategize best practices related to the 'invest in girls' message.

In October 2008 and 2009, the Coalition for Adolescent Girls published a collaborative report on girls' economic power titled, *Girls Count: A Global Investment & Action Agenda* (CAG 2011). This report proposed that a series of tactical investments in girls' economic futures results in stronger economies, healthier civil societies, and improved governance (Levine et al. 2009). Following the publication of *Girls Count*, members from the Population Council, Center for Global Development, International Center for Research on Women, and American University produced a similar series of quantitative reports exploring education and health, as well as girls' potential impact on the economies of Third World countries (CAG 2011). The Nike Foundation subsequently used this data to "build [its] knowledge base and increase investment" capital for the economic empowerment of girls, and has reportedly invested over \$43 million in the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Adolescent Girls to exclusively support girl driven programming, education, and job training (Nike Foundation 2011).

The Nike Foundation also maintains a working relationship with the World Bank. In 2008, the World Bank and Nike Foundation launched the Adolescent Girls Initiative, a strategic set of investments designed to "promote the transition of adolescent girls from school to productive employment" (AGI 2011). This initiative piloted a series of economic empowerment programs for girls in 5 countries, including Afghanistan, Gambia, Liberia, Nepal, and Sudan. Coalition members remarked, the purpose of this series was to document how "investing in adolescent girls' economic opportunities has a large development impact on their families and their future children... help[ing] them to gain financial independence and become productive members of society" (AGI 2011). As one of the largest and most recognizable funding sources in the Global South, the World Bank's alliance with the Nike Foundation contributes much to the visibility and international legitimacy of the Girl Effect campaign. Because the Girl Effect is likewise connected to the United Nations and United Nations Foundation, Coalition for Adolescent Girls, and Clinton Global Initiative, the Nike Foundation and other multinational corporations have been able to influence the funding priorities in international development policy, as well as shape the conversation around girls' human rights.

Notably, Hayhurst (2011) expresses great concern for the ways that the Girl Effect and other marketing campaigns 'brand' social justice initiatives and international development policy in mainstream Western society. She comments,

While traditional philanthropic actors such as NGOs, faith-based entities and international organizations, such as the UN continue to play an important role addressing pressing global concerns... the role of multinational corporations are becoming increasingly pertinent in funding, creating and governing international development interventions. This is part of a growing trend in donor logic and, in many ways, the influence of multinational corporations, high-powered businesspersons and celebrities (e.g. Bono's Produce RED™, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) on aid priorities that may often be entirely detached from governments' foreign policy priorities (Hayhurst 2011:352).

This new form of “global corporate social engagement” aligns economic development priorities with public marketing strategies that enhance corporate image, attract customers, and stabilize new markets (Hayhurst 2011:352). Consequently, Hayhurst (2011) notes “as a global movement mostly led by corporate donors in the West and by international organizations such as the UN, the Girl Effect initiative has perhaps normalized such Eurocentric perspectives on gender by assuming that microfinance programmes, self-empowerment and girls’ individual self-responsibility are the answers to ‘developing’ many countries in the Two-Thirds World” (Hayhurst 2011:534). At the same time, Third World girls are more or less signified by their differential positioning as ‘untapped’ economic resources and potential consumers waiting to be ‘harnessed’ for the good of their communities. It is in this way, the Girl Effect markets neoliberal ideologies and individual philanthropy as the only feasible solutions to global economic disparity.

The mainstream Western media in turn utilizes the Girl Effect as a pedestrian catchphrase for identifying concerns with global poverty, economic development, or girls’ empowerment. A cursory review of print and digital media between the years of 2008 and 2011 captures the increasing usage of the Girl Effect and the ‘invest in girls’ message. Select news articles include, *Save a Girl, Save the World, Global Education of Girls is the Key to Development, Nike Harnesses ‘Girl Effect’ Again, Girl Effect Ripples Beyond CGI 2010, Are Girls the Key to Economic Development, Girl Effect: What if a Girl Could Change the World? What if a Video Can?* and *‘Girl Effect’ Could Lift the Global Economy*. These articles appeared in the New York Times, Huffington Post, Bloomberg Businessweek, Politics Daily, Oprah, and Women’s E-News.

Taken together, I want to suggest these relationships, events, and publications evidence, not only the mainstreaming of international development discourse vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm, but also the increasing popularization of the ‘invest in girls’ message in the West/Global North. In the next section, I examine the contemporary (re)production of *girl* as a neoliberal subject by documenting key girls studies scholarship on neoliberal girlhood. This section gives preliminary consideration to how neoliberal ideology shapes girls’ political subjectivity and agency, and also serves as a starting point for my deconstructive analysis of the Girl Effect discourse.

1.2: Neoliberal Girlhood(s) and Political Agency

Neoliberal ideology is characterized by a decentralized government, the privatization of social programs, education systems, and other service-based initiatives, greater consumer participation, free market strategies, global competition, and the erasure of gender, racial, economic, ethnic, or age-based differences.⁸ The rise of neoliberal discourse within the late modern period remains widely documented in sociological and girls’ studies research. Sociologists Anthony Giddens (1991, 1994) and Ulrich Beck (1992) theorize that industrial and economic changes associated with late modernity have resulted in the production of self-reflexive actors invested in notions of individuality, choice, and autonomy. Similarly, social theorists Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (1992)

⁸ See Beck 1992; Giddens 1991, 1994; Mitchell 2003; Rose and Miller 1992; and Rose 1999.

maintain the so-called ‘freedoms’ identified with this period are in fact, regulatory illusions which make the ideals of autonomy, individuality, and choice seem plausible and desirable. Within the new neoliberal order, “each individual must render his or her life meaningful, as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in the furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization” (Rose and Miller 1992:185). Adolescent girls, it seems, remain uniquely well suited for this neoliberal project of self-production.

Girls’ studies scholars have also comprehensively explored the impact of neoliberal ideology in relation to girls labor and schooling practices. Angela McRobbie (2004) critiques the discourses of female achievement and success within the field of education, while Jessica Ringrose (2007) problematizes the role of feminist empowerment discourse in neoliberal narratives of educational success. Joanne Baker (2010) argues that narratives of educational success diminish girls’ recognition of how structural inequalities and social constraints inform their everyday lives. She proposes neoliberal ideology encourages girls to take personal responsibility for their experiences and to leave the structures of power in tact or in many cases, unnoticed.

In the absence of state-based social protection strategies, girlhood scholars claim changes in the global labor market demand the production of feminized citizen-subjects able to independently succeed in spite of, or perhaps because of dismantling state structures. Within these neoliberal parameters, Marnina Gonick (2007) attests education is systematically re-configured to secure rational, flexible, and self-reflexive actors able to excel in a rapidly transforming and unstable global market. Her research investigates how discourses of individualism, choice, and autonomy “offer girls new positions previously denied them,” while at the same time, limiting what they are in fact, able to do and become (Gonick 2007:207).

Neoliberal ideologies obscure the ways that deeply entrenched power structures make difficult the project of autonomy and choice for differently situated subjects. As such, Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001) examine how neoliberalism constructs autonomous female subjects capable of succeeding in the free-market economy. Walkerdine (2003) in turn also documents the management of gender and class in the new labor markets of Great Britain. She concludes that regardless of socioeconomic status or gender difference, girls “come to understand themselves as responsible for their own regulation” because structural inequalities and differences are “taken to have melted away” (Walkerdine 2003: 239). It is in this way, she suggests neoliberal ideals encourage girls to individualize, privatize, and depoliticize their everyday experiences while simultaneously endorsing a direct relationship between the autonomous ‘consuming’ subject and the global marketplace.

At the same time, girls’ human rights scholar Nura Taefi (2009) contends, girls intersectional locations “intensifies the denial of their rights” (p.325). Girls are “less able to voice their concerns or draw attention to rights infringements after they occur” because they do not necessarily have a direct or adequate relationship to the state, marketplace, or global politic (Taefi 2009:348). Moreover, Annie Bunting (2005) remarks, girls remain “increasingly regulated, policed and

governed by adults and in relation to adults” particularly with respect to their political capacities as human rights subjects (p.19). As a result, it is not necessarily individual agency or neoliberal autonomy that ensures girls political empowerment but rather, the realities of structural inequalities, generational power, and other age-based differences that determine the extent to which girls can claim political subjectivity and agency.

The Girl Effect, I will suggest, mobilizes neoliberal discourses to problematically position girls differently with respect to their human rights and political agency. This study thinks critically about the types of subject positions made available to girls through the Girl Effect paradigm, and in turn, offers an account of how CSW 54 girl delegates navigate these regulatory effects to bring meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s). The next section defines girls’ political subjectivity as conceptualized in this study.

1.3: Defining Girls’ Political Subjectivity

Feminist poststructuralist approaches to subjectivity draw upon the complex intersections between the speaking subject and the available discourses that make *girl* known or ‘real’. Because girlhood is understood to be discursively created, Gonick (2003) suggests subjectivity is “this dynamic that involves a double movement between a subject speaking/writing her way into existence by using the stories or discourses that are available and in the moment of doing so, also subjecting herself to the constitutive forces and regulative norms of those discourses” (p.10). In this regard, subjectivity is not about coming to a coherent endpoint as a stable, self-aware and speaking subject, but rather about thinking through the ways in which girls make sense of themselves and the world around them. Girls’ studies scholars, Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2006) similarly insist subjectivity foregrounds agency “albeit not through the kind of reasoning implied by notions of ‘choosing’ girlhood” but in the sense that positioning occurs through the discourses which come to designate “our sense of who we are and what is therefore possible and not possible for us to do” (p.423).

In this project, I treat girls’ political subjectivity as that which is constituted through discourse and operationalized in the language systems and stories available in a particularized-local moment. This approach, Dentith (2004) surmises, is ultimately about “understanding the subject position as something one is not wholly free to take up as one wishes to but instead as a subjective position created through the use of discursive knowledge and through the negation with/against competing discourses within a specific historical moment and space” (p.465). This theorization of subjectivity moves beyond dichotomies of active/passive and subject/object to ultimately reveal a largely ambivalent project, where girls appear to ‘choose’ their subject positions and yet also remain limited by the discursive possibilities and structures of the local moment. I concurrently draw upon Honneth’s (1995) theorization of mutual recognition in familial, legal, and communal relationships and Fraser’s (2000) focus on equitable participation as fundamental elements for girls to experience themselves as ‘political.’ This combination approach allows me to more holistically capture the intersecting signification processes that produce and deny political subject-hood to girl subjects.

Girls' political subjectivity is about how girls experience, represent, and bring meaning to their 'becoming' subjects recognized in the everyday as 'political' (Driscoll 2002, Benjamin 1994). In this sense, political subjectivity is less about individual self-esteem or feelings of personal empowerment, and more about how girls claim voice and visibility as integral members of their local-global communities. I define political subjectivity as experiencing oneself as mutually esteemed and valued in the everyday (Honneth 1995) and being able to fully participate and determine the conditions of one's differential positioning (Fraser 2000). This approach foregrounds "the public sphere as a space [girls] can shape" and transform (Taft 2010:24); but it also moves beyond the normative construction of *girl* "as opposed to, or otherwise, defining the mature, independent woman as feminist subject" (Driscoll 2002:9). It takes seriously the discursive (im)possibilities produced by the Girl Effect paradigm, while simultaneously capturing how girl delegates make sense of and resist the Girl Effect to produce their political selves at CSW 54. In order to appreciate the political environment experienced by girl delegates, this next section provides a brief overview of the Commission on the Status of Women.

1.4: The Commission on the Status of Women

I selected the Commission on the Status of Women as my primary research site because I could access a subset of politically engaged girls with an understanding of human rights. At the same time, CSW 54 bore further relevance to this study because the 54th Session sought to review the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and Section L.⁹ The United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW or Commission) was established in June 1946 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)¹⁰ as the "principal global policy-making body" dedicated exclusively to the advancement of women's rights and promotion of gender equality (UN Women 2011). The Commission prepares recommendations and reports on pressing issues and concerns related to the realization of women's human rights in the realm of politics, economics, education, society, and culture. Each year representatives of UN member states gather in New York City at the United Nations headquarters for two-weeks (or 10 working days) in late February and early March to discuss and evaluate "progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete policies to promote gender

⁹ Section L of the BPfA was the first international declaration that focused specifically on the needs of girl children. Chapter Three examines the significance of Section L in greater detail.

¹⁰ ECOSOC was established under the United Nations Charter to serve as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues. The ECOSOC Council coordinates the work of 14 UN specialized agencies, functional commissions (of which the CSW is a part) and five regional commissions. It is responsible for: "promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress; identifying solutions to international economic, social, and health problems; facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation; and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (UN ECOSOC 2011). It has the power to initiate and require studies or reports on these central issues and concerns, as well as assist in the organization, management, and follow-up for major international conferences related to economic and social development. Its purview extends to include "over 70 percent of the human and financial resources of the entire UN system" (UN ECOSOC 2011).

equality and women's empowerment worldwide" (UN Women 2011).¹¹ A total of 45 UN member states serve on the Commission at a given time, with each member elected to the CSW for a period of four years. Members of the Commission represent an "equitable geographical distribution" at all times: meaning 13 members from Africa, 11 from Asia, 9 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 8 from Western Europe and other States, and 4 from Eastern Europe make up the Commission's membership (UN Women 2011).

In 1987, ECOSOC expanded the Commission's mandate to include: promoting equality-driven initiatives, monitoring the implementation of measures designed to advance women's rights, development, and peace, and review of improvements made (and not made) at the national, regional, and global levels (UN Women 2011). Additionally in 1995 following the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, the UN General Assembly ordered the Commission to include regular follow-up and review measures regarding the twelve areas of critical concern outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action¹² - the 12th of which highlighted the needs and rights of girl children. The ECOSOC Council modified the terms and objectives of the Commission again in 1996 to allow for a more detailed and strategic approach to the realization of women and girls' rights as agreed upon in the Beijing Platform for Action. These new terms required the CSW to assist ECOSOC in "monitoring, reviewing, and appraising progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, ... [as well as] maintain and enhance public awareness and support for the implementation" of the Beijing Platform and ensure support for gender mainstreaming throughout the entirety of the UN system (UN Women 2011). One of the principal ways that the Commission accomplishes these mandated objectives is through its annual meeting, where CSW members identify priority and review themes to assess progresses made and address central obstacles, barriers, and challenges. In 2010, the 54th Session of the Commission opted to conduct a fifteen-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action and in this way, was both historically relevant to the work of the Commission and the girls' human rights movement as well.

At the close of each annual CSW session, member states produce a document of *agreed conclusions* to submit to the ECOSOC Council for adoption. This document centers upon the priority theme set for that year and contains a progressive review, identification of current gaps or challenges, and a set of concrete recommendations for action. Draft recommendations are required to include governments, civil society actors, intergovernmental bodies, and other relevant stakeholders as they collaborate on advancing gender equality at the local, national, regional, and international levels; and at various stages, the Commission may adopt additional resolutions, which pertain to a particular issue, topic or concern for women's human rights.¹³ As per the Commission mandates, any

¹¹ This annual meeting is where I conducted my interviews with the girl delegates and is also what I reference in this study as 'CSW 54.'

¹² Further discussion of the Beijing Platform for Action is provided in Chapter Three, as it remains integral to the establishment of girls' rights as distinct from women's human rights.

¹³ In 2007, the 51st Commission considered the situation of the girl child to be one of these key concerns.

individual, non-governmental organization (NGO), group or network may submit recommendations, research and studies, complaints, appeals or petitions related to women's rights and gender equality to the CSW. Traditionally, the CSW "considers such communications as part of its annual programme of work in order to identify emerging trends and patterns of injustice and discriminatory practices against women for purposes of policy formation and development of strategies for the promotion of gender equality" (UN Women 2011). One of the principal ways NGOs, individuals and civil society actors communicate with Commission members is the annual meeting in NYC. Most Commission members communicate through expert group meetings and panels, high-level plenary sessions, side events with member states, and NGO-facilitated parallel events, which identify key issues of concern and success in the realization of gender equality.

CSW 54 included a record total of 3,440 delegates from 138 countries, representing 463 NGOs, 425 of which were ECOSOC accredited – meaning the ECOSOC Council officially recognized their work on behalf of women's rights and the advancement of gender equality.¹⁴ Because the Commission is required to accept and acknowledge information from any group or individual regardless of their ECOSOC accreditation, it would seem that any NGO, civil society organization, or individual could elect to attend the CSW on their own accord. But this is actually not the case; in order to be granted access to the high-level plenary sessions or expert group discussions where CSW members are in attendance, one must have an official CSW delegate pass from the ECOSOC Council. In recent years due to heavy construction at the United Nations headquarters, NGOs have been limited to twenty delegate passes per CSW session, and delegates are required to hold additional secondary passes for all of the events held in the main UN building. For my purposes, this restriction has meant that with a limited number of passes, many NGOs elect to bring adult representatives over girl delegates. Thus going into CSW 54, I was operating at an unavoidable disadvantage in terms of accessing a large, globally representative group of girl delegates to participate in the research. Beyond the historical absence of girl delegates from Commission meetings, I was likewise restricted by the small number of ECOSOC accredited NGOs financially able and willing to support the participation of girl delegates. Because of these constraints, the vast majority of my research participants came from North American countries and well-funded NGOs.

The Commission is supported by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women in New York (NGO CSW), which plays an active role in organizing and managing NGO participation during the annual CSW meeting. The NGO CSW represents approximately 80 different organizations that monitor, support, and participate in the New York City-based work of the United Nations (NGO CSW 2011). During the annual CSW meeting, the NGO CSW facilitates *NGO Consultation Day* in preparation for the CSW session, where NGO delegates meet with one another to share best

¹⁴ ECOSOC accreditation is granted through an application process for what is referred to as, 'consultative status' for NGOs. The process includes documentation of organizational by-laws, mission and vision statues, financial information, annual reports or publications, organizational charts and any official registration documentation verifying the work of the NGO. The NGO Branch of the ECOSOC Council conducts application reviews, and approval allows each NGO to acquire two annual UN grounds passes, as well as up to twenty delegate passes for CSW meetings.

practices and strategies, as well as issue joint statements and recommendations on the language included in the *Agreed Conclusions* document. NGO Consultation Day is typically held the weekend before the start of the CSW, allowing civil society actors one to two days of preparation time. The NGO CSW is also in charge of scheduling NGO parallel events throughout the two-week meeting; these sessions are held off UN grounds at the UN Church Center or Salvation Army across the street from the UN headquarters. Parallel events address the priority and review themes identified by the Commission and are organized by participating NGOs. Parallel events are typically open to the public and do not require an official CSW pass. The parallel event sessions are therefore popular, accessible alternatives for girls and other civil society actors unable to secure ECOSOC accreditation or a CSW grounds pass.

Girl delegates primarily participate in the CSW session through NGO CSW parallel events. Because any individual or civil society organization can attend these sessions, WGG members often find this space helpful in terms of including girls in the work of the Commission without having to ask NGOs and member states to 'give up' one of their twenty CSW passes for a girl delegate. The WGG's Girls Participation Task Force looks to "bring girls into active participation within the United Nations system... help to prepare, support, and empower girls in their UN interactions as young delegates... [and] ensure girls are present, visible, and heard in UN events and documents" (WGG 2011). In the beginning, the majority of this work was conducted in collaboration with NGO CSW because we were able to offer girl delegates access to hundreds of parallel events sponsored by various NGO groups on site. While we certainly would have preferred to see more girls officially designated as CSW delegates by the ECOSOC Council, this approach nevertheless allowed us to bring more girls to the Commission meetings, raise critical visibility on the necessity of their inclusion, and provide key leadership, facilitation, and speaking roles to girl delegates themselves. Since 2007, the WGG has sponsored over thirty girl-centered parallel events during the CSW. In 2010, these sessions included the Girls' Rights Caucus, Girls Only Workshop, Girl-Boy Dialogue, and drafting of the Girls Statement to the 54th Commission, among others (WGG 2010).

Girls' studies scholars Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2006) assert "the material and cultural conditions under which girls shape their identities and see their futures as 'women'" afford much by way of revealing the forms and possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency (p.420). In this study, I identify CSW 54 as the primary site where girl delegates made sense of themselves as political subjects. Critically, CSW 54 is also the space where girl delegates repeatedly encountered the Girl Effect as *the* dominant discursive paradigm of the girls' rights movement. The Girl Effect video was shown during the Youth Orientation session to highlight the importance of girls' human rights. CSW 54 delegates and NGO representatives frequently referenced the Girl Effect during plenary sessions and parallel events; and civil society members cited the importance of 'investing in girls' and believing in the 'girl effect' throughout the Commission meetings. The Girl Effect paradigm emerged so often in fact, that I suggest, it successfully collapsed the language of girls' human rights into that of neoliberal economic empowerment. Because of this particular convergence, the Girl Effect strained and made difficult girls political signification outside of this discursive paradigm. It is in this way, I propose CSW 54

girl delegates used the Girl Effect discourse to bring meaning to their political subjectivities *and* to talk about their human rights. This study therefore offers a critical account of what is made (im)possible for different girlhood subjects in the context of the Girl Effect paradigm.

1.5: Overview of Thesis Chapter Structure

As an introduction to my dissertation, this chapter provided a preliminary roadmap through the conceptual structures and experiential origins of this study on contemporary girlhood(s). The following provides a brief overview of the subsequent chapters included in this draft:

- Chapter Two: provides a clearer picture of how I conducted this research. I describe the epistemological foundations of feminist poststructuralist analysis and detail the selection of *The Listening Guide* as the voice-centered methodology used to thematize the data gathered from my interviews with CSW 54 girl delegates.
- Chapter Three: documents the historical emergence of *girl* as a different type of human rights subject. I conduct three comprehensive literature reviews on the girl child, girl power, and girls' political agency to trace the broader discursive parameters of the study.
- Chapter Four: discursively deconstructs the Girl Effect video in order to specify the problematic (re)production of neoliberal girl power and oppositional girlhoods. This chapter reveals the more concealed logic of missionary girl power and gives evidence to the ways that the Girl Effect shapes contemporary girlhood(s) *differently*.
- Chapter Five: provides key background and contextual information related to my findings chapters. I give an overview of how I organized the girls' testimonies in relation to Taft's (2010) civic engagement spectrum and introduce the CSW 54 girl delegates using the voice-centered research methodologies approach.
- Chapter Six: is about the experiences and meaning of girlhood vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm. I explore concepts of gender, femininity, inequality, and the (re)production of *other* girlhoods to investigate how girls defined and positioned themselves as political subjects.
- Chapter Seven: investigates how girls made sense of girls' human rights in relation to the discursive logic of the Girl Effect. I examine themes of representation and voice, impact of the mainstream media, and generational disadvantage to explore how the Girl Effect functions to determine what girls' human rights are imagined to be and who has access to them. This chapter also examines girls' experiences as delegates to the 54th Commission.
- Conclusion: ties my findings chapters together to (re)capture the forms and possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency as afforded by the Girl Effect paradigm. I offer some concluding considerations, identify areas for additional research, and reflect upon the insights generated by this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Investigating Girls' Political Subjectivity: Research Methods and Design

This chapter details the epistemological and methodological foundations of this study on contemporary girlhood(s). I employ feminist poststructuralism to interpret issues of girlhood subjectivity, agency, and resistance vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm, and borrow from standpoint theory to privilege girls' voices and experiences as politically marginalized subjects. Following this epistemological and contextual mapping, I describe how these approaches are instrumentalized via voice-centered research (VCR) methodology; and lastly, recount the research design, methods, site selection, and participant recruitment tools used in this project.

2.1: Epistemological Foundations

Poststructuralist feminist theory is primarily concerned with the construction of meaning and how discourses operate to facilitate and limit certain types of subjects, knowledges, and truths. It rejects the notion of a single, rational speaking subject and alternatively posits subjects as discursively produced and situationally relevant (Butler 1990, 1993). This approach imagines subjectivity to be fluid, multiple, and contradictory, yet simultaneously determined by a specific set of discourses rooted to a particular place and historical moment (Currie et al. 2006, Dentith 2004). Girlhood in this respect, is not natural or essential, but rather bound by intersecting discourses "continually realized," performed, and produced by embodied girls (Butler 1997:420). Mary Celeste Kearney (2009) remarks, this means, "there are many ways to be a girl, and these forms depend on not only the material bodies performing girlhood, but also the specific social and historical contexts in which these bodies are located" (p.19). Because girlhood discourses are unstable and numerous, it is equally as important to recognize how differently situated girls take up and resist available subject positions to mediate to their respective girlhood(s).

Girls' studies scholars, Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2006) argue girlhood subjectivities do not and indeed, cannot exist outside of hegemonic discourses, "instead, there is a series of discontinuous and constantly changing opportunities for girlhood within systems of stabilizing, but at the same time disorienting, discursive elements, each having unpredictable effects" (p.423). In Butlerian (1990) terms, this conceptualization suggests girlhood is a "contested site of meaning" where girls become known and recognizable through the available discourses of gender and femininity (and in this study, the Girl Effect paradigm) (p.44). Operating within this contextual framework, girlhood is always a discursive effect - an illusion produced and regulated by normative discourse and made 'true' in the sense that *girl* is identifiable by a series of learned, repetitious, and stylized acts that designate "which bodies come to matter - and why" (Butler 1993:xii). Because girlhood subjects do not fit within the prescribed parameters of any singular discursive structure however, the concept of girlhood itself remains a critical site from which to observe the ways that girls and girlhood is made real by different *girl* subjects.

Poststructuralist theorists additionally challenge the idea that identity categories or subjects are simple, innocent or obvious (Hekman 2004, Moore and Looser 1993). They conversely suggest girlhood subjects reflect varying “modalities of power” continuously specified in particular socio-cultural, geo-political, and historical moments (Driscoll 2002, Gonick 2003:10). It is in this way feminist poststructuralism aims to reveal how discursive power operates to inform girlhood(s), while additionally destabilizing pre-determined notions of the self, identity, truth and knowledge (Butler 1990, 1993, Hekman 2004, McCall 2005, Weeks 1998). In other words, as Marnina Gonick (2003) states, “girls become girls by participating within the available sets of social meanings and practices – the discourses which define them as girls” and that which sets out to delineate normative and deviant girlhood(s) (p.5). On the other hand, feminist scholar Nancy Hirschmann (2004) warns, affording too much power to discourse and the ability to make subjects *real*, negates and ignores the ways that, “we participate in our own social construction in ways that are both destructive... and productive” (p.327). Consequently, she and others surmise while it is critical to destabilize essentialist notions of the self and knowledge, it is equally as necessary to attend to the material ways that *difference* (and not just discourse) informs girls’ everyday experiences and sense of themselves as *girls* (Hekman 2004, Hirschmann 2004, and Weeks 1998).

Kearney (2009) too cautions girls’ studies scholars and activists from becoming singularly invested in analyzing the discursive power structures that produce *girls*; she comments,

Girls’ studies scholars must keep in mind that our work has significant political effects both within and outside the academy. At the heart of our scholarship is a demographic group that has been consistently marginalized, trivialized, and exploited throughout the ages... For many, such disempowerment is exponentially multiplied as a result of their race, ethnicity, class, ability, sexuality, religion, and/or nationality. Indeed, compound disenfranchisement is the norm for most female youth today, though such identities and the social experiences associated with them are the least represented in popular discourse (p.21).

Critical texts by feminist theorists of color, such as Collins (2004), hooks (2004), Crenshaw (1997) and Smith (2004) further evidence the ways that interlocking systems of power shape the meanings and experiences of girlhood. Their work collectively challenges the undifferentiated and essentialized woman of feminist theory to better illustrate the fundamental importance of attending to structural and material differences. In the context of girls’ political subjectivity, it is likewise essential to take into account girls’ political marginalization and intersectional positioning in relation to contemporary girlhood discourses.

In this study, I therefore borrow from feminist standpoint theory in order to better specify how the material differences associated with girlhood remain complexly interwoven within the same structures and institutions that organize and produce discursive girlhoods. This combination approach, I suggest, allows me to investigate how the discursive logic of the Girl Effect informs girls’ generational

disadvantage as political subjects, while additionally addressing some of the central limitations of feminist poststructuralist theory.

One of the key advantages of standpoint theory is the idea that “social and political disadvantage can be turned into an epistemological, scientific, and political advantage” (Harding 2004:7). Sandra Harding (2004) defines standpoint theory as “a kind of organic epistemology, methodology, philosophy of science, and social theory that can arise whenever oppressed peoples gain public voice” (p.3). Feminist standpoint theorists look beyond the discursive systems of power to prioritize the voices, knowledges, and experiences of the structurally marginalized. This epistemological framework consequently begins at the intersections of material difference, and looks to destabilize and deconstruct the normative conditions of differential status by shifting the *other* from object to subject (Collins 2004). In this way, standpoint theory prioritizes difference as discursively contingent and lived by certain types of embodied subjects, suggesting as Leslie McCall (2005) comments,

If we can determine the source of the complexity, we can describe it, and we can theorize it in this view, [and] change... the patterns of inequality and the underlying structural conditions of society, [as not only] dynamic, complex, and contingent, but also amenable to explanation (p.1794).

Mohanty (2003) similarly suggests, attending to the specific ways that marginalized subjects experience and understand their situatedness allows us to “explain the connections and border crossings” more completely and without dismissing the central role that discourse, positionality, and agency play in the constructive process (p.226).

The second epistemic advantage afforded by standpoint is the value and function of experience itself. Experience is central to standpoint theorizing in that standpoint privileges the experiences of the marginalized to offer a different vision and understanding of hegemonic power. Standpoint theorists claim that privileging the experiences of the marginalized, allows us to gain a better understanding of how power operates to create and inscribe hierarchies of domination and subordination. At the same time, the margins are neither innocent, nor unmarked by discursive power; Joan Scott (1991) asserts, “we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences” (p.83). In other words, experience is not natural or automatic in standpoint, but rather systematically shaped and regulated by contemporary discursive regimes. Yet because standpoint theory locates experience and knowledge within the confines of socio-material, historical, and intersectional differences, Nancy Naples (2003) contends it is more apt to avoid pluralist reductions and hierarchies of knowledge based on essentialist, relativist, or colonized truths. The intersectional approach rather instrumentalizes the differential material specificities of the margins in order to access a series of partial and incomplete truths that contribute to a broader understanding of how discursive paradigms work in our everyday lives.

Standpoint theory thirdly enhances feminist poststructuralism by taking seriously the agency of the differential subject. Contemporary standpoint theorists make use of a particularized and critical view from the margins to consider how the *other* navigates the material *and* discursive conditions of her oppression. In this way, Haraway (1988) resolves standpoint theory requires “the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not... as a slave to the master who closes off... agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge” (p.95). Moreover, standpoint theory holds the producers of knowledge accountable for what it is that they learn to see and how they interpret those experiences; and in so doing, resists what Uma Narayan (2004) terms the romanticization of oppression and marginalization. Standpoint theory thus permits a more nuanced understanding of hegemonic power because it pays attention to the numerous and intersecting knowledge projects which stem from the margins and the center (Weeks 1998).

Indeed, far from a relativist view from nowhere or a romanticized notion of the oppression, I claim standpoint theory compliments feminist poststructuralist theory to provide a solid epistemological basis from which to investigate girls’ political subjectivity and agency. It is my position that by incorporating feminist poststructuralist analysis with elements of standpoint theory, I am better able to attend to the regulatory power of the Girl Effect logic *without* simultaneously denying girls political marginalization as differentially situated subjects. This approach in turn allows me to epistemically prioritize the experiences of girls as different political subjects, while also taking seriously the discursive conditions under which girls produce and manage their political selves and girlhood(s). Because I am interested in how girls encounter and negotiate what is made (im)possible vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm, I propose, this approach compliments my exploration of girls’ political subjectivity and agency. In this research, I offer an account of girls as complex, contradictory and complicated subjects both regulated by and resistant to the discursive conditions that inform their everyday lives.

2.2: *Research Methodology: Voice Centered Research¹ via The Listening Guide*

Given the epistemological foundations of this study, I utilized the voice-centered research (VCR) methodology to thematize the information gathered. This section details the selection of *The Listening Guide* as my primary research methodology and documents the sociological adaptations incorporated, as per the work of Natasha Mauthner and Andrea Doucet (1998, 2003). *The Listening Guide* is a voice-centered and relational method of data analysis arising from Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) extensive research with girls in the fields of developmental psychology and education. Feminist sociologists Mauthner and Doucet (1998) re-interpreted this methodology to accommodate more sociological and interdisciplinary research projects. For the purposes of this study, I chose to follow the guidelines and adaptations suggested by Mauthner and Doucet (1998, 2003), but also drew upon the preliminary insights afforded by Brown and Gilligan (1992) in terms of ‘hearing’ the multiple voices of adolescent girls.

¹ Sample research methodology tools including, VCR worksheets and discursive deconstruction notes can be found in Appendix G.

Voice-centered research is designed to accommodate multiple voices, experiences, and discursive effects. Developed by Brown and Gilligan (1992), *the Listening Guide* requires the researcher to 'listen' or code each narrative transcript at least 4 separate times, each time hearing the participant's responses in a different way (Brown 1994, 1997, Gilligan et al. 1995). According to Gilligan (1993), listening multiple times allows for the participant's numerous voices to emerge in more a complex and dynamic way. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) similarly suggest that incorporating sociologically determined readings helps make explicit the role of relationships, cultural and social structures, and political institutions in participant responses.

VCR makes essential that which might otherwise go unspoken or unacknowledged in research, particularly the role of participant *and* researcher in directing the interpretations of the data collected (Brown 1997; Mauthner and Doucet 2003). Mauthner and Doucet (1998) comment, this research methodology "allows the researcher to examine how and where some of her own assumptions and views – whether personal, political or theoretical – might affect her interpretation of the respondent's words, or how she later writes about the person" (p.127). This conscious self-reflexivity challenges the researcher to not only consider the implications of her own positionality, but to also make explicit the function of her academic, institutional, personal, and political interests in the ways that she hears, reads, and interprets the research data (Mauthner and Doucet 2003).²

In following Mauthner and Doucet's (1998, 2003) adaptation of *The Listening Guide*, I conducted four conceptual readings of my interviews with the girl delegates. The first reading focused on the general scope of the narrative and my relationship to that narrative (Gilligan et al. 1995). I listened to each girl's testimony, marking recurrent themes, key players, locations, experiences, emotions, and thoughts, as well as any contradictory statements, or adjustments and changes made to her narrative throughout the interview process. I additionally recorded my first impressions, conceptual processes and emotional responses, and purposefully highlighted the moments when participant responses brought me to a detailed analytic or conceptual exercise (Mauthner and Doucet 1998).

The second reading attended to first-person voices or "I" statements in order to hear how each girl spoke about herself, what she felt, what she did and did not say, and where she sounded confused, tentative, or conflicted (Gilligan et al. 1995). This 2nd reading is essential to one's understanding of how girls represent and locate themselves within the interview narrative. Gilligan (1995) argues first-person statements indicate when a person is fully present in the described experience and not simply the narrator of a story; she is an actor - feeling, thinking and shaping the outcome of her own experience, narrative, and history. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) likewise describe the second reading as "in a sense, the first step of a phased process of listening to respondents as they speak about

² The illumination of the researcher's positionality and authority in the research process is not necessarily a new concept, but Gilligan (1995), Brown (1997, 1998), and Mauthner and Doucet (1998, 2003) insist voice-centered research methodologies deepen feminist self-reflexive practice, as well as stress the situated nature of all research accounts and analyses.

themselves, the lives they live and the worlds they inhabit” (p.130). From a sociological perspective, this reading is therefore about trying “to hear the person, agent or actor voice her or his sense of agency, while also recognizing the social location of the person who is speaking” (Mauthner and Doucet 1998:130). Focusing on “I” statements and tracing them through the entirety of the narrative increases the possibilities of ‘hearing’ multi-layered voices without distorting those voices with the researcher’s voice. As such, Brown (1998) suggests, this second reading allows the listener to hear who or what girls measure themselves against and whom girls consider to be their *others*.

The first two methods of listening are relative staples to *The Listening Guide*, whereas the third and fourth readings are more explicitly linked to the specific research topic (Brown 1997, 1998, Gilligan et al. 1995, Mauthner and Doucet 1998, 2003). The final readings locate the participant’s responses within the broader discursive, socio-cultural, geo-political, and historical contexts of her everyday world. For the third and fourth readings of my interviews, I adopted Mauthner and Doucet’s (1998) approach to consider how girls encountered and engaged with the discursive logic of the Girl Effect to define their political subjectivity and agency.

In the third reading, I listened to how the girls spoke about their interpersonal relationships and the broader social networks of their everyday lives. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) assert that in focusing on relationships, the listener is able to achieve a more balanced understanding of the participant as independent and interdependent, autonomous and interconnected, individualized and communal. By working through girls’ interpersonal relationships, I was thus able to situate participants within the broader social networks that *they* identified as relevant to their everyday lives, while also gaining insight into how they functioned within these personal relationships. I charted recurrent relationships and listened to how participants described these connections. I listened to when and with whom girls felt listened to and supported; and then in contrast, identified those relationships that prevented or made difficult expressions of agency and empowerment. In this third coding, I read for how girl delegates described their relationships with *other* girls and girlhoods. And lastly, I listened to how girls experienced themselves as political subjects during CSW 54 – again coding the relationships where they felt politically valuable and visible, and those where they felt politically invisible and marginalized.

For the last reading, I focused on the regulatory effects of the Girl Effect paradigm. I listened to how girls encountered the discourse of the Girl Effect, coding for facilitating and constraining moments with respect to their girlhoods, political subjectivity, and agency. Once more following the insights of Mauthner and Doucet (1998), I listened to how and when participants referenced the Girl Effect and examined whether she accepted or resisted the subject positions made available by this discursive paradigm. I paid close attention to the replication of the Girl Effect message, but also marked when girl delegates utilized the Girl Effect to better understand girls’ political subjectivity as marginalized subjects.

The VCR method is a detailed and lengthy data coding process, but Mauthner and Doucet (1998) remark, “if we do not take the time and trouble to listen to our

respondents, data analysis risks simply confirming what we already know... and defeating the point of doing the study in the first place” (p.135). As a working research methodology, the VCR method provides a very practical structure for investigating girls’ political subjectivity and agency. Through this methodology, I was able to systematically code for multiple research questions, as well as consider the function of the Girl Effect paradigm while simultaneously privileging girls’ voices and experiences as politically marginalized subjects. Mauthner and Doucet’s (1998, 2003) sociological adaptation of *The Listening Guide* likewise afforded a strong set of methodological tools from which to process my interviews and examine the regulatory function of the Girl Effect paradigm.

2.3: Research Methods and Design

Childhood studies scholar Amy Best (2007) notes, in the vast majority of child-focused research children are imagined to be “subjects-in-the-making” and not “subjects in their own right” (p. 11). This characterization limits the extent to which children *can* represent themselves in the research process. And indeed, while feminist researcher Nancy Naples (2003) insists research participants “have the power to influence the direction of the research, resist the researchers’ efforts and interpretations, and add their own interpretations and insights;” this process is invariably more complex when the participant is under the age of 18 years (p.4). Given the complexities of conducting research with adolescent girls, I use this section to address some of the key challenges I encountered during the research process. I self-reflexively detail the stages leading up to, during, and following my interviews at CSW 54, and document the methods used in this work. Lastly, I explore issues of representation and power with respect to the researcher-participant relationship and describe some of the specific tensions experienced during the research process.

*Site Selection: 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 54)*³

The 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women was held during the first two weeks of March 2010 at the United Nations headquarters in New York, NY with a record attendance of over 3,000 participants (CSW 2010). The priority theme for the session was *The Follow-up to Beijing: Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* and the secondary theme considered remaining obstacles and new challenges related to the Millennium Development Goals (CSW 2010). CSW 54 bore historical significance for the girls’ human rights movement and the recognition of girls as political subjects. Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) was the first human rights document to bring international visibility to the rights of the *girl child*⁴ (Cohen-Price 1997). Moreover, the explicitly political environment of CSW 54 served as an opportune space from which to investigate girls’ political subjectivity and agency.

Girl delegates attending the CSW are typically involved in a number of ways including, high-level meetings, evaluations, and draft recommendation strategies for UN member states, and in NGO sponsored parallel events. They serve as guest

³ Chapter One introduces the CSW in greater depth, describing its historical development, key actors, thematic focus and the role of girl delegates in its work at the United Nations.

⁴ Chapter Three explores key human rights documents and events related to the emergence of the girl child as a *different* human rights subject.

speakers, facilitators, and experts on issues related to girls' empowerment and gender equality, and the primary and review themes. In selecting CSW 54 as my primary research site, I anticipated working with an elite group of girls who would otherwise be familiar with girls' human rights and with characterizing themselves as political. CSW 54 additionally captured a particular geo-political, socio-cultural and historical moment reflected in the increasing popularity of the Girl Effect and the call to 'invest in girls.' In this way, CSW 54 proved an ideal site for exploring the subject positions made (im)possible for differently situated girls vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm, and for considering how CSW girl delegates mediated their differential political status to bring meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s).

Participant Recruitment

Childhood studies scholar Madeline Leonard (2007) is blunt, yet honest in stating that "access to children [is] negotiated through multiple layers of gatekeepers, and the process provides important clues as to the nature of social relations within the research setting" (133). Regardless of the researched undertaken, studies on and with children begin with a conversation amongst adults; this reality serves as an effective reminder of children's relative invisibility and assumed passivity as research participants (Best 2007, Brown 1998, Leonard 2007, Raby 2007). The practice of 'gatekeeping' impacts nearly every stage of research with children; it reveals the inequitable power dynamics amongst adults, and between children and young people alike. Gatekeepers exercise their influence in the research process in a variety of ways – whether by granting or denying initial access to research participants, evaluating the significance of the research topic to 'their' child or children, or defining the extent to which the child can be involved in the study itself. Despite the fact that it is "children's knowledge that one wishes to access," research with children and young people requires a series of trust building and negotiation exercises with other adults first (Leonard 2007:152). Nevertheless, Leonard (2007) maintains that gatekeepers also act as important 'protectors' of potentially vulnerable subjects who might otherwise be overly amenable to granting adult researchers access to their everyday worlds. At the same time, children's studies scholar Raby (2007) remarks, "there is also a danger in framing structural inequalities in terms of young people's vulnerability, victimhood, and incompetence, all of which ignores their agency and fails to identify the ways that children and adolescents control access to their worlds" as well (48).

In this study, I experienced a similar set of hierarchal social structures and relational power dynamics as those described by the children's studies scholars above (Best 2007, Leonard 2007, Naples 2003, and Raby 2007). The recruitment of study participants began with a meeting of the adult members of the Working Group on Girls (WGG) Steering Committee in July 2009, where I presented the objectives of my research project. Prior to CSW 54 and while studying in Ireland, I had maintained an active membership status with the WGG, sustaining previous professional relationships with WGG steering committee and general body members. After speaking about my project, the WGG agreed to support and assist me with the logistical details for the study; in return, I agreed to share the results of my research and to relay relevant feedback that might allow the WGG to better serve future CSW girl delegates. As the first and most critical of all the gatekeepers

involved in this study, the WGG's endorsement helped to facilitate access to CSW 54 girl delegates, as well as to assist in my securing passes and interview space during the CSW. For transparency and self-reflexive purposes, the following documents the WGG's involvement in the various stages of this research process.

Working Group on Girls

The Working Group on Girls was established in 1995 following the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, China; it functions as a subcommittee of the NGO Committee on UNICEF.⁵ The WGG advocates for the “ongoing inclusion and development of girls’ rights in the work of the United Nations” and promotes girls’ participation “as agents of change in their own lives, families, communities and societies” (WGG 2010). It boasts a membership of more than 400 international organizations in over 60 different countries, and coordinates the International Network for Girls (“INfG”) to promote the local and global visibility of girls’ human rights (INfG 2009). Every year the WGG encourages the United Nations and civil society organizations to include girls in their CSW delegations. During Commission meetings, they sponsor girl-friendly and girl-focused parallel events, and look to substantiate and legitimize the inclusion of young people in NGO and member state delegations (WGG 2010). At CSW 54 for example, the WGG organized the participation of over seventy-five young people under the age of 25 years, hosted seven parallel events on girls’ rights and concerns, distributed talking points on girls’ human rights to CSW delegations, and sponsored the drafting and submission of the Girls Statement to the United Nations (WGG 2010).

The WGG's extensive knowledge of and involvement with the CSW proved essential to the successful integration of my study within the two-week session. Because the WGG is a valued and recognized member of the United Nations system, their endorsement of this work bolstered the authenticity and reputation of my research, as well as afforded necessary access to NGOs and member states for the recruitment of research participants. The WGG's reputation helped to substantiate my position as a researcher, allowing me to gain the trust of those sponsoring girls’ participation fairly quickly. I found when speaking with an organization or delegate's parent, the ability to reference a colleague at the WGG or speak to my previous experience working with girl delegates fostered levels of trust and dependability that I might not otherwise have had without my connection to the WGG.

To facilitate the recruitment process, I presented on the purpose and goals my study, and discussed participation eligibility during the January 2010 WGG membership meeting. WGG colleagues from the Girl Scouts, Girls Learn International, Loretto Community, and The Grail also assisted me by recruiting members from their own delegations, and others who had contacted them about girl-friendly events during CSW 54. The WGG Girls Participation Task Force⁶ forwarded information about the study to NGOs sponsoring girl delegates, connecting me to PLAN Canada's *Because I am a Girl* Speakers Bureau and

⁵ Note as of August 2011, the Working Group on Girls separated from UNICEF in order to establish 501(c)3 status.

⁶ Professional members of the Girl Scouts, Girls Learn International and The Grail chair the Girls Participation Task Force.

recruiting two participants. The use of the WGG website further substantiated the research project, and prior to CSW 54, web-based advertisements were posted on the WGG website and Facebook pages with links to participant and parental consent forms. The WGG distributed recruitment letters to NGOs and member states and used the website to reference materials needed for study participation. The Girls Participation Task Force additionally invited me to recruit participants at their CSW 54 Youth Orientation Training Session held in mid-January 2010 in New York City. This meeting garnered the initial interest of fourteen adolescent girls from the NYC region and of that group four took part in the research. Lastly, I recruited participants during the CSW by attending girl-themed events and approaching girls and/or their chaperones directly. This method of recruitment secured access to a girl delegate from the Philippines.

CSW 54 Girl Delegates⁷

In total, a group of eleven adolescent girls between the ages of 14 and 18 years participated in the project. Efforts were made to select participants according to geographical, ethnic, and age-based diversity; however, these efforts were largely pre-determined by sponsoring NGOs and member states, and thus out of my control. In the end, the study included 3 girls (14-15 years), 6 girls (16-17 years), and 2 girls (18 years). Participants represented an ethnically diverse grouping with three Caucasian girls, two Jewish-American, two Asian and Asian Pacific girls, one African girl, one Middle Eastern girl, and two biracial girls who identified as African American and Hispanic, and Native American and Caucasian. The vast majority of the participants resided in the Global North; nine girls lived in the United States and Canada, one in Portugal and another in the Philippines. Of the nine girls in North America, three were first generation. Seven girls were from middle to upper-middle class families with the remaining four being of working-class backgrounds. Ten of the girls spoke English as their first or second language; one delegate needed the assistance of a translator because she spoke only minimal amounts of English.

Research Methods

I used two traditional research methods to investigate girls' political subjectivity and agency vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm. I discursively deconstructed the Girl Effect to identify emergent regulatory effects. Second, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with CSW 54 girl delegates to examine how girls negotiated these discursive forms to construct their political selves. The following describes the instrumental processes involved with these methods.

Discursive Deconstruction: I employed the strategy of discursive deconstruction to reveal how the Girl Effect paradigm operates to mobilize certain types of girlhood subjects. Discursive deconstruction involves interrogating hegemonic texts to evidence the unarticulated logic, suppositions, and power underlying the site. The term deconstruction comes from French philosopher Jacques Derrida's use of the word, which feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1989) explains, "in its technical

⁷ Chapter five provides a more thorough introduction of the girl delegates involved in this research. Following the VCR method, I couple structural/material markers with the girls' testimonies, allowing the girls to introduce and define themselves as they did during the research process.

sense refers to a series of tactics and devices... to make explicit what must remain unsaid for domination to continue” (p.xv). Derrida proposes a three-tiered system for deconstructing hegemonic texts, each of which presupposes binary oppositions at the start. The procedure Grosz (1989) details includes,

1. Strategic reversal of binary terms, so that the term occupying the negative position in a binary pair is placed in the positive position, and the positive term, in the negative position;
2. Movement of displacement, in which the negative term is displaced from its dependent position and located as the very condition of the positive term; and
3. Creation or discovery of a term, which is undecidable within a binary logic, insofar as it includes both binary terms, and yet, exceeds their scope (p.xv).

The purpose of discursive deconstruction is not necessarily about replacing or reconstructing a new and more acceptable set of oppositional terms, but rather about making clear the function of normative power in order to create a “more fluid and less coercive” organizational structure “in our intellectual history” (Grosz 1989:xv).

Girls’ studies scholar Catherine Driscoll (2002) applies this practice in her text *girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*; as a foundational text in the growing field of girls’ studies, her analytic approach informed my discursive deconstruction of the Girl Effect paradigm. Driscoll’s (2002) work produces a genealogy of girlhood which traces the emergence and (re)production of *girl* as an essential figure in Western history during the late modern period. Beginning in the 19th century and concluding in the early 21st century, she shows “how knowledge about girls has shaped what it means to be a girl and how girls experience their own positions in the world in relation to diverse ways of talking about and understanding girls” (Driscoll 2002:4). Driscoll traces the initial identification of feminine adolescence as part and partial to the industrial age of mass commodity production and evaluates what girls and girlhood has meant (and continues to mean) to Western culture, politics, and history. In this genealogy of girlhood, Driscoll (2002) endeavors to “map how things and ideas are possible within a given context” rather than locate their point of origin (p.3). She concludes by noting, “recognizing female adolescence as an idea that depends on and contributes to a range of particular but not inevitable knowledges, a genealogy of feminine adolescence focuses instead on how that idea works and what it has been used to say” (Driscoll 2002:4).

Utilizing Driscoll’s (2002) approach to girlhood as “made up” and where “girls are brought into existence in statements and knowledge” which speak more to the late modern culture than they do girls themselves, I draw upon key tactical insights afforded by her discursive analysis with respect to my own study of contemporary girlhood(s) (p.5). Specifically, I engage in the three-pronged discursive deconstruction strategy detailed by Grosz (1989) to reveal what is made (im)possible for girls to *become* vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm. I then similarly employ the tools of feminist postcolonial theorizing to consider the underlying

colonial logic of the Girl Effect message. These analyses in turn establish the conceptual stage for my investigation of how CSW 54 girl delegates mediate the Girl Effect discourse to bring meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s). In addition to discursive deconstruction, I interviewed girl delegates and detail this method in the next subsection.

*Interviews*⁸: Individual interviews were conducted with each of the research participants to access in-depth descriptions of girls' experiences as political subjects. Fieldwork questions were semi-structured and open-ended, and the interviews audiotaped and transcribed in the weeks and months following CSW 54. Each participant was given detailed information about the study prior to her taking part and had adequate time to ask questions about her involvement. Consent forms were completed and signed by each participant, as well as her parent or guardian if she was under the age of 16 years. All of the information gathered during the interviews was kept confidential and anonymous; each delegate selected her research pseudonym, which was also kept strictly confidential. Interviews were held during the first week of CSW 54 (1-5 March 2010) in local NGO offices, UNICEF cafeteria, and UN hotel lobby or UN hotel rooms. Interviews ranged from 60 -120 minutes in length with the majority taking place twice over the course of the first week of the CSW. Due to timing and spacing constraints, a couple of the interviews were conducted for a single 60-90 minute period. In the weeks following CSW 54, delegates received personalized thank you notes for their participation. A total of twenty hours of interview data and notes was collected and transcribed from this method.

Examining Issues of Representation and Relational Power in the Research Process Feminist researchers assert that in order to access and generate rich research data, researchers must develop close relationships with participants (Best 2007, Kirsch 2005, McCall 2005, Rubin and Rubin 2005, Taft 2007). Researchers endeavor to build rapport, make interactions mutually beneficial, and encourage the exchange of information. These practices however are not straightforward and the research relationship is forever complicated by the dynamics of gender, age, race, and socioeconomic status (Taft 2007). Girls' studies scholars remain acutely aware of the ways that age and generation work as an axis of power and difference (Kirsch 2005, Raby 2007). Taft (2007) for example suggests, "the patterns of adult intervention in teenagers' lives can make adult researchers' questioning feel like another form of adult surveillance and supervision" rather than an opportunity to speak openly or critically about one's experiences and perspectives (p.212). Webster and Mertova (2007) additionally note that while research participants might selectively remit information about how they make sense of their worlds - they are not passive objects in this practice. Research participants instead play a powerful role in shaping exactly what researchers come to know about their everyday lives and experiences. As a result, the researcher-participant

⁸ Copies of the pre-interview protocol, fieldwork questions, and coding matrix are included in the Appendix. It should be noted: two pilot interviews were conducted in the weeks prior to CSW 54 in order to refine the fieldwork questions and coding matrix. These pilot interviews also served as trial runs for the transcription and coding process. Consent forms were collected for each of the pilot interviews; however, neither interview was included in the final analyses, coding, or interpretation of the data.

relationship is always more nuanced and complex, than it is hierarchal or unidirectional (Naples 2003, Webster and Mertova 2007).

Feminist theorist Gena Kirsch (2005) alternatively advises scholars to avoid treating the research relationship like a friendship or an encounter where both parties are assumed to be of equitable positioning. The problem with this type of relational framing, she argues, is that it can leave participants feeling betrayed or misunderstood by the researcher or the research process. The complexities of power, intersectionality, and difference are never entirely removed from any research relationship, and Kirsch's (2005) work serves as a powerful reminder that sometimes hierarchies of power operate to protect both parties in some fundamentally critical ways. Consequently, feminist and youth studies scholars insist that continuous self-reflexivity throughout the research process lends itself to more sound, ethical, and respectful studies with children and young people (Best 2007, Kirsch 2005, Olesen 2005, Taft 2007).

Many of these dynamic complexities emerged in my research at CSW 54. I was acutely aware of my own privileged location as a young, educated, white, western woman trained in both feminist theorizing and activism, and with a significant amount of advocacy experience at the CSW. Throughout the interview process, I relied on the skills and techniques from my professional work with adolescent girls and tried to treat them as integral to the research at hand. I took a friendly and laid back approach in asking my questions and soliciting information; I was extra sensitive to the girl's body language, facial expressions and eye contact during our meetings. At various points, I allowed their gestures to direct me in asking follow-up questions and in directing the conversation. For example, if a participant brought up a sensitive topic or experience and appeared to 'regret' doing so or got very emotional afterwards, I tried to give her the space she needed to collect herself, and then took her lead as to whether or not she was comfortable sharing more information. I wanted to respect the girls' silences, distances and withdrawals from the interview process; therefore, I did not needlessly linger on topics or conversations that the girls clearly indicated were out of bounds or finished as far as they were concerned (Kirsch 2005).

Alternatively, if I asked a question that resulted in the eye-roll, I would laugh at the 'absurdity' of my question and then "let myself be an uncool and curious adult rather than a hip and wise one" (Taft 2007:208). It was a curious experience as a young researcher - for regardless of the fact that I kept up with youth culture and perhaps look young to my peers, I was not in fact *young* in the eyes of the CSW girl delegates. The eye-roll moments affirmed my outsider status, reminding me that while I may be able to build rapport and connect with the girls in that moment, it was important to acknowledge, as Taft (2007) suggests, "I will not be seen as their peers and that this will shape what [the girls] are willing to tell [me]" and how they conceive of my role in the research process (p.212).

Overall, the individual interviews produced vast amounts of rich data on the girls' experiences and understandings of political subjectivity and agency; in many cases, I was surprised by the girls' candor. I had hoped that in forming respectful and honest relationships with the girls, they would be more likely to reveal

personal information, thoughts, feelings and experiences. And in fact, many of the girls shared stories of dealing with divorce, loneliness, and difficult friendships, as well as surviving physical and sexual abuse, and overcoming a number of personal struggles. I listened empathetically to each of the girls' experiences and found their frankness a "powerful reminder for me that neither researchers nor participants can anticipate how they will respond to even the most seemingly innocuous questions" (Kirsch 2005:2164). While I was deeply honored by their trust in me, I found the research protocol inadequate for responding appropriately to the depth of information provided to me.

Feminists work hard to establish close relationships between the researcher and participant, but at the same time these "relationships are still based in large part on an interview process whereby the flow of information is one-sided" and the relationship often abruptly ends after collecting the appropriate level of data (Kirsch 2005: 2165). Because my interviews were conducted during a time-sensitive event, I had little flexibility in extending or adjusting the research schedule to accommodate the sensitive direction that some of the interviews took. Most of the participants attending CSW 54 had chaperones that kept them on tight schedules – dropping them off for the one-hour interview and then promptly reclaiming their time once the interview finished. This time constraint often left me feeling as if I hadn't responded appropriately *enough*, particularly when a participant disclosed a difficult or upsetting experience. I could often do little more than listen, respond with empathy, and thank her for sharing her story with me.

Ethically, I was fortunate in that I did not run into the dilemma of girls disclosing unknown information to me (in each case, the appropriate adults or authorities were already involved); however, personally I struggled emotionally with my role as the listener/receiver. I grappled with the effects of learning first-hand the difficult realities of the research participants. Feminist researchers have quite thoroughly theorized the consequences of unintentionally causing research participants' pain or discomfort during the research encounter; however, few as thoroughly attend to the impacts of the fieldwork on the researcher herself (Gilligan et al. 1995, Kirsch 2005, Lal 1999, McCall 2005, Naples 2003). As I reflect upon the research experience, I perhaps return to this complexity because of my own uneasiness in being positioned outside of the realms of direct impact or influence. There was (of course) nothing that I could have done to change the girls' past situations, but I had to let go of my usual role as an advocate and educator.

Lastly, I kept a research diary to record and process my observations, thoughts, and emotions. Data notes were collected from January 2010 through March 2010, resulting in over 36 hours of data notes that I used for self-reflexive purposes and to help distinguish between my voice and that of the girls during the coding process. Because I selected the VCR methodology, I found that keeping a research journal helped to further separate and distinguish between my experiences during the research process and that of the girl delegates.

I recall these experiences and reflections here to better describe my position in this study, but also to paint a picture of the research relationship and depth of information shared. Coupled with the discursive deconstruction of the Girl Effect,

the individual interviews functioned as the primary means by which I interpreted and conceptualized how the Girl Effect paradigm 'worked' to shape girls' political selves.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the methodological foundations of this study as a feminist poststructuralist analysis of girls' political subjectivity and agency that borrows from standpoint theory to prioritize girls' politically marginalized status. After painting a clearer picture of *how* I conducted this project, the next chapter gives a substantive review of relevant literatures. I trace the emergence of the girl child in human rights policies and consider girls increasing political visibility in girls' studies and human rights scholarship. The literature review highlights how *girl* exists as a contemporary political subject with multiple theoretical boundaries. In Chapter Three, I put these disparate perspectives into conversation with one another.

CHAPTER THREE

Girlhood on the Global Stage: The Genealogy of Girl as Political Subject

This chapter traces the development of *girl* as a political subject within human rights and girls' studies literatures. I conduct three comprehensive literature reviews representative of the wider discursive parameters of this study. The first focuses on the production of the *girl child* in human rights documents and texts, while the second considers the evolution of girl power in contemporary girls' studies research. In the third and final section of the chapter, I examine the conceptualization of girlhood agency and political power in girls' studies and children's rights scholarship. The Girl Effect paradigm, I suggest, draws from these paralleling concepts to produce the logic of missionary girl power, oppositional girlhoods, and neoliberal girl power. This chapter maps the disparate, yet simultaneous construction of the *girl* and *girl child* in order to better appreciate their present convergence in the discursive logic of the Girl Effect.

3.1: Examining the Girl Child in Human Rights Literatures

To understand the historical emergence of the girl child in human rights texts, it is important to first consider the political climate under which girls' human rights developed. The mid-1990's are commonly recognized as the height of the human rights movement, where women, children, disabled individuals, indigenous peoples, and racial and ethnic minorities challenged the normative parameters of human rights, and called for a framework that more adequately addressed their experiences as marginalized subjects (Bunch and Frost 2000, Reilly 2007). The women's movement in particular confronted the failure of the liberal state to deliver on the promise of universal human rights to female subjects; and feminists critiqued the hierarchy of rights, public/private divide, and gender neutral approaches to the realization of rights in women's everyday lives.¹ Bunch and Frost (2000) note, "in the evolution of what is becoming a global women's movement, the term 'women's human rights' has served as a locus for praxis, that is, for the development of political strategies shared by the interaction between analytical insights and concrete political practices" (p.1). As a result of feminists (and many other political actors) collaborative opposition, the normative scope of the human rights agenda has been significantly augmented. The new vision of human rights better accommodates *difference*, thereby improving both women's *and* girls' status as human rights subjects (Price-Cohen 1997).

The movement for girls' human rights is an extension of the women's rights and children's rights agendas. Girls' rights legal scholar, Nura Taefi (2009) maintains "girls are uniquely situated as both women and children" and as a consequence, the girls' rights movement must call attention to their intersectional positioning as female children (p.345). In fact, it is this particular focus on the gender-specific needs and

¹ See Bunch 1990, Charlesworth and Chinkin, 2000, Lacey, 2004, Okin 1989, Romany, 1994.

experiences of female children that inspired the term *girl child*, which was coined by UNICEF in the early 1990's (UNICEF 2002). Introduced after the 1989 adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the girl child signals an understanding that age and gender produce a different type of human rights subject - one who necessitates supplementary protections and provisions to realize her human rights.²

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The nearly universal adoption of the CRC in 1989 marks a significant shift in the theorization of childhood and children's rights by the international community, but it also signals the formation of the girls' rights movement and girl child agenda. The CRC asserts that all children (regardless of age or gender) are independent rights holders, autonomous subjects, and full participants in society with similar access to the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights afforded to adults. Children's rights scholar, Deirdre Fottrell (1999) argues that as a binding treaty, the CRC effectively elevates the status of the child by mainstreaming children's rights issues into the human rights agenda and instituting one of the most "holistic and all encompassing approach[es] to the rights of the child" to date (p.169). Indeed, the significance of the CRC lies in its treatment of children as more than vulnerable dependents, and in the broad categorization of children's entitlements and protections.

Childhood is normatively perceived as a temporary condition of natural incapacities requiring and in fact, legitimizing parental authority and protection; consequently, Lim and Roche (2000) contend that the concept of the child as an autonomous, rights holder "goes to the heart of 'private' life... challenging the very nature of intimate relationships within the family" and contesting children's assumed powerlessness and dependence on adults (p.52). Legal scholar Cynthia Price-Cohen (1997) goes even further in her characterization of the CRC as a "feminist landmark" providing a comprehensive set of provisions for all children, but for girl children in particular (p.27). Girls' human rights are protected primarily through Article 2, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. In addition, the CRC's Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography have unique implications for girl children. The CRC utilizes gender-balanced language throughout its text, referencing both he and she in each provision; thus, making room for increased gender sensitivity and awareness in its implementation, as well as bringing attention to the gendered specificity of rights-based needs and experiences. Collectively, these provisions and frameworks have a powerful impact on the scope of girls' human rights.

² The relative success and effectiveness of this intersectional approach continues to be debated by children's rights advocates and feminist scholars, particularly with regard to the CRC's effectiveness in bringing attention to girls' intersectional status and providing adequate protections for their lived vulnerabilities. For more information, see Archard (2004), Bunting (2005), Croll (2006), Fottrell (2000), Goonesekere (2006), Olsen (1992), Raitt (2005), and Taefi (2009).

World Summit for Children and the Decade of the Girl Child

Shortly after the adoption of the CRC, UNICEF declared the 1990's the *Decade of the Girl Child* during the World Summit for Children held in New York in September of 1990 (Berman and Jiwani 2001; UNICEF 2002). The World Summit for Children convened as a Special Session on Children where 71 heads of state and government promised to “protect children and diminish their suffering; to promote the fullest development of the human potential of every child; and to make them aware of their needs, their rights and their opportunities” (UNICEF 2002). Participants produced the World Declaration and Plan of Action, which called for a series of national and international initiatives related to children’s health, education, protection, and survival.

During the World Summit for Children, the governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and UNICEF of South Asia joined together to promote the 1990's as the *Decade for the Girl Child in South Asia* (SAARC 2011; UNICEF 2011). As part of this initiative, UNICEF launched the *Meena Communication Initiative* (MCI), a project aimed at promoting girls’ rights and improving girls problem solving and communication skills. MCI produced five cartoon films and six story books that followed the adventures of Meena, a nine-year old South Asian girl, who spoke out on important social issues, healthy behaviors, hygiene, nutrition, and corporal punishment. She quickly became the symbol for girls and children’s rights throughout the region (UNICEF 2011). The Meena Initiative was so successful with girls and young people, that a similar project was launched in Eastern and Southern Africa in 1995. Dubbed the *Sara Adolescent Girl Communication Initiative*, this project focused on the importance of education, HIV/AIDS, domestic labor, early marriage and female circumcision (UNICEF 2001). Similar to MCI, the Sara Initiative boasted high levels of success and mainstream popularity in Eastern and Southern Africa (UNICEF 2001). Together, these early projects demonstrate some of the ways that the UN, UNICEF, NGOs, and governments sought to promote the rights of girl children – laying the groundwork for the unprecedented visibility of the girl child at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

UN Fourth World Conference on Women and Section L of the Beijing Platform

Over 30,000 women and 400 girls attended the UN Fourth World Conference on Women and NGO Forum held in Beijing, China in September of 1995 (UN 1997). Participants and delegates considered the themes of the advancement and empowerment of women in relation to women’s human rights, poverty, decision-making, violence against women, the *girl child*, and other areas of concern. At the conclusion of the Beijing Conference, delegates adopted the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), which identified twelve areas of critical concern, including the last section (Section L) on the girl child (UN Women 2011). Section L draws upon the entitlements outlined in the CRC and remains one of the most important human rights platforms dedicated to the exclusive promotion and protection of girls’ human rights (Price-Cohen 1997). Section L calls attention to the ways that gender and age intersect in particularly difficult ways for girl children. It brings visibility to issues of harmful

cultural traditions (including female circumcision, son preference, and early or forced marriage), access to education, sexual exploitation and abuse, economic exploitation and unsafe working conditions, girls' roles within the family, and the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life (UN Women, Section L 1995).

Despite the growing visibility of girl children as needing a different set of human rights provisions, the inclusion of Section L in the Beijing agenda was not a straightforward process. In fact, Mavic Cabrera-Balleza (1996) of Women in Action recalls that if not for the two-year strategy put into place by African and South Asian NGOs and UNICEF, the girl child may have been left out of the Beijing Conference all together. She notes during the preparatory meetings and negotiation processes leading up to the BPFA, concerns with prenatal sex selection, inheritance rights, sexual education and the use of the term family or families created tension amongst member states. Even in areas where there was general consensus, such as education or female circumcision, most of the commitments made by heads of state came with significant reservations and provisions for change (Cabrera-Balleza 1996). On the other hand, if we look at the inclusion of girls and young women in the Beijing Conference, Women in Action's Lan S. Mercado Carreon (1996) argues that we see a critical shift in the recognition of girls' human rights and girls' capacities as political agents. Ms. Magazine contributor Haga Scher (1995) similarly asserts, if the "future of women depends on involving girls and young women in the process of change" then certainly the efforts made by the Asia-Pacific Youth Group and African Working Group on the Girl Child have helped to solidify the necessity of Section L, as well as drawn critical attention to the importance of girls' participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women (p.90).

Sixty-four countries included girls and young women in their Beijing delegations, including one of the most well documented groups, the Girls International Forum (GIF) from Duluth, Minnesota. Thirteen girls between the ages of ten and seventeen years attended the Fourth World Conference as members of GIF, an initiative founded in 1994 by *New Moon* magazine (Johnson 2005). To prepare for the conference, members of GIF solicited information from their peers on critical areas of concern and how best to improve girls' daily lives. This information was compiled into a single document titled, *Listen to Girls: A Girls' Agenda for the UN Conference on Women* and was distributed to conference attendees (Johnson 2005). Throughout the conference, GIF delegates held girl-driven workshops titled *Girls Speak Out*, conducted interviews with other girl delegates from around the world, and assisted with the NGO Forum's closing ceremonies (*Teaching the Teachers: Girls Take Global Lessons to the Classroom* 1996). GIF delegates kept journals documenting their experiences and in the months following Beijing, published numerous articles in *New Moon*, *Ms. Magazine*, and *University of Minnesota Press*, among others.

Girls' participation in the Fourth World Conference afforded girls with the unique opportunity to engage in rights-based advocacy work; however, it also exposed adults

to the benefits and challenges of engaging girls in formal political processes. The girl child and girls' human rights movement achieved greater international visibility because of girls' participation in Beijing and the inclusion of Section L in the BPfA. Yet despite this increasing recognition of girl children, it would not be until over a decade later that the United Nations would again exclusively consider the rights and needs of the girl child. This time, the forum was the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women³ (CSW 51) and like Section L of the BPfA, CSW 51 transformed the landscape of the girls' rights agenda.

Girls' Rights at the Commission on the Status of Women

CSW 51 took place in late February and early March of 2007 with the priority theme of *The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child*. Held nearly twelve-years after the Beijing Conference, CSW 51 focused on girls' human rights and how girls experience violence and discrimination (CSW 2007). Over two hundred girl delegates participated in CSW 51 as representatives of local, regional, and international NGOs, and as delegates from various states and governments. Girls played an integral role in high-level discussions, formal and informal meetings, and assisted in the drafting of recommendations for the agreed conclusions and outcome documents of the session (CSW 2007). In addition, two high-level panel discussions were sponsored by member states to facilitate dialogue amongst girl delegates, heads of state, and NGO representatives.

The first panel, moderated by Katie Couric of CBS news and titled after the 1995 GIF workshops in Beijing, *Girls Speak Out: Finding Their Own Solutions* featured six adolescent girls from Nepal, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jordan, Zambia, Thailand, and Armenia (CSW 2007). Girls spoke about their experiences with war and conflict, labor, HIV/AIDS, disabilities, sex trafficking, and prostitution, and presented their ideas on how to best ensure the protection and realization of girls' human rights. The second panel focused on the Millennium Development Goals and explored girls' suggestions for better serving marginalized and disadvantaged youth. The discussion included six adolescent girls from Africa, Latin America and the Arab States, who advocated for:

- The inclusion of girls in empowerment programs,
- Creation of safe spaces to build self-confidence and assertiveness,
- Provisions for job training, education and literacy skills,
- Fostering of more holistic programs to address girls' health concerns,
- Provision of equal opportunities for girls' leadership,
- Facilitation of mentorship programs to assist girls in effectively navigating adolescence,

³ Chapters One and Two provided a description of the Commission on the Status of Women, including the history of the Commission, selection of primary and review themes, key players, structures, goals, and responsibilities. This chapter details when, where, and how girls participated in the work of CSW 51 in 2007.

- Promotion of familial partnerships and mixed gender peer groups in gender equality initiatives, and
- The establishment of recurrent opportunities for girls to design and implement human rights programs in their local communities (CSW 2007).

In addition to the high-level panel discussions, CSW 51 girl delegates engaged in a wide-variety of workshops and informal events organized throughout the two-week session, having the opportunity to speak directly to member states, NGOs, and civil society organizations about their experiences with gender-based violence and discrimination. Because CSW 51 identified the girl child as a different kind of human rights subject, the session played a pivotal role in solidifying her rights as integral to the human rights framework - affording greater visibility to the girls' rights movement and to girls as political subjects.

Over the last twenty years, the girls' human rights movement has continued to gain momentum and recognition at the United Nations. From the girl child's early emergence in the Convention on the Rights of the Child to her more recent thematic identification at the Commission on the Status of Women, the girl child remains a unique and important figure in the contemporary human rights landscape. In this section, I have documented the growth of the girl child in successive fashion - examining key events and platforms leading up to the introduction of the girl child as a human rights subject. I have also followed her representation in several key areas: CRC, UNICEF's Decade of the Girl Child, the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The next section explores the analogous production of 'girl power' in the Global North.

3.2: Review of Girls' Studies Literatures: The Production of Girl Power

During the 1990's, Western narratives of *girl power* paralleled that of the girl child in human rights discourse. The phrase "girl power" originated in the early 1990's when all female punk bands rallied young women and girls against the confines of a patriarchal, sexist, ageist, racist, and classist society.⁴ Popularly known as the Riot Grrrls, this group of feminist activists re-claimed their girlhoods by promoting DIY (do-it-yourself) ethics, producing zines as alternative sources for young women's writing, and re-appropriating mainstream media to sell and popularize their own counter-cultural agendas (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris 2005). Riot Grrrls encouraged young women to see themselves as producers and creators of knowledge, and to reject the notion that they were simply passive consumers or self-destructive Ophelias⁵ in need of adult intervention (Sheridan-Rabideau 2008). The Riot Grrrls

⁴ A number of texts provide comprehensive histories of the Riot Grrrls and girl power movement. For example, see Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005), Baumgardner and Richards (2000), Driscoll (2002), Lipkin (2009), and Sheridan-Rabideau (2008).

⁵ Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* popularized the 'girl in crisis' narrative of the early 1990's. Her work asserts that adolescent girls lose their confidence, agency, and voice when they enter adolescence because of America's "girl-poisoning" culture.

sought to intentionally respond to the notion that girls *needed* help from adults and in doing so, challenged the presumed passivity and vulnerability normatively associated with girls and girlhood. As part of a recent review of the girls' studies discipline, Elline Lipkin (2009) notes, the Riot Grrrls "centered their message around female solidarity and... repudiated traditional constructions of girlhood" in order to conceptualize new understandings of grrrl that recognized girls as powerful actors in their own worlds (p.156). As a result, Sheridan-Rabideau (2008) writes in *Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies*, this group of girls and young women "ushered in a grrrl-centered decade... [that] foster[ed] a new generation of feminist activism" defined by the grrrl power revolution (p.46).

By the mid-1990's however, the subversive message identified with the Riot Grrrls was co-opted by mainstream Western media and consumer culture; transforming the anti-establishment agenda of the Riot Grrrls into the commercial slogan of girl power. And for better or worse, feminist scholars agree the popularization of the girl power movement owes much to the British pop group, the Spice Girls. The impact of the Spice Girls on girls' conceptualizations of empowerment has been explored at length in feminist and girls' studies scholarship; and while I do not intend to reiterate this discussion in my research, I would like to note the cultural significance of the Spice Girls in terms of marketing and making commonplace the slogan of girl power in Western culture.⁶ The Spice Girls produced what Sheridan-Rabideau (2008) calls "a more palatable girl power" one, which appealed to the masses in ways that feminist punk music did not (p.49). Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) similarly argue that the Spice Girls *and* Riot Grrrls introduced the girl power phenomenon to mainstream Western society. They write,

Despite the objections of the Riot Grrrls, the lid was off the can and certain aspects of girl power...became ubiquitous, entering mainstream cultural arenas through an incredible range of products and services. In the media, the term 'girl power' was used to headline almost any newsworthy event or phenomenon that involved women...[while] community organizations and government departments also picked up on the terminology and aspects of the ideology (Aapola, Gonick, and Harris 2005:25).

The slogan of girl power proved undeniably lucrative for feminists and non-feminists alike; within a decade of the Spice Girl emergence, Lipkin (2009) remarks, "girl power representations... [appeared] on almost every sort of saleable item," marshalling in a new era girl power politics based upon Western girls consumer power (p.160).

⁶ For feminist analyses of the Spice Girls, see Brabazon, Tara and Amanda Evans. 1998. "I'll Never be Your Woman: The Spice Girls and New Flavours of Feminism." *Social Alternatives*. 17(2): 39-42.; Driscoll, Catherine. 1999. "Girl Culture, Revenge and Global Capitalism: Cybergirls, Riot Grrrls, Spice Girls." *Australian Feminist Studies*. 14(29): 173-193.; Fritzsche, Bettina. 2004. "Spicy Strategies: Pop Feminist and Other Empowerments in Girl Culture." Pp. 155-162 in *All About the Girl: Culture, Identity, and Power*, edited by Anita Harris. New York: Routledge.

Alternatively, Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) note the stark contrast between the Riot Grrrls and mainstream girl power movement, commenting, “while the Riot Grrrls themselves clearly saw their movement as attached to a liberatory social and political agenda; the mainstream media opted to present a different message altogether” (p. 23). This new message, Taft (2004) argues, sold “girl-positive feelings” at the expense of girls’ political selves with a market-driven version of girls empowerment best expressed via consumer practices (p.71). Rachel Fudge (2006) likewise notes the contextual ‘girl power’ shift in her essay, “Girl, Unreconstructed: Why Girl Power is Bad for Feminism.” In this essay, she laments the loss of the feminist politic in the girl power slogan, asserting

It reduces the theoretical complexity of feminism to a cheery slogan... it represents the ultimate commodification of empowerment; and it reinforces the simplistic conception of feminism as being... ‘all about choices.’ But most of all... [it] discard[s] every ounce of political heft, and reduce[s girl power] to cheap iron-on letters on a baby T” (Fudge 2006:155).

Market-driven girl power, Fudge (2006) contends, erases decades of struggle against gender inequality, “lull[ing] us into thinking that all of feminism’s battles are won” and girls have nothing left to fight for (p.156). It is in this way, the consumer market sold girl power as a series of products and identities unrelated to feminist politics or collective social action.

According to Angela McRobbie (2000), the girl power movement signals the beginning of the post-feminist era. Within this paradigm, she observes, “feminism is aged and made to seem redundant” and girls learn that gender equality and success are the result of personalized (and consumer-based) choices and not collective political engagement (McRobbie 2004:3). Jessica Taft (2004) similarly argues post-feminism “promotes the idea that girls should be satisfied and content with the current social order, potentially obstructing their attempts and desires to create social change” (p.72). She further remarks post-feminist girl power discourses “encourage girls to think of their lives in individualized fashion... and they are more likely to see their problems as personal troubles, rather than as issues of public concern” (Taft 2010:19). Girls learn to focus on personal empowerment and self-esteem, instead of how to resist and challenge the material conditions that necessitate their making the ‘right’ choices in the first place.

Cultural studies scholar Shelley Budgeon (2001) conversely maintains despite the post-feminist discursive regime, girls and young women remain highly attuned to the impacts of gender inequality in their everyday lives. She writes, “the kinds of feminist discourses available to young women in a post-feminist climate allow them to understand their location within social relations and the resistance they encounter as being due in some part to a gendered struggle over power” (Budgeon 2001:20). She suggests post-feminist discourse gives girls increased sensitivity to gender bias, which *can* in turn become transformative acts of feminist resistance. Rather than foreclose

the possibilities of a feminist politic, Budgeon's (2001) work considers how post-feminist girl power might produce counter-hegemonic subjectivities as well. Taken together, girls' studies research on girl power demonstrates the complex ways that girls encounter mainstream girlhood discourses. From the Riot Grrrls to post-feminist consumer power, this section documented the evolution of the girl power slogan in Western culture, while also highlighting its broader implications as post-feminist ideology.

In the next section, I blend girls' studies, children's rights, and human rights literatures to identify common approaches to girls' political subjectivity and agency. Girlhood is often first and foremost presumed to be an apolitical identity and the assumption that girls are inherently not political or otherwise uninterested in *becoming* political continues to dominate scholarship. This last section thus considers how narratives of disempowerment and vulnerability inform the conceptualization of girls' political subjectivity and agency in human rights and girls' studies texts.

3.3: Girls as Political Subjects: Common Approaches and Conceptualizations

Girls' studies scholars have investigated the complexities of girlhood in a wide variety of arenas including, but not limited to girls schooling experiences (AAUW 1991, Orenstein 1995), sexualization in the media (Lamb and Brown 2006, Levin and Kilbourne 2008), relational aggression and friendships (Brown 2003, Simmons 2002, Wiseman 2002), teen pregnancy and sexuality (Luker 1997, Davis 2004, Thompson 2005, White 2002), loss of self-esteem and voice (Brown 1998, Fine 1992, Pipher 1994), and body image distortion, and eating disorders (Brumberg 1988, 1997, Wolf 2002). But studies on how girls experience themselves as political subjects remain curiously absent in literatures on girlhood agency, power, and resistance.⁷ Noting this absence in her recent book *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas*, Taft (2011) comments girls' political practices are an "extremely under-explored scholarly topic, largely invisible in academic literatures on girlhood" and equally as marginal in youth studies and children's rights texts (p.4). In the following literature review, I similarly examine the problematic manner in which girls are characterized as *apolitical* (non)actors or at best *potential* or *future* political subjects.

Children's rights scholars Mayer and Schmidt (2004) for example explored the impacts of gender socialization on adolescent girls and boys' perception of politics in China, Japan, Mexico and the United States. They sought to ascertain the impacts of gender on young people's beliefs in the value of political participation. In this study, Mayer and Schmidt (2004) concluded although girls valued political participation at least as much as the boys, girls were less likely to become politically active because

⁷ Examples include: Best's (2004) investigation how girls negotiate meaning and identities through prom; Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz's (2006) research on girls who identify themselves as empowered subjects and resist the narrative of victimization; Gonick's (2003) examination of how immigrant girls negotiate and construct new feminine identities in post-industrial societies; Harris's (2004) consideration of girls use of alternative media sites to resist consumer culture; and Taft's (2006) analysis of when and how girls reject 'politics' as a strategic tool of resistance.

they characterized politics as a predominantly masculine sphere of engagement. Another research team, Alozie et al. (2003) investigated the extent to which levels of political orientation differed according to the intersections of gender, race and socio-economic status among adolescents. They too discovered regardless of race or socio-economic status, girls were more likely than boys to express interest in political activity and to regard political participation as important for the future. In contrast to gender socialization expectations and normative conceptualizations of girlhood, both studies found girls to be equally (if not more) politically oriented and civically minded than their male counterparts – even when they identified politics as a limited space for girls’ meaningful engagement.

Similar to Mayer and Schmidt (2004), and Alozie et al.’s (2003) studies on girls’ *potential* interest in politics, another common approach to girls and politics is to consider the impact adult female role models on girls’ future activism and political leadership. Toward this end, Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007) studied whether female politicians influenced adolescent girls’ future political activities. Their research argued adolescent girls were more likely to envision themselves as future political actors when an increased number of female role models were depicted in mainstream media. They correspondingly concluded with an increased number of female politicians, girls could “close the gender gap in anticipated activity as the percentage of women in office increases, matching or even slightly exceeding boys” (Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007: 933). This study evidences the power of mainstream media in advancing opportunities for gender equality via women’s increased political representation; however, it also reinforces the idea that girls’ political agency is chiefly related to their *future* political selves and not the present. By approaching girls’ political selves as a future event or age-related task, these studies make invisible the ways that girls might already *be* political.

In many ways, the normative regard for girls’ political engagement as part of their future stems from traditional approaches to youth politics in general. Youth studies scholars Johanna Wyn and Rob White (1997) comment “the extent to which young people are seen as citizens in their own right rather than as ‘incomplete’ adults” is invariably shaped by intersections of difference and relations of power. Because youth is not a fixed or universal concept, the ways that young people conceptualize and articulate their political subjectivity depends upon their socio-historical location and the hierarchical production of power in their everyday lives. One of the ways that power shapes youth experience is through age-based differences, where biological age affords differential access to social power and political status. As such, youth studies scholars Jones and Wallace (1992) contend because “it is assumed that children can derive their citizenship rights through their parents, by proxy,” youth are often left relatively powerless when it comes to *individually* claiming their rights or challenging their marginalized political location. In other words, when biological age dictates the normative conditions of political participation and political agency, the only option for young people is to *grow up* and *become* political subjects. It is in these ways, hierarchal structures of age and gender work to constrain girls’ political

engagement according to adult models and standards. Because adults perceive girls as *future* political subjects, this conceptualization shapes and determines the ways that girls can, in fact *be* and *become* political.

The lifecycle approach is another conceptualization that limits girls' status as political subjects. Adopted by women and children's rights advocates, the lifecycle approach frames girls' human rights as part and partial to their status as children or future women. The lifecycle approach privileges womanhood over girlhood, positioning *girl* as woman's other and making her the object that defines and stabilizes womanhood (Driscoll 2002). Operating within this model, girls' political subjectivity and agency is determined by her future status as woman. Driscoll (2002) maintains the vitality of the women's rights movement depends upon girls wanting to *become* feminist women. It is therefore, imperative that girls learn to position themselves in relation to the women's rights agenda, if the movement is to survive each coming generation. On the other hand, if girlhood simply marks the linear progression towards womanhood and becoming *real* adult subjects - then Baumgardner and Richards (2004) assert, feminism will have little to offer girls in their current everyday lives. Rather, the conceptualization of girls as future women erases girls' current desires and replaces them with what adult women assume girls need or want. According to PLAN International's (2007) research on the state of the world's girls, the lifecycle approach and "the struggle for women's rights has made little impact on girls who continue to be undervalued in society and within their families" (p.117). It is therefore highly problematic to presume that an agenda for women's rights automatically advances the rights of girls, or that treating girls as an appendage to the women's movement ensures adequate consideration of their needs and concerns.

In addition to the characterization of girls as *potential* political subjects, another common approach to girls and politics assumes girls have little to no interest in politics itself. As a result, girls are conceptualized as apolitical or apathetic subjects. Notably a small group of girls' studies scholars have endeavored to complicate the 'youth apathy' hypothesis by examining girls' understandings of the political. Taft (2006) for example rejects the notion of youth apathy to alternatively argue, "some U.S. teenage girls deploy the rejection of politics as a tool for political intervention" (p.330). She contends American teen girls reject the 'political' because it represents something done by people not 'like them' - i.e. those of a particular socio-cultural, political and economic group that does not often include or value the insights and experiences of girls. Taft (2006) consequently suggests "rather than trying to combat [political] disaffection, those interested in increasing youth political engagement should help youth increase their efficacy as political outsiders *and* work with them to democratize the decisions that affect their lives, creating opportunities for real political voice, not simply token inclusion" (p.349). Her work critically illustrates the material and structural complexities surrounding girls' experiences with the political, while simultaneously providing a more nuanced understanding of girls presumed political apathy.

Chilla Bulbeck (2008) contributes to this complication of girlhood apathy in her assessment of Australian girls understanding of politics. She comments, “this is not a generation with no opinions about politics... It is a generation that tests the meaning of politics against the traditional definitions and considers that activism does not need to involve parliaments and ‘men with pot-bellies’” (Bulbeck 2008:230). Similar to Taft (2006), Bulbeck (2008) concludes, girls neglect to label their activist practices ‘political’ because these activities appeared too concentrated or ineffective to connote politics and social change. In response to Bulbeck’s (2008) findings, Anita Harris (2008) suggests, “for some young people, a lack of engagement [may be the] result of deep suspicion of the formal political process” and not necessarily of politics itself (p.234). Because girls are not often given the opportunity to participate in formalized political structures, it should not be surprising to find that girls distance themselves from politics or disengage from the political sphere all together (Bulbeck and Harris 2008). Harris (2008) additionally notes, “in a culture where youth often feel they are not listened to, lied to, belittled, and dismissed, developing a critical insight can mean separating oneself from the institutions of power, even if temporarily [and] we might call this a healthy disregard for formal politics and its agendas” (p.235).

Bulbeck and Harris’ (2008) scholarship re-defines what is commonly perceived as girls political disengagement to optimistically consider whether their distancing might “produce other ways to engage in politics and build community” outside of formal or traditional political power structures (Bulbeck and Harris 2008:235). Instead of assuming that girls need to be taught the value of politics, Taft (2006), Bulbeck and Harris (2008) expose the inherent flaws of an adult-centric political system. They alternatively (re)conceptualize girlhood as a contested site of meaning where girls actively work through local discourses and material constraints to make use of the political in their daily lives. On the other hand, social development scholar Hava Rachel Gordon (2008) asserts that regardless of the critical insights gained by girls’ marginalized political status, girls repeated absence from formal politics “compromises their ability to become public, social movement actors” and successful political leaders (p.35). One of the most significant gaps identified in conducting this literature review remains the fact that while these studies crucially challenge traditional approaches to girls and politics, they do not necessarily tell us much about how girls *actually* experience themselves as political, or how they engage in explicitly politicized spaces. Indeed, Taft’s (2011) *Rebel Girls* is one of the only substantive publications on girls’ current political practices to date.

Taft’s (2011) book provides a long overdue account of girls’ political identities and practices in the twenty-first century. Interviewing over seventy-five girl activists throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, the United States; Mexico City, Mexico; Caracas, Venezuela; Vancouver, Canada; and Buenos Aires, Argentina, Taft (2011) challenges the invisibility of girls’ political activism in mainstream society and academia. She brings girls’ political voices into conversation with that of adult scholars and activists, and illustrates how girls’ experiences and perspectives produce effective models of social change. Divided into two parts, the first half of the book

examines how teenage girls construct their activist identities, while the second half addresses girls' political practices. According to Taft (2011), girl activists articulate a new understanding of girlhood that runs counter to popular images of passive victimhood and empowered consumer citizenship. Girl activists reject the notion that they need to be empowered and alternatively, draw a clear distinction between empowerment and activism. Empowering girls, Taft (2011) states, encourages girls to think of their lives in individualized terms and "to see their problems as personal troubles, rather than as issues of public concern" (p.30) whereas, girls' activism engages in a collective vision that requires "actually doing something" as the girls in her study argue (p.31). Girl activists thus re-define the parameters of their girlhood identities, moving beyond narratives of self-esteem and individualized girl power, and into more sociological critiques of power and inequality.

Rebel Girls details a wide-variety of tactics and strategies employed by girls to achieve social change goals. In conducting this activist work however, Taft (2011) notes "girl activists regularly reject and respond to a ... prominent discourse about girls' political identities: the widespread assumption of youth apathy and the concomitant idea that any youth who is involved in activism must, in fact, be an extraordinary or exceptional individual" (p.41). Girl activists alternatively "understand activism as an ordinary practice" that is part of many young people's lives but one that rarely receives public, mainstream, or scholarly attention (p.43). In order to give visibility to girls' activism, Taft (2011) brings attention to the broad scope of their social change agendas. These strategies include:

- Political education workshops: film screenings, study circles, and cultural events
- Formal political interventions: lobbying, petition drives, party building, public policy strategizing
- Traditional social movement practices: community service, charity, fundraising, and development work on human rights or poverty issues, and
- Political action alternatives: establishing youth organizations, institutions and cooperatives, health clinics, community-run kitchens, and childcare programs.

Critically, Taft's (2011) text takes seriously girls positioning as *current* political subjects and in doing so, makes room for girls to be seen as participatory peers in local and global social justice movements. My research project similarly explores the (im)possibilities for girls to *be* political in the context of the Girl Effect paradigm. It asks: how do CSW girl delegates bring meaning to their political selves and girlhoods vis-à-vis the Girl Effect? And what are the broader implications of this discursive paradigm for the girls' human rights movement?

Chapter Summary

In 2004 former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan declared, "when it comes to solving many of the problems of this world, I believe in girl power" (Annan 2004:3). Seven years later and it seems that girls have indeed taken center stage; Angela McRobbie

(2000) notes, perhaps now more than ever, the beneficiaries of girl power (i.e. Western, economically privileged girls) enjoy a neoliberal global stage upon which to demonstrate their empowerment. At the same time, the girl child or Third World girls have emerged as the latest symbols of modernity and global development. This chapter investigated the historical and contemporary discourses that contribute to girls increasing global visibility. It paid particular attention to the rise of the girl child in human rights literature and the evolution of girl power in the Global North. In addition, I explored common conceptual approaches to girls as political (non)subjects, and proposed that collectively this literature gives meaning to the broader discursive landscape of the Girl Effect paradigm.

The next chapter is the first of my findings chapters and it details the regulatory practices of the Girl Effect paradigm. Utilizing the tools of feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis and post-colonial feminist theory, I deconstruct the Girl Effect narrative and consider how this contemporary paradigm operates to persuade the forms and possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency. Specifically, I identify the regulatory effects of oppositional girlhoods, neoliberal girl power, logic of missionary girl power and the erasure of girls' human rights.

CHAPTER FOUR

It Starts with a Girl: (Re)Thinking the Girl Effect

This chapter is about how the Girl Effect works to mediate girls' political subjectivity and agency. By deconstructing the script¹ and imagery from the first self-titled Girl Effect video, I investigate how this discursive paradigm regulates the forms and possibilities for different girl subjects. It is my contention that the Girl Effect brings certain types of subjectivities and agencies into focus while foreclosing others. This chapter is thus about identifying the prescriptive function of the Girl Effect, in order to more thoroughly consider how girls encounter these disciplinary practices to give meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s). Drawing from the critical insights of postcolonial and poststructuralist feminist theory, I explore two interrelated concepts: the (re)production of oppositional girlhoods and the (re)vitalization of neoliberal girl power. Collectively, I suggest these practices conceal the logic of missionary girl power² and make invisible girls' human rights.

4.1: "Not like Us"³: (Re)Producing Oppositional Girlhoods

One of the most powerful aspects of the Girl Effect stems from its seductive and seemingly innocuous graphics and text, which position an unidentified – yet distinctly Western viewer⁴ at the center of this unfolding story. Narrated by the viewer's own inner-monologue, the Girl Effect encourages *us* to literally imagine the developing world, poverty, girlhood, hunger, and HIV. At the same time, we are repeatedly told, we can "fix this picture", "see her", and "change the course of history" (Girl Effect 2008). The textual narrative guides viewers through the corresponding visual representation of neoliberal economic development, shifting the viewer from passive observer to proactive investor via the likes of neoliberal girl power. Because the video is captured almost entirely in text-based images, graphics, and marketable slogans, it relies upon the viewer's imagination to create and illustrate this story of Third World girlhood.

**YOU
START THE
GIRL EFFECT.**

Gender development scholar Lyndsay Hayhurst (2011) contends, the Girl Effect "though useful in drawing attention to the failure of the development community in addressing the marginalization of girls... tends to recycle former discourses of

¹ The full transcription of the *Girl Effect* video (28 May 2008) is included in Appendix A.

² Missionary girl power is a phrase coined by Sensoy and Marshall (2010).

³ Jessica. 2010. Personal Interview. New York, NY: March 1.

⁴ Because the Girl Effect's text is singularly presented in English, it presupposes a literate, English-speaking, North American or Anglophone audience.

colonial paternalism” and incite limiting depictions of Third World girls as requiring the rescue and empowerment of “their counterparts in the global North” (p.534). The Girl Effect discursively (re)produces Western and so-called ‘non-Western’ girlhoods as oppositional subjects positions - imagining Western girls as empowered subjects, while Third World girls alternatively appear dependent and vulnerable.⁵ By interrogating these discursive power relations, however, I propose, we gain a better understanding of the types of subjectivities made available to differently situated girls. This first section is about exploring what is possible in the production of oppositional girlhoods vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm.

Postcolonial feminist theory affords much to the analysis of the Girl Effect discourse and the construction of Third World and First World girlhood(s). At the most basic level, it challenges us to invert the Western gaze and consider the power structures and forces of prescriptive colonization at play within the Girl Effect video and script. Building off the work of literary scholar Edward Said (1978), this type of feminist thinking (re)considers the processes of signification by infusing the theory of orientalism with a gender and sexuality based perspective. Said (1978) famously argued that orientalism is “fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient” in which representations of the *other* serve to legitimize Western colonization and re-affirm Western power (p.204); postcolonial feminist theorist Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) adds, Western representations of non-western subjectivity rely upon “a network of codes, imageries, [and] signs” which not only reflect colonial desires and power, but sexualized differences as well (p.22).

Yegenoglu’s (1998) work on the veiled *Oriental* woman examines how these colonized symbolic and material effects function, offering a more complex relational model of Third World and Western subjectivity, while nevertheless maintaining that the *other* is always little more than a discursive effect produced for the Western subject. According to Yegenoglu (1998), colonialist discourse subordinates the *other*, so that the Western subject is solidified as the dominant and desirable position. Given this framework of Western/Third World subjects as “always-already entangled with its representation, [and] always articulated within a political field of signification,” the Girl Effect takes on a different conceptual frame in relation to global girlhood (Yegenoglu 1998:22). If the Western subject gains status and power through the *other’s* (re)signification, then the Girl Effect tells us more about the discursive (re)production of Western girlhood than it does anything about girls’ lives in the Global South; and in fact, revisiting the Girl Effect video evidences this particular regulatory effect.

The Girl Effect, first and foremost is framed from the perspective of the Western viewer, and as a consequence, is ironically absent of the *girl child* herself. The video does not feature any ‘real’ images or video of *actual* Third World girls. Instead, the Western viewer is left to personally construct and imagine this text-based and graphically styled girl - privileging the viewer’s voice and agency over

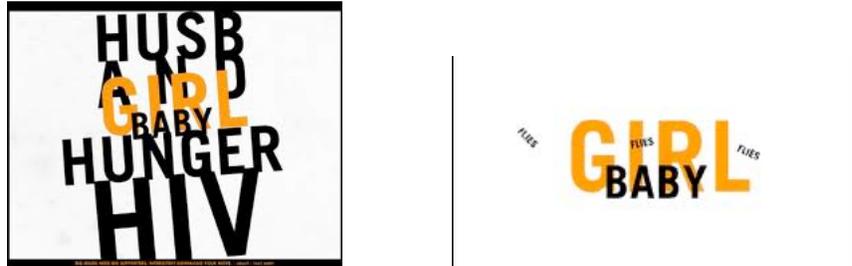
⁵ In this analysis, the conceptual distinction between Western and Third World girlhood is related to their status as human rights subjects and not necessarily race or ethnicity. Western girlhood thus assumes an empowered, rights-holder, whereas Third World girlhood is signified by the denial of human rights.

that of girls themselves (Switzer 2011). At the same time, this narration style allows the Girl Effect to instruct and determine how the viewer ‘sees’ Third World girlhood(s). For example, the Girl Effect asks the viewer to “imagine a girl living in poverty” and then in anticipation of some respective resistance, repeats the request, while reassuring the viewer that it is okay to conjure this disturbing image of poverty, stating “No, go ahead. Really, imagine her” (Girl Effect 2008).

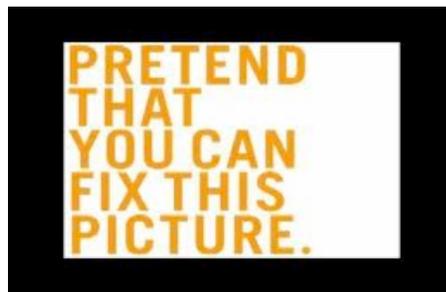
Immediately following this sentiment of assurance, the word ‘girl’ appears in the center of a blank screen.

GIRL

Then, as if to assist the viewer in truly seeing impoverished girlhood, girl is surrounded by words like baby, husband, HIV, and hunger with several word ‘flies’ buzzing around her.



These loaded terms (re)inscribe colonized images and narratives, recalling and referencing mainstream Western media depictions of poverty in the Global South. But as the scene unfolds, the girl is removed and replaced with a simple declaration of benevolent Western rescue. The viewer is told - “Now, pretend that you can fix this picture” (Girl Effect 2008).



The relational structure of colonial discourses allows for the colonizer / Western subject to definitively articulate the differences between self and other, and to erase existing connections and interdependencies amongst the Western subject

and non-Western object. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) labels this disciplinary strategy “discursive homogenization” where the relationship between self/other requires the colonized take on the identity of the *other* in order to be recognized and ‘real’ in the eyes of the colonizer (p.374).

In the Girl Effect, this relational positioning is established in a variety of ways. First, the viewer’s understanding of Third World girlhood defines the world of the colonized *other*; in the absence of the voices and faces of girls in the Global South, the Western subject is free to construct *other* girlhoods in whatever form he/she likes. Second, the relational structure precludes the possibilities for the *other* to speak, and girl is not only silenced by the voice of the colonizer, but determined by the colonized depiction of her world as well. In this way, the Girl Effect is always successful and true because the viewer’s imagination is never questioned by the *real* voice of the *other*. Instead, Third World girls *become* whatever the viewer imagines them to be; the Girl Effect confirms this reality through its portrayal of Third World girls as both text-based and generic graphics. Indeed, “A Girl” could be anyone and anything: she is simply a word on the screen, and cannot resist her hegemonic representation.

Uma Narayan (2000) calls this particular discursive practice the “package picture of cultures,” where the *other* is represented “as if they were entities that exist neatly distinct and separate in the world, and independent of our projects of distinguishing among them, obscuring the reality that boundaries between them are human constructs, and undermined by existing variations in worldviews and ways of life” (p.1084). Mohanty (2003) similarly states in her classic essays, *Under Western Eyes* and *Under Western Eyes: Revisited*, this disciplinary effect produces singular and composite images of the *other* as universally defined by experiences of gender inequality and patriarchal oppression. This singular representation is easily identified in the Girl Effect’s narrative and imagery, which underscore the same forms of colonized signification. Throughout the video, we learn virtually nothing about the realities of girls’ everyday lives in the Global South, nor do we gain a more complex understanding of their girlhoods or their local communities. The ‘girl’ of the Girl Effect is rather compositely defined by her experiences with poverty and patriarchy. She is universally understood to be poor and uneducated – she is a fixed victim living in highly ‘traditional’ (i.e. non-Westernized) culture.

Based on the critical insights of postcolonial feminist theory, the characterization of non-Western girlhoods as defined by poverty, gender disparity, and unchanging ‘traditional’ practices can be read as functioning to underscore the importance of Western rescue. In this way, the Girl Effect works to (re)establish the Western viewer / subject as normative, while allowing the Western subject to produce itself in opposition to the Third World *other*. The message of the Girl Effect is clear: it is not the girl’s family, community, or nation that “puts her in a school uniform” or “gets her a loan for a cow”, but rather the wealthy and progressive West that “invests in a girl” and “changes the course of history” (Girl Effect 2008). Indeed, it is only after the West “pretends [to] fix this picture” that the Girl Effect affirms, “Now, she has a chance” to become the “unexpected solution” (Girl Effect 2008).



UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

Taken together, these brief declarative statements exemplify how the Girl Effect serves to tell us more about how the Western subject imagines and constructs him/herself than it does anything about *real* Third World girls. Operating within this relational framework, I suggest the Girl Effect works to universalize a particular type of normative Western girlhood alongside the discursive production of Third World girlhood. Yet because neither representation of Western or Third World girlhood is 'real', the Girl Effect can alternatively be read as revealing Western anxieties over neoliberal subjects "who are unsuccessful in producing themselves" appropriately (Gonick 2006:2). The production of oppositional girlhoods recycles colonialist divides that reinforce the ideological boundaries between *us and them*, and silences more sociological explanations for why some girls are successful in the task of neoliberal empowerment and why others are not. Under the auspices of investing in *other* girls, this discursive effect acts as a tool of Western self-affirmation, wherein Third World girlhood makes possible the signification of Western girls as *already* empowered, rights-holding subjects.

In this first section, I have proposed the Girl Effect paradigm traces girlhood through (re)inscribed colonized images of the victim/rescuer of the Global South/North to situate girls differently with respect to their political selves and girlhood(s). The logic of the Girl Effect in turn prompts Western girls (as viewers) to associate gender discrimination with Third World girlhood. It is my contention that this oppositional positioning problematically limits girls' political subjectivity and agency because Western girls learn *not* to recognize the ways that gender inequality shapes their daily lives or the complex similarities between theirs and *other* girlhoods.

4.2: "I Know I Can Do It - It's Just about Having the Power"⁶: (Re)Vitalizing Neoliberal Girl Power

The Girl Effect espouses neoliberal principals throughout the entirety of its narrative, but particularly in the portrayal of girls' economic empowerment as the key to gross global inequalities. Epitomized by the message of neoliberal girl power, the Girl Effect evokes ideals of autonomous agency and making the right decisions in a free market economy as ensuring personal mobility and the modernity of Third World nations. Previously, I have argued that the Girl Effect operates as the latest manifestation of neoliberal ideology personified in the colonized image of Third World girlhood. In this section, I explore how the Girl Effect mobilizes neoliberal girl power to inform girls' political subjectivity and

⁶ Elena. 2010. Personal Interview. New York, NY: March 2.

agency. Utilizing my previous identification of oppositional girlhoods, I reveal how the Girl Effect problematically equates girls' economic potential and consumption practices with political empowerment and agency.

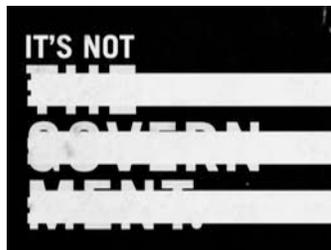
The opening sequence to the first Girl Effect video makes clear the essential function of neoliberal ideology within this discursive paradigm. It starts with the declaration,

THE WORLD IS A MESS.

The text then describes some of the key factors contributing to this worldwide 'mess' "Poverty. AIDS. Hunger. War. So, what else is new?" (Girl Effect 2008). The Girl Effect apathetically takes as a given the economic and political injustices between First and Third World nations, and the narrative confirms that viewers should imagine the Third World as a little more than a "sinking ship" (Girl Effect 2008). Once the viewer is convinced of the Global South's inevitable demise, the Girl Effect declares,



The textual sequence that follows this statement strongly espouses neoliberal principals. The viewer is asked, "would you even know it, if you saw it" and is then promptly told, "It's not the internet. It's not science. It's not the government. It's not money. It's (dramatic pause) A Girl" (Girl Effect 2008).



Visually this sequence concludes with the word 'girl' alone and isolated in the center of the screen, and the viewer is subsequently prompted to follow the figurative arrows of economic development as they move the individual 'girl' from

her school, to family provider, to business owner, to environmental activist, and lastly, to the village council or local government.



The Girl Effect literally traces a direct causal relationship between the autonomous neoliberal agent and the global marketplace, claiming because she chooses to,

Use the profits from the milk to help her family... she becomes the business owner who brings clean water to the village, which makes the men respect her good sense and invite her to the village council, where she convinces everyone that all girls are valuable. Soon, more girls have a chance and the village is thriving (Girl Effect 2008).

Without the interference (or support) of her government, the Third World girl's agency leads to personal success in her school and workplace, and within her family and community as well. Indeed, she single handedly brings,

Girl Effect



and "Stability" to her country and the rest of the world (Girl Effect 2008). Yet she accomplishes all of these tasks with little to no assistance from her surrounding community. It is instead her individual choices and economic capacities that drive her continued success. She is in every sense, the neoliberal biographer of her life story.

My concern with this account is how it makes invisible and unnecessary her familial and socio-cultural support systems. The Girl Effect exemplifies the ways that Third World girls have “become the new poster boy for neoliberal dreams of winning, and ‘just doing it’ against the odds” (Ringrose 2007:484). According to this discursive logic, girls can only be successful when they are completely and utterly alone. In fact, when the ‘girl’ of the Girl Effect is first introduced, the viewer watches as she is trapped by larger than life terms in daunting black capital letters (hunger, HIV, poverty, husband, and baby), which dominate and force her into the background. The girl and viewer are paralyzed by this visual representation of Third World vulnerability and victimization. And yet, just when all hope is lost, the Girl Effect offers viewers (and the girl) *the* solution. In the narrative that follows, we watch as the girl is ‘freed’ from the burdens of her husband, child, hunger, community, health concerns, and of course – the flies of poverty. Within a matter of seconds, the girl is literally stripped of her socio-cultural ‘baggage’, and left to embark on a solitary journey of personal achievement and economic empowerment. It is at this stage of the Girl Effect narrative - when the girl emerges without her family or culture - that the viewer is told, “Now, she has a chance” (Girl Effect 2008).

The Girl Effect’s promotion of neoliberal girl power encourages girls to become subjects “capable of bearing the burdens of liberty” (Rose 1999:ix) and able to “understand themselves as responsible for their own regulation” (Walkerdine 2003:239). Neoliberal girl power prompts girls to dismiss the ways that structural inequalities shape their daily lives – and in fact, throughout the entirety of the Girl Effect video, the girl does not encounter any limitations or constraints because of her gender, age, or socioeconomic status. She does not experience resistance, violence or inequitable treatment in her pursuit of economic power and equality; apart from her cow and invitation to speak with the village council, she *alone* resolves the systemic issues of poverty, inadequate education opportunities, poor food and water supply, HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality. In this way, the Girl Effect encourages viewers to systematically divorce girlhood “from any serious relationship to structural systems” and to instead more securely attach girlhood to notions of individual choice and responsibility (Gonick 2007:439). In the end, we learn that hard work and sheer determination, and *not* collective social action enable Third World girls to “turn this sinking ship around” (Girl Effect 2008).

The Girl Effect also walks girls through the regulatory processes of continuous self-management and self-production in the new neoliberal order. Because free market strategies have replaced governmental oversight and social protection policies, Katharyne Mitchell (2003) asserts, neoliberalism creates subjects with the “complex skills necessary for individual success in the global economy” (p.399). Girls live in a world where, “the nation state is super-ceded by global flows... and where social relations are transformed into processes of individualization,” (p.10) and as a result, McRobbie (2004) contends, it is ever more important for girls “to consider themselves free to compete in education and in work” if they are to survive the neoliberal economy (p.7). Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) additionally suggest, neoliberal education narratives can be read as an attempt to “improve the chances of national economies in the ever-intensifying climate of financial competition” (p.58). The Girl Effect indeed moves Third World girls from

school to “Cow. \$. Business. Clean H2O. Stronger Economy. Better World” in a series of non-stop narrative frames that illustrate the ease of this neoliberal success story (Girl Effect 2008). It is in this way, the Girl Effect presents the quintessential neoliberal story where economic prosperity and broad scale social change ‘naturally’ happen once girls are in school. Despite ample evidence to the contrary⁷, the Girl Effect identifies school as a ‘safe’ depoliticized space where girls can freely choose their life stories. The Girl Effect simultaneously reinforces the ethos of neoliberal girl power, thereby making possible the, “invest in a girl and she *will* do the rest” message (my emphasis Girl Effect 2008).

One of the only substantive critiques of the Girl Effect paradigm comes from Lyndsay Hayhurst (2011), international health and physical education doctoral student, who notes that to date, “there is little probing as to whose interests [the Girl Effect] represents, or to whom they might be accountable” (p.438). She investigates the impact of the Girl Effect campaign on funding for sport, gender, and development programs in the Global South. Based on interviews with Nike Foundation staff argues the Girl Effect serves to enhance Nike corporate image and to “attract consumers not only as sustainable supporters of the sport, gender, and development movement but also as long-term customers” of Nike products (Hayhurst 2011:544). This form of neoliberal governmentality, she asserts, allows multi-national corporate interests to replace politically unstable nations that might have otherwise regulated the involvement of corporations like Nike.

At the same time, the Girl Effect discourse instrumentalizes girls’ consumer / producer power as “smart economics” while ignoring or at best failing to mention the equitable importance of girls’ human rights and political agency (Girl Effect 2011). Neoliberal girl power instead ties girls’ political empowerment to the needs of the global marketplace and in doing so, reifies the oppositional and colonized (re)production of Western and Third World girlhoods. Literary scholars Sensoy and Marshall (2010) claim, the Girl Effect characterizes Third World girls as “untapped ‘natural resources’ ready to be harnessed and dispatched for their society’s good” (p.301). The Girl Effect similarly positions Western girls as the empowered ‘success stories’ of neoliberal agency. Neoliberal girl power masks the value of collective social justice movements for marginalized subjects and puts the onus “on the girls to change their behaviors, actions, and attitudes in order to achieve gender equality” (Hayhurst 2011:534). As a result, Western girls are prompted to identify experiences with inequality and discrimination as private, personalized struggles and not necessarily issues of public or collective concern (Taft 2010). It is also in this way, that neoliberal girl power encourages Western girls to position themselves as empowered consumers with the ability to invest in Third World girls as *other*.

The oppositional positioning of Western and Third World girls is additionally illustrated by the United Nations Foundation’s *Girl Up* campaign. In February of 2010, the UN Foundation launched Girl Up, an initiative that gives “American girls the opportunity to become global leaders and channel their energy and

⁷ See Plan International’s annual reports on the State of the World’s Girls beginning in 2007 to the present.

compassion to raise awareness and funds for United Nations programs that help some of the world's hardest-to-reach adolescent girls" (Girl Up 2010). According to Executive Director Elizabeth Gore (2011), Girl Up mobilizes a "surprising army" of *philanthro-teens* dedicated to "rescuing girls [because] it is the right thing to do" (quoted in Gibbs 2011:1). This generation of American girls, Gore (2011) states, "are all givers... they gave after Katrina. They gave after the tsunami and Haiti. More than any earlier generation, they feel they know girls around the world" (quoted in Gibbs 2011:1). Consequently, the Girl Up program provides North American girls with a 'place' to invest their funds and 'untapped' consumer power.

The identification of Western girls as philanthro-teens very clearly identifies, "Western girls as 'good girls' who participate in the patriarchal salvation of non-White oppressed women/girls" (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:302). But it also (re)inscribes colonialist discourses that affirm a set of pre-determined differences between Western and Third World girls. This difference includes the notion that Third World girls experience oppression by 'bad' "men in the East, but not by Western masculinities or patriarchal policies of the West" (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:302). Girls oppositional positioning further locates Western girls as human rights-holders, prompting them to singularly identify themselves as empowered neoliberal 'investors' in Third World girls.

In this section, I have drawn attention to the ways that the Girl Effect paradigm (re)vitalizes neoliberal girl power to promote the 'invest in girls' message. This discursive practice dismisses the socio-cultural complexities of girls' everyday lives, while further pressuring girls to take sole responsibility for their successes and failures. The logic of the Girl Effect additionally constructs First and Third World girlhoods differently, identifying Western girls as empowered philanthro-teens and Third World girls as 'untapped natural resources' in the global economy. The next section connects these two concepts of neoliberal girl power and oppositional girlhoods to reveal the underlying discursive practice of Sensoy and Marshall's (2010) missionary girl power logic.

4.3: *The Logic of Missionary Girl Power*

After reviewing contemporary post-9/11 children's books, Sensoy and Marshall (2010) coined the phrase *missionary girl power* to describe the textual representation of Western girls relationships to Third World girls. They propose missionary girl power recycles neocolonial characterizations of the *East vs. West* to discursively "position 'First World' girls as the saviours or caretakers of 'Third World' girls" (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:296). For this research, I employ Sensoy and Marshall's (2010) concept of missionary girl power to manage the discursive function of neoliberal girl power and oppositional girlhoods vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm. This section investigates how the missionary girl power logic mediates girls' global relationships with one another, and how it informs girls' political subjectivity and agency.

Missionary girl power is perhaps best understood as an assemblage of discursive practices that shape girls' experiences as political subjects. Sensoy and Marshall (2010) conclude, that "in this discursive project, non-Western girls are cast as the most vulnerable citizens" whose political and economic capacities wait to be

'harnessed' by compassionate Westerners (p.301). The Girl Effect and other similar campaigns, they contend, appeal to "adult Western women and other 'feminists' to do the right thing [and] break the cycle of backwardness to free the non-Western girl from the conditions that do not recognize her potential" (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:301). By focusing on non-Western girls lost talents, the Girl Effect suggests the West "need only harness latent 'girl power'" to address the injustices experienced by Third World girls (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:301).

The logic of missionary girl power additionally draws upon contemporary discourses of neoliberal girl power to root humanitarian aid efforts with situations and contexts outside of Western girls presumed daily lives. The Girl Effect prompts Western girls to "ingest a pedagogy that positions the project of feminism and social action as helping less fortunate others, all the while ignoring the ways in which masculinist institutional domination impacts their lives as girls and women in the West" as well (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:308). This discursive logic operates to continuously mask more involved genealogies of non-Western girlhood, while simultaneously encouraging Western girls to construct their political selves and girlhoods against the signified *other* of the Third World.

A recent PBS report on the United Nation's *Girl Up* campaign provides another illustration of the missionary girl power logic.⁸ In this report, correspondent Ray Suarez (2011) interviews a group of American girls involved in the Girl Up initiative. He centers the majority of the newscast on a conversation with Isabella: a Vietnamese girl adopted by an American family whose twin sister still lives in Vietnam. Isabella says of her work with Girl Up,

I just wanted to help, not just her, but other adolescent girls around the world. There's a huge difference between our lives. I go to school. I play with my friends. I hang out with my friends. She doesn't get to hang with her friends. She gets to do chores and she's got to work 24/7. It's not what a normal teenager would do (quoted in Suarez 2011).

This particular interview clip, I suggest captures how missionary girl power operates to mediate the discursive relationship between Western and Third World girls – solidifying colonized images of Western benevolence and Third World oppression, embedded within notions of difference and rescue. Missionary girl power logic requires Isabella to "become an agent of missionary girl power, saving wounded children (rather than critiquing US policy), 'pulling oneself up by the bootstraps' (rather than organizing together), and fighting against all odds – ideas firmly rooted in mainstream US ideals... and Western values of individuality" (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:307). By focusing on the imagined or 'real' differences between Isabella's daily life and her sister's, this discursive logic prevents viewers from asking more complex and difficult questions; questions which postcolonial feminist theorist Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) comments, "lead to the exploration of global interconnections" which challenge the artificial divides between the Global

⁸ Girl Up is an American-based campaign of the United Nations Foundation founded in 2010 to "harness the energy and compassion of American girls to raise awareness and funds" that support girls via UN initiatives in the developing world (UNESCO 2010). See Section 2 of this chapter re: "philanthro-teens" for more information.

North and South (p.789). The logic of missionary girl power instead solidifies the assumed differences between Western and Third World girls.

The Girl Effect remains one of the most popular viral movements of the late modern period. It is my contention that this discursive paradigm employs the logic of missionary girl power to quite literally call upon Western girls to save their Third World sisters. Missionary girl power also teaches Western girls that experiences of patriarchal oppression overwhelmingly (if not exclusively) occur in the Global South. It is in this way, Abu-Lughod (2002) asserts, such projects of Western rescue, “depend upon and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners... that deserves to be challenged” (p.789). Indeed, Sensoy and Marshall (2010) conclusively argue, that by identifying “Third World girls as the most in need, those in the ‘West’ pass up a rich opportunity to engage in complex questions about [how] oppression, patriarchy, war, families, displacement, and the role of values” shape girls lives all over the world – not just in the Global South (p.309).

The regulatory effects of neoliberal girl power, oppositional girlhoods, and the missionary girl power logic offers much to this study. The logic of missionary girl power (re)inscribes a neocolonial relationship between the Third World and West, positioning Western girls as decidedly more empowered than their “Third World sisters.” At the same time, Taft (2004) notes, the recent revival of girl power discourse often “excludes girls’ political selves,” in favor of individualist and consumer driven notion of political power that “define girls as noncritical and non-active subjects” (p.69-70). The Girl Effect similarly imagines Western girls as personally, but not politically motivated consumer subjects. I also want to suggest that because Western girls are encouraged to focus their energies (and money) on helping *other* girls, the Girl Effect prompts Western girls to identify themselves as advocates for *other* girls’ rights, but not necessarily their own. In the next and final section, I explore the consequences of this differential positioning and argue the Girl Effect paradigm makes invisible the transformative possibilities of girls’ human rights.

4.4: *The Loss of Girls’ Human Rights*

In the last fifteen years, girls have increasingly attracted the interest of feminist scholars and human rights activists; this attraction has resulted in a proliferation of popular texts, literature and research on all things *girl*. Yet despite girls increasing visibility, scholarship on girls’ human rights continues to show “just how little we really know about the lives of girls and how best to improve them” (Plan 2007:121). Girls’ rights scholar Elisabeth Cross (2006) comments, outside of girls education and reproductive health, “there have been few attempts to address the practical – let alone strategic needs of girls as members of the female gender or as female children” in the human rights movement (p.1289). The complexities of girls’ human rights rather remain hidden behind narrowing discourses, which simplistically highlight girls’ vulnerability and ignore their resilience and agency (Harris 2004; Jiwani et al. 2006).

Girls’ studies scholars Berman and Jiwani (2001) note in the vast majority of research on girls’ rights in the Global South, they are almost always portrayed as victims. They state,

Girls are the desperate and reluctant victim of female genital mutilation in Africa; the poverty-stricken child laborer and child-bride in India; the child prostitute in Thailand; the undeserving victim of honour killing in the Middle East; the illiterate, uneducated, exploited and uncared for child in Latin American; or the unwanted girl child in China (p.1).

Third World girls are also defined politically by their exposure to gender-based violence and discrimination. They are characterized as forever vulnerable 'to be' subjects and not politically engaged subjects. This simplistic representation is quite clearly illustrated in the Girl Effect logic where Western girls emerge as empowered political agents and Third World girls remain their geo-political and socio-cultural *others*.

At the same time, the oppositional production of Western and Third World girlhoods marks human rights invisible and unnecessary for girls in the Global North and South. For Western girls, this invisibility is the result of having grown up in a neoliberal world where the state is presumed a hindrance to the public good and where individual girl power is said to deliver on the promises of equality and justice. For Third World girls, unstable governments have been replaced by corporate social responsibility platforms and Western philanthropic charities that encourage girls to become individual agents of economic power (Hayhurst 2011). Collectively, these efforts move human rights beyond girls' grasp, making difficult their meaningful political engagement as rights-holding subjects.

The Girl Effect concurrently teases neoliberal ideologies through its narrative of personal and corporate investment in Third World girl power. These neoliberal ideals leave girls with a 'feel good story' that does little to advance the transformative possibilities of girls' human rights because the state is made redundant. Quite tellingly, the Girl Effect neglects to use the words *rights*, *human rights* or *girls' rights* in its description of local-global social change. It alternatively substitutes human rights with discourses of neoliberal economic potential and girl power that effectively erase the progressive movement for girls' human rights. In the end, this displacement of girls' human rights problematically shapes the forms and possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency. Girls, in the absence of human rights, have little other than individual girl power to challenge their status as marginalized human rights subject (Taefi 2009, Taft 2010).

CSW 54 is a political space where human rights are individually and collectively realized. Given the scope of the Girl Effect logic, I am particularly interested in how girl delegates engaged the Girl Effect discourse to *become* political subjects. Based on my interviews with eleven CSW 54 girl delegates, I investigate the boundaries of girls' political subjectivity and agency vis-à-vis the Girl Effect logic. Specifically, I ask: how do CSW 54 girl delegates navigate the neoliberal agenda of the Girl Effect paradigm? What is made (im)possible for differently situated girls? It is my contention that the Girl Effect paradigm removes human rights mechanisms and tools from the *girl child* conversation, and in doing so, sanctions girls to a less than adequate relationship to the state and global politic. In other words, without the language of human rights, the Girl Effect paradigm leaves girls with little to no

ground from which to challenge their continued political marginalization. The Girl Effect logic rather ensures girls' human rights have been replaced/collapsed into the production of oppositional girlhoods, neoliberal girl power and the logic of missionary girl power. In this way, the Girl Effect exemplifies the triumph of the neoliberal moment.

Chapter Summary

This chapter critically (re)considered the discursive logic of the Girl Effect. I identified the problematic erasure of girls' human rights, and the production of oppositional girlhoods, neoliberal girl power and missionary girl power within the discursive logic of the Girl Effect paradigm. It is my contention these forms and possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency signal a number of troubling positions from which to imagine girls' political selves. Because of these regulatory effects, I suggest the Girl Effect makes the following practices difficult for Western girl subjects:

- Thinking about the ways that socio-cultural and geo-political power structures operate in their daily lives;
- Identifying the political similarities and connections to girls globally;
- Considering how their experiences with discrimination and violence might shape and inform public/political concerns;
- Questioning the simplistic characterizations and divides between Western and Third World girlhoods;
- Challenging the narrative of neoliberal girl power as the key to economic development and gender equality; and lastly,
- Developing an understanding of and language for the transformative possibilities of girls' human rights.

The logic of the Girl Effect establishes a dynamic where 'real' oppression singularly occurs in the Global South and where gender inequality in the West is regarded as a private and personalized struggle. As a result, I maintain the Girl Effect paradigm problematically mediates girls' political selves. Over the next three findings chapters, I investigate how CSW 54 girl delegates navigated the Girl Effect logic in order to bring meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s).

CHAPTER FIVE

Setting the Analytical Stage: Introduction of CSW 54 Girl Delegates

This chapter provides additional background information related to the analysis and findings chapters that follow. It begins with an overview of Taft's (2010) civic engagement spectrum, describing how I adopted this conceptual model to thematize the delegates' testimonies. It concludes with an in-depth introduction to the CSW 54 girl delegates. In order to be consistent with voice-centered research methods, this delegate introduction blends socio-cultural profile markers with self-descriptive excerpts from the girls' interviews to allow the girls to introduce themselves in the research project as they did in during CSW 54.¹

Following the girls' introductions, I present the findings from my interviews with eleven adolescent girls attending the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 54) at the United Nations. Based on the girls' testimonies, chapters six and seven examine how the delegates experience themselves as political subjects. Specifically, I investigate how girls encountered and resisted the discursive logic of the Girl Effect paradigm. Together, these two analysis chapters capture the limitations and possibilities afforded by the Girl Effect discourse, revealing the ambivalent and fluid processes by which girls come to construct their political selves and girlhood(s).

- Chapter Six focuses on the production and experience of girlhood, asking what does 'being a girl' mean to the delegates? How do they make sense of their girlhood(s) in local and transnational contexts? In what ways do they imagine *other* girlhoods (or oppositional girlhoods) as part of their girlhood experience? This chapter identifies common themes and concepts from the girls' testimonies, considering the construction of girls' political subjectivity and agency vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm. Select themes include, gender norms and expectations, inequality and discrimination, femininity and femininity, girl power and solidarity.
- Chapter Seven builds upon the previous chapter's analyses of 'being girl' to consider how the delegates interpreted girls' human rights through the Girl Effect paradigm. It asks: what do girls imagine human rights to be or look like? Who has human rights and who does not? What tensions and conflicts exist in the experience and identification of girls' political subjectivity? And in what ways, does the discursive logic of the Girl Effect inform girls' participation strategies and practices during CSW 54?

The concluding discussion in Chapter Eight ties the analyses and interpretations offered in this study together with the broader theoretical debates related to *girl* as a political subject. After discursively deconstructing the Girl Effect and exploring how the Girl Effect shapes girls' political selves, the final chapter thinks about how this research adds to our understanding of contemporary girls and girlhood(s).

¹ See Appendix F for identification table of the CSW 54 girl delegates.

5.1: Analytical Framework

Each of the narrative excerpts included in the next two chapters come from individual, in-depth, and semi-structured interviews conducted with girl delegates in February and March of 2010. I coded the interview transcripts using Mauthner and Doucet's (1998, 2003) adaptation of Brown and Gilligan's (1992) *The Listening Guide*, as a voice-centered research (VCR) methodology that privileges the voices and experiences of the respondent. In Chapter Two, I provided a detailed discussion of the VCR method and its role in the research process. Here however, it is important to note that the VCR method also served as an invaluable analytical tool - particularly in terms of identifying common concepts and themes within the girls' testimonies. After extracting the most vital and topical of these narrative threads, I adopted Jessica Taft's (2010) conceptual model of normative versus transformative civic engagement strategies, in order to additionally thematize recurring experiences and understandings from a variety of different angles. Taft's (2010) civic engagement spectrum allowed me to trace the fluid (re)production of girls' political subjectivity and agency vis-à-vis the Girl Effect discourse, while simultaneously considering the subjective possibilities and limitations afforded by this discursive logic.

Taft's (2010) essay, *Girlhood in Action: Contemporary U.S. Girls' Organizations and the Public Sphere* explores girls' civic and political identities as imagined by U.S. based girls organizations. In this text, she compares the programming models of the YMCA, Girls Inc., and Girl Scouts and identifies two oppositional approaches to girls' civic and political participation. The normative model, she states, "focuses on strengthening the skills and knowledge of individual girls in order to better prepare them for facing challenges and leading successful lives," while the transformative model asks girls "to change the conditions of their schools, communities, and the broader social contexts in which they live" (Taft 2010:12). Because each model relies upon a different set of individual and structural conditions necessary for girls' political engagement, Taft (2010) suggests the normative and transformative models produce different types of political subjects.

The normative approach for example, emphasizes individualist and protectionist strategies to youth civic engagement. In this model, girls learn how to successfully navigate personal experiences of inequality, but not necessarily how to remove or challenge those same obstacles and limitations. According to Taft (2010), this strategy stems from the notion that girlhood is universally mired by experiences of low self-esteem; and as a consequence, the normative model endeavors to train or arm girls with the required skills and capacities to overcome (but not necessarily resist) structural barriers and inequalities. This model, Taft (2010) comments, "constructs a vision of society as full of barriers that cannot be removed or changed" (p.22); girls learn to frame their problems and struggles as personalized failures, rather than as "issues of public concern" (Taft 2010:19). Because the normative model endeavors to empower girls as *individual* agents of change, Taft (2010) further insists this approach problematically eludes more sociological analyses of race and class, as it likewise fails to expose girls to the "possibilities of social transformation" (p.19). For my purposes, the normative model is also understood as a reflection of neoliberal ideologies and the (re)vitalization of individual girl power vis-à-vis the Girl Effect paradigm.

The transformative model alternatively encourages girls “to think systematically about the conditions of their lives and their communities and the intersecting forces of racism, sexism, classism, and ageism (among others)... [in order to] help girls to develop their capacity as organic intellectuals and to critically analyze social problems” (Taft 2010:23). This approach focuses on girls’ collective agencies and capacities as social actors or politicized peers engaged in the processes of social transformation. It “imagine[s] the public sphere as a space they can shape” while categorically rejecting the notion that girls must learn to individually navigate an inevitable series of obstacles and limitations to their personal success (Taft 2010:24). According to Taft (2010), the transformative model emphasizes learning social change tactics and civic engagement strategies that “help girls claim authority in public spaces,” rather than endeavoring to protect or individually arm girls against the dangers and injustices of the world (p.25). Transformative strategizing is therefore not only about working with girls to identify issues of private and public concern, but also about working together to challenge and alter those same institutional barriers and obstacles that threaten girls’ individual *and* collective successes. In this way, I propose Taft’s (2010) transformative model reflects a more progressive approach to girls’ human rights and political agency.

For this study, I adopted the broad classifications of normative versus transformative models to advance my investigation of girls’ political subjectivity and agency vis-à-vis the Girl Effect. After extracting common themes and critical concepts from the interview transcripts and analysis, I used these models to interpret the girls’ testimonies in further depth and detail. Normative responses reflected notions of individual agency or personal empowerment, while transformative responses favored more collective and structural analyses or resistances. As a method for documenting and exploring how the Girl Effect discourse works to mediate girls’ political subjectivity and agency, I found this simplified classification structure enabled me to better trace girls’ interpretations and resistances to the Girl Effect logic. These models also aligned well with the VCR methodology, proving a rather effective strategy for thinking through how girls both accommodate and subvert the Girl Effect discourse.

5.2: Profile of CSW 54 Girl Delegates

This section offers a profile of the CSW 54 girl delegates and of myself at the time of this research project. This information provides greater clarity to the project and gives additional contextual details related to the discussions and analyses included in this and the following findings chapters. In the spirit of the VCR method and in an effort to more accurately capture the girls’ voices, I combine self-descriptive excerpts with other socio-cultural markers to complexly profile the research participants. Additionally, throughout the findings chapters that follow, I leave in tact the inflections, emphases, gaps and pauses in the girls’ testimonies – allowing their voices and experiences to organically unfold as they did in the interview process. Collectively, I believe these decisions help paint a more holistic and complicated picture of the girls and myself in the study.

At the time of the interviews, I was in my late-twenties and had recently relocated from Dublin, Ireland to the United States. I was living in northern New Jersey,

residing in my parents' home with my husband, and commuting into New York City on a weekly-basis leading up to the CSW and then on a daily-basis throughout the Commission's two-week session. Because I was a full-time student and my husband was in the midst of a difficult job search due to the unstable economic climate, we struggled financially throughout this time period. To alleviate some of our financial stress, my parents took us into their home for approximately 6 months – during which time, I was able to focus on my doctoral research and my husband, his job search. I grew up in a rural area of northern New Jersey in a middle-class family with two younger male siblings. I am Caucasian, able-bodied, and English is my first and only language. Prior to CSW 54, I maintained an active membership status with the Working Group on Girls (WGG) at the United Nations; and because of my involvement with the WGG, I was able to easily navigate CSW 54 and access the WGG's network of girls' rights activists to solicit participation and support for my research project. Throughout the interview process, I relied upon seven years professional experience working with girls in a variety of capacities and settings including, the facilitation of girls' participation in local, regional, and international conferences.

As previously referenced, I interviewed eleven adolescent girl delegates for this project. The median age of the research participants was 16 years; however, they ranged in age from 14 to 18 years. Jessica and Andi were 14 years old, Hannah was 15, Sophie, Dona, and Marie were 16, Cecilia, Elena, and Ann were 17, and Sasha and Debbie were 18 years old. All of the girls were sponsored by member organizations of the Working Group on Girls with three representing the Girl Scouts, three sponsored by PLAN International's *Because I am a Girl* Campaign, two from The Grail, two representing the Loretto Community, and one delegate from Girls Learn International. Andi, Hannah and Ann were members of the Girl Scouts and had been so for approximately seven to twelve years. Elena and Marie were involved with PLAN Canada and Dona was a member of PLAN Philippines; at the time of the interviews, all three girls had been part of the *Because I am a Girl* campaign for six to twelve months. Sophie had been a member of The Grail in Portugal for eight years; and Debbie was active in the Queens, NY chapter of The Grail for two years. Jessica and Cecilia attended the CSW through the Loretto Community, which sponsored a gender, race, and class course at their high school in Kansas City. Lastly, Sasha was a member of Girls Learn International in NYC for four years.

With the exception of Ann (who had been attending the CSW for the past 3 years with her Girl Scout troop), the delegates had little to no direct experience with the United Nations or the Commission prior to their participation in CSW 54. Eight of the girls (Andi, Hannah, Ann, Elena, Marie, Jessica, Cecilia, and Sophie) attended the WGG's Youth Delegate Orientation to CSW 54² held on the Sunday prior to the start of Commission meetings. The youth delegate session was facilitated by members of the Working Group on Girls and attended by over 75 youth under the age of 25 years. During the youth orientation, girl delegates learned about the

² The Youth Delegate Orientation was established to prepare youth delegates for their participation in the CSW. This session is briefly mentioned in Chapter One. I recruited study participants during this event.

history of the CSW and its work at the UN. They received training on the primary and review themes³, drafted advocacy speeches related to girls' human rights, and developed strategies for navigating the politics and culture of the CSW.

The vast majority of the CSW 54 girl delegates resided in either the United States or Canada: out of the eleven girls interviewed, nine lived permanently in North America. Marie and Elena lived in Toronto, Ann in Vermont, Hannah and Andi lived in Connecticut, Debbie and Sasha in New York City, and Jessica and Cecilia lived in Kansas City. Two of the delegates lived outside of North America: Dona lived in the Philippines and Sophie in Portugal. Debbie was granted asylum in the United States at the age of 12 after living in Guinea, West Africa and the Ivory Coast to escape civil war, female circumcision and early marriage. She described this transition as,

Well, I am from Guinea, West Africa. My parents separated when I was three, but um, you know it didn't stop me from seeing a lot of - you know the injustices that girls were going through. The main reason that my Mom and Dad separated is because my Mom kind of saw a future for my sisters and I that she didn't want us to go through. She was arranged to marry at 17 and she just thought, I know that if they stay here this is probably and most likely going to happen to them. So, she moved us to the Ivory Coast. When she moved us to the Ivory Coast, I was happy you know? It was a different life - not that I didn't miss my home or the people who were there - but the fact that, it was such a freedom, you know? We were allowed to play more in the streets and it wasn't so much of, 'Get the girls inside!' You know, these rules and everything, I mean I was running around like a tomboy all the time. It was a life that every child wants, you know, to run around without getting yelled at for it because it is what you do at ten. (Long pause) And then the civil war broke out and then everything went back to ground zero and we had to start over. So we moved here (U.S.) (Debbie 2010:1).

At eight years old, Marie also relocated from her home in China to Toronto, Canada. She explains, "Okay, well I am a Chinese Canadian, I came to Canada when I was 8 years old from China and uh, it took me about a year to learn English and ever since then, I have been pretty active in school and I try to keep my marks up and other than that, I am pretty normal (laughs)" (Marie 2010:1). I asked her why her family decided to move and she commented,

Well, my parents, they know that the life that I am going to have in China is not going to be as great, as if I got to Canada. Do you know school and education in China is very tough. It is very grilling and uh, I remember when I was in grade 2, my parents had to actually even do my homework for me because it was just getting too much and I couldn't even finish it. Yeah, it

³ The primary theme for CSW 54 was, *The Follow-Up to Beijing: Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, and the review theme identified *Remaining Obstacles and New Challenges related to the Millennium Development Goals*.

was – and that was in grade 2, so I can't even imagine what high school would be like (Marie 2010:1).

Since relocating to the United States and Canada, neither Debbie nor Marie had returned to Guinea, the Ivory Coast or China; however, Marie hoped to visit with family in Summer 2011.

Seven of the girls interviewed were bi-lingual or in some cases, tri-lingual. In addition to English, Marie spoke Mandarin, Cecilia and Sasha spoke Spanish, Dona spoke Filipino, Elena spoke Iranian Arabic, Sophie spoke Portuguese, and Debbie spoke French, as well as African tribal languages. Marie and Debbie learned English during the first year living in Canada and the United States. Marie jokingly commented that she learned English by watching television,

Well I love to watch TV, so it was only about 2 months of grade 2 and then it was the summer time, so during the summer time, I tried to pick up a lot of English by TV and yeah, by grade 3 my English was a lot better and I could understand most of the stuff, but yeah – TV was so helpful! TV, I love TV! (Marie 2010:1).

Debbie likewise comments,

It is really like every other story, we struggled in the beginning. My Mom struggled and we didn't speak the language. We spoke French and the tribal languages of Africa and I mean, I was put into a school where it was like, this teaching was speaking to me and I am looking at her like, 'What are you saying?' You know, what I mean! And that was very difficult (Debbie 2010:1).

With the exception of Dona and Sophie, all of the girls were fluent in English as their first, second, or third language. Dona was conversationally fluent, but needed the assistance of her chaperone at various points during the interview process. Sophie however spoke very little English and required her translator's assistance for the entirety of the interview.

As a group, the delegates represented a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Andi and Ann identified as Caucasian, Hannah and Sasha as Jewish-American, Cecilia as African American and Hispanic, Jessica as Caucasian and Native American, Elena as Arab Canadian, Marie as Chinese Canadian, Debbie as Guinean, Dona as Filipino, and Sophie as Portuguese. Debbie, Marie, and Elena were first generation American and Canadian citizens. Debbie and Elena additionally identified themselves as Muslim, Sasha and Hannah as Jewish, Dona, Sophie and Cecilia as Roman Catholic, and Jessica, Ann, Andi, and Marie as Christian.

Apart from Sophie and Dona (who did not reside in North America) and Debbie and Marie (who immigrated to the U.S. and Canada), four of the delegates had travel experiences outside of the country. Elena visited family in Iran the previous summer with her mother; she said of the experience,

Yeah, I was visiting family. It is really such a beautiful county and it is a shame that some people don't see it in that way, because of the way it is – because of the inequality - that was my first time there and I was kind of nervous to go and didn't know if I was going to like it there. I was like, 'Mom, are you sure?' But then, I didn't even want to come back when I was coming back (Elena 2010:7).

Hannah spent time in Peru with her Girl Scout troop and it too, was her first experience outside of the country.

There is a program called Destinations where you can apply to trips to all different places, so last summer I went to Peru with the Girl Scouts and we met Peruvian Scouts there, so that was a connection that I thought was really cool. It was a really, really fun trip. It was for 10 days and it was mostly um, it was to the Amazon Rainforest so it was mostly about biology and nature and wildlife, which I am interested in (Hannah 2010:1).

In contrast, for Andi, international travel was central to her family dynamic, and she had visited a number of different countries with her mother and grandmother.

I have been to Peru, Costa Rica, Central America and a lot of Europe. I am going to China this summer and Panama... I think I might have been to – we went to Belgium and Denmark and Paris and Amsterdam maybe. A lot of places and they just, my family brought me up to be very open to things and just to experience everything that you can and try to make as many networks as you can to go and do things (Andi 2010:7).

Sasha similarly remarks,

I have spent about 3 years outside of the U.S. cumulatively – traveling. Traveling is something that my family has taken into our lifestyle and I have been to over 30 countries and that has definitely shaped who I am and my beliefs. I think of myself as a global citizen, I guess. I have been to Guatemala fourteen times - that used to be a pretty annual place for us to go to. I have been everywhere in South America except for Colombia and some of the more sketchy places up north. I spent a lot of time in Southeast Asia – Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, China, India, and then I am going to Africa in a month for three weeks, which I am really excited about. I am going to Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia. I have been to the Middle East – Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey (Sasha 2010:1).

Based on Andi and Sasha's extensive travel experience, it can be concluded that they come from stable, financially privileged backgrounds. In fact, seven of the girls families could be described as middle to upper-middle class (Elena, Marie, Hannah, Andi, Ann, Sasha, and Dona) with the other four (Sophie, Cecilia, Debbie, and Jessica) being of working-class backgrounds. Two of the girls (Sophie and Cecilia) were involved in the foster care system: Sophie lived in a local shelter for teenage girls in Portugal, after having been removed from an abusive home at the age of 14.

One day when I had 13 or 14 years, I wanted to go to my grandmother's house and my father didn't allow me. Because of that he picked me up or he 'pow' with the... um the thing that we use to water the plants (Emily: "The hose?") yes, the hose" (Sophie 2010:5).

I live in the shelter, children's shelter and um, it was difficult to accept it, but now I believe it is best or better for me. Now I feel that I am um, I am better than – I avoid and I make progress. I came from the north of the island and continued to do school in the city because the shelter is in the principle city. I live with other girls, there are 11 other girls, and there are then 12 in the house. The other girls go to school and if not, they do some work – occupational programs and stuff like that, but study is the most, mainly the goal of our shelter (Sophie 2010:1).

After spending ten years in the American foster care system, Cecilia was adopted just weeks prior to the CSW. She too had been removed from her birth parents home, and since the age of seven had lived in five different families and foster-care facilities.

Well, I'm adopted – I was recently adopted on February 13th my adoption was finalized and um, I was in the foster care system since I was little. When I was little, like around age 7 or 6 and all the way to 7, I was abused when I was little and hit. I don't remember what age exactly, but I was abused by a babysitter my Mom left me with and um, I wasn't taken care of. My parents did drugs too... I was experienced with drugs too, they made me like clean weed and stuff and take the seeds and the stems out, cause they would sell the weed to people and get money for it. She would make me sell it to people and clean it (Cecilia 2010:9).

I don't really remember what number it was, but I think it was around 7 years old and um, I came into a foster home and the foster home wasn't all that great. They made me cut my hair like a boy... and um, eventually they got divorced so I had to go to a second foster home and there were 2 people who worked full time jobs, so it was hard from them to take care of 4 kids, so that is how I came to my other foster home, my 3rd foster home, which – they were really cool and I kept in touch with them, but um she got tired of doing foster kids too... then I went to my 5th, no my 4th foster home and there was, I was in Forestville for 6 years...and then I got adopted by my 5th foster parents (Cecilia 2010:10).

Two of the delegates' parents were divorced or separated: Debbie lived with her mother and two older sisters, but had no contact with her father.

He left her [my mother] pregnant – and so after he left, really left her and went on to, you know with his goals of studying abroad and it was, 'Oh, this is normal. He is going to finish his studies.' And I thought, really? (pause) We never saw him again (Debbie 2010:3).

Jessica lived with her mother and two younger sisters, but split her time between her father and mother's homes each month. "I live in Kansas City, I have two little sisters, and my parents are divorced. I have two stepsisters and a half-brother and a half-sister" (Jessica 2010:1). She continued,

They [my father and step-mother] live a couple of blocks away, so we are over there every other day and then um, every other weekend, we are over there. On Saturday's though, I stay home, so it is just me and my Mom, and my little sisters go to my Dad's house. It's chaotic. I think it has kind of passed me now, so I just sort of go with it, but sometimes when I just sit there and start thinking about it, it all kind of hits me and is like, 'Oh, my gosh.' It makes me think about how crazy it all is (Jessica 2010:7).

The remaining nine delegates lived in two-parent, heterosexual households. Marie, Elena, and Sophie were only children. Andi and Sasha had an older brother, Hannah had a younger sister, Dona was the youngest of three siblings with an older sister and brother, Debbie was also the youngest with two older sisters, Cecilia had two older brothers and one younger brother (none of whom lived with her adoptive family in Kansas City), and Ann was the oldest of five male and female siblings. Five of the delegates' families earned two full or part-time incomes with both parents employed outside the home, and five were from single-income households. Sophie was supported by the Portuguese state.

Half of the girls lived in cities and urban environments, while the other half lived in suburban communities. Ten of the girls were high school students, grades 9 through 12 or freshman through senior. One of the delegates, Andi was enrolled in college at the age of 14. She remarked,

I am 14 and I am a sophomore in college. I skipped a lot of school, but I went to a lot of different schools. I was home schooled for two years and um, I am in first year robotics... I am what you would call double gifted, which um a regular gifted child but I also have several learning disabilities so that is what you would call double gifted. So, I was like, in school I was always really bored and I already knew everything, so I would just sit there and be bored. My Mom thought, this is insane and so she pulled me out of school (Andi 2010:1).

Almost all of the girls described themselves as academic over-achievers, identifying school and higher education as very important to them. For example, they stated,

Well this is my last year of high school and I am 16 years old and I want to become a nurse. I just want to help people and preserve good health (Dona 2010:1).

I think I set pretty high expectations for myself cause I mean, I see myself going to college. I am really interested in biology so probably something with biology. I am not sure exactly what, but I want to keep working with the Girl Scouts through high school (Hannah 2010:6).

I want to go to university to study biomedical science because I want to become a dentist and do Dentists Without Borders later on in life, so that I can help provide health care for everyone (Elena 2010:1).

I think when I go to college I want to study India and China. I am sure I will change my mind a hundred times, but I am going to BU (Boston University) and I think I will major in International Relations, just because I want that background and understanding (Sasha 2010:8).

Well, I have to say that I am a very academic person, so in front of teachers and in front of presentations and tests, when I know I have excelled at something or I know that yes, I am being respected... I like to think that I am more than average smart, but uh, and then some people ask me for my help during tutoring and I am always open to when that happens – just because it is really nice to help others and to be recognized that um, I have a brain so (laughs) (Marie 2010:11).

At the time of the interviews, Debbie, Elena, Sophie, Dona and Ann were in the process of completing their applications to attend university in the fall of 2010. Sasha had been accepted to Boston University and Andi was enrolled in her second year of study at the local community college in Connecticut. Debbie, Ann and Sasha planned to study International Relations and International Politics, while Dona, Sophie and Elena intended to study Nursing, Biology and Science.

In addition to their academic pursuits, the girls were engaged in a host of other sports, activities and hobbies. Jessica, Andi, Dona, Marie, and Cecilia enjoyed art, music, and other forms of creative expression.

Everybody in my family is an engineer and I am probably the only person that is into art. I like glass blowing and photography (Andi 2010:1).

I am into art and music. I wish I played an instrument, but my only instrument is my voice. I write my own songs and music about my life and about my past (Cecilia 2010:3).

I also like making poems and writing stories and then sometimes I like singing (laughs) and I like playing mind games, but I hate ball games (Dona 2010:1).

Both of my parents are artists, but when it comes to my art, I am like – one of those people that when they start something, it takes them forever to do it because they are like, I don't know I am never really pleased with it until it is really done. I reach this point where I am like, okay I really like this and then I just stop. But on some of my other things, I just kind of keep going and going and never stop (Jessica 2010:18).

I am also in the school band. I play the bassoon so, it is a pretty obscure instrument, but it's a – I searched for it and it was like the extinct instrument, no the endangered instruments and on it was the bassoon and I

thought, "Oh, no!" And well, my teacher was discussing it and he was just naming some of the instruments that we have in our school and one of the ones was the bassoon, and I didn't even know what a bassoon was – like, what's a bassoon? And he said, 'Oh, we can get it fixed if someone wants to play it.' So, I said, 'Yes! I want to play it' (Marie 2010:5).

Other delegates balanced a heavy schedule of sports, clubs, and extracurricular activities.

In school, I am part of the We the People group. It is a constitutional, I call it debate class and um, it's a competition where you have to go by state and then if you win the state, you go to D.C. My school is going to D.C. for the April break. We are going to be on one of I believe 53 total teams. I am very political and uh, I like teamwork, community service oriented activities and I have been in the Girl Scouts for, well this is my 11th or 12th year... and I am in Girls Rock the Capital in Vermont (Ann 2010:1).

I like to ski a lot, I am on my school's ski team and I do dance and Girl Scouts - I write for an independent student newspaper at my school, which is really cool... I am super involved with the Girl Scouts (Hannah 2010:1)

Before I became a girls' advocate with PLAN, I was an environmental activist, I am still an environmental activist so I am involved in a lot of environmental stuff at my school. So for example, I am the Treasurer of the Environmental Council and I started lots of initiatives. I am also the head of the recycling team at my school (Marie 2010:5).

I excel in our activities at school, when um I joined the student government, I am now the Secretary – and actually, there are only a few major positions in that particular organization in our school and the first is President - and that is a boy, the next is Vice President - and that is a boy - and our Treasurer is a boy, I am the only girl... I was chosen as the editor and chief of our school publications because we also write stories about children (Dona 2010:5).

I really like to read and I like to do advocacy stuff and fight for rights and make a difference. I am really involved in my school. I am the Vice President of the Anti-Tobacco Group, I am grade 12 representative on the Student Council and um, I am on this Students and Staff Helping Others Committee, so we help raise money for um, Penny's for Peace and we supported a family in our community during Christmas time, and lots of other stuff. I am a prevent-mentor to grade 8 students at risk, who will be coming to my school next year and stuff like that. Oh, and I write too – yeah, I am really busy (laughs) (Elena 2010:1).

The following chapters present the research findings from my qualitative interviews with the delegates. Having established the regulatory effects of the Girl Effect paradigm in Chapter Four, the next two chapters examine how delegates brought meaning to the Girl Effect during CSW 54. This research explores how the

Girl Effect logic plays out at CSW 54 by a group of girls situated in a political space outside the parameters of their everyday lives. Because CSW girl delegates encounter the Commission as political outsiders, I claim their voices collectively evidence the possibilities for girls' political subjectivity as afforded by this contemporary discourse. I am thus primarily interested in the intersections of age and gender; however, at various points, I incorporate other identity markers and sociological details when those elements prove relevant and necessary to the contextual analysis at hand.

Chapter Summary

This chapter offers a better understanding of the CSW 54 girl delegates involved in this project. It is my intention that these brief stories and profile markers paint a clearer picture of the girls' personal histories, voices, and personalities – helping to position their experiences and perspectives at the center of this study. These introductory descriptions additionally offer greater contextual detail and background information related to the research analysis and findings.

In the next chapter, I examine how girl delegates define what it means to 'be a girl' in the context of the Girl Effect. Specifically, I investigate the regulatory function of oppositional girlhoods.

CHAPTER SIX

Contested Sites of Meaning: (Re)Considering Oppositional Girlhoods

It is my position that the discursive logic of the Girl Effect encourages Western girls to construct their girlhood(s) against a colonized image of their so-called 'Third World' sisters. This chapter investigates how the production of oppositional girlhoods shapes girls' political subjectivity and agency: asking how do the delegates understand and experience their girlhoods in relation to *other* girls?¹ What does 'being girl' mean in the everyday? And in what ways, does the Girl Effect inform what 'being a girl' looks like in the Global North and South? Throughout this chapter, I reveal how CSW girl delegates interpret the subject positions made available to them and in doing so also capture how girls bring new meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s).

6.1: Getting 'Invested' in the Girl Effect

"I really do have faith that if we invest in girls then change will come" (Sasha 2010:1).

The Girl Effect revitalizes Western narratives of neoliberal girl power to sell its message of investing in girls. By building off of the cultural nostalgia for *girl power* in the West, it markets a new 'global sisterhood' fostered by the 'original' beneficiaries of the girl power agenda. Hayhurst (2011) notes this global sisterhood in her analysis of the Girl Effect's marketing strategy: she remarks "the need to engage female consumers in the global North to empathize with their 'counterparts' in the global South" remains essential to the success of the 'invest in girls' message (p.544). Multinational corporations like Nike use the global sisterhood tactic to not only attract consumers "as sustainable supporters of [social development initiatives] but also as long-term customers of the multinational corporation" itself (Hayhurst 2011:544). Indeed, Hayhurst (2011) quotes an employee of one such multinational corporation as stating,

If you go to an African country and you connect those girls with Canadian girls... you will have solved the funding issues. Those kids [Canadian girls] will be motivated, and they will care about brands that they see supporting those girls. Not out of pity, but because there's a sisterhood involved (Hayhurst 2011:544).

Given the financial and relational undercurrents to the Girl Effect paradigm, this chapter begins with consideration for how girls frame the message of the Girl Effect. In what ways do they become 'invested' in the Girl Effect? And how do they experience the global sisterhood being marketed to them?

¹ For this project, *other* girlhood is not about race or ethnic identity, but about Western and Third World girls' status as human rights-holders, or the implicit assumption that Western girls *have* rights and non-Western girls do not.

For Andi, the Girl Effect video both captured her attention and motivated her to 'do' what was being asked of her in the script.

I really thought the website flash thing was really cool. I thought that was really interesting, especially with the music and the text and its moving – it made it really appealing and interesting. After I saw that, I thought I want to go visit that website and explore the whole thing, I want to donate money, I want to go to workshops and help or do whatever I can. I thought that was really good (Andi 2010:10).

She continues describing the ways that the graphics and music² in the video helped solidify the Girl Effect message.

I think it was a lot of things actually because it had the whole – it wasn't like boring, informative text – it was moving and sizing and there was different parts with arrows, so you could visually see that they were all connected and you could see the sequence where like, you give a girl a cow and the cow goes to the market and that whole thing – that was pretty cool. The message is still in my head! (Andi 2010:11).

Sasha similarly recalls the staying power of the Girl Effect video:

Well from what I have learned it seems that education is the best way to help with all of these problems because when you give girls the skills to be self-reliant then they have a voice in her own village and they are respected and then that whole video about the girl getting the cow and the cow raising money and then she has money to buy another cow and then all of a sudden, the village respects her and the village becomes a community and that branches out. I do believe in that happening (Sasha 2010:6).

For Sasha, the Girl Effect represents more than just a marketing strategy; she imagines that it provides a conceptual road map for how social change and economic development work in tandem. She suggests girls' personal empowerment and individual agency can transform communities:

For example, I heard of this one story from Eve Ensler about a girl who, she was cut from FGM and resolved that she was never going to let another girl get cut again. She went around with a cardboard model of a vagina and compared it to what a cut one to a healthy one looked like and then, in one year just by walking around, she was able to save something like a couple thousand girls from being cut... And this is just from one person... I don't know, it just bridges on and on and on – what one person can do and it starts with the individual. There is a huge potential and it really does spread – passing it forward (Sasha 2010:6).

² The musical score for the Girl Effect was composed by Jonathan Elias, founder of Elias Arts – a company specializing in musical branding for companies like Pepsi, NFL, and the Olympic Committee of 2012 (Elias Arts 2012).

As much as Sasha identifies individual girl power as *the* answer however, she troubles her own prescribed positioning within this discursive paradigm as the savior of other girls. She rejects the missionary element of the Girl Effect and somewhat cautiously wonders whether individual empowerment might challenge cultural discrimination and gender inequality more effectively than Western liberation.

I also think that it's maybe most important to have it start from within, which is what is so hard from my perspective – I mean, from my personal – cause, I don't ever want to go in and be like, 'What you are doing is wrong and I am going to change you and fix you and show you the right way.' I mean, I think that would be really bad and for their self-esteem it just wouldn't work and I mean, who am I? But when you do empower their village to help one another and when it comes from within and when it's their own women saying 'I know this is our culture, but it is not right.' Then I think that is what is most effective... I think it is complicated and it is just – it makes them feel that what they have been doing – I feel like it is de-humanizing to have like an outsider, someone who is from the western world for example, who doesn't understand their culture, to go in and it's not going to make them feel respected or like part of the solution – they are going to feel like they are taking orders from an outsider... and besides, I wouldn't want it to be an entirely western world, like I don't want to drop little pieces of America around. It just has to come from within, that's when it will really be responded to and respected (Sasha 2010:6).

Thus, while Sasha initially identifies with the Girl Effect message and believes in the potential of girls to change their communities and nations, she tempers this advancement to resist colonizing characterizations of *other* girls and their respective cultures. She rejects the exportation of Western ideals and norms, but concurrently struggles with how to advance gender equality in the Global South *without* imposing Western standards. It is in this way that Sasha subverts the normative 'savior' functioning of the Girl Effect paradigm to propose a more nuanced understanding of *other* girlhood(s) – even as she largely leaves in tact notions of her own empowered rights-holder positioning.

Later in Andi's interview, she too reflects more deeply on the Girl Effect message and begins to question whether or not it is actually as effective or captivating as she first believed. In working through the purpose of the video, she wonders if the Girl Effect is really any different from other 'save the children' campaigns with which she is familiar.

I don't think most people would connect that, like - I think they would mostly think that it is a campaign to raise money for girls in Africa to go to school for a year, cause that is what most things are – like, 'Oh our school raised \$4000 so eight girls in Maasai land can go to school for one year.' It's like, well awesome but what about for the rest of their life and all the millions of other girls? (Andi 2010:11).

Unlike Sasha's commentary on the benevolent Westerner and personal agency, Andi questions the long-term benefits of Western philanthropy and individual charity. She begins to move beyond the 'feel good' graphics that initially impressed her, and instead confronts the absence of more sustainable solutions to gender inequality. Contrary to her earlier statement of wanting to "go visit that website... to donate money," Andi (re)thinks the financial core of the Girl Effect agenda and resists the idea that Western philanthropy solves gender-based injustices (Andi 2010:10).

Andi additionally alludes to the necessity of a more complex understanding of *other* girls. She parallels Sasha's discussion of humanizing girls in other cultures and de-stabilizing the images of a victimized African girlhood in mainstream media. She observes,

Maybe it is just me, but it seems like America is really ignorant to some of this stuff, like they don't even know or if they have read a headline about it, they don't even think about that one – they are just like, "Oh, that is just those things that happens..." like you see those things at the bottom of the page and it is like a mini-headline and there is a section like (squeezes fingers together) this big and the picture is like a grainy picture of an African woman walking in a hut with a jug of water on her head and that is it – that is all they know, they don't even want to look into it further (Andi 2010:10).

Hayhurst (2011) contends, the Girl Effect masks recognition of the interlocking forces of power that contribute to the necessity of "saving the distant other" through catchy videos and simplistic story lines (p.541). What Sasha and Andi's testimonies reveal however are the ways that the Girl Effect logic is also useful for working through some of the limitations of the 'invest in girls' message. Both Sasha and Andi draw upon the Girl Effect paradigm to contemplate issues of cultural essentialism and colonization to understand how this image of the colonized *other* relates to their political selves and girlhoods. It is in this way their comments allow for the possibilities of a *different* kind of 'girl effect' message.

6.2: *Experiencing Shared Girlhood(s)*

"My favorite thing is knowing that I have the power to make a difference because I am a girl" (Elena 2010:5).

For many of the delegates, the Girl Effect brought about expressions of connection and empowerment narrated through a shared girlhood experience. The delegates identified themselves and other girls as powerful global actors with the capacities to foster social change. Drawing upon the language of girl power with a Girl Effect twist, the delegates spoke to celebrating and respecting the potential for girls to 'solve' the world's problems. In this way, the Girl Effect served as a platform from which to claim political subjectivity and agency - prompting girls to believe in their capacity as change agents, and cultivating a shared gendered experience of 'being girl.'

Elena (2010) for example, comments, if she could give the CSW 54 delegates and other world leaders one message,

I would tell them that, girls are not the insignificant people that they see and that if given the chance to speak and the opportunities to do things, they will succeed and they will empower other people and they can make a difference (Elena 2010:13).

Dona (2010) similarly asserts, when given the opportunity girls can accomplish anything they set their minds to.

I noticed that girls are not so exposed to economic opportunities and they have a limitation in expressing their views even though they have the potential... maybe when society allows her to expose her potentials, allows her to do things of what she can do without any limitations or restrictions, that is when the girl achieves her fulfillment in life" (Dona 2010:4).

Embedded within Dona's message of empowerment is an ideal of neoliberal girl power, which provides *the* answer to the world's problems. She remarks, her message for girls is simple:

Girls should be aware and they should also consider some challenges because it is just some challenges – even if there are so many obstacles, you can still change if you are willing. If you are really willing to change and you want something to be done – make your own way, as long as you know it is right (Dona 2010:7).

For Hannah, the Girl Effect presents an opportunity to publically recognize girls' capacities as change agents; like Elena and Dona, she draws upon a narrative of individual agency and girl power to speak to the ways, girls can traverse systemic inequalities and discrimination.

I want people to recognize what girls can do, like that I can change the world and I can make differences and I want to be recognized for that... I want to bring awareness to the ways that girls suffer and also even more so to the power of girls and the ways that girls can change their own situation and girls can change the rest of the world (Hannah 2010:15).

Debbie likewise reflects upon the power of women and girls, both individually and collectively. She comments on the necessity of girls' personal empowerment in order to initiate social change at every level of society.

There is nothing like two women sitting in a room fighting for a cause. They can move mountains, um with just the fact that they are women. I don't think I need to go on and on to explain, I don't even think it is a vague statement. I just think you know what, there is something quite powerful about being a woman... I think girls need to know their own strength. It is really my wish that I just want to say that my wish for girls around the world is to know their own strength and power. I think that is the first

step... I think knowing that can give them all the resources they need – it is not money, it is not people – I mean to a certain extent, you do need people to help get you somewhere but I really think it starts with them, with those girls knowing that they have options, they are their own selves and it is not a curse to be a woman (Debbie 2010:15).

Taken together, the girls' testimonies reveal how they identified girlhood as a powerful source of strength and identity, which in turn evoked the narrative of neoliberal girl power and the solidification of the Girl Effect message. Now certainly, this incitement to believe in girls' strengths and capacities has merit in the sense of encouraging girls to believe in themselves and in other girls. The problem however, is that by promoting neoliberal girl power, the Girl Effect fails to address (or acknowledge) the ways that structural inequalities continue to determine the extent to which personal empowerment can in fact, be realized in girls daily lives. The Girl Effect instead proposes individualized solutions "oriented toward improving girls' ability to cope with problems, rather than remove them" (Taft 2010:19). This approach to girls' political engagement, Taft (2010) contends, "not only elides the social contexts for [girls'] problems, but also flattens out girls' lives into a universal experience, thus avoiding issues of race and class difference" (p.19). It is this precise formation of a universal girlhood experience that problematically lends itself to the marketing of a global sisterhood that all too often prioritizes self-change and individual empowerment over more collective and structural solutions.

On the other hand, CSW 54 delegates identified this universal girlhood experience as an empowering and integral aspect to their gendered experiences. They characterized themselves as deeply connected to *other* girls; indeed, 'being girl' emerged throughout our conversations – helping girls to position themselves as political subjects and to articulate the solidarity they felt with other girls. Sasha (2010) for example 'warns' me that she recently finished reading Eve Ensler's *Being an Emotional Girl* and is really "into that whole girl emotional thing" (p.4). When I ask her to elaborate on this idea, she explains it is about valuing girls' emotions and passions, not assuming that "I over-react or I get too riled up about something" (Sasha 2010:4). She regards the dismissal of girls' emotions as indicative of the current patriarchal order, where all things 'girl' and feminine are labeled inferior.

I still think that society accepts that girls are not good at things and it is a diss to call someone a girl, pretty much... and the stereotype that girls are caddy and girls are mean and boys are just, like chill. I mean that's not true at all and I feel like so many people don't even realize that at all. And the negative connotation of the word feminism in general, I feel like is a huge problem... even the fact that girls and women are emotional is supposed to be a bad thing, but in reality, I think it is actually really healthy to be emotional (Sasha 2010:3).

To a certain extent, Sasha's comments reflect her own internal processing of Ensler's text and the ways that this notion of emotional girlhood relates to her own experiences of gender and femininity in the everyday. But her discussion also

centers upon an important and repeated concept in many of my other interviews: namely, this desire to re-value the feminine, specifically girls' emotional capacities. Later in her interview, Sasha suggests girls understand themselves as inherently connected to one another because of a shared gendered experience. She theorizes girls share a 'universal girl language,' that allows them to instantly relate with one another across local language barriers and cultural differences.

I think the comradeship, I guess about being a girl. The fact that I can go anywhere and regardless of the total difference that we have in our cultures, we are still all girls together. I feel like we share that bubbly excitement and that giddiness (Sasha 2010:4).

[Girl language includes] I think its like giggling and smiling, pointing and gesturing and then there is a regular human language as well. But I think smiling and giggling has a lot to do with it – like the history, I mean you don't have to explain to someone what a period is or if you say, '*it's that time of the month*' - they kind of understand that instantly (Sasha 2010:9).

During her second interview, Sasha tells me more about this conceptualization of a universal girl language and the shared experience of girlhood. She proposes the feeling of connection stems from the negative representations of girlhood within patriarchal societies and cultures.

I think even in every society, girls are pretty much treated as second class citizens, even in ours and maybe not as, I mean obviously to a very different degree and a lot more subtle degree, but there is a reason why girls or women aren't making as much as men. But apparently we are now, but that it only because guys have – well all their jobs are cancelled. So I think there is that whole mentality of being second to boys and not being as strong physically, but also really like powerfully, and not having our – or being like, oh she is just a girl, she is just being emotional, she is just being insane (Sasha 2010:20).

Sasha critically identifies the notion of a universal girlhood experience as reflective of the girls' global marginalization; in doing so, she speaks to an alternative conceptualization of girlhood than is represented by the Girl Effect paradigm. Sasha alternatively (re)interprets girls' emotional capacities and socio-cultural *otherness* as fostering solidarity - not distance - across localized experiences of gender inequality. She describes girlhood as a globally marginalized position in which all girls (regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds) can relate to one another in a normative and essentialized manner. Thus, Sasha subtly challenges the hierarchal positioning of Western girlhoods against *other* girlhoods to theorize a more collective and shared gendered experience.

Sophie also comments, 'being a girl' allows her to access her emotions and feelings, and to quickly bond with other girls.

The good things is to say that with a girl, we do more and with the others, we can be more affectionate and with the boys, no. In being a girl, I know

that other people will be more affectionate with me - for example, when a girl cries the other ones see like a normal expression and the guys it is not normal (laughs). And when it happens, they make fun of him. To go shopping is fun with girls, but that is superficial (smiles) – but we feel more of the things, one good thing in being a girl is that we can feel things better. We are more emotional and we can feel, we can um, and we help others more (Sophie 2010:4).

Dona too identifies girls' emotional capacities as a shared experience and source of self-empowerment, though not necessarily a catalyst for building female solidarity. Dona instead proposes that her embrace of femininity allows her to build a more authentic relationship with her father, who based on the norms of masculinity is denied access to his emotions.

Because of all his children, I am the only one who is close to him. I just don't know, my teachers told me that as a girl, you must be close to your mother because you are both girls. But in my case, I am more close to my father. Because he told me that, as a girl you should be open about your feelings and then, I am trying to open up my feelings to him because then he understands what the feeling is of a girl. That is the best thing that I enjoy as in being a girl, that I have the chance to open my feelings to others – unlike boys, who maybe when they cry someone will say, *'Oh, that boy is so weak.'* Some boys need to hide when they need to cry and if you are a girl, you can show it... that is maybe, I think – good for me as a girl (Dona 2010:4).

Cecilia contrastingly describes girlhood as a privileged position that she has only recently found herself enjoying. In the excerpt that follows, Cecilia reflects on how she was encouraged by her foster mom to adopt normative feminine behaviors and consumption practices, and how this experience proved to be personally empowering.

When I went to my 4th foster home, they were really, really nice people. They bought me a lot of nice stuff, a lot of clothes – nice clothes from Kohl's and that is my favorite store. They bought me a lot of nice clothes from Kohl's and she never went a day without feeding us and I did gain some weight, which is really good because I was underweight when I came into foster care cause there was no – they weren't feeding us right... when I went into that foster home, I thought she was rich because she had enough money to feed all of us, to make us wear nice clothes, and have a nice home, and take us to school everyday. She was a hardworking Mom and she had appointments almost everyday, her schedule was always packed. She had 6 girls – nothing but girls, I went to an all girls home. She said it was easier to take care of girls... She doesn't like body piercing or gothic makeup or anything. She wants the girls to look normal, like out in public normal, like you can go out in public and she won't feel ashamed of you – like if you had all this black makeup on your face, she wouldn't really like that. She would make you take off your makeup, all of your dark makeup and give you new makeup to wear, some better makeup. She changed some girls' lives by doing that - she was a really cool foster mom... I couldn't change the life that

I had in my past, but um I let all that go and I let it go to the past – that is one thing that I learned in my 4th foster home, she told me you have to let everything go. You can't keep that all inside or else, you are going to hate everyone and hold this grudge on your parents for letting you down (Cecilia 2010: 10-13).

Later in the interview, Cecilia identifies her friendships with the other girls in the foster home as integral to her experience of familial support and safety.

I got along with those girls, sometimes we argued but it wasn't like fistfights or anything, we never hit each other. They were really nice girls and um, I consider them as my sisters because we basically were always together. We hung out; we stuck up for each other at school and stuff. If one of us was being picked on, we would always stick up for her and each other. All the new girls that came into that home, we always made them feel safe at home, like it was their home too (Cecilia 2010:13).

Debbie also describes her female friendships as essential to the shared girlhood experience. She suggests 'being a girl' gives her the capacity to empathize with other girls, regardless of their circumstances.

But for a girl to another girl, you can understand that some days you feel certain things – you wake up with so much power within yourself and you don't know what to do with it if no one is telling you what to do with it. Some days you wake up with so much need and need to be loved and you just don't know what to do if no one is loving you. So for me, it is very hard because in going to an all girls' school, I can see um, what girls go through. There are friends I think – well I am very happy that people feel able to come to me when they go through things because I feel like, it is my favorite thing in the world – being able to make someone feel better (Debbie 2010:18)

At the same time, Debbie maintains girls and women must learn to work in solidarity, and to not allow their shared gendered experience to fall by the wayside.

But you know, girls are affecting girls – other girls are affecting other girls and I think we all have to work together - I think you really have to be careful, all women and girls have to be careful with how we think about ourselves. We have got to hold hands... the fact that I share something with these girls is the important thing. That is something I also want to say to girls, we all share something – we are all girls and no one can take that from us (Debbie 2010:19).

Correspondingly, Hannah affirms different societal views of girlhood shape the extent to which girls experience solidarity and positive regard.

I think there are a lot of similarities in what girls feel and how they act and stuff, but differences in how they are viewed by other people, and probably

how they view themselves because of how they are viewed by other people (Hannah 2010:4).

Hayhurst (2011) comments, the Girl Effect disregards the “multiple identities and social locations of women and girls” in a way that leaves little room for building movements of solidarity across globalized girlhoods (p.544). The universal sisterhood promoted by the Girl Effect runs the dangerous risk of cultural essentialism and the homogenization across cultures. My research with girl delegates however suggests otherwise.

Based on my interviews, I suggest the (re)production of a shared girlhood experience is perhaps more ambiguous, and potentially more advantageous, than previously realized. What the delegates’ comments reveal is how the Girl Effect discourse also sparks discussions about gender differences and patriarchy. And while many of the girls problematically promoted individual girl power as *the* solution to inequality and ignored the function of localized power structures in their daily lives, they nevertheless employed the Girl Effect discourse in order to position themselves and other girls as political subjects. Moreover, they did not imagine their girlhoods to be hierarchically structured (as per the Girl Effect logic); rather, they thought about how patriarchal gender norms produce a shared cross-cultural experience that enables girls to foster solidarity across borders.

Based on the girls’ testimonies therefore, it appears the Girl Effect functions to not only facilitate personal empowerment and political subjectivity, but to provide a space from which to resist the colonialist undertones of this discursive logic. By identifying theirs and other girlhoods as uniquely bonded by their gendered status as *girls*, the delegates rejected the ‘us versus them’ narrative to make the Girl Effect also be about Western girls experiences. It is in this way, CSW 54 girl delegates cultivated new forms for girls’ political subjectivity and agency, while simultaneously (re)thinking the logic of the Girl Effect paradigm.

6.3: *Identifying Different Girlhoods: (Re)Thinking the Bonds of Global Sisterhood*

“I mean it is all connected, but here it seems less catastrophic! But I mean, in terms of prioritizing” (Sasha 2010:5).

One of the most troubling aspects of the Girl Effect paradigm is the way that it prompts Western girls to position themselves as agents of missionary girl power saving their “Third World sisters.” Critically, Sensoy and Marshall (2010) observe, this discursive logic prompts “girls [to] ingest a pedagogy that positions the project of feminism and social action as helping less fortunate others, all the while ignoring the ways in which masculinist, institutional domination impacts their lives as girls and women in the West” (p.308). The Girl Effect is marketed as being about girls ‘over there’; consequently, Western girls come to understand that their experiences with gender discrimination are *not* part of the Girl Effect message. Hayhurst (2011) further remarks, “framing these [non-Western] girls and women... as the appreciative recipients of those provisions and services re-inscribes static elite conceptions of girls in the Two-Thirds World as victims, instead of questioning the broader social, economic, and political forces” that

contribute to their situation in the first place (p.541). In other words, by identifying Third World girls as those in need of saving, Sensoy and Marshall (2010) comment, “those in the ‘West’ pass up a rich opportunity to engage in complex questions about oppression, patriarchy, war, families, displacement, and the role of values” in theirs and other girls’ everyday lives (p.309).

In contrast to the delegates’ previous testimonies of a shared girlhood experience, this section examines how girls describe *other* girlhoods as different from their own. It explores how these perceptions shape girls’ political subjectivity and agency. In order to better contextualize the problematic function of oppositional girlhoods, I begin with a brief analysis of how the delegates talked about gender inequality in their daily lives. This discussion is then followed by an analysis of how girl delegates described Third World girlhood. I put these two thematic analyses side by side because it helps to show how the Girl Effect paradigm works to silence Western girls’ experiences when in comparison with the *real* injustices *other* girls’ lives. This section is therefore about how the delegates distanced themselves from Third World girls and also how they reinforced the colonizing logic of the Girl Effect paradigm.

‘Seeing’ Gender in the Everyday

“I always wondered things like why genders are so segregated” (Andi 2010:2).

The following offers an account of how the delegates articulate gender norms and expectations, and how they understand gender difference working in their everyday lives. Whether seeing gender in the media and consumer culture, school dress codes, sports teams and academics, or careers and family, girl delegates engaged with these contested sites of meaning in order to bring meaning to their girlhoods and political selves.³

Andi (2010) introduces herself by stating, “I am 14 and I am a sophomore in college. Yeah, that is probably important if you ask whether I have been discriminated against in my day to day life” (p.1). Taking her lead, I ask Andi to tell me more about how she has experienced discrimination. She responds by identifying gender-biased trends within mainstream media, and speaking to the hierarchal privileges attributed to feminine and masculine norms.

I can’t like – not a particular scenario that played out or anything, but I always thought that it was really important and I always wondered things like why genders are so segregated – like, if you ever watch TV and there are commercials for kids toys, like you watch the boys commercial and its all blue and they are being rough and stuff and it’s all cars and trucks and building stuff. And then you watch a commercial for girls’ toys and its’ all pink and pretty, there are flowers and like, I don’t know all that stuff. And

³ Notably, the vast majority of these conversations about Western girls’ experiences with gender-based inequalities took place in the earlier stages of the interview process (i.e. first interview session at the start of or prior to girls participation in the CSW). The changes noted in the later stages of their interviews give additional evidence as to how the Girl Effect and CSW intersect to problematically inform girls’ political subjectivity and agency.

it's not really anything that you have to use your mind with, it is mostly like – well you would with your imagination, but it's not anything like building. It is just dolls and stuff (Andi 2010:2).

I follow-up by asking questions about her experience as one of the only girls in robotics class and she remarks,

I don't think I have ever really been, what's the word, discriminated against in robotics or prejudiced except, that a couple of the male mentors, they are not really um, prejudiced against girls but they kind of act like you can't – that girls can't do anything by themselves, so they will send guys over to come help you, or they won't let you lift the robot by yourself, or they won't let you lift the tools by yourself. And I always thought that, well that always really bothered me and I would tell my Mom about it because she is a head mentor too. I would be like, 'that really bothers me. Can you please tell them to stop, because I feel really prejudiced against?' And she would be like, 'No, he is just trying to be polite.' But I don't know, I am not feeling that (Andi 2010:2).

In response to Andi's mother labeling these encounters inconsequential masculine chivalry, Andi explains she has developed a new technique for dealing with gender bias in school.

Now just day to day stuff like with the mentors - with one of the male mentors, I would be like 'I think I got this. You don't really need to like, bring some guys over here. I can do this myself.' And I even made it a point sometimes and would be like, 'just because I am a girl doesn't mean that I can't do this. I am not lower than guys.' They will still be like, 'Oh, well I am just being a gentleman.' But I am like, 'No, you are not' (laughs) (Andi 2010:3).

Andi characterizes herself as someone who individually confronts gender stereotypes and refuses to be limited by traditional gender expectations; however, she also notes that gender norms limit girls' political selves - particularly when one does not fit the traditional image of feminine girlhood.

This isn't really rights - but girls are expected to behave a certain way and guys are expected to behave a certain way, just like gender stereotypes. Girls are supposed to like pink and draw flowers and hearts everywhere, um and guys are supposed to be more manly and wear cargo shorts and sneakers and all the baggy clothing... girls are supposed to wear more fitted clothes, brighter colors, and if you wear black all the time or dark make-up, then you are considered *weird* (Andi 2010:3).

Andi draws upon gender distinctions within her peer group to consider the tensions produced by normative gender codes with regards to personal self-expression and gender identity. And perhaps because she experiences some of these gender-based constraints in her own daily life (she is studying robotics, dyes her hair different colors, and prefers dark, loose-fitting clothing), Andi draws a

loose correlation between gender expectations and girls' political agency. Despite her initial dismissal of gender stereotypes as not "really rights", her comments reflect an attempt to conceptualize gender as inherently political - even if she cannot pinpoint their exact relationship.

For many of the delegates, school and peer groups emerged as critical sites for gender difference - specifically those that restricted girls access to normative 'masculine' spaces. Hannah for example describes her school dress code as highly gendered and limiting.

You are not to have skirts above like mid-thigh and you can't have spaghetti straps, like you aren't supposed to wear any tank tops. Yeah, actually that is kind of annoying. There are some things like it says that you can't have shirts that promote things like drugs or violence, which could go for girls or guys. I think it says that you are not allowed to wear ripped jeans, which um, I guess guys could have, but no one really enforces that. There is um, a rule that you can't show undergarments, which I always assumed and people usually think of as bra straps showing... it is definitely focused more on girls (Hannah 2010:9).

Hannah experiences the increasing regulation of her body and sexuality in school, whereas Dona contrastingly comments on the normative disregard for girls' labor within the home, and their ability to play 'male' sports.

One of my teachers told me that a girl is weak in nature. It seems that a girl is kind of for simple things. But maybe girls are underestimated about their potentials because just like what we do in our culture, we say girls must stay at home and then work for household chores, but they didn't think much about how difficult these things are. Maybe it doesn't help that the value is in money, so it is just given sentimental value, not like what boys are doing. For example, I wanted to join the games of the boys and I am not the only one who wanted to join the games - you know the one with the flying saucer or frisbie? The one where you will run for the corner and somebody will hit the saucer so that you can escape? Yeah, that game - so, I really wanted to join because I liked seeing them, but then almost all of them are boys and I am not the only one who wanted to join that game so, we have very many girls who wanted to join it. But the boys told us that, 'No, you cannot run as fast as we can and you cannot escape, like how we can escape.' I think, maybe they are underestimating our ability that, oh we can't do that, but they didn't let us join their games. And it is really - maybe they think that we should have our own games as a girl instead (Dona 2010:5).

Elena (2010) describes a similar situation when her female friend tried to join the football team. She recalls that this moment is particularly memorable for her because it was one of the first times she recognized the role that gender norms play in restricting girls from activities and spaces perceived as masculine.

The thing I have been mentioning a lot is mainly with sports at my school. They wouldn't let my friend make the football team because they said that girls can't play football. And even in my high school, there is no girls' football team – there is like, kind of touch football, but not actual football. But it is getting better now, girls are fighting for their rights in sports I think... [my friend] kind of did it herself, she lobbied and got her own flag-football team at least and was happy with that, but then she kind of dropped it afterwards cause she got tired of fighting for it, I guess (Elena 2010:1).

Soon after this discussion of gender and sports, Elena connects her friend's experience to her own observations of gender bias in education.

If I wanted to go study engineering, it would be really hard because that is for guys. Even in my school, like my physics class there are 3 girls or 2 girls in the physics class and the rest are boys. So, there is still like professions where girls aren't seen – like law school and stuff, so if you want to study politics, its, '*No, that is a guy's thing*'. So I think, there is still a lot of gender inequality in Canada as well (Elena 2010:2).

Andi, Hannah, Dona and Elena's comments capture some of the everyday limitations produced by gender stereotypes in school-based environments. What is most notable in Elena's testimony however is the way that her remarks reflect a deeper sense of gender inequality as a global problem with local roots. She shifts from an analysis of school-based inequality via sports teams and science classrooms to later link these arenas to institutionalized gender discrimination and hierarchal power structures. Her final statement about gender inequality *also* existing in Canada challenges the discursive logic upon which the Girl Effect rests - calling into question the production of oppositional girlhoods and rejecting the notion that the West has somehow already achieved gender equality.

Fourteen-year old Jessica (2010) alternatively suggests that because gender discrimination is more or less normalized within American culture, girls learn how to manage gender biases in the everyday.

I think guys actually go through more with this kind of stuff than we do, or they can't really ignore it as well as we can because we hear it so often, just all these sexist things that it just kind of goes over us now, but they have to catch up on everything... sometimes, like when [boys] hear about how girls are in different countries and how abused they are and just they - cause I think they don't really realize that all the girls in the world are not like the girls in the U.S. and how even in the U.S. there are people like that, who don't have the same things that we do and they are just kind of, I think they just realized in this class and when we were here – that girls go through more problems than they do (Jessica 2010:2).

Jessica identifies herself as both empowered and vulnerable in her daily girlhood experiences. On the one hand, she argues that in comparison to girls in *other* countries, she appears to enjoy a relatively privileged existence. On the other,

Jessica notes that in order to experience herself in this manner, she must passively ignore regular encounters with sexism and inequality. She remarks, the worst thing about being a girl is, “the inequality – that is a lot more tough for me I think, cause I don’t know, I try not to really think about it – I am just here, I am trying to make my way” (Jessica 2010 4).

Jessica’s comments illustrate how she engages with the discursive logic of the Girl Effect to make sense of herself as a political subject, but it also evidences how she resists the oppositional positioning of hers and other girlhoods. Like Elena, Jessica complicates the production of oppositional girlhoods to suggest a more nuanced understanding of gender inequality in a local and global context. At the same time, Jessica (like Andi) also relies upon a normative and individualized approach to navigating gender discrimination in the everyday.

For other girls like Marie (2010), gender difference is initially identified within the home and family. Drawing upon her experiences of girlhood in China and Canada, Marie defines gender as socially constructed and therefore, malleable and fluid. She describes encountering different levels of socio-cultural acceptability in terms of male and female relationships in China and Canada.

Well, to be honest, I knew that there was a difference between girls and boys ever since I was young. In China, as you know, the girls and boys are divided much more – well the difference between them is much more clear than in Canada and when I moved to Canada, I noticed that girls here are a lot more free, they are – they talk with boys more and the interaction between them was much more equal. Not perfect, of course! It is never perfect anywhere, but it was much more equal than in China... for example, I lived with my grandparents and one of my cousins was a boy and he came over to play. They would always let him play and uh, sometimes I am allowed to go out and play with him, but usually they just kept me in the house and they would be like, ‘*Oh, go help your mother or go sweep or blah, blah, blah.*’ And then, but my cousin was outside everyday playing with his friends and I thought that is not really fair (Marie 2010:2).

Marie resists the potential for colonizing depictions of the West as gender equitable and the East as discriminatory throughout her discussion of China and Canada. She subtly re-frames her experiences in China as being interconnected with her current gendered experiences in Canada. It is in this way that she resists the discursive logic of the Girl Effect and leaves room for the commonalities and intersections across cultures and girlhoods - even though she also characterizes her experiences in China as more limiting.

Collectively, these testimonies offer an account of how girl delegates perceived gender ‘working’ in their daily lives. They identified gender inequality as a regular part of their girlhood experience, particularly in the context of school, culture, and family. The next subsection looks at how the delegates described *other* girls’ experiences with gender inequality. I ask to what extent do girl delegates counter the logic of the Girl Effect paradigm (like Marie, Jessica, and Elena) rather than reinscribe the oppositional distance between theirs and *other* girlhoods.

Making Sense of *Other* Girlhoods

“The difference is the obstacles and the situation for them, the obstacles are a thousand times higher than the obstacles I face...” (Marie 2010:4).

The Girl Effect paradigm works to get Western girls ‘invested’ in *other* girls - not as peers or equitable partners but as vulnerable figures waiting to be rescued by their benevolent Western sisters. Based on Sensoy and Marshall’s (2010) analysis of children’s literature on Third World girlhood, they argue the image of Third World vulnerability serves to solidify “a fictional figure through which characterizations of Western girlhood are re-established as the preferred norm” (p.301). By producing images of non-Western girls as uniformly oppressed, the Girl Effect acts to re-inscribe colonized depictions of the West versus ‘the Rest’, and position Western girls as decidedly more empowered than “their less fortunate sisters” (Sensoy and Marshall 2010:307). This discursive practice in turn reinforces the ideological boundaries between ‘us and them’ and prompts Western girls to trivialize or make distant their experiences with gender inequality in favor of *other* girls’ experiences with *real* gender discrimination. The following examines how the delegates imagine girls’ lives in the Global South and how this determination informs the possibilities for girls’ political subjectivity and agency. To what extent does the (re)production of oppositional girlhoods limit girls’ political subjectivity? And how do girls challenge the subject positions made available through the Girl Effect logic?

In comparison to girls’ earlier discussions of gender expectations impacting their daily lives, many regarded *other* girls’ experiences of gender discrimination as *different* from their own. The image of Third World vulnerability permeated conversations about the meaning of human rights. And whereas previously, they had spoken of a shared girlhood experience and readily identified the constraints produced by gender norms in Western girls’ lives, they struggled to maintain that same sense of connection and solidarity in speaking about girlhood in the Global South.

I think especially with girls in America it is really easy to feel connected because I am from Canada, but like, the girls from the developing world – it is kind of harder because I am so shocked by some of the things she has to face and I feel like I, like the things that I take for granted and am really privileged to have. So, it is kind of like, an awakening for me (Elena 2010:8).

I find that the girls, they all have a dream, they all have plans for the future and they all have a goal that they want to achieve. The thing that girls want to do when you boil it down to the most basic things, it is not that different. We all want to go to school, we all want to have a job and be successful and happy in life. These are the things that all girls want to do in their life, but of course, the difference is the obstacles and the situation for them – the obstacles are a thousand times higher than the obstacles that I face, so it is harder to feel similar (Marie 2010:4).

I definitely feel connected, but it has also made me realize how good I have it in this developed country. Like, how I am respected and not abused and taken seriously a lot... especially when I started to learn about girls in other countries (Andi 2010:17).

One of the major themes to emerge in the girls' testimonies revolved around this feeling of being grateful for the opportunities afforded to girls living in Western countries. Noticeably absent in the preceding and following narratives is any direct reference to their prior conversations about gender discrimination in their daily lives. This sense of inherent privilege was instead almost always coupled with an expression of guilt and paralysis when they compared Western girls to the colonized image of Third World girls.

I feel like every girl should have the ability to have the opportunities that I have had and I think it's really - I just want to be able to learn more about the problems they face. It is just not fair like, I don't know - it sounds stupid, but it's not what girls face everywhere (Hannah 2010:2).

We have to stop thinking about ourselves, and that there are other things that happen in the world. There is other things that happen in the world and other people that suffer and that aren't good in their life... I always said that I have the right to this and that, but it was always something so superficial (Sophie 2010:3).

I learned about history through the years and everything - realizing okay, these countries don't have many girls going to school, whereas we do and yet, we gripe about it and complain - and they would love to! As soon as - and that is something that I think about when I am like, 'Oh, I really don't want to do homework right now or I just want to stay at home in bed!' But there are others who can't do that and want what I have the privilege of going to. So, it is kind of a wake-up call in some areas (Ann 2010:2).

True to the discursive logic of the Girl Effect, the delegates imagined Third World girlhood as defined by experiences of violence and discrimination. Sasha tellingly details a long list of the human rights abuses faced by girls in the Global South.

I think of, well I just thought of this film, *Mula Day* and it's about female genital mutilation in an African - in a village in Mali. I think that girls being denied like, in India and China there are a lot of girls dying because the attention is given to their brother and not them. This whole idea of girls being a burden, I think is a really big problem in human rights because not only is it not true, but it is so de-habilitating for girls to grow up thinking that they are second class citizens and um, I think that FGM is a huge human rights violation - cause it is a very clear metaphor because if you are cutting something off of someone to make them less happy... I think education, but also I really do believe that education is probably the most effective way to strengthen girls because they are given the skills that they need to speak on their own... I mean the list goes on and on and on. In terms of marriage, legally in a lot of countries like in Africa or the Middle East um, there the

woman is in-debt to her husband and has to do what he says. I don't think that even from a human rights position that is fair or equitable or healthy. I mean maternal health should also be a huge initiative because it starts from birth, especially child-mothers if they are given more support they will have healthier babies and it won't be such a trauma on either of them. And then, I mean rape as a method of war... but women are really, really badly mutilated and there needs to be a lot of hospitals, obviously to help them. I can't even imagine how you would even begin to stop the rapes in the first place. (Long breathe). I am going through the list and trying to think – but I think that is basically it (Sasha 2010:5).

Andi shares a similar (though shorter) list of human rights abuses to describe Third World girlhood in the everyday.

Well because right now, it doesn't really seem like girls have any rights in a lot of countries, like they are not fed, they are not educated at all. Basically they are killed too, their genitalia is cut, they are abused. They don't even have any basic human rights at all (Andi 2010:3).

She later elaborates on the issues that she believes need to be addressed by the human rights community, and details what girls' lives *would* look like if they too enjoyed their human rights. This list notably centers on an understanding of Third World girlhood that is disconnected and presumably different from her girlhood experiences in the Global North.

Well, when they are a girl, it is um, not being killed at birth, not being a child prostitute, getting an education, learning just basic human respect towards everyone, stuff like that... [when girls enjoy their human rights, they are] um, getting fed, getting an education, being respected by their family, not being hit when they come home or not being held home all day and their brother gets to go to school just because of the gender difference. The teachers aren't biased and they are gender sensitive and so, they don't just pick on all the boys or they don't um, single out girls because they are girls or always pick on girls... having separate bathrooms, we talked about that today because of the culture, like families won't send their girls to school because they have to share a bathroom (Andi 2010:4).

Elena paints a similar picture to that of Andi and Sasha in her description of girlhood in the Global South. Her comments reflect the power of the Girl Effect paradigm as well as the (re)inscription of a static Third World against the backdrop of the modern West. It is in this way, Elena's testimony frames girls' human rights as being needed for *other* girls, while additionally positing neoliberal economic empowerment as the best solution to gender inequality.

I think in the developing world, I think families are most important because the families will most likely put their boys first and they make girls do all the domestic work and they will say that because of the global recession, they make the girls stay home and work instead of going to school – whereas boys will most likely still get the chance to go to school. Whereas

the girls have to fetch the water and bring it back, so they are more subjected to harm when they go by themselves. Um, it looks really bad. I think that um, it is kind of what is going on causes a lot of problems in society. So, like the economy can benefit if girls have rights whereas when they don't, so you see like a country that isn't getting anywhere and they are still not developing because nothing has changed from when they began. And I think that girls – there would be more poverty... more girls with low self-esteem and lacking education, so that they don't have the tools to earn a living in the future or be successful (Elena 2010:3).

If the discursive logic of the Girl Effect encourages Western girls to position themselves as more empowered than non-Western girls, the above comments illustrate some of the more concerning ways that this paradigm (re)produces colonized images that mark girls' experiences in the Global South as having little to do with girls in the Global North. Indeed, the delegates' testimonies reveal the power the Girl Effect message in shaping girls' understandings of what girlhood looks like 'here' and 'over there.'

Conversely, those delegates with more globalized travel experiences and/or exposure to the Global South challenged the overarching narrative of rescuer versus victim. Marie for example comments that despite her positioning as an empowered Western subject, she continues to struggle with obstacles and doubts in her everyday life.

In my life, um, I feel like some of the obstacles is that I have some doubts, even though I am, I am from a privileged country and I have all these things, I still have doubts about myself and sometimes I don't even know why I have these doubts because I know I am confident and I know I can do whatever I want in my life, but at the same time, I find that I am doubting (Marie 2010:5).

Critically, Marie's comments reflect not only the limits of neoliberal girl power in automatically producing success and achievement, but also how the Girl Effect paradigm leaves absent more structural analyses of socio-cultural change.

For other delegates, global travel and encounters with *other* girls de-stabilizes the discursive figure Third World victimization. Sasha in particular reflects upon a memorable experience with a girlfriend in Guatemala - an encounter, which she now considers more nuanced and complex than previously realized.

I think it kind of began when I was growing up – like I would spend two weeks, Christmas and New Years in Guatemala. So I would actually have friends there and although my Spanish isn't fluent at all – there was just this language of girl-talk that we participated in and a lot of this, I never really understood until high school. I remember when I was 15, we went back and it was uh, this girl was my best friend there, Rosa and she was a year older than me. And um, but we had always been kind of the same and it didn't really make a difference. But when I was 15 and she was 16 and I went back, usually I would find her on the beach selling trinkets, but this year she

wasn't there. So we looked down the main street for her. Um, and she was in a stall and married with a baby. For me, coming from the states where that is totally not the norm at all, it was really scary (laughs). Cause there is one thing about being a girl and another thing about being a mother. And so, I was just kind of really – what is the word – felt ostracized from her. I um, I didn't really know how to communicate with her anymore... I felt like we just became a lot more separate (Sasha 2010:2).

Sasha struggles to maintain her connection with Rosa and she recognizes a distinct difference between them because of their respective life experiences. In recalling this story however, she resists the colonized image of victimization versus empowerment, and subverts her own hierarchal positioning as the benevolent Western savior of her friend, Rosa.

But also, I just want to like clarify, again that – I don't think that she was necessarily unhappy. It isn't like she was being, like she wasn't unhappy, she didn't think that she was being necessarily – well, I don't know what she thought or rather, I don't want to say that she felt oppressed by societal norms. It just kind of made me realize that, 'Oh wait, not everyone is the same.' I kind of assume – as much as I can that probably she would have been happier if she felt like there were more opportunities... but I just think from my own perspective that if you feel like you have more opportunities and more chances and you don't feel like the only way to go is to have or marry and have kids, just like you mom has done and your grandma has done and all your friends are doing – then she probably would have been happier. (Sighs). I mean, I can only assume that and I don't want to speak for her really, does that make sense? (Sasha 2010:2).

Debbie likewise draws upon her girlhood experiences and those of her family members to disrupt the simplistic image of the victimized non-Western *other*. She endeavors to provide more contextual details to the ways girls and their families struggle with gender bias in the Global South. It is in this way, she resists the discursive logic of the Girl Effect and rejects the colonization of Third World girlhood. In this excerpt, she talks about female genital cutting and forced early marriage.

My Mother left Guinea because I was a girl and the problems that I was going to face when I was, let's say 18. Because let's say, I was in Guinea right now, they would say, 'Ok, you know what, she is 18, we are not going to give her time to explore her life. She is not going to have time to choose the love of her life or anything like that. Oh, there is nothing like that for you honey. You are getting married, no question about it. You are going to come home and lord have mercy on you if you do not go through female genital mutilation before then.' Which could mean, you've got some serious physical problems with you or trauma because of what happened to you. I mean, these are the things you don't realize because it's in the culture... I mean, this is something my ancestors did, this is something they are continuing to do. So it is very hard for something that has been going on for centuries to stop... I have seen girls go through it, when I was younger.

Because what happens is they have this huge celebration, where girls walk around with um, all white – dressed in all white – representing purity... but I can be taken away from that situation. For a girl from Guinea, it is socially acceptable. If she leaves her home and runs to her neighbor's house, they are going to stop her and actually, you know force her to stay there so that her parents can come find her... the problem is that girls are stuck... girls need to do what you are told to do, you do what – you know (laughs) they think is best for you and that is the way they show their love for their children. Because they think that if you don't get married, the community will not care for you (Debbie 2010: 3-4).

Debbie also challenges the 'us versus them' dichotomy and the logic of missionary girl power by speaking to the ways that 'Third World' girls and women work to transform gender norms and expectations. Far from passive *others* waiting to be rescued by the West, Debbie draws attention to their resistances and agency.

I think this is what I am saying; they are all fighting private battles to stop their daughters from going through these things – like my Mom did, that is a private battle. I mean, that is something no one really knows about but, it's a hero story and to me, that is my hero story. That is a hero story because I think that for a woman to leave those conditions, it must have been like – and must have taken, god knows, what kind of courage. Because she said, 'No' for the first time in her life and it is not always easy to do that because you are risking everything... it took a lot of strength for her to say, no to a marriage and no to her parents for herself and for me and my sisters (Debbie 2010:6).

Sasha and Debbie's testimonies critically capture an attempt to disrupt the image of Third World vulnerability. Hannah's travel experiences however affirm rather than challenge the differences between the West and 'the Rest.' She remarks,

When I went to Peru um, in the city there was always like – there would be guys who would be following us and whistling at us and so, it was just weird to see how different you are treated here – because all the women there were treated like objects and it really wasn't what I was used to, so that was kind of weird for me to see how much I just don't realize how much I am treated equally here I guess (Hannah 2010:2).

The guys in Peru, they were following – well not really following, but they stared at us and followed us a bit and whistled, but like other than that – not here, I have never, I don't think I have ever really experienced anything like that before (Hannah 2010:4).

What is particularly telling about this testimony is how Hannah's Peruvian experiences shape her understanding of hers and *other* girlhoods. She describes *other* girls as experiencing sexual harassment and objectification on a daily basis, while she does not. At the same time, Hannah previously described her discomfort

with the increasing policing and sexualization of her body via school dress codes;⁴ yet she neglects to draw any connection between those gendered experiences. Instead, true to the logic of the Girl Effect paradigm – she identifies herself and *other* girls as oppositional subject positions with different, distant life experiences.

This section offers an account of the problematic role the Girl Effect paradigm plays in producing oppositional girlhoods. It is my position the colonized images of the empowered Western girl versus victimized Third World girl limit the forms and possibilities for building political solidarity amongst girls globally. At the same time, the delegates' discussions of feeling grateful and paralyzed by the normative story of Third World girlhood, affords great insight into how the delegates make use of the Girl Effect discourse in order to make sense of themselves and *other* girls as political subjects.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined how CSW 54 girl delegates defined 'being a girl' in the context of the Girl Effect paradigm. Based on shared themes from the girls' testimonies, it explored how essentialized femininity and the (re)production of *other* girlhoods informed girls' political selves. These contested sites of meaning thematically evidenced the limitations and opportunities afforded by the Girl Effect logic, while simultaneously capturing the fluid processes by which girls challenge this discursive practice to understand their respective girlhood(s). The next chapter explores how the Girl Effect paradigm shapes the ways that CSW 54 girl delegates advocate for girls' human rights.

⁴ Hannah's description of gender bias exemplified in school dress codes can be found in the earlier sub-section of 6.3: *Identifying Different Girlhoods* titled, "Seeing Gender in the Everyday."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Girls' Political Subjectivity and the Role of Human Rights

This chapter is about how the Girl Effect paradigm informs girls' human rights discourses and practices at CSW 54. It examines how girl delegates invoke the Girl Effect discourse to advocate for girls' human rights, and conversely, the moments when girls call upon an alternative set of discourses to advance the girls' rights agenda. Because the Girl Effect constructs First and Third World girls as oppositional subjects, it is my contention that this discursive logic mobilizes girls differently with respect to their human rights. It encourages Western girls to position themselves as political subjects *with* rights and to imagine Third World girls as universally *without* human rights. At the same time, because the Girl Effect paradigm collapses girls' human rights language into a narrative of neoliberal economic empowerment, I propose girls' political subjectivity and agency remains otherwise constrained by this discursive logic, particularly within human rights spaces like the CSW.

Based on CSW girl delegates' testimonies, this chapter explores how girls negotiate the political subjectivities made available to them. How do the delegates make sense of girls' human rights at CSW 54? And in what ways, does the Girl Effect logic determine the broader discursive boundaries of their human rights? Building off my previous analysis chapters, I offer a critical account of the ways that girl delegates experience their roles at CSW 54, and correspondingly, illuminate the problematic intersections of the Girl Effect paradigm with girls' human rights practices. The Girl Effect, I suggest, fails to provide girls with the necessary tools by which to address the structural limitations produced by their age and gender. And as a result, girl delegates struggled to move beyond their marginalized political status during the CSW proceedings. This chapter contextually considers how girls mobilize the Girl Effect paradigm in order to understand their political positioning at CSW 54, and in turn offers a close reading of those experiences. In this chapter, I lastly explore girls' resistances to the Girl Effect logic and illustrate how the theme of media enabled girl delegates to raise other rights-based discourses not captured by the Girl Effect paradigm to construct their political subjectivities and agency.

7.1: Advocating for Other Girls' Human Rights: Issues of Representation and Voice

"It sounds silly, but the main reason I am here is for the girl child" (Andi 2010:18).

In Chapter Six, I argued the Girl Effect problematically recycles colonized images of Western and 'non-Western' girlhoods to re-inscribe the discursive boundaries between girls, thus prompting Western girls to liberate their Third World sisters. This chapter examines how the discursive production of oppositional girlhoods informs girls' understanding of human rights. Hayhurst (2011) asserts the Girl Effect is successful because it capitalizes on Western girls' philanthropic desires to 'make a difference' in the world. She notes throughout her interviews with Nike staff, they too believed "social causes more broadly have always been initiated, mobilized, and/or sustained by women [and girls], and felt that they could use this propensity to their advantage in terms of building their brand" (Hayhurst

2011:544). In this way however, the Girl Effect rallies Western girls to 'make a difference' by advocating for *other* girls' rights in the absence of their own. Because girl delegates employed the Girl Effect discourse to articulate their roles at CSW 54, I further propose this paradigm prompts Western girls to associate human rights with Third World girlhoods.

The desire to 'make a difference' in the lives of Third World girls resonated deeply with CSW 54 girl delegates - inspiring them to get involved with the girls' human rights movement and the work of the Commission. By participating in CSW 54, they felt that they were *really doing* something for girls in the Global South. Elena for example, comments PLAN International's *Because I am a Girl* campaign provides her with an activist network where she can more effectively engage in social change efforts.

They have provided many opportunities for me to do advocacy and things that I normally wouldn't have been able to do by myself and all alone. They give you a foundation to start from and they provide you with like places to go and public speaking events that want to hear about the *Because I am a Girl* initiative for the Day of the Girl. So, I have had my chance to get my message across and feel like I am doing something good for, you know, society and being part of something amazing (Elena 2010:8).

Being part of this collective movement gives Elena a sense of political subjectivity and agency,

I just really hope that, um in my lifetime before I am older, I do see a change in girls' rights. I really want to feel that I was part of that experience and seeing the flip between you know, discriminating against girls to having equality. I really hope that it comes through (Elena 2010:13).

Hannah similarly notes, her engagement in CSW 54 allows her to raise awareness about *other* girls' lives in her local community and gives her a similar sense of political agency and purpose.

Well, I think coming to CSW, I can learn a lot more about what is going on and what other people are doing and then go back and raise awareness. I will probably talk to people in Girl Scouts and I might do my Gold Award, which is like a high service project for Girl Scouts on something with girls' rights. I am not sure what, but I am hoping to do something that connects with other girls from other countries. I think I can just talk to people and try to make a difference in something (Hannah 2010:3).

For Ann, being involved in CSW 54 is an extension of her personal interest in politics and law. An active member of her Girl Scout troop and Girls Rock the Capital, she notes, participating in the field of politics allows her to be more strategic in terms of how she makes a difference.

Part of it is that I really like feeling like I am a making a difference or helping as many people as I can, maybe that is why I am taking the political

route... cause I feel like, I am being more useful that way, I feel that if I go into – well, when I go into politics – I will be able to help girls, women, and everybody in general have a better pathway and a better future by the laws that I might be able to enact (Ann 2010:2).

Sasha contrastingly distinguishes between girls with a political identity and those that want to feel like they are ‘doing’ something; although she identifies herself with the former, she nevertheless appreciates the value of collaborating with those who may have less of a vested interest in politics. Notably, Sasha links the discursive (re)production of oppositional girlhoods to the successful support of her peers in her work with Girls Learn International (GLI).

Um, I mean there is always going to be some people, like me, who are just – who gear towards politically active things and who have a like - being socially conscious is part of their identity and like, nature as a person and you are not going to change that. But there is a social action club and all these other clubs at my school, so it is hard to get people involved in my GLI chapter. I focus on the international partner school pretty much completely and the social action part of it – like, we raise money so that they can have bathrooms. I don’t talk about the human rights part of it at all. And like that – cause the fact that we are doing a real – like the social action club in my school at least, doesn’t do much action besides spreading awareness about issues and so, the fact that we *actually* do stuff is I think the most attractive part of it and you feel like you are making a difference in like, real people’s lives (Sasha 2010:12).

The delegates’ testimonies show the ways that the Girl Effect paradigm works to manage Western girls’ interest in social justice issues. By promoting a message of neoliberal possibility, the Girl Effect positions Western girls as the voices and advocates for *other* girls without necessarily considering the ways that First and Third World girlhoods mutually inform one another. For many of the delegates, the default response when speaking about girls’ human rights was to reflect upon images and stories that existed outside their frame of reference. Consequently, I propose the Girl Effect paradigm functions to problematically encourage Western girls to define human rights as being about Third World girls, but *not* necessarily about girlhood in the Global North.

For example, when asked about what the world looks like when girls enjoy or do not enjoy their human rights, the delegates gave remarkably similar responses about Third World victimization. Jessica stated,

It looks awful... when I hear all of this, it is just devastating to hear that around the world, girls are not noticed. They are just ignored and abused (Jessica 2010:2).

Sophie draws a similarly stark comparison between *other* girls’ lives and her own, asserting that when girls do not have human rights,

It is horrible to think that these other people or to think that other girls do not have access to education, to health care, to choose what they want to be. It is horrible. It is like to be in jail or the labyrinth. I would prefer not to live if I didn't have rights, it is like to, if there is not another world, only that world that others impose – and like a prison that has so many limits for girls to move forward and there are many consequences (Sophie 2010:3).

Hannah, Elena, and Marie alternatively noted a series of social changes that occur when girls enjoy their human rights. Throughout their testimonies, it remains clear that they are primarily talking about *other* girls.

I think a big thing is education, if girls can get an education and a good education and then choose what they want to do with their lives, like if they want to get a job, they can do that. Girls have access to health care and aren't thought of as less than sons. They aren't neglected because of preference for sons and they are able to play with other children and not have to live in a stereotypical role in the family if they don't want to or not feel pressures to do certain things... [Without rights.] I think it's a world where girls aren't visible. They are restricted to stay at home and be a daughter or a sister or a mother, but never their own person. They are always seen in relation to a male person and they don't like, they are not seen in the workforce or in politics or anything like that. I think that society in general isn't as successful then because women can't contribute to the economy or anything really, it's not I don't know, just a sad world (Hannah 2010:3-4).

I think like, being kind of equal – it would be the perfect world I guess, because there would be no discrimination. I think there would be less poverty and because each year that a girl stays in school, she gets 10 to 20% more income and a girl is 90% more likely to give her income to her family and men are less likely to do that. So I think, we would see a rise in people going to school and education wise, and girls would be empowered to study things and um, do what they want to do really, so if they wanted to study mechanical engineering, they would go study mechanical engineering regardless of whether they were a boy or a girl because there would be no difference between them... but it starts at such an early age for girls, that they are easily subjected to discrimination of being uh, not allowed health care or they can't go to school for certain reasons, like they don't have a birth registration or they can't, you know, they are lacking many opportunities at an early age so that kind of causes the downfall (Elena 2010:3).

I think once again, they need to know that they are supported and that they are not alone. One thing that I would say is the most important is to just eliminate that look, that negative belief that boys are better than girls in all aspects of their life. They need to know that yes - girls can go outside; yes - they can play soccer, they can deal with machines, they can build a car and that boys can do household chores, they can cook and they can do the laundry and they can make clothes and so on. And that there is not

discrimination on both sides about these issues – when that kind of thing happens, then girls will be just girls and boys will be just boys... I think that these kinds of things begin at birth, if at birth you are not brought up in a family that is very equal, very liberal that everyone has equality in that family – regardless if you are a mother, father, or child – in that family, the child will grow and will be educated in the right way (Marie 2010:13).

Andi on the other hand, replies by questioning whether or not education is in fact the most pressing issue for girls globally. Her comments illustrate the normative differences constructed between Western and ‘non-Western’ girlhoods. She takes as a given that Third World girls experience repeated victimization and abuse.

So, they were talking about like, we really need education for everyone in the world, which is really true and I think important. But I think that maybe when they say that, they were thinking about more of the developed countries that aren’t like the countries in Africa or South America or like Bangladesh and Southeast Asia, but um – they were thinking more about developed countries where most girls and women are like at the health level and then they wanted to go a step above, which is good. But I think the way that they said it wasn’t right, because if you are abused everyday and you get raped and all this bad stuff and you are shunned by everyone, your main concern isn’t education, you want to get fed everyday and you want to stop being abused, you want health. I know that for millions of girls, they need their health first (Andi 2010:16).

Collectively, the girls’ testimonies capture some of the ways the Girl Effect works to discursively shape the parameters of girls’ human rights. The Girl Effect logic prompts Western girls to position themselves as the agents of missionary girl power, while likewise imagining Third World girls as perpetual victims without human rights. According to Sensoy and Marshall (2010), one of the hallmarks of the Girl Effect includes, “non-Western girls [being] cast as the most vulnerable citizens, as untapped ‘natural resources’ ready to be harnessed and dispatched... [because] their ‘power’ lies in the wait,” while Western girls are constructed as those with the capacity and perhaps even *responsibility* to “break the cycle of backwardness and free the non-Western girl from the conditions that do not recognize her potential” (p.301). Given this oppositional positioning, I argue that the Girl Effect mobilizes girls’ political subjectivity and agency differently – encouraging Western girls to define human rights as something they already have and *other* girls need, and to additionally position themselves as the representatives for Third World girls’ human rights.

For the vast majority of the girl delegates I interviewed however, the prompt to speak for *other* girls was met with discomfort and resistance – even when they described their role at the CSW as about advocating for their Third World sisters. Elena for example, describes her involvement with PLAN International’s campaign for the Day of the Girl.

Well, we go to a lot of fundraising events and events to speak. We get invited to go and other groups want us, so we share that we want a Day of

the Girl on September 22nd and to sign the petition and we give out our fliers, so. And there is a commercial going around on TV now, so I think it is hitting a lot of people. But I have explained that we speak out on issues affecting girls globally and we want or we are advocating for them (Elena 2010:2).

Later in her interview, Elena reflects on the extent to which she can speak for *other* girls' issues and concerns.

I try my best to keep it personal for my thing because I am not going to speak for someone else's situation, so I can't you know, say that I was exactly there – cause it is fake and not right. But we do have facts, so we use our facts as best we can to get our message across because people can't tell us that we are wrong when we have the facts (Elena 2010:9).

Ann also qualifies her role as a girls' rights advocate during CSW 54, noting that on the one hand her gender and age allow her to speak collectively for girls' concerns, but that on the other, it is important to resist talking about girls' experiences in a universal manner.

When I am in a session where I am either the only girl under 18 or 20 or um, one of a handful, I feel honored in that I am doing my part because now, I at least know for a fact that we are getting heard in at least one session, where had I not been there, we may not have ever been heard. It is kind of a comfort thing too, knowing that if I am there at least something will get said, even if I don't think like all the other teenagers in the world – there is at least some sort of aspect that might be similar with the others (Ann 2010:5).

Dona¹ characterizes her role at the CSW as less about her personal experiences, or that of her parents and sponsoring organization, and more about speaking to girls' collective concerns and limitations.

Actually, I will say honestly that I wasn't really thinking about it as a student. It was just normal for me, but then I was chosen and I was – I stayed in Manila where I was working for my visa to be accomplished and there they oriented me and they talked about it, and they teach me about girls' rights. I know that girls and boys are equal, but I just noticed through their documents and reports about girls' rights and violence and discrimination, so it was then that I thought I should be involved in this particular thing... but at first, somebody told me about this, somebody told me about facts – I listened to it and I actually learned about it and I just didn't believe it easily. I really think, is it true? Or is it really the thing that girls experience? So, actually then my parents told me that, you should really say the real situation. Do not just think that because it is said in the

¹ Dona was sponsored by PLAN International's *Because I am a Girl* campaign to attend CSW 54 and represent girls in the Philippines. She was one of a very small handful of CSW 54 girl delegates residing outside of North America.

books that girls are discriminated, or that you should simply say girls are discriminated – maybe you should say specifically and what is really happening in our place so that it will be reliable... and the first time speaking is yeah - it is very hard. I really felt nervous and the good thing is not just nervous, I am excited because I know I am representing here not for myself or because my parents told me to do it. I am representing for the body of girls (Dona 2010:3).

Debbie likens her role as a delegate to that of a platform for Third World girls' unheard voices. She describes this sense while reflecting on her experiences as a panelist during a high-level Commission meeting.

It was like yesterday, I went home and I really had to think about it because they all said, 'Oh, you spoke so nicely. You are such a smart girl.' I just thought how easy to get a swelled head with that, how easy to go home and think, 'Oh, I am such a smart girl, I spoke at the UN and I am the greatest person on earth right now.' But it is not about you, it is what you said. It is speaking for people who cannot speak for themselves, it has nothing to do with you. You are just the voice (Debbie 2010:14).

Thus, as much as the delegates did in fact understand themselves as speaking for *other* girls, they nevertheless interpreted this role in a way that resisted the normative production of oppositional girlhoods. Debbie in particular counters the discursive logic of the Girl Effect by framing her advocacy efforts as an integral part of - and not distant from or oppositional to - her politicized self. She states,

One of the main reasons I wanted to become a human rights advocate was because, if my Mom hadn't done what she did – take me out, me and my sisters out of that environment (Guinea) and brought us here (United States), I probably would have been there – god knows, without a future. I couldn't be sitting here having an interview about it. Um, probably would never have traveled and so, it is because someone stood up and said, 'this is wrong. I am not going to let this happen to you.' She saved our lives (Debbie 2010:5).

Because Debbie (2010) is "living in these two worlds" (p.9) and navigating an often, conflicting set of cultural expectations, she is perhaps more likely to resist the colonizing logic of the Girl Effect. Yet Debbie also challenges the production of oppositional girlhoods by building solidarity amongst 'different' girlhoods. She establishes a connection between her speaking for *other* girls' human rights and that of Western girls' political agency.

I don't think that this is something that – that I can come in here and say this is what I think about girls and then go home and sleep and forget about it or think that as long as I am good, everyone else is good. We don't live in that world anymore. I took an exploring humanitarian law class that said, everybody is in charge of everybody... I have always felt like if there um, I remember something a friend said to me, 'Debbie, when there is something that bothers you, you just won't shut up about it!' And I just felt like

(laughs), well, what are the chances that girls are always quiet about what is bothering them? How many shows are on television about girls who can be saying, you know you treated me this way and that is wrong or standing up for themselves? But what is holding them back is what we should be figuring out, what is holding these girls back from standing up for themselves. I said yesterday, empowerment is the key to helping girls but it is not something you are going to give them, it is already within themselves, they just have to find it and support each other in finding it (Debbie 2010:19).

For other delegates, subverting the Girl Effect's prompt to speak for *other* girls meant calling attention to issues of representation at CSW 54. Girl delegates resisted the notion that it was their responsibility to advocate for *all* girls' human rights; they further challenged the extent to which, they (as Western girls) could speak about Third World girlhood. Sasha states,

I don't think I would recommend girls coming physically to NYC from, I mean, ideally sure, but I would say video conferencing would be a really good way to ah, kind of compromise, just because its so expensive to bring people over and you have to deal with all these like, legal things as well. But actually listening to their voices – like literally – as opposed to us who learn about it, I mean I learned about it, but most of the girls haven't actually been there, so even we don't know what its' like to be a girl around the world. I would say video conferencing would be a really good way to literally listen to those girls and it would also empower them and help them feel like they have a voice and are part of the process. I mean, obviously you don't want people from the Western world only saying their point of view, cause they are not the ones who live it everyday (Sasha 2010:10).

Hannah, Marie, and Dona similarly identify the lack of ethnic and age-based diversity as a significant problem when the CSW looks to address girls' global concerns. In addition to critiquing the lack of representational diversity, they bring attention to the structural and age-based constraints experienced by girls during the Commission.²

I think just inviting more girls to speak at different sessions and having or making sure that there are different ages represented too. Like, I know Dona, the girl from the Philippines was on a lot of different panels and events with a lot of older people, and I think that people listened to her especially because she was younger and had a different perspective and it was a personal story. I think more opportunities like that to have more girls participate in more events is really important (Hannah 2010:17).

One thing that I feel is that girls are not really represented at these kinds of meetings – even though the issues are about girls, girls are always missing and I don't know why. So, we are girls and we are the ones that they should

² Section 7.2: 'That's Cute': Experiencing the Structural Limits of the Girl Effect, addresses the age-based constraints experienced by the girl delegates in additional detail.

be listening to the most, so I don't know why they never include girls in anything they do (Marie 2010:4).

There are also other girls who are willing to share their experience because we have different experiences and we have different countries, so here at CSW... there are also girls who want to share their experiences and their differences and to attend different sessions and there are so many girls who really want to say something even through it is running out of time because there is a lot more experience to share (Dona 2010:6).

Critically, Marie also highlights the ways the Girl Effect discourse mobilizes girls' political subjectivity and agency differently. She evokes the oppositional positioning of hers and *other* girlhoods while commenting on the irony of always talking about girls in the Global South, but never *actually* seeing or hearing from them.

I do feel that we need to hear from girls more, but especially girls from developing nations. Just because their voice – they represent most of the girls in this world, and yet they are the ones who are never heard and they are also the ones that we are trying to help, so um, it would be great to hear some other girls speak (Marie 2010:4).

Later, Marie additionally challenges the discursive construction of Third World girls as little more than vulnerable and oppressed objects.

I would like to see how their daily life is as a girl, what kind of experiences they have as a girl, and what kind of limitations that they feel they have as a girl, what are the limits? But, at the same time, what do they feel that they could do? What are their capabilities? Like these kinds of things, I am pretty sure that every single girl can answer them and every single girl can have and will have a different answer to that, which is very unique. Because research is research – it is fact and everybody is going to say the same thing about them because it is “fact.” But these kinds of things are not, they are experiences and stories and every single girl lived a different life... has different feelings, different emotions, different desires, and it is so interesting to hear these things from different girls – but it doesn't really get heard or even asked about here (Marie 2010:8).

This section examined how the Girl Effect promotes different girlhoods and political subjectivities that encourage Western girls to position themselves as advocates for *other* girls' human rights. I explored how this differential positioning shaped girls political participation at CSW 54 and highlighted how the girl delegates resisted this discursive practice to challenge the politics of voice and representation. Together, these testimonies reveal how the delegates made sense of their relationships with Third World girls and to broader project of girls' human rights.

7.2: *'That's Cute': Experiencing the Structural Limits of the Girl Effect*

"Ageism and sexism are two different things" (Marie 2010:10).

"They were going on and on about how we are the people who are going to change the world, and then when we tried to say something that wasn't strictly to the Beijing +15 theme, we were silenced" (Jessica 2010:20).

Despite girls increasing visibility as powerful political agents, girl delegates' experiences at the Commission capture the structural limits of the Girl Effect paradigm. The Girl Effect promotes a neoliberal approach to girls' political subjectivity and stresses individual solutions to gender discrimination and inequality. According to Taft (2010), this normative approach to girls' political participation "identif[ies] a variety of social failings that produce barriers to the happiness and success of girls, but the solutions are primarily oriented toward improving girls' ability to cope with these problems, rather than removing them" (p.20). This section considers the ways that generational politics shape girls' experiences during CSW 54. I explore the intersections of age and gender, and investigate how generational disadvantage stimulates resistance to the discursive logic of the Girl Effect.

Girl delegates countered the regulatory effects of the Girl Effect paradigm in their reflections on the CSW experience. For some girls, participating in CSW 54 fostered a collective understanding of feminist politics and political agency, which resisted individualizing notions of neoliberal girl power and the benevolent logic of missionary girl power. Sasha for example comments,

I always imagined feminism to be kind of like, battle of the sexes – like I saw on MTV or in sports and things, like 'girls are better than boys!' but once you start seeing and analyzing, like the media especially, I kind of realized how all girls – even in my own society, are like objectified and that made me really angry (Sasha 2010:2).

Andi (2010) concurrently states, "I think about women's rights a lot because it is relevant to me" (p.1). Ann (2010) too remarks,

You know, there isn't really anything that bothers me about being a girl, because I see, going back to the past and everything, I have seen how hard women have worked to gain as close to equal rights as they can for me – so I try to take what they have done and what I want to accomplish and what I want to accomplish for the generations after me; and not seeing more women in legislation or something, just gives me that fuel for the fire and make me work harder... I am hoping that I can break through the glass ceiling and pave the road for more, for others and just take what is not right and injustice, and make it to justice (Ann 2010:6).

Marie identifies the women's movement as an integral part of her political subjectivity.

Whenever I have doubts, I tend to go onto Wikipedia and read about the most amazing women and currently, that is Marie Curie because she is my hero! (laughs) I am just like, 'ah' and I get more and more inspired to think, 'Yes! I can do this.' But of course, there is my Mom too and I always talk to her and she is there for me and she comforts me whenever she can (Marie 2010:5).

She furthermore maintains girls' human rights are as much about individual empowerment, as they are about fostering solidarity amongst girls and women.

One thing I think is to get more girl representation everywhere and in general, for me, um inspiration was key. I was inspired by amazing women in past history, and in my life, who have done so much and I realize that even though they are women, they still can do all of these amazing things. And uh, it just leads me to want to do my best as well and to try my best to get myself up there too. But uh, a lot of times, I think when people make remarks against girls and these negative insults to girls, there are a couple of reactions. One would be, the girl will be more shy, more introverted and they won't say anything anymore, they will just be quiet and then they will just try to stay out of the way, but the second type is um, the fury they will have like, 'What?! What did you say?' And then try to stand up. I think that even those quiet, shy types of girls - I am still those types of girls at some points in my life, but when I see other girls standing up too, when I know that there are other girls trying to support me and there are other girls who are with me, who are for this and I am not alone - that is when I can say, 'Yes, I can do this and I can make it' (Marie 2010:12).

Sophie's experience at CSW 54 inspired her to make connections between her personal experiences with violence and the larger movement for girls' human rights. She states that in coming to the CSW,

I think that this is a good experience, we are (makes gesture of amazement) - we are girls, we important, we don't know that in other parts of the world there is someone who talks about us, and what we go through (Sophie 2010:2).

She remarks in hearing about *other* girls' experiences with violence, she has come to a new understanding of her own experiences and the importance of girls' rights.

I am giving an example because yesterday, we talked a lot until midnight and it came out some questions and personal matters in my family life. We talked about a personal situation in my life - a family problem, where I felt something horrible and saw and felt something horrible and asked for my mother's help and my mother didn't help me. This was the moment that I signed or is a sign that I was not respected or helped and my mother didn't say anything or give importance to my needs (grabs a tissue out of her bag and cries)... but being here and hearing the other girls speak, I want to tell girls to not have shame, to talk and to express your opinions and personal

experiences because people here are not here to criticize but to find some solutions for the problems - violence problems girls have (Sophie 2010:6).

Thus in some ways, girls' involvement with CSW 54 shifted the neoliberal undercurrents of the Girl Effect paradigm and its silence regarding girls' human rights. These testimonies evidence how girls made use of the available subject positions to *become* critical actors engaged in the possibilities of girls' human rights - and not just neoliberal or missionary girl power. Girl delegates rather alternatively identified themselves as integral members of the girls' human rights community, and challenged the (re)production of oppositional girlhoods.

At the same time, girl delegates' experiences with generational politics at CSW 54 highlighted the failure of the Girl Effect to underscore the intersections of age and gender in the realization of the *girl effect* and of girls' human rights. They were acutely aware of the structural limitations produced by age and gender. In fact, girls' participatory inclusion and exclusion during CSW proceedings served as a powerful reminder of their politically marginalized status. Andi for example comments,

I was at the young women's caucus and they were talking about how even if we give girls opportunities to be leaders and they do all these things and they talk, how like men still might not take them seriously. So, I guess I kind of thought that all the men leaders, like most of the men in the world would not take us seriously - be like, 'Oh, that's cute that you are trying to do that, but' (Andi 2010:14).

Girls represented a small portion of the CSW delegates. Andi recognized the irony of advocating for girls' human rights and political empowerment with very few girls present. She also believed however, that because of their small numbers girls' voices would be respected and listened to by the adult delegates.

Yeah, actually cause um there was like 8 of the girls in the room too, and whenever we said something, they would take us very seriously and like, there was a lady from France I was talking to in there... and she took us like, well everybody really wanted to know what we had to say because they needed the um, young girls perspective on it cause otherwise it is just a bunch of adults sitting in a room talking about what should be best for someone that is not even there to represent themselves. I feel like we still had input and if we wanted to say something especially because like, we might not look as old as we are so, if you stated like '*I am Andi. I am 14 and from the US*' then people really paid attention because there are only a few girls at this whole thing. There is like 15,000 people here at this whole thing - I heard that number thrown at me at one point, but there is probably a total of 50 or 100 girls (Andi 2010:14).

Hannah participated in the same caucus as Andi and she observed a similar set of structural limitations.

It is very comfortable and people are excited to see us here and are excited that young people are coming, but I think in some ways, we haven't effected the decisions very much. In the young woman's caucus, someone said, another woman said something interesting that, girls a lot of times people will see girls in positions of leadership and see us coming here and will be like, that's so great, it is cute or whatever, it is good that they are doing stuff, but we don't actually have input in decision making. It is great that we are including girls here, but they are not really doing anything to actually include girls, like in the high level decision making, we could have been more included (Hannah 2010:12).

Hannah proposed girls continued exclusion from formal political arenas results in girls feeling less qualified to advocate for their rights. Because of generational disadvantage, she maintained girls' political engagement requires that more concerted efforts be made to facilitate their full and equitable inclusion.

I think sometimes girls feel like their voices are overpowered by other people; like the women who have been here for many years or the governments. I think sometimes when girls aren't like, when there aren't a lot of girls in places – like the girls' caucus or girls' workshop – once you leave those, I think sometimes girls feel like their voices aren't heard as much. I think a lot of times when there is more experienced people who come in with a lot of statistics and powerful statements and they are talking a lot too – or at a higher level, like the official UN sessions, um, girls kind of start to feel like, *'Oh, maybe I don't know as much as I thought I knew or I don't know enough about the issues or they already know about the issues we are talking about.'* So, girls kind of lose the confidence that they had in the smaller groups where they really like were talking about their own issue. Once they go out in some cases, they don't really feel like there is an opening for them to speak (Hannah 2010:17).

Similarly, Marie asserted girls' voices do not receive the same level of authority and influence as the adult delegates at the CSW.

I think that a lot of people tend to be patronizing towards girls and then they will be like, *'Oh, there is a girl. Let her speak for awhile and then put her to the side.'* Because they want to hear the big, important people speak about blah, blah, blah. Which is nice, I do realize these are important people and that we should hear their thoughts and their opinions, but at the same time, I feel like girls are just being discarded because um, people think that girls have no, they have no experiences, they are not educated, they don't know the issues as well as adults do; which is not true because personally, some of the girls I met, especially the girls from the developing nations, they know a lot more than the adults here. They know what the issues are and they can speak much better than – and their voices are much more powerful. When they speak, I listen a lot more because it is a girl and she knows what she is talking about (Marie 2010:4).

Marie calls attention to the ways that gender, age, and power limit girls' political subjectivity and agency, particularly in the context of participatory parity. She endeavors to re-value girls' voices while subsequently returning to her earlier comments on the power of girls' everyday experiences. In the following, she considers the impact of language and accessibility for girls' political participation:

I think the most important events are the ones where girls are forgotten. Like today, I was doing – you know, the panel session in the morning and I just thought, you know – they made me speak, but I thought at times it was kind of patronizing. It was kind of like (baby voice) *'Oh, let the little girl speak for a little bit'* and then, they just left me to the side until the last minute, so that I can end it. But yeah, I noticed during the questions, they never asked a girl. Even though, I thought um, today I attended another event and there was only one girl, everybody else was Ministers and an economist and these big important people – but that one girl has the most powerful voice of them all and she spoke about the issues that she faced and she was extremely passionate because it was her life. It was her life she was sharing... but at the same time, people just ignored her afterwards, they just asked other questions to big, important people because they think they are the *experts*. But they don't realize that they are not. It is the girls themselves who are experts of girls, who else are the experts? Right! So, yeah I feel that in general girls, in these events, even though the issue is about girls, its' – girls aren't really part of it. They are kind of just putting a girl for decoration, like oh look we included a girl! But even the questions that they asked me, were very uh – like, I think I got it, I think I answered it well, but the questions weren't very girl friendly. They were issues that most adults would know after years of research and reading about them, but they weren't issues that girls can really talk about because um – it wasn't really anything that girls could relate to. It was more of like, *'Oh, after years of research, I know this and this and this'* but, they never asked anything about girls' living through these issues or where their experiences were (Marie 2010:7).

Sophie similarly argues that the intersections of age and gender prevent girls from being afforded equal weight in political discussions. Her testimony focuses on the differences between women's rights and girls' rights, and in doing so, highlights the tensions evoked in the realization of human rights for differently situated subjects.

The differences between women's rights and girls' rights is that women have more maturity and are more respected and um, it is true that the things that she could say or advice are more weighted or given more authority than a girl and she can express more confidence – because it is so mixed women's rights and girls, but when we think about girls, we cannot compare the same rights. They do not have the same rights: it is false that they have the same rights. They are very different (Sophie 2010:7).

Like Sophie, Marie's participation in CSW 54 brings attention to the generational tensions and disadvantages experienced by girls as politically marginalized

subjects. Marie rejects the idea that women's empowerment *trickles down* to girls and she highlights how age and power shape the possibilities for girls' meaningful political participation.

When women are empowered, well women are empowered, but that doesn't mean that girls are. I feel like a lot of times, women don't listen to girls. They put on this false front that they are, but I can tell that a lot of women here at the UN don't really care about what girls have to say. And that is a big issue because, well you were once a girl and you wanted to be listened to right? They will ask a simple question and it will be very simple like, *'Oh, it is so nice to meet a youth who is here, so tell me what you are doing?'* And when you answer them, they will nod and smile, but you can tell that they are looking at other things and as soon as you are done, they are like, *'Well, it was great meeting you.'* And then they rush off to another place, so you can tell these people are just making a false front to make it look like they care but, okay come on – we are not that stupid. We can tell when you are listening to us and when you are not (Marie 2010:10).

Having attended the CSW for three consecutive years, Ann identifies the differential treatment of girl delegates as a normative aspect of the Commission meetings. She expresses annoyance with the ways that she and other girls are treated in these politicized spaces.

I feel that this year, it might still be the same because it's still – well, you are younger than everyone else and so, it's like *'Oh, you can follow! You are not texting or anything like that.'* So, I am predicting that it is still going to be shock first and maybe respect after. But that is kind of going off of other things that I have noticed too – like in the work I do with my state, like going to the State House. I have been in the Girls Rock for, this is my 4th year and each year the people coming in new, like legislators are always shocked at first that there are young people here that actually know what we are talking about and so, it is something that should be more accustomed and hopefully, will become more accustomed to, so that maybe in a couple of years – instead of having just me or three girls my age in the room, perhaps it will be 10 or 15 or half the people in the room! So, it is a better voice overall of what is going to or is happening, but also that the shock value lessens (Ann 2010:5).

Ann additionally notes the ways that age and gender subordinate girls' voices in the politicized spaces of the CSW; like Marie, she notes how adult delegates *talk at* rather than *with* girl delegates. When I ask her what message she would like to share with the adult delegates, she states,

I would say try and make it so that when you speak with girls, um don't come off as *'Okay, I am an adult, I am in charge – do as I say, not as I do.'* Be a team member; earn their trust before you start maybe giving advice or anything because if you don't have their trust, then they are not going to listen anyway. Um, so gain the trust of girls that you are speaking to first before you try and uh, I don't want to say push because that is such a heavy

word, but before you go and gradually get what you want them to know. And realize, you don't know their background when you are first meeting them, you don't know if they have had a great childhood or an abusive one, if they live with their family or if they are orphans. Don't assume one thing or the other, that they have had a certain life or something – share a little bit about yourself, figure out something you have in common and then grow a relationship from there (Ann 2010:16).

Marie offers a similar piece of advice to the adult delegates interested in 'investing in girls.'

Adults who respect us will try to engage us in conversation. It is like, even if they are talking to adults, they will try to introduce us to the conversation, they will ask us questions and make sure that we all participate as equals in the conversation – that even though I am younger and I don't have a university degree that I have my opinions to get across too, and it is the same as their opinions, you know? It is kind of like a debate, but yeah a lot more level ground and you feel that they are not patronizing you. I hate it when people try to uh, make this big deal about a girl being here, but at the same time they are not talking with the girl, they are just talking *about* the girl. So it is like, she is an object there and they are just talking about her and never talking to her or treat her as if she has a voice or treat her as if she is an equal (Marie 2010:11).

On the other hand, Ann suspects that because of her age and the negative image of teenagers, her voice might be afforded more weight and power than one might assume – even when adults adopt an authoritarian role in the conversation.

I think adults tend to listen more to my point of view because I think that the stereotype of teenagers not actually caring and just wanting to go and call friends or stay up late and party or something um, that I actually take time to look at issues, think them through and then discuss them. I think they find that intriguing and want to see kind of, um how much I do know about the issue and possibly help me understand it in a different way or more in the same way that I was thinking already (Ann 2010:13).

Sasha conversely contends that regardless of whether adults hear or value girls' voices and experiences, it is nevertheless critical for girls to share their opinions and demand equitable political participation.

There is also the reality of what they are going to do and how they might be moved by our statements - no matter what we say. I mean there isn't, I mean I don't know how much there is that we could say that they haven't heard before... but I think its also still really important to hear from girls and respect their voice (Sasha 2010:10).

Jessica adds generational power differences affect the manner in which girls can participate in politics and how they advocate for their rights. She counters the

normative presentation of girls' vulnerability in the Girl Effect paradigm and challenges traditional approaches to girls' human rights discourse.

We [my classmates and I] were saying how like, the sad story in there was kind of, made it sound pleading I guess, that we are like begging to have our rights, but we deserve them and we need them, so why not have a success story, like look at what girls have achieved by getting this (Jessica 2010:12).

The delegates' testimonies about their inclusion and exclusion from the activities of the CSW evidences how the Girl Effect paradigm fails to address the structural constraints produced by the intersections of age and gender. Girl delegates witnessed the limitations produced by the Girl Effect discourse and countered the extent of neoliberal girl power in providing girls with the necessary tools to shape the world around them. This section examined how girls' participation in CSW 54 inspired girl delegates to critique the logic of the Girl Effect paradigm.

The next section explores how CSW 54 girl delegates continued to counter the (re)production of oppositional girlhoods in order to (re)claim human rights as *also* needed by so-called 'empowered' Western girls .

7.3: *Taking on the Media: (Re)Claiming Human Rights for Western Girls*

"It is not the time for girls to be passive anymore, we are done with that" (Debbie 2010:17).

In this research, the Western media emerged as a prominent theme: girl delegates spoke about the importance of including the media in girls' human rights frameworks. The following offers an account of how the delegates (re)framed girls' human rights to include their concerns with the media and in doing so, resisted the discursive logic of the Girl Effect paradigm. It is in this way, CSW 54 girl delegates rejected their own oppositional positioning and instead brought visibility to the importance of human rights in the lives of Western girls. Girls' discussions of the media further illustrate a departure from the Girl Effect paradigm, as they mobilize other human rights discourses to construct their political selves.

In speaking about girls' concerns in the Global North, Marie identifies Western media as one of the most significant obstacles to girls' political agency.

I think the big thing is the media. I think the media has just such a negative portrayal of women and they make these celebrities look like they are the most important thing in the world, which for me - I don't agree with at all. And you just know, that younger and younger girls are getting into this uh, fiasco with celebrities and oh look it's blah blah and uh, look at how amazing he or she is. But more often than not, these celebrities are not the best role models for girls (Marie 2010:13).

She describes the media as highly problematic in terms of advancing gender equality and girls' human rights because it reinforces traditional gender roles.

Marie alternatively contends girls should be taught to value their intelligence and educational achievements over appearance and beauty.

The media is why makeup is geared towards women and not men, and makeup for women is important, they *need* to have that, they *need* to feel pretty – otherwise, they are not important. The media just makes the external appearance so much more important than the internal appearance, which I completely disagree with so, that is why I don't wear any makeup and I, well right now I am dressed kind of fancy, but that is only because I went to a reception and don't want to make a fool of myself! (laughs) But, I always try to tell my friends that it is okay if you don't feel pretty, you don't need to feel pretty to be valued, that it is you and the you, that you want is the most important you. The beautiful you and the normal you – the normal you is more important than the beautiful you. Media just places so much more on girls' appearances and girls' appearance is one of their most vulnerable and fragile things. They feel that they need to have that in order to be a girl, which is not true. You can be a girl in a lot of different ways. For me first and foremost, I am an academic and I really believe that girls need to use their brains – you know, being smart is so much more better than being pretty. Being smart will get you a job and get you a perspective on life that you wouldn't be able to have, that is so much more valuable. Beauty fades and as you get older and older, it is gone – along with, or it comes with wrinkles and white hair and stuff, but your knowledge stays with you. Your knowledge and your intelligence will always be a part of you, no matter where you go and no matter what, that is why it is more important to have that. And it will be a much greater asset, it will get you jobs, on base with other intelligent women, and so much access in life and so much more opportunities than if you were just pretty (Marie 2010:14).

Sasha similarly describes the impact of the media as a key component of the contemporary girls' rights movement. She argues that the media is an issue that affects Western and 'non-Western' girls alike – shaping their current and future recognition as legitimate public figures.

I think it is important to have conversations about self-esteem, maybe that is a psychology standpoint where if you feel more confident about yourself then you'll feel more confident about speaking up and defending others and making those really hard decisions. Because to go against the crowd is really difficult... so I would say from a broad standpoint, self-esteem is a very important issue and it is something that everyone can relate to – girls in the developing world and girls here and even men too... I think the media is probably the biggest subliminal squasher of girls (laughs) um in America. We really are bombarded all day long with these stereotypes of what a woman should be like and how successful you will be, if you follow this prototype (Sasha 2010:3).

For Sasha, the impact of the media remains a deeply personal issue related to her own sense of political subjectivity and agency. She maintains the media's message

of ideal beauty not only impacts her daily life, but also the ways that she comes to understand herself personally and politically.

I mean, I guess there are pressures to look good and be thin. I like to go to the gym a lot and my doorman, I remember he said to me, *'Why do you go to the gym? You are already thin.'* And I told him, *'I go to the gym to be strong!'* You know what I mean? There is, I mean I don't work out and take care of my body really for other people, which I think is – I mean, people just don't really get it. And like, the whole way that I dress, I don't really know what other people think but I am sure that they are judging it. Like, this one guy – I have this friend and he is obsessed with me wearing makeup, cause he thinks that I should wear makeup or something like that. And its like, I mean, its not like I am not wearing makeup because of political reasons, I just don't like it. But there is pressure on how I should look and I feel like all throughout high school, I realized that when I started to take care of myself more people were open to being my friend – that could be a high school thing, but that could also be a human thing I guess. I am sure there are plenty of studies out there that say that people respond better to more attractive people, um but – yeah, so I mean I take care of myself for myself and because it feels good, but also its just easier to get around and have people – I don't know its just easier socially. Well, it's harder and easier (Sasha 2010:4).

Debbie also identifies the issues of ideal beauty and thinness as particularly troubling concerns for Western girls; she connects these issues to the socio-cultural backlash against girls and women's empowerment.

I remember a friend of mine who came to me with a weight problem. She had a couple of other friends, who it was easier for them to have boyfriends and all that, and she felt that she really couldn't fit in because of her weight. She just felt so self-conscious about it. I told her, *'You know, in Africa the bigger you are the better it is!'* And she just seemed to feel great about herself that day (laughs) just from that little bit I was telling her. She is one of my closest friends today and I just remember telling her that it is not about your weight. I said, I think the reason you feel so out of that circle is because you are so different from them. Your heart is so good and you are so different from who they are. You have a great capacity to love people and to be there for people and to give to people. These are the things I think she should concentrate on, not your weight so much. That takes a lot of energy out of you to think *'I am so fat'* and you could be doing so many other things (Debbie 2010:18).

Debbie also expresses great concern for the ways that media celebrities serve as some of the few role models made available to girls. She argues the recent media coverage of Rhianna and Chris Brown's relationship promoted a dangerous message about dating violence and domestic abuse, which in the end, left girls *wanting* and in need of other possibilities for personal empowerment.

I am sitting here talking about how girls should know about their rights and how they should stand up to earn their respect and no matter how small – it begins with the small things... I mean coming back to modern times, it is like the Rhianna and Chris Brown situation when he hit her. And I just thought, it must have been built up and I highly doubt that was the first time and of course, it wasn't the first time. I think it starts with the small ones and I think as hard as it can be to say, 'No' when your heart wants it so much. But I remember listening to the Rhianna interview and knowing, you know what – that could have been me. I mean, I think it is very easy to say, 'Oh, she probably provoked it' like most of my friends were saying that somehow she provoked that. And I just felt so angry that they would even say something like that – no one deserves that. You know what I mean? It is not even that she is my favorite singer or anything, I am just saying that no one deserves that. He did not have to do that and I think that it has happened to so many girls and we don't know about it. But because Rhianna is famous that is why we are seeing it all over the news. But a girl as we are speaking right now is going through the same thing and what is she going to do, but go back to him when we don't give her any other choices (Debbie 2010:17).

Because media permeates almost every aspect of Western girls' daily lives, Hannah advocates expanding Section L in the Beijing Platform for Action to better account for the ways that media shapes girls' everyday experiences. During her time at CSW 54, Hannah advanced this platform by collaborating with other youth delegates interested in (re)framing the girls' rights agenda. She comments on the importance of the media in her discussion of the CSW 54 Girls Statement,

I think there were a lot of things included that were specifically for girls, like the media section on it was really important because that is kind of a new issue, especially that really affects girls. I think because it was really written by girls and it was issues that are important to us and are important to girls around the world who couldn't come to the CSW, it should be paid attention to... There was a section on the media in the Beijing Declaration, but it wasn't as big of a thing then as it is now, like the Internet and stuff like that. I noticed a lot about it especially in the girls and young women's caucus there has been a lot of discussion about ads and the Internet and um, social networking and how it is really different from when the Beijing Declaration was written, how it is really promoting like in the young women's caucus, we talked about the sexualization of girls and the pressure, social pressures of acting older at younger and younger ages (Hannah 2010:16-17).

At the same time, Hannah and Dona assert media also serves as a powerful tool for advancing girls' human rights and promoting girls' political participation.

It is important to collaborate with the media. The media is the one who can widely spread the news about girls and girls' rights. So when girls are being informed then they will feel very open to say their experiences and attend sessions like the CSW (Dona 2010:6).

I think there has been a lot of focus on the negative impact of the media and we also talked about using media as a tool because there are so many people on social networks, like facebook and myspace – it can really be used as a tool to promote women and girls’ rights if it is used in the right way because so many people have access to stuff like TV, Internet, and radio. It can be um, promote positive images of girls, but there are a lot of changes that have to be done because a lot of times girls are represented in a negative light. This is an issue that I have heard about mostly from younger women and girls; and I haven’t heard it talked about much in the plenary sessions or other things. I think it is definitely something girls talk about more and needs consideration (Hannah 2010:17).

It is my argument that the logic of the Girl Effect makes realizing human rights difficult for Western girls. However throughout this section, I have contrastingly revealed how CSW 54 girl delegates resisted the discursive limitations of the Girl Effect to identify girls’ human rights as *also* being about and for girls in Western countries. Girl delegates’ testimonies on mainstream media culture captured a unique and critical disruption to some of the more troubling aspects of the Girl Effect paradigm. CSW 54 girl delegates alternatively brought visibility to the importance of girls’ human rights in Western girls’ daily lives and in doing so, challenged their absence in the Girl Effect discourse.

Chapter Summary

This chapter investigated how girls mediated the political subjectivities made available to them through the Girl Effect paradigm. It explored the ways that CSW 54 girl delegates made sense of girls’ human rights and considered how the discursive (re)production of oppositional girlhoods informed what human rights were and were not imagined to be. I additionally examined the themes of representation and voice, impact of the media, and the structural limitations of age and gender – to draw attention to how CSW 54 girl delegates subverted the logic of the Girl Effect to claim political subjectivity and agency.

The following concluding chapter returns to the conceptual threads introduced at the start of this research project and ties them together with my research findings in order to consider what is and is not happening for girls as a result of the Girl Effect paradigm.

CONCLUSION

Mobilizing A Different Girl Effect

This research examined the construction of girls' political subjectivity and agency in the context of the Girl Effect paradigm. I explored how CSW 54 girl delegates navigated available subject positions to bring meaning to their political selves and girlhood(s). I also identified four disciplinary practices produced by the Girl Effect paradigm, namely: neoliberal girl power, oppositional girlhoods, the logic of missionary girl power, and absence of human rights. Based upon the complex ways that girls mobilized the Girl Effect discourse to *become* political subjects, this concluding chapter (re)examines what is and is not happening for girls as a result of the Girl Effect logic. In the end, I maintain that despite the Girl Effect's powerful 'invest in girls' message, this discursive paradigm fails to provide the necessary skills or language to realize girls' human rights. Rather, the Girl Effect at its best introduces girls to ideas of gender inequality and global injustice, while otherwise neglecting to engage in a more transformative approach to their political subjectivity and agency.

In this chapter, I therefore return to previous theorizations of *girl* as a political subject and consider how the Girl Effect paradigm contributes to these initial considerations. I suggest that by taking seriously the voices of CSW girl delegates, we gain a better understanding of how this discourse works to regulate girls' political selves – and in turn, also how to more successfully direct the Girl Effect logic to produce a *different* kind of Girl Effect message. According to Dentith (2004), poststructuralist feminist analysis “can lead to the negotiation of new spaces between binary opposites that become central to one’s understanding of identity, subjectivity, and position” (p.469). Toward this end, I ask: how might the Girl Effect message be used to support girls' political participation or to build global solidarity amongst girls? How can it inspire more complex understandings of the ways that gender and age inform girls' political status? And in what ways, can the Girl Effect paradigm be made accountable to the transformative possibilities of girls' human rights?

8.1: The Structural Limits of the Girl Effect Paradigm

The Girl Effect I have argued, problematically (re)inscribes colonialist power structures that position First and Third World girls in opposition to one another. This relational divide prompts Western girls to become agents of missionary girl power and to 'save' their so-called Third World sisters. I have similarly proposed the Girl Effect collapses girls' human rights with neoliberal economic power to position Western girls as subjects *with* rights and non-Western girls as those *without* rights. As a result, I maintain the Girl Effect paradigm provides very little from which to challenge the structural injustices created by age and gender. It is in this way, the Girl Effect obscures the language and practice of human rights discourses to limit the forms and possibilities for girls' political subjectivity and agency.

Girls' experiences as delegates to CSW 54 highlights the failure of the Girl Effect to deliver on the promise of neoliberal political empowerment. Despite Western girls

identification as powerful change agents, the delegates nevertheless struggled with the institutional constraints produced by age and gender. Their testimonies offer an account of how generational disadvantage and political marginalization cannot be addressed by neoliberal girl power alone.

Taft (2010) asserts, the normative approach to girls' political participation tends to "isolate girls from the public sphere by maintaining both individualist and protectionist discourses and program practices" that leave girls underprepared for engaging in social change projects (p.22). The Girl Effect offers similarly narrow definitions of girls' political subjectivity - whether depicted as powerful agents of missionary girl power or *potential* political subjects, the Girl Effect paradigm fails to equip girls with any concrete strategies to address the structural inequalities that shape their everyday lives. The Girl Effect logic rather erases human rights discourse to singularly promote neoliberal girl power as *the* solution to gender inequality. Because the Girl Effect marks human rights unnecessary or at best based in girls' economic potentials, the girl delegates in this study lacked the political language from which to confront structural disadvantages encountered throughout CSW 54 meetings. Indeed, girl delegates evoked a fairly normative understanding of girls' political selves and in doing so, foreclosed the possibilities of a more transformative approach to girls' political empowerment.

Girl delegates' testimonies also reveal the problematic production of oppositional girlhoods, where they imagined *other* girls' lives to be dominated by violence and discrimination. This singular image of the vulnerable Third World girl, I propose caused a sort of arrested political development for First World girl delegates. They reported feeling paralyzed and exceedingly grateful for the opportunities granted in their own lives. In addition, girls grappled with the relational consequences of their presumed differences from *other* girls, often finding it difficult to move beyond the colonized image of Third World girlhood. It is in this way, the fictitious 'girl' of the Girl Effect prompted girl delegates to lessen and in some cases, dismiss their own experiences of gender discrimination in order to advance *other* girls' human rights. Moreover, the lack of representational diversity during CSW 54 exacerbated the conceptual distances between First and Third World girlhoods - as North American delegates constructed themselves as advocates for *other* girls' human rights.

The thematic notion of a shared girlhood experience additionally stabilized the function of the Girl Effect paradigm in the delegates' testimonies. Girl delegates called upon rather traditional notions of femininity to establish their connection to *other* girls and to also legitimize their advocacy role during CSW 54. For some delegates, this shared girlhood experience afforded a more transformative understanding of girls' political subjectivity and agency - inspiring them to resist the colonizing logic of the empowered-victim dichotomy. They raised concerns related to girls' political representation at the Commission and the absence of *actual* Third World girls in the meetings. Yet because the Girl Effect paradigm collapses girls' human rights discourse, I want to suggest girl delegates had little choice but to (re)shape the Girl Effect narrative. In fact in the absence of girls' human rights discourse, CSW 54 girl delegates *had* to employ the Girl Effect logic if they were to address the experiential disadvantages of CSW 54. Therefore while it

is critical to acknowledge these particular moments of resistance, it is equally as important to recognize how the Girl Effect paradigm effectively limited the forms and possibilities for girls' political subjectivity in the first place. The Girl Effect was so omnipresent during CSW 54 that it would have been difficult for girl delegates *not* to engage in this discursive paradigm.

Taft (2010) asserts the transformative approach to girls' political participation encourages girls "to think systematically about the conditions of their lives and their communities and the intersecting forces of racism, sexism, classism and ageism (among others)" (p.23). Within this model, girls "develop their capacity as organic intellectuals" and they come to understand that their lives "are not isolated from the community and social forces, but shaped by them" (Taft 2010:12). In this study, I propose girl delegates' critiques of the media revealed an alternative set of human rights discourses than that, which is captured by the Girl Effect paradigm. Girl delegates rather moved beyond the Girl Effect paradigm to advocate for an expanded human rights agenda that included their concerns with the media. It was in these unique moments that girl delegates rejected their inscribed positioning to challenge the normative conditions of their everyday lives. The Girl Effect in this context operated as a starting point for girls to engage in more transformative and complex conversations about local-global inequalities. They critiqued what it meant to be a girl in North America and in turn, (re)framed the Girl Effect logic to accommodate an understanding of Western girlhood as more than empowered philanthro-teens. In this way, the theme of media facilitated the production of a *different* Girl Effect message – one where girl delegates mobilized other human rights discourses to claim their political subjectivities and agency.

Despite the delegates' critiques of the media however, I nevertheless maintain that the Girl Effect problematically constrains girls' human rights practice and in turn, girls' political selves. It overvalues the economic *potentials* of Third World girls and the philanthropic power of Western girlhood, while simultaneously reflecting very traditional approaches to girls as *potential* political subjects. I assert that these neoliberal conceptualizations do a great disservice to the girls' human rights movement and to girls themselves. For rather than advancing a holistic approach to *girl* as a political subject, the Girl Effect encourages girls to imagine individual economic power is the only effective human rights practice. This study offered an account of how a small group of girl delegates mobilized the Girl Effect discourse to experience themselves as political subjects. In the end, I contend it reveals how the Girl Effect paradigm restricts girls' human rights discourse and constructs a very limited set of possibilities for girls to *become* political subjects.

8.2: Final Thoughts and Considerations

One of the key limitations of this study is the relatively small and elite group of girls involved in the research project. Given a larger or less politically oriented subset of girls, the study would no doubt yield a different set of results. Future studies might therefore consider how girls from a variety of settings (particularly those in the Global South) interpret the Girl Effect paradigm. How might the Girl Effect function in the lives of Third World girls? What do girls in the Global South think about the Girl Effect message? How do they negotiate their subjective positioning within it? Similarly, what subjectivities are produced for poor girls

residing in the Global North or affluent girls in the Global South? What spaces are left for them in this discursive paradigm?

Additional research might explore the ways that NGOs and girls' organizations make use of the Girl Effect in their work with girls in the Global North and South. How do different groups define or employ the Girl Effect message? Is it used to engage girls in social justice movements? And if so, how is it used? Are these normative or transformative approaches to girls' political engagement? Studies of this nature, I suggest continuously speak to the participatory limits of the Girl Effect paradigm, capturing and challenging the participatory opportunities available to girls as a result of the 'invest in girls' message. Understanding how different groups of girls and adults engage the Girl Effect allows us to trace its discursive evolution. But is also allows us to explore how differently situated subjects bring meaning to their political selves through the Girl Effect logic.

This study focused on the regulatory effects of the first Girl Effect video, but it is also important to consider the narrative scope of the second video, *The Clock is Ticking*. How has the Girl Effect message changed since the first video? How has it been received in the mainstream human rights community? Does the new video offer greater or more limited forms of girls' political subjectivity and agency? In what ways, have the regulatory effects of the first video been addressed and/or (re)shaped in the next generation of the Girl Effect videos?

Previously, I have stated that I locate this research within the disciplinary field of girls' studies, but that it also contributes to human rights and children's rights research. Historically, girls' human rights have not fit easily into either the women's rights or children's rights agenda (Croll 2007, Taefi 2009). Despite overlapping interests and similar critiques of rights-based systems, feminist scholarship on children's rights remains conspicuously partial, while children's rights literature is equally as silent on their affinity of interests (Lim and Roche 2000, Olsen 1992, Raitt 2005). Children, Olsen (1992) asserts "have too often been used as hostages" against women's interests and as a result, women's rights groups view "legal protection(s) of children... as a [potential] basis for controlling women" (193). In this sense, the tensions between children's and women's rights require that to "recognize the rights of one group...mean[s] limiting the autonomy of another group" (Van Beuren 1995:757). This division, Taefi (2009) adds "makes it difficult to capture the lived experiences of [girls'] multiple oppressions" (p.345) because "the issues that effect girls are invariable eclipsed by larger concerns general to children or women" (p.347).

Given the historical friction between children's rights and women's rights, it is perhaps not surprising that the Girl Effect paradigm emerged as the primary girls' human rights discourse during CSW 54. The Girl Effect indeed soothes the tensions between girls' rights and women's rights by focusing on economic investments and individual girl empowerment without necessarily speaking to girls' human rights. This research project as such contributes to the ongoing debates surrounding girls' rights and women's rights, but it also challenges the overwhelming embrasure of the Girl Effect discourse within the mainstream women's rights movement.

It is my hope this dissertation marks the beginning of many more analyses of the Girl Effect and the ways that this contemporary discourse informs how we do and do not talk about girls as political subjects. For in the end, if we are serious about producing the *girl effect*, then girls' human rights need to be at the forefront of our conceptual and activist efforts – not only because it is in girls best interests, but because as Sasha (2010) boldly declares, “it’s in your best interests too” (p.20).

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APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE GIRL EFFECT
VIDEO UPLOADED MAY 24, 2008
WWW.GIRLEFFECT.ORG

The world is a mess. Poverty. AIDS. Hunger. War. So what else is new? What if there was an unexpected solution that could turn this sinking ship around? Would you even know it if you saw it? It's not the internet. It's not science. It's not the government. It's not money. It's (Dramatic Pause) A Girl.

Imagine a girl living in poverty. No, go ahead. Really, imagine her.

Girl. Flies. Baby. Husband. Hunger. HIV.

Now pretend that you can fix this picture.

(Removes Flies, Baby, Husband, Hunger, HIV).

Girl.

Ok. Now she has a chance. Let's put her in a school uniform. And see her get a loan to buy a cow and use the profits from the milk to help her family. Pretty soon, her cow becomes a herd. And she becomes the business owner who brings clean water to the village, which makes the men respect her good sense and invite her to the village council, where she convinces everyone that all girls are valuable. Soon, more girls have a chance and the village is thriving.

Village. Food. Peace. Lower HIV. Healthier Babies. Education. Commerce. Sanitation. Stability.

Which means the economy of the entire country improves and the whole world is better off. Are you following what's happening here?

Girl (arrow) School (arrow) Cows (arrow) \$ (arrow) Business (arrow) Clean H2O (arrow) Stronger Economy (arrow) Better World.

It's called the Girl Effect. Multiply that by 600 million girls in the developing world, and you've just changed the course of history.

Invest in a girl and she will do the rest.

It's no big deal. Just the future of humanity.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF COMMON TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| AGI | ADOLESCENT GIRLS INITIATIVE, WORLD BANK |
| BIAAG | BECAUSE I AM A GIRL, PLAN INTERNATIONAL |
| BPfA | BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION |
| CAG | COALITION FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS |
| CEDAW | CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN |
| CGI | CLINTON GLOBAL INITIATIVE |
| CRC | UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD |
| CSW OR COMMISSION | COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN |
| CSW 51 | 51 ST SESSION OF THE CSW, 2007 |
| CSW 52 | 52 ND SESSION OF THE CSW, 2008 |
| CSW 54 | 54 TH SESSION OF THE CSW, 2010 |
| ECOSOC | ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL AT THE UNITED NATIONS |
| GIF | GIRLS INTERNATIONAL FORUM, NEW MOON MAGAZINE |
| GLI | GIRLS LEARN INTERNATIONAL |
| GSUSA | GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA |
| INfG | INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR GIRLS |
| MCI | MEENA COMMUNICATION INITIATIVE |
| MDGs | MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS |
| NGO | NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION |
| NGO CSW | NGO COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN, NEW YORK |
| SECTION L | 12 TH AREA OF CRITICAL CONCERN, BPfA |
| UN | UNITED NATIONS |
| UNICEF | UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND |
| VCR | VOICE CENTERED RESEARCH |
| WGG | WORKING GROUP ON GIRLS, NGO COMMITTEE OF UNICEF |

APPENDIX C

COPY OF RESEARCH FORMS AND MATERIALS

INCLUDES:

- PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM
- PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMATION SHEET & CONSENT FORM
- TRANSLATOR CONFIDENTIALITY FORM
- NGO & MEMBER STATE RECRUITMENT LETTER
- COPY OF WGG WEBSITE POSTING FOR RECRUITMENT



National University of Ireland, Galway

Research Participation Invitation

January 2010

Dear CSW54 Girl Delegate:

You are invited to take part in a research study on girls' rights at the upcoming 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2010 at the United Nations.

The research project is titled, "What does it mean to be a girl with 'rights'? A conversation with UN CSW girl delegates about how they understand and experience rights in their everyday lives."

Before you decide if you would like to participate, it is important for you to know a little bit about the research and what you can expect if you join the study. This information sheet will tell you everything you need to know about the project, but if there is anything that you do not understand, I will be happy to explain it to you. Take as much time as you need to read this sheet and think about whether or not you want to participate in the girls' rights study. If you decide that you want to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form, which confirms your interest in joining the study. Additionally, if you are under the age of 16 years, your parent(s) or guardian(s) will need to sign a consent form.

All consent form(s) should be returned to me before you join the study.

Thank you for reading about this project.

Sincerely,

Emily Bent

Doctoral Student, Global Women's Studies Programme, NUI Galway

Email: e.bent1@nuigalway.ie

All About the Study

* **Why are you doing this research? And why do you want me to join?**

This purpose of this study is to find out what rights mean to girls in their everyday lives. How do girls speak and think about their rights? When do they use and not use their rights?

I am interested in talking to adolescent and teen girls between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. You have been asked to join the study because I want to hear your thoughts and opinions on girls' rights.

You have also been asked to join the study because you are going to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March 2010, which is where this research will take place.

* **What would my part be in the study? And how long would it last?**

All of the research session will be scheduled during the CSW (beginning February 27th and ending March 5th). If you choose to take part in the study, you will be expected to take part in a group interview with three or four other girls from the study. We will meet as a group to talk about girls' rights for 1.5 to 2 hours.

A few girls will be invited to meet with me (the researcher) to talk a bit more about their thoughts on girls' rights. We will meet twice during CSW54 for 1 hour. These interviews will be scheduled with you in advance.

If you decide to join the study, you can expect that your part will last for 2 hours (if you only participate in the group meeting) or up to 5 hours (if you take part in both the group and individual meetings).

* **How will you remember everything that we talk about in the study?**

All of the research sessions will be audio recorded (i.e. voice recorded) during the CSW. Once the CSW is over, I will write down, word for word, what has been recorded on the audiotapes. No names or identifying information will be included in this process, so that your part in the study remains confidential and anonymous.

* **How do I join the study?**

To join the study, you need to fill out the **Participant Consent Form**, which confirms that you're interested in joining the study and that you know what

you have to do to participate. If you are under the age of 16 years, you will need to get permission from your parent(s) or guardian(s) to join the study and they will need to fill out the **Parental/Guardian Consent Form**. These forms should be returned to me before the start of the study.

All of the study participants will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed copy of the consent forms to keep.

* **Do I have to take part in this research? What if I change my mind during the study?**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this research. If you do decide to join the study, you will keep this information sheet and be reminded to sign the **Participant Consent Form**. Your parent(s) or guardian(s) will also need to sign the **Parental/Guardian Consent Form** for you to be able to participate if you are under the age of 16 years. If you decide to join the study and later change your mind, you are able to remove yourself from the research at any time. You will never be asked to give a reason for not participating and you will not be penalized in any way.

* **What are the benefits of joining this study?**

All of the girls who participate in this study have the opportunity to meet and speak with other girls from different parts of the world attending the CSW. You will get to learn about each other's lives and talk about your own. Girls in the study will see what it is like to be interviewed and will have the opportunity to voice their opinions about girls' rights. Plus, it will be fun!

* **What are the risks of taking part in this research?**

This study includes discussions about various aspects of girls' lives, both present, past and future. There may be some sensitive and/or difficult topics brought up, such as experiences with abuse, violence, neglect or physical, mental or emotional harm. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the study or you do not want to talk about a particular topic, you can excuse yourself from answering the question or the session. You do not have to talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable. If you would like to speak with someone about any of the topics brought up during the study, I will be happy to get someone for you.

Any information that you share during the study will be kept confidential and anonymous. You are free to say whatever you think or feel and the researcher will not share your responses with your parent(s) or guardian(s), friends, or family.

If you share information that indicates a significant risk to either your or someone else's safety, health or wellbeing, the researcher is obligated to take steps to prevent future harm from occurring.

* **What do you do with all of the information that is collected during the study? What happens at the end of the research?**

All of the information that is collected during the study will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. The information collected during the interviews, talks, and meetings that we have together will be stored in a way that prevents anyone from knowing your identity. It will be necessary for me to discuss my research with my supervisor; however, I will not reveal your name in these meetings. Any publications of this study will be reported anonymously, so that you will not be identified in any way.

All of the girls who participated in the study will be contacted after the research is complete, so that they can see the published results. The anticipated publishing date for the study is 2011.

The voice recordings will be typed-up for ease in research and the originals will be securely stored for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed.

* **Who should I talk to if I have questions or need more information about the study?**

If you have any additional questions about this study, you can contact me by email at: e.bent1@nuigalway.ie

Emily Bent
Doctoral Student, Global Women's Studies Programme

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may also contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

Thank you for reading and thinking about this study. I hope to meet you in March 2010 at the CSW!



Participant Consent Form

Study Title: What does it mean to be a girl with 'rights'? A conversation with UN CSW girl delegates about how they understand and experience rights in their everyday lives

Researcher: Emily Bent, Doctoral Student, Global Women's Studies Programme

Name: _____ Date: _____

Birthday: _____

Where are you from? _____

Who are you at the CSW with? Organization Government Individual

What is the name of the organization, government or individual that you came with?

Please read each line and write your initials to show that you have read them*

1. I have read about this study and have had the chance to ask questions about it. _____

2. I know what the study is about and my part in it. I have had the chance to think about whether I want to join the study. _____

3. I would like to join the study. I know that I can leave the study whenever I want to and I do not need to give a reason for stopping. _____

4. I understand that my voice will be recorded on tape during the study. _____

5. I know that the researcher will not use my real name when she talks or writes about the study. _____

6. I will do my best not to talk about the other girls' stories with people that are not in the study. If I do talk about the girls' stories, I will not use anyone's real name. I promise not to post anything from the study online (facebook, twitter, blogs, etc.). _____

Name of Participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature

1 for participant; 1 for researcher; 1 to be kept with research notes

Participant Identification Number: _____



National University of Ireland, Galway
Research Participation Invitation – Parent/Guardian

January 2010

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your daughter has been invited to take part in a research study on girls' rights at the upcoming 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2010 at the United Nations.

The research project is titled, "What does it mean to be a girl with 'rights'? A conversation with UN CSW girl delegates about how they understand and experience rights in their everyday lives."

Before you decide if you would allow her to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This information sheet will tell you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to your child taking part and she is under the age of 16 years, I would ask you to sign the **Parent/Guardian Consent Form**. If there is anything that you are not clear about, I will be happy to explain to it to you. Please take as much time as you need to read the information sheet. You should only consent to your daughter's participation in this research study when you feel that you understand what is being asked of her and have had enough time to think about your decision.

If you and your daughter consent to her participation in this study, I would request that both consent forms be returned to me before she attends the CSW.

Thank you for reading about this project.

Sincerely,

Emily Bent
Doctoral Student, Global Women's Studies Programme
National University of Ireland, Galway
Email: e.bent1@nuigalway.ie

Study Information Sheet

* **What is the purpose of your research? And why do you want my daughter to participate?**

This purpose of this study is to explore what rights mean to girls in their everyday lives. How do girls speak and think about their rights? When do they use and not use their rights? In particular, I am interested in talking with adolescent and teen girls between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. Your daughter has been asked to join the study because I want to hear her thoughts and opinions on girls' rights. Additionally, she is attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March 2010, which is where the study will take place.

* **What would her part be in the study? And how long would it last?**

All of the research sessions will be conducted during the first week of the CSW54, beginning February 27th and concluding March 5th. Each participant will take part in a group interview session with three or four other girls from the study. This group interview will be conducted for 1.5 to 2 hours with myself (the researcher).

A few girls will also be invited to meet with me individually to discuss their thoughts on girls' rights in length. Those selected for this part of the study will meet with me twice during CSW54 for approximately 1 hour each session. These interviews will be scheduled in advance with each girl.

If your daughter decides to join the study, she must take part in the group session and will have the option to participate in the individual interviews. In total, you can expect that her participation can range from 2 to 5 hours.

* **How will you record the information gathered from the study?**

All of the research sessions will be audio recorded (i.e. voice recorded) during the CSW. Once the CSW is over, I will personally transcribe all of the information. No names or identifying information will be included in this process, and your daughter's participation will remain strictly confidential and anonymous.

* **What does she need to do to join the study?**

To join the study, your daughter will need to fill out the **Participant Consent Form**, which confirms that she is interested in joining the study and understands her role in the research. If she is under the age of 16 years, you will need to complete the **Parental/Guardian Consent Form**. These forms should be returned to me before the start of the CSW.

All of the study participants will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed copy of the consent forms to keep for future reference.

* **Does she have to take part in this research? What if I do not consent to her participation? And what if she changes her mind during the study?**

It is up to you and your daughter to decide whether she should take part in this research. If you do not consent to her participation and she is under age 16 years, then she will not take part in the study. If she is 16 years of age or above, then she can freely consent to her participation in the research. If she decides to take part in the study, she is free to

withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. She will not be penalized in any way for withdrawing from the study.

* **What are the benefits of joining this study?**

All of the girls who participate in this study have the opportunity to meet and speak with other girls from different parts of the world attending the CSW. She will get to learn about other girls' lives and talk about her own. In addition, all of the girls in the study will develop interview and public speaking skills, as well as gain the experience of being interviewed. Participating in this research may also make her experience at CSW54 more memorable and fun!

* **What are the risks associated with her taking part in this research?**

This study includes discussions about various aspects of girls' lives, both present, past and future. There may be some sensitive and/or difficult topics brought up, such as experiences with abuse, violence, neglect or physical, mental or emotional harm. If she feels uncomfortable at any point during the study or does not want to talk about a particular topic, she can excuse herself from answering any questions or withdraw from the session. She does not have to talk about anything that makes her uncomfortable or distressed. If she finds that she would like to speak with someone about any of the topics brought up during the study, I will be happy to recommend someone. Additionally, should your child (or any child in the study) disclose information that indicates significant risk of harm to either herself or others, the researcher is obligated to break confidence and take steps to prevent harm.

* **What do you do with all of the information that is collected during the study? What happens at the end of the research?**

All of the information that is collected during the study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. The information collected during the interviews, talks, and meetings that the participants and I have together will be stored in a way that prevents anyone from knowing your daughter's identity. The voice recordings will be transcribed for analysis and the originals will be securely stored for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed. Additionally, the results from the research will be reported anonymously, so that your daughter will not be identified in any way. It will be necessary for me to discuss my research findings with my supervisor; however, your child's identity will not be revealed during this process.

All of the girls who participated in the study will be contacted after the research is complete, so that they can see the published results. The anticipated publishing date for the study is 2011.

* **Who should I talk to if I have questions or need more information about the study?**

If you have any additional questions about this study, you can contact me by email at: e.bent1@nuigalway.ie

Emily Bent
Doctoral Student, Global Women's Studies Programme
National University of Ireland, Galway

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent and in confidence, you may also contact the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics

1/17/10, Version 3

Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway,
ethics@nuigalway.ie.

**Thank you for reading about this study and considering your daughter's participation.
I hope to meet her in March 2010 at the CSW!**



National University of Ireland, Galway

Participant Identification Number:

Parental/Guardian Consent Form

(Necessary for all participants under the age of 16 years)

Title of Project: What does it mean to be a girl with 'rights'? A conversation with UN CSW girl delegates about how they understand and experience rights in their everyday lives

Researcher: Emily Bent, Doctoral Candidate, Global Women's Studies Programme

Please read each statement and initial each line*

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated December 2009 and have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding my child's involvement. _____
2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information. _____
3. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that she is free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any penalties. _____
4. I agree to my child's participation in the above study and understand that her participation will be audio taped. _____
5. I understand that my child's participation and her identification information will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous in any publications or public use of this data. _____

Name of Parent/Guardian

Date

Signature

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

1 for parent/guardian; 1 for researcher; 1 to be kept with research notes



National University of Ireland, Galway

Participant Identification Number:

Translator Confidentiality Form

Title of Project: What does it mean to be a girl with 'rights'? A conversation with UN CSW girl delegates about how they understand and experience rights in their everyday lives

Researcher: Emily Bent

Please read each statement and initial each line*

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated February 2010 and have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding my involvement.

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information.

3. I understand my role in the study and consent to my translation's being audio taped.

4. I agree to maintain the confidentiality of all participants in the above study.

Name of Translator

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

1 for participant; 1 for researcher; 1 to be kept with research notes



National University of Ireland, Galway

September 1, 2009

NGO/State/Organization
Contact
Address
City, State ZIP
Country

Dear NGO/State and/or Contact:

I am writing to inform you of a research study on girls' rights taking place during the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2010. The research is titled, "What does it mean to be a girl with 'rights'?: A conversation with UN CSW girl delegates about how they understand and experience rights in their everyday lives." The purpose of this research is to speak directly with girls about how they define, articulate and negotiate rights, while simultaneously exploring girls' political subjectivity. All of the data gathered during this study will inform my doctoral dissertation in Global Women's Studies at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

In order to undergo this research, I am interested in identifying 6 – 10 adolescent girls and teens between the ages of 12 -18 years attending the upcoming CSW54. Selected participants would attend three research sessions during CSW54 including, a peer-to-peer interview, focus group and individual interview. The total amount of participation time required for this study is five hours. Participation in the study is voluntary and all data collected will remain anonymous and confidential. Participants will be asked to sign a consent form to take part in the study and if the participant is under the age of 16 years, her parent(s) or guardian(s) will be asked to sign a consent form as well.

If your NGO/State/Organization is intending to sponsor a girl to attend CSW54 and she meets the above requirements, I would appreciate your assistance in informing her of the study. I am happy to provide copies of the enclosed participant information sheets and consent forms, along with a self-addressed and posted envelope for any interested parties. Additionally, should your NGO/State/Organization require further information on the study, I can be contacted via email at e.bentl@nuigalway.ie or phone at +353 085 1500147.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this research. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Best regards,

Emily Bent
Doctoral Student and Galway Fellow
Global Women's Studies Programme, NUIG
e.bentl@nuigalway.ie
+353 085 1500147



National University of Ireland, Galway

Recruitment Web Postings*

*WGG website and Facebook page

Posting Title: Invitation for Girls Attending CSW54 to Participate in Study on Girls' Rights!

Are you a girl between the ages of 12 and 18 years who is attending the upcoming 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2010? If so, then you are eligible to participate in an exciting study on girls' rights at CSW54!

The study is titled, "What does it mean to be a girl with 'rights'? A conversation with UN CSW girl delegates about how they understand and experience rights in their everyday lives." The purpose of this research is to speak with girls about what rights mean to them and to explore how having rights impacts girls' everyday lives.

To join the study, you must be attending CSW54, be between the ages of 12-18 years, and of course, be a girl! Each participant is expected to attend 3 research sessions during CSW54 including, a peer-to-peer interview (where girls in the study interview one another), a focus group with all the girls in the study, and an individual interview. Participation is voluntary and any information collected during the sessions will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. A maximum of ten girls will be selected for this research.

If you are interested in joining the study or finding out more information, please contact Emily Bent at: e.bent1@nuigalway.ie.

APPENDIX D

COPY OF FIELDWORK QUESTIONS

Round One: 60 MinutesBroad Starter Question (alternate between No. 1 and No.2)

1. Think about how you came to CSW54; can you tell me about what led to your decision to come to the CSW?
2. Think about when you first realized that you or girls had rights? Tell me about that experience.

Follow-Up

- a. What influence(s) has this experience had on you today?
- b. What role did others play in this experience?

Main Research Questions

1. What do you think it means for girls to have human rights?
 - a. Follow-Up
 - i. Are there similarities and differences between girls' human rights and women's human rights? Can you describe some of them?
2. When are girls able to enjoy having rights? What does this look or feel like?
 - a. Prompts
 - i. At home
 - ii. With friends
 - iii. In the community
 - iv. At school
 - v. In church or religious institutions
 - vi. In home country
 - vii. Globally
3. What about when girls are not able to enjoy having human rights? When does this happen and what does it look or feel like?
 - a. Follow up
 - i. What prevents girls from enjoying their rights?
 - ii. Who is responsible for making sure that girls are able to enjoy having human rights?

Round Two: 60 MinutesBroad Starter Question:

1. What have you been doing at CSW54? What are your favorite and least favorite sessions?

Main Research Questions No.1: (alternate between No.1 and No.2)

1. Follow-Up question from Round One interview re: particular experience or discussion.
2. What do you like most and least about being a girl?
 - a. Follow-Up
 - i. Can you give me an example of when you felt you were treated unfairly because you are a girl?
 - ii. When do you think girls are treated fairly?

3. When is it most difficult for girls to be respected?
 - a. Follow-Up
 - i. Can you think of a time when you felt respected? What happened?
4. If you could give one message to all of the UN Delegates at CSW54, what would it be and why?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

Main Research Questions No.2:

1. Follow-Up question from Round One interview re: particular experience or discussion.
2. What do you think girls need in their everyday lives to feel safe and secure?
 - a. Follow-Up
 - i. When and where do girls feel most unsafe?
 - ii. Where and who do they go to if they need help?
3. Can you give me an example of a time when you felt that what you had to say mattered?
 - a. Follow-Up
 - i. What about a time when you felt you were not being listened to or heard?
 - ii. Who listens to what you have to say? Who does not listen?
4. If you could give one message to all of the UN Delegates at CSW54, what would it be and why?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

APPENDIX E

COPY OF DATA CODING MATRIX

(Refined) Code Set

- * Girlhood Themes
 - Oppositional / Different
 - Victim
 - Empowerment
 - Similarities
- * Refinements
 - Type / Context
 - Normative
 - Transformative
 - Actors Involved
 - Facilitating
 - Obstructing

(Original) Code Set

- * Rights Experiences
 - Love
 - Respect
 - Solidarity
 - Status
- * Refinements
 - Location(s) / Sphere(s)
 - Actors Involved
 - Facilitating
 - Obstructing

APPENDIX F

APPENDIX F

PROFILE OF GSW 54 GIRL DELEGATES

| | Age | Sponsoring Organization | Country - Residence | Country - Origin | Ethnicity | Languages | Class | Family | Location | Education Level | Hobbies |
|---------|-----|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|----------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Andi | 14 | GSUSA | USA | USA | Caucasian | English | Upper Middle | Two-Parent | Suburban | College Soph | Artist |
| Ann | 17 | GSUSA | USA | USA | Caucasian | English | Middle | Two-Parent | Rural | 12 th Grade | Debate Team |
| Cecilia | 17 | Loretto | USA | USA | Afr. Amer. & Hispanic | English & Spanish | Working | Foster Syst. Recently Adopted | Urban | 10 th Grade | Art & Music |
| Debbie | 18 | The Grail | USA | Guinea | Guinean, 1 st Generation | English, French & African Tribal | Working | Single Mother (divorced) | Urban | 12 th Grade | School Clubs |
| Dona | 16 | PLAN | Philippines | Philippines | Filipino | English & Filipino | Middle | Two-Parent | Suburban | 12 th Grade | Art, Writing, Student Gov. |
| Elena | 17 | PLAN | Canada | Canada | Arab Canadian, 1 st Generat. | English & Iranian | Middle | Two-Parent | Urban | 11 th Grade | School Clubs |
| Hannah | 15 | GSUSA | USA | USA | Jewish American | English | Middle | Two-Parent | Suburban | 10 th Grade | Dance & Sports |
| Jessica | 14 | Loretto | USA | USA | Caucasian & Native Amer | English | Working | Divorced | Suburban | 9 th Grade | Artist |
| Marie | 16 | PLAN | Canada | China | Chinese Canadian, 1 st Generat. | English & Mandarin | Middle | Two-Parent | Urban | 11 th Grade | Music & Environmental Activism |
| Sasha | 18 | GLI | USA | USA | Jewish American | English & Spanish | Upper Middle | Two-Parent | Urban | 12 th Grade | Travel |
| Sophie | 16 | The Grail | Portugal | Portugal | Portuguese | Portuguese | Working | Shelter Living | Urban | 12 th Grade | Sports |

APPENDIX G

SAMPLES OF THESIS METHODOLOGIES: DISCURSIVE DECONSTRUCTION & VCR METHOD

Discursive Deconstruction: Frame and Textual Analysis

Visual Content:

- Girl alone on screen and then 3 word “flies” appear to swarm around her
- Baby then pushes against “Girl” and she shifts to background
- Girl is in bold orange, capital letters
- Flies & Baby are in bold, black letters (references to ‘darkness’ of Third World / colonial image) – stand out more on the screen
- White, blank background
- Music is very daunting and scary at this stage in video

Narrative: What is said?

- Learn that girls in poverty cannot escape pregnancy
- Poverty is represented by ‘flies’ – reference to Sally Struthers-esk ‘save the child’ commercials from the 80’s with flies in child’s eyes to help show how impoverished she is
 - Reflects/Brings up images of Third World poverty primarily
 - African girl springs to mind immediately – as the victim of patriarchy, early marriage, and abject poverty
- Linkage between girls and motherhood that shifts girls into the background of lives – not leading / telling their story – rather the issues of poverty dominate
- Music reflects her lack of agency / power

Hidden Narrative: What is not said?

- Who is “Girl”? Viewer creates her – just words on the screen, so don’t really know anything about her except that she has a baby and is pestered by flies
 - Girl changes based on the viewer, however, it seems with the flies that we are speaking to a Western audience (again with the Sally Struthers / rescue narrative) being recalled
- Not talking about poverty in ‘developed’ world
- Images of flies & baby recall colonized notions of the Global South, where girls / women do not have agency, rights, or power to change their situation – “Girl” is in a position of vulnerability & victimization
- Sequence begins the crushing of ‘girl’ by these larger than life terms, which reflect institutions, structures of power, and cultural norms – begin to see ‘girl’ become constrained by her culture with the flies & baby

Voice Centered Research: Method Tools

- Transcription Scan Copy (Pgs. 1 – 3) from Sample Interview
 - Illustrates the tracing of multiple-voices in the interview
 - Readings 1 through 4
 - Different colored pencils for each reading/context
 - Reading 1: See Narrative Analysis Worksheet
 - Reading 2: Orange – “I” Statements
 - Reading 3: Relationships (Pink – Facilitating; Brown – Constraining)
 - Reading 4: Broader Discourses (Blue – Girlhood; Green – Institutional/Structural)
- Narrative Analysis Worksheet (Pgs. 1 – 2)
 - Used alongside transcription tracing for Reading 1 to better capture the interview narrative and distinguish interviewee’s voice from my own voice
 - Sample from Interview
- Additional Notes: Concepts & Themes
 - Included select pieces from Readings 1 through 4 to illustrate thematic content pulled from VCR coding
 - Note: Average concepts/themes document for each interview ranged 20 – 25 pages or 8,000 – 10,000 words
 - Examples pulled from concepts document provides two to three themes from the original 25-page document.

1st & 2nd Interview
March 2010

- Relationships: Enabling
- Relationships: Constraining
- 9 Statements
- Girls & Disables
- Institutions: Facilitating

Opening Process: Reviewed Participant Consent Form; Data collected in the interview is anonymous and confidential (Pseudonym Chosen). Interview runs for 1 -1.5 hour and is audio-taped; Will discuss findings with Supervisor but will not reveal name; Questions, Comments or Concerns

I: Tell me a little bit about yourself.

PR: Uh, well I am in [redacted] and I want to go to university to study biomedical science because I want to become a dentist and [redacted] later on in life, so that I can help provide health care for everyone. I really like to read and I like to do advocacy stuff and fight for rights and make a difference. I am really involved in my school.

I: What kinds of things do you do there?

PR: Um, I am the Vice President of the [redacted] representative on the Student Council and um, I am on this [redacted] helping other's committee, so we help raise money for [redacted] and we supported a family in our community during Christmas time and, lots of other stuff. I am a prevent-mentor to grade 8 students at risk, who will be coming to my school next year and stuff like that.

I: So do you have any free time? (laughs)

PR: Um, yeah I am really busy and I volunteer too (laughs) so.

[Interruption [redacted] chaperone who was checking in and letting us know where she would be. Interview held in the lobby of the hotel at the end of the day.]

I: Sorry, quick distraction there. But, how did you get involved in the CSW?

PR: Well, I joined that [redacted] and they had, they were bringing 2 girls to this Commission on the status of Women and me [redacted] were selected to come.

I: Did you have to apply?

PR: Uh, we had to write a speech and we presented it at [redacted] meeting and everyone was there, there were like 15 girls and they picked me and [redacted].

I: Wow. What was your speech about?

PR: It was about why we wanted to go and kind of an answer so, I guess I made my case really well. (Laughs).

I: Do you remember some of the reasons why you wanted to come here?

PR: Well, one of the reasons was that um, I really wanted to advocate [redacted] and the [redacted] event. I also have a lot of experience with public speaking, so I guess that is what [redacted] and I really want to learn more about girls' rights and raise awareness on the issue when I go back.

I: Have you had a good experience so far at the CSW?

PR: Yeah, I didn't know anything about even Section L till I got here so (laughs).

I: So you are learning things along the way.

PR: Yeah. (Laughs and gets quiet).

I: Is there a time that you can think about when you realized that you or that girls had rights?

PR: Um, well the one that I have been mentioning a lot is mainly with sports at my school. They wouldn't let my friend make the football team because they said that girls can't play football. And even in my high school, there is no girls' football team there is like - kind of touch football, but not actual football. But it is getting better now, girls are now fighting for their rights in sports I think and also, the media like effects girls and I thought, hey this isn't right - its' wrong.

I: Did you get involved then in your school and try to fight against or help your friend?

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- "train"

Gender
C

PR: Um, well she kind of did it herself, she like lobbied and got her own flag-football team at least and was happy with that. But then, she kind of dropped it afterwards cause she got tired of it I guess. But yeah, like the media and stuff – you know like, I always tell everyone or as many people as I can that you know that is not how you are supposed to look like and it isn't right what they show you.

I: The extreme images that they have?

PR: Yeah.

I: Do you feel like here you have a good space to advocate for girls' rights?

PR: Um, yeah – especially at the event today. I think we hit a lot of people and really got the message out for having:

I: What other things are you doing to try to get the

PR: Well we go to a lot of fundraising events and events to speak. We get invited to go and other groups want us, so we share that we want a on September 22nd so, to sign the petition and we give out our fliers, so. And there is a commercial going around on TV now so, I think it is hitting a lot of people.

I: Oh cool. Have people asked you a lot about it at home?

PR: Uh, yeah. I have explained that we speak out on issues affecting girls globally and we want or we are advocating for them.

I: What kinds of things then do you think it means for girls to have rights in their everyday lives?

What do you imagine for them?

PR: I think its' more like, they realize that it can be gender equality and that girls should not be discriminated, that it is not normal to live this way. That girls shouldn't be the reason that – girls shouldn't be, that women shouldn't be the first one's laid off or the ones that don't get to go to education because the family can't afford it and the boys must go and the girls don't get to and they have to stay home and do domestic work. I think it will just level it all out and make it equal for everyone.

I: Do you feel like girls have equal rights from where you are from at this point?

PR: Um, I would say that um a lot of – like if I wanted to go study engineering, it would be really hard because that is for guys. Even in my school, like my physics class there is 3 girls or 2 girls in the physics class and the rest are boys. So, there is still like professions where girls aren't seen – like law school and stuff, so if you want to study politics – its no, that is a guy's kind of thing. So I think there is still a lot of gender inequality. But for myself, other than the media affecting me and like, cause I really don't play sports much (laughs) so I am just kind of like, okay. But yea, other than the media and seeing how poverty and education can affect girls, there is not much else.

I: Do you feel like you are treated equally in your school?

PR: Uh, yeah I think um a lot of – well some people don't know how to treat girls really, but most of the time yea – you are treated fairly.

I: What kinds of things are – well you mentioned that some people don't know how to treat girls fairly?

PR: Yeah, there are some people in my school who are a little bit egotistical and who think its' a man's world and that girls should be marginalized and are at the bottom of the kind of chain of society. They don't respect girls at all.

I: Are these peers or teachers?

PR: Uh, no they are peers. Yeah.

I: And guys or girls?

PR: Uh, they are guys, yeah.

I: So is there still a divide then?

PR: Yeah, some guys just think that they are all that still (Laughs).

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I: Some keep that for quite some time and take awhile to let that go! (Laughs) What do you then see, as if you could imagine a world where girls had rights completely – what would it look like to you?

PR: I think like, being kind of equal – it would be a perfect world I guess because there would be no discrimination. I think there would be less poverty and because each year that a girl stays in school, she gets 10 to 20% more income and a girl is 90% more likely to give her income to her family and men are less likely to do that. So I think, we would see a rise in people going to school and education wise, and girls would be empowered to study things um and do what they want to do really, so if they wanted to study mechanical engineering they would go study mechanical engineering regardless of whether they were a boy or a girl because there would be no difference between them. And if they wanted to play sports or dream about going to the Olympics, whether they were a girl or a guy, they would go.

I: So, it would be a complete gender equality then?

PR: Yeah.

I: Do you feel like, or what kinds of areas would you say girls' rights apply the most?

PR: Um...

I: Like with their friends, or in school or with their families or communities, where would you see it having the most impact?

PR: Um I think in the developing world, I think in families because the families will most likely put their boys first and they make girls do all the domestic work and they will say that because of the global recession, they make the girls stay home and work instead of go to school, whereas the boys will most likely still get the chance to go to school. Whereas the girls have to fetch the water and bring it back, so they are more subjected to harm when they go by themselves.

I: When you think of girls not having rights then, what does that look like?

PR: Um, it looks really bad. I think that um, it is kind of what is going on causes a lot of problems in society. So, like the economy can benefit if girls have rights whereas they don't, so you see like a country that isn't getting anywhere and they are still not developing because nothing has been changed from when they began. And I think that girls...there would be more poverty, um more girls uh that are affected by the media, so a lot of eating disorders or like, girls with low self-esteem and lacking education, so they don't have the tools to earn a living in the future or be successful.

I: Who do you think is responsible for making sure that girls have rights?

PR: I think everyone is really because girls' problems are everyone's problems, right? So, um girls are starting to take a stand - I know in the we are saying that we want our rights, we want equality between girls and boys. And it is not just us that needs to do it though, we need everyone to do it, cause everyone once knew a girl or knows a girl, so their problems can't be ignored and everyone needs to help because girls effect everyone's lives.

I: Do you feel that people are responsive here to hearing about what girls' need?

PR: Yeah definitely, at the event today I think it went really well and people got the message and were open to receiving it, because they are here for women anyways and we are just letting them know that those women were once girls, so in order to get to that stage, something needs to be done in the earlier stages.

I: Do you see any similarities between women's rights and girls' rights?

PR: Uh, yeah there are some similarities still regarding... because they kind of apply to each other in a way, so I guess like being discriminated by their ethnicity or being marginalized by their jobs would also affect both ways and also cause um, families too.

I: What are some of the differences that you see?

PR: Differences I think would be that because it is such an early age for girls, that they are easily subjected to the discrimination of being uh not allowed health care or they can't go to school for certain reasons like they don't have a birth registration or they can't, you know, they are lacking many opportunities at an early age so that kind of causes the downfall.

I: So is it the age factor that makes it more difficult?

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DATA ANALYSIS: READING ONE

| PLOT | READER-RESPONSE |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [redacted] wants to go to university for biomedical science to become a dentist; goal is to work for [redacted] enjoys reading & doing advocacy work for rights; wants to 'make a difference', involved in her school ([redacted] - raise funds & support families in the community, mentor for 8th grade students at risk who are coming to her school the next year); also volunteers in the community too - CSW: joined [redacted] & was selected to attend CSW; had to write a speech & present it at the [redacted] meeting (15 girls there) and they picked her & Marie; Speech was about why we wanted to go: wanted to take part in the [redacted] advocacy & the [redacted] events; has a lot of experience with public speaking which helped her get through the application process; wanted to learn more about girls' rights & then raise awareness on the issues when returns home - States that she didn't know anything about Section L till she got to CSW - Realized girls had rights when her friend in school was denied acceptance on football team in school because she is a girl; denial of girls' rights in sports made her recognize rights; also the ways that the media affects girls - sees as a rights issue; Wasn't involved in her friends fight for acceptance on the football team but watched her lobby - eventually she got her own team and dropped it cause she got tired of having to fight so hard to participate; But for [redacted] - thinks that the media has a huge role to play in obstructing girls' rights for the images portrayed & tries to speak with other people about these images - At CSW, feels it is a good space for advocating girls' rights; is happy with event for the [redacted] & thinks they got the message out that they wanted to; [redacted] she is invited to speak at different events about the Day of the Girl, passes out fliers; encourages people to sign their petition, goes to a lot of fundraisers; have a TV commercial about the day - so feels that with all of these avenues the message is getting out to people - sees herself as speaking out on issues affecting girls globally & that she is advocating for them | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Never heard of [redacted] and this is the first time that one of the girls had a specific career in mind which was encouraging; Interview was done at night in the hotel lobby so it was a bit difficult to conduct with any great depth, but compromises had to be made to be able to access the girls from [redacted] - Theme of 'making a difference' emerges again - following on the tail end of Girl Power/ Missionary or otherwise & supergirl syndrome - Deeply involved in poverty issues in her community & appears very stretched with time! Involved in so many different groups - clear Type A personality in many ways which again feeds into the girlhood narrative of power - Membership in [redacted] is central to her experience at CSW (somewhat mini celebrities in being asked to speak on larger panels; attend events; speak for the [redacted]) which resulted in a different experience than girls coming without established access to different people, events & it also gave them a bit more 'authority' in speaking; Also linked to the amount & type of information the girls received as 'training' prior to CSW - [redacted] says that she didn't even know about Section L or Beijing Platform before CSW, so clear agenda that the girls have been trained to speak to, which makes me question the 'voice' of [redacted] - Quick reference to being interviewed many times while at CSW. [redacted] but then also a struggle for me in that I felt that I needed to push a bit more to move the girls off of the script they were given or felt that they needed to say; well versed in media based interviews, so would give a good 1 line & then I had to probe a bit more to get at the content/context - Realization of girls rights came in school setting & the discrepancy re: girlfriend playing football (the girl later got a girls team, but at that point was exhausted from the fight & gave up - I think this is a fairly frequent reaction from those fighting for rights - take a little and then just give up) - First mention of the media & its impact on girls - which she relates to a rights based issue, I wish that I had asked her a bit more about this idea |

DATA ANALYSIS: READING ONE

| PLOT | READER-RESPONSE |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Girls having rights in everyday – is to realize gender equality and remove discrimination vs. girls, that there doesn't have to be discrimination or difference – girls don't have to live this way (where women are laid off first, don't get an education cause the family can't afford it, have to stay home & do domestic work) – to level things out and make it equal for everyone - Doesn't see gender discrimination as outside of the [redacted] context – still a lot of gender inequality, particularly when it comes to professions, sports & media; in school science classes are dominated by boys & very few girls in the class which extends to professional lives too; for her personally, the largest impact is the media as far as she sees it & then also interested / invested in how poverty & education affects girls - Does she feel treated equally at school – tentative yes, most people but still has problems with some peers (guys) who believe that it is a man's world & are egotistical, girls should be marginalized in society & they don't treat girls very well; Q: some guys just think that they are all that" (Peers/School/Gender) - World of Equality with Rights for Girls: Perfect world without discrimination; would be less poverty because girls would be educated (and girls tend to give income to her family more than boys/men do); rise in people going to school & girls would be empowered to go into professional fields that are normatively male or play sports- all spaces would be open to them - In developing world, sees rights as mostly played out in families because are more likely to send boys to school (especially during global recession) and then girls' rights are infringed upon with needing to stay home and do domestic work – also more vulnerable & subjected to harm when sent out to collect water - World without girls' rights – looks really bad & is kind of what is going on right now; economy can benefit from girls' rights – where a country can't really get anywhere without girls – "still not developing because nothing has been changed from when they began"; also more girls being effected by the media with more eating disorders, low self-esteem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [redacted] activities that she participates [redacted] – fundraisers, speaks at events, passes out fliers, gets people to sign the petition – traditional ways that organizations get governments to pay attention to them – I imagine it is a good skill for the girls to learn & reminds me of my work [redacted] the ways that girls were able to participate - See her participation as advocating for girls rights globally – speak for them – I wonder immediately about issues of colonial discourse, disconnection & whether this us vs. them context is maintained – but after her interview is complete, I think that she has a very strong sense of it not being a dichotomy & actually a well-grounded sense of her participation in the group - Rights for girls is framed in a fairly basic developed vs. developing world sense – gender equality being going to school, working out of the home – not based on issues in own context; so perhaps its an understanding of rights as basic & then moving to issues of discrimination / marginalization as different than at least having the right to health care or education - Tried to focus her on inequalities within own life – and she does, examining school subjects & professions as gender biased, sports poverty, & media but for her again – media is the main impacting factor because she doesn't play sports & dentistry isn't gendered (?) - Peers (boys) emerge as not necessarily treating girls with respect in schools all the time; again as with most of the girls interviews the centrality of peers & the space of the school is where rights are learned as gendered subjects, negotiated, and realized with re: power, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. - World where girls' had rights – focused again on education as being central to creating change (is the global narrative & CSW narrative for sure); cites some statistics on impact of education for girls & families (clearly 'trained' on stats); empowerment is focused on education/professional goals and that equality is achieved when girls are able to access these spaces in same ways as boys |

Further Notes Rights (Facilitated/Obstructed)

Reading 1: Further Notes from Plot, Characters, Themes & Emerging Concepts

Making a Difference

- Repeated theme for many of the girls in why they decided to come to CSW; seen as a space for action, part of the solution, having something to do
- Related to the Western narrative of privilege translating into helping the 'other'; for many this focus of making a difference is not necessarily about local/personal/western context but very much centered on the girl child discourse
- Also can easily be related to their sense of needing to 'do' something – 'supposed' to be doing something to create change, but what exactly that something is, difficult to navigate, articulate, understand – tied up in Girl Power narrative, Missionary in particular
- Equally as central to this sense of wanting to make a difference is the importance of having a 'solution' or task to do that helps the girls feel like they are actually involved; not enough to 'talk' or learn about the issue – want a hands on task (like █████ who enjoyed the volunteering aspect of her CSW participation much more than learning about rights – feeds into the girlhood/womanhood concept of being self-sacrificing & doing for others – feel more accomplished & central to the goal of advocating for girls' rights when have something practical & physical to do)

Supergirl / Type A Personality

- Links in again with notion of needing/wanting to make a difference – girl that is stretched all over the place & tries to be involved in everything; many of the girls selected to attend CSW are these types of girls – very academically driven, motivated & desire to be within adult/active spaces
- Recognize own privilege re: western girl, socioeconomically and almost feel 'guilty' about that privilege, so go into overkill mode to assist other girls rather than focus on issues of gender disparity within own lives
- Strong realization of own apathy or notions of taking rights / lives for granted, which ultimately ends up highlighting their privileges further & hiding the disadvantages – ways that gender inequality & rights are not fully realized within own lives

Reading 2: Representations of Self (Agency & Identity)

Activist/Do-er

- Actor with strong sense of agency in all the different groups/organizations that she belongs to and participates in; Identity centrally tied to 'making a difference' locally & globally; over-achieving aspect of self
- Identity as a self-taught activist for girls' rights; after experience in Iran, did own research, educated herself & got involved with █████ – self initiated, agency, identity (but initially admits to being rather ignorant of the realities of gender inequality globally – which is where she locates most of her peers too)

- Supported by parents (mother & father) who give her strength to continue on with her activist work; Mother in particular always wanted her to get involved in girls' rights work – but she resisted initially (typical teen behavior)! ; Sense of identity & connection to her parents, fully supported, loved, etc.
- Parents not constructed as 'pushy' but rather supportive & want her to pursue own dreams; in this description reinforces her sense as an independent thinker & actor in her own life (she wants to be a dentist, so took a coop – actively sought to gain experience, etc.) – full agent & identity as actor
- Describing her future again reinforces this strong sense of action / actor/agency in self – go getter in ensuring that she is successful & able to access her dreams; has many different things that she wants to accomplish, but is now actor in deciding the direction of her life
- Participation & identification with [REDACTED] helps reinforce her identity as activist/do-er/making a difference – they provide the spaces, but she is the speaker (agency & identity/ owns her message)
- Poverty advocate is another central aspect to her identity & as her first identity too – since initially was & still is very involved in context of poverty in her home (22% are low income)
- Sought out the experience of CSW – wanted to learn about girls & rights & have the experience directly, not just through books – again labels herself as active learner, seeks knowledge herself (agent), but also recognizes that age prevents her from knowledge in that with CSW, knew that no one would take the time to explain it to her (levels of authority and how they play out re: knowledge access)
- Identifies self as someone who wants to know about gender & rights but hasn't been given the opportunity; somewhat out of her hands or sense that unless have an inkling that you have rights how else would you learn about girls' rights or CSW, CRC – ways that knowledge can be obstructed, particularly for girls & young people is again about power and she recognizes that power dynamic between young people & adults

Girls/Girlhood

- Interconnected notion of self with girls / gender linkage – in [REDACTED] group to speak for girls, as a girl; gender interconnects her & sense of identity wrapped in her gender & agency as well
- Active/Actor in stating “we want our rights, we want boys & girls treated equally” – solidarity & status in this action, while then also a distance in talking about girls with no rights, problems, discrimination (doesn't understand herself to be one of those girls, but nonetheless equally as responsible like all society to advocate for girls' rights)
- Actor/Agency in participation in [REDACTED] event – sense of ownership in message about girls' rights
- Primarily invested in girls rights as the starting point for gender equality & ending discrimination vs. women as well; Notion that again, if girls go to school with health care & have opportunities that gender inequality falls by the wayside (obvious focus on developing world & sense of already having these things – but then have to question whether or not gender equality is

- possible just through rights? Again the issue is that gender equality is not adequately addressed as still an issue in the west too)
- Sense of comfort with the other girls at CSW – looks for them in the sessions; notion of solidarity in age; Understands herself as an agent with a strong voice & opinion as a girl & that people want to hear it
 - Age impacts ability to follow the ‘technical’ language of CSW; feels that it was difficult & that is why other girls may not seek participating in larger CSW sessions; fully owns this confusion! And her age as factor which prevents this knowledge/language fluency – instead is forced/able to rely on the adults who have sponsored them to ‘translate’ which again reinforces the adult-child power dynamic & prevents full participation; come to understand self as not an expert, not authority – when in fact, she feels that she is (challenge to her notion of self)
 - Critiques ways that people/peers and adults look at her sometimes as if she cannot accomplish something or doesn’t know what she is talking about; again reinforces her sense of identity as strong speaker, knowledgeable, able to accomplish things, do-er – powerful individual (Ex: is CSW where all the ‘experts’ on girls are talking and here ‘you’ are as a girl, what authority do you have – which may have been in fact one of her experiences at CSW, but works to remind herself of her own power, authority in speaking, voice, etc. – uses ‘you’ language in describing this experience, to distance herself perhaps from the active critique of CSW); Also links her experience as 8th grader running for student government & the ways that peers responded to her – voted for the boy & not her; she now understands/constructs as being about gender & popularity too
 - Distance in her identification / connection with girls in developing world – again speaks to the difficulty of moving beyond her struggles to see ‘her’; uses distance language of I and she – no longer we, as with the [REDACTED] Also represents herself as having privileges & taking them for granted (somewhat shamefully) and that knowing about other girls makes her open her eyes more
 - Distance in sense of being unsafe, insecure or not protected ([REDACTED] [REDACTED] – identifies safety issues with developing world & not her reality
 - Age negotiation – speaks about doing presentation about girls’ rights at her school but needs permission from principal, which she thinks she will get because has gotten the support of other teachers first (hierarchies, power, age dynamics) where she recognizes her own authority limitations and works with them to get what she wants (presentation)* - recurrent theme for understanding the context of girls’ rights & where/how they play out
 - Hopeful sense to her involvement in girls’ rights – wants to see change in her lifetime & feels that it is possible; again she understands herself as actively involved in movement for change – strong sense of agency & identity in that

Reading 3: Relationships Integral to Identity & Agency (Rights Obstruction/Facilitation)

Overall, █████ didn't go into much detail about the central relationships in her life, whereas other girls spent the entire time talking about relationships – this might be attributed to her being 'trained' or skilled in the interview process & so, providing more meta-narrative statements rather than content about own experiences

Girls Group

- Facilitating: access to CSW, opportunities to speak, learn fundraising & organizational skills, supportive network of other girls & professionals advocating & educating about girls' rights; Connection to other girls – Respect, Solidarity & Status via organizational membership
- Obstruction: █████ determines the information passed along to the girls re: their rights; didn't know about Beijing Platform, CRC, Section L – rather all the information about girls' lives came from their own reports, which have to question then how much they really are focused on advocating girls knowing & realizing rights if they don't know what those rights are
- Facilitating: sense of collective power & speaking as girls – want equality, want rights and that everyone should be involved in this struggle if they really care about advancing society: solidarity, status & respect
- Facilitating: able to explain & deconstruct the sessions the girls attend & explain what was being discussed or help them gain clarity; Age, Experience at CSW prevents the girls from fully understanding what is going on, so helps to have those adult mentors working with them
- Facilitating: sense of self-esteem & value of her voice is central to the organizational mission; able to speak more confidently in school & advocate for girls with adults & peers alike (from governmental spaces to fundraisers to peer groups in school)
- Facilitating: lots of skills development & sense of accomplishment with other girls in the group; collective notion of their work and that all are on the same page re: perspectives on girls' rights: Respect, Solidarity, Status

Peers

- Male - Obstructing: sense of girls as not able to do same things as boys; egotistical & assume that girls should be marginalized or at a lesser level in society; gender policing & hold on to gender stereotypes
- Male - Obstructing: experiences with debates where gender defines who appears more 'logical' or authoritative in sessions; again voice is ignored in favor for gendered notions of who debates better
- Female – Obstructing: in debates agreeing with her until boys speak – not necessarily a betrayal of gender, but this reinforcement of girls not being able to speak with authority – where girls reinforce it just as much as boys
- Female (Developing world) – strained relationship in that it is difficult to move beyond simplistic definitions or understanding them as defined by their struggles

CSW Women

- Facilitating: sees them as allies in struggle for girls rights because they too were once girls; if you are for advancing women's rights then need to start younger; sense of being heard & supported in their message for the ██████████ Respect, Solidarity & Status
- Facilitating: sense of being heard & being important/integral to the conversation about gender equality – pay attention when speak because they stand out due to age: Status, Respect
- Obstructing: at times get the sense that no one is really paying attention to what are saying because 'just a girl' and not an expert with a big title in front of your name – voice is ignored or looked at as if have nothing to offer to the conversation – denial of voice, authority & experience

Reading 4: Cultural Contexts & Social Structures – Facilitating / Constraining

Girlhood – Power/Empowered/Over-achieving

- Facilitating/Constraining: highly involved in various projects, after school groups, advocacy re: girls' rights, issues of poverty, mentorship to younger teens, volunteer work, drama, etc. – but also constrained with amount of work & as part of the girl power narrative, girls now need to be involved in everything – supergirl syndrome
- Lifelong plan of all the things that she wants to accomplish, but has recently tried to let herself just be as well – the intensity of the supergirl narrative doesn't leave much room for failure – just planning to do everything & then see what happens

Missionary Girl Power / Making a Difference

- Central to notions of advocating for girls' rights – focus on girls in developing world as in need/victims, while girls in west simply take things for granted, feel guilty for not being more aware of own rights, etc.
- Girls can & will success in making changes in world – but need adults to recognize this; narrative of empowerment when girls are given the opportunity to succeed
- Desire to see change within her lifetime & understands it as something that will occur soon – connects the power of technology with ensuring this change happens soon – countries can't 'hide' anymore because technology ensures all access to 'dirty laundry' but also connection between girls is also possible

Girl Child Narrative at UN

- Specific group which advocates for girls in developing world to be more visible in work of UN & international efforts; Recruit group of girls to be on the ██████████ to attend fundraisers, gain petition signings, speak on behalf of / for girls in non-west/developing world; Organizing the ██████████ as an advocacy campaign aimed at ██████████ to establish a day for girls
- A lot of funding that goes into this campaign (TV ads, fliers, report books, media outlets, interviews, websites, staffing), so the girls who represent ██████████ are deeply embedded within their mission & 'trained' to speak about

- vision; Example can be seen in [REDACTED] not being familiar with specific rights documents (Section L, CRC, etc.) but knowing statistics from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] – Constrained facilitation of rights – are able to access powerful spaces, feel important & be involved, speak on behalf of girls & advocate/make a difference – but again, it is the question of whether the girls are really doing anything other than reinforcing colonialized images & discourses of girls' rights as 'developing world' strategy & ultimately ignoring discrimination in own lives
- Stumbles a bit in describing focus of involvement – but lands on saying that they are speaking out about issues affecting girls globally & advocating for girls (i.e. from developing world) – certainly an ability to see rights facilitation happening, [REDACTED] & other girls from West (but also sense of constraint because their struggles / experiences of gender inequality are not part of the general conversation about advocating for girls' rights); Facilitation certainly happening in raising awareness & increasing focus / attention on some of the dire realities of girls' lives in developing world; however also constraining because the girls become defined by struggles or victimization (single identity based on image of victim/marginalization) and seemingly impossible to escape that image
 - Facilitating & Example of the Girl Power Narrative – favorite part about being a girl is knowing that she has the power to make a difference because she is a girl (almost a direct from the Girl Effect) but gives her sense of agency, rights, authority, voice & status
 - Training aspect is central to participation in organization – are the voice of the mission & also reflect that organization every time they speak for girls' rights (Reflects Girl power, missionary, girl child narratives) but also strong sense of collective strength with the other girls involved in the program – have similar interests, experiences & solidarity in efforts & goals
 - Frequent references to the government action on behalf of girls also reflection of the linkage to 'training' and the mission of girl group
 - Ability to rattle off statistics re: girls in the developing world – also clear link to training & perhaps particularly training for interviews
 - Clearly 'owned' the [REDACTED] workshop – instructing the girls on what to do re: monologues, but girls still have a sense of individual & collective ownership as well