A Girls' Eye View of Aggressive Adolescent Female Behaviour

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Abstract

This thesis challenges media claims that adolescent girls in New Zealand are becoming more aggressive and are therefore behaving like boys. Most early studies of aggression ignored girls entirely or presented them as a subset of boys. Although later studies did address issues around girls' aggressive behaviour, these were largely focused on adults' views of girls' relational or social aggression. This doctoral study therefore used a small case study to explore adolescent aggression from the perspective of six adolescent girls whose behaviour had been described by their schools as aggressive.

The girls' accounts of their experiences and beliefs about gender-specific aggression were gathered via a series of individual conversational interviews, and initially analysed through the theoretical perspective of role theory and psychological perspectives on aggression. However, as the study progressed, the limitations of that approach became apparent and the girls' transcripts were revisited via the lens of poststructural theory, using the tools of discourse analysis.

The study found that these girls' behaviours and beliefs did not fit the description of severe adolescent female aggression as described in the literature. Nor did the risk factors most commonly associated with aggression at adolescence appear to have affected them. Conversely, it would appear that their physicality influenced how they positioned themselves and how others positioned them; as "sporty girls", "tomboys", "loving daughters and siblings", or as "righteous aggressors". Their behaviours frequently challenged the dominant discourse of conventional schoolgirls. None of them thought that girls were becoming more aggressive and all stated that girls could behave how they wanted without being labelled de facto boys.

This study was limited in terms of the number of participants and the range of cultures represented, therefore no generalisations can be drawn from it. Nevertheless, it does have some important implications for policy makers and practitioners: particularly that interactions of culture, class and gender impact on the way that individuals constitute themselves and others. Interpretations of behaviour are determined by the discursive context and the experiences and belief systems of both "actor" and "audience".

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Ethics approval was granted by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. As the research also focused on and involved children, there were additional requirements under section 18 (p. 16) of the ethical code. This study was subsequently reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 06/22, 2006.

Contents

1. Introduction

In 2004, newspaper headlines in the *Dominion Post* declaring "Girls Going Bad" (2004) and "Alarm Over Rise in Violent Crimes by Young Women" (2004) rekindled my long-standing interest in and concern for girls at risk of developing seriously aggressive behaviour. At that time I was the behaviour service manager of the Ministry of Education's special education services in a large urban centre in New Zealand. The role of this team was to support students who experienced severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, and the teachers and whanau or caregivers of those students. Anecdotal evidence, supported by school referral records for the previous year, revealed an increase in the severity of the behaviour of female referrals and a decrease in the age at which the girls were being referred to these services in all regions of New Zealand. In October 2002, there had been a meeting[1] of professionals from a range of adolescent services – Child Adolescent and Family Services (Mental Health), Child Youth and Family Services, secondary school principals, Police Youth Aid, and the Ministry of Education special education services – to explore growing concerns around the behaviour of adolescent girls. All of these professionals had experienced an increase in the number of young women presenting with "unruly" behaviour. An additional concern was the trend for girls to be referred for behavioural support at a younger age, some still attending intermediate school; that is, at 11 and 12 years old. All of the representatives of the services who attended that information sharing meeting expressed frustration at the lack of information and specific strategies for the early identification and support of girls at risk of severe aggression at adolescence.

My concern about the lack of early intervention services for adolescent females who behave in violent or extremely aggressive ways was long-standing: in 1987, my Postgraduate Diploma of Special Education explored the effects of a programme of creative dance on the self-esteem of girls in a New Zealand remand home (Arnott, 1987); in 1992, my Master of Education (Arnott, 1992) focused on the educational needs of adolescent girls in a residential therapeutic community in London; and in

[1] Organised and hosted by the Ministry of Education's Wellington special education services.

1995, my Master of Business Administration (MBA) (Arnott, 1995) studies explored the inequalities of funding and support between boys and girls who experienced severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. These studies will be referred to in more detail in the next chapter and the MBA study is described in the next paragraph. Before 2000, there was little research literature available about aggressive adolescent females, despite the commonly held belief that such girls were far more difficult to work with than their male counterparts (Arnott & Martin, 1995; Grant, 1995).

While working at the residential centre in London, I was intrigued and disturbed by the fact that none of the girls had been identified as in need of emotional or educational support until they reached puberty, although many of them had been identified by the neighbourhood office of the local Social Services as maltreated infants and almost all of them had criminal records. The young women at the residential centre were all over 16 years of age and had received little or no formal secondary school education. In most cases, they had drifted out of secondary school or been excluded from secondary school for continual non-compliance (Malcolm & Haddock, 1992). All of the girls were past victims of sexual abuse and had adopted extremely aggressive behaviours towards others and themselves, including an ongoing history of self-harm, cutting of arms and legs, and abuse of alcohol, drugs and substances such as butane gas and aerosol propellant, and most had attempted suicide. All were highly sexualised, with many involved in prostitution. Many of these girls also had a history of court appearances for criminal activity such as robbery with violence. In a one-to-one situation, the girls were generally intelligent, personable individuals who bonded well with their “key workers”, and most gained good passes in the General Certificate of Education examinations; with one girl in particular gaining “A” level passes in English and art. By contrast, the young males in the centre had been receiving support and intervention since the age of 7 or 8 years and although they too had histories of neglect and maltreatment, they had been supported to remain within the education and social welfare systems since that time.

Following my work at the residential centre, I was appointed to the position of principal of a central London school for children who experienced severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. When I started at this school there were 43 boys aged from 8 to 15 years on the roll, and one 11-year-old girl. I again noticed the contrast between the behaviour of the girl when nurtured in a one-to-one situation and her

extreme aggression in class and in the playground. Concerned about the inequality of support and the apparent escalation of female violence, as referred to previously, I undertook qualitative MBA research which investigated the processes for identification, intervention and support for young women and the gender bias in resource allocation for such children. This involved semi-structured interviews with the local primary school principals, the principals of the three secondary schools in the borough that catered for girls, the local education authority special education inspector, the education welfare officer, representatives of the school health services, and several neighbourhood social workers. The questions that I asked were: of the children in your school or service whose behaviour causes you concern, what is the ratio of girls to boys? What differences do you notice between the behaviour of girls and boys? How do you support them to manage or change their behaviour? At what stage do you involve external support services for boys? For girls? What intervention services are available for boys? For girls? How effective do you find those services?

The main findings from this research were:

- Most of the children identified by their teachers as *having* [sic] emotional and behavioural difficulties behaved violently and most of these were boys.
- The allocation of resources between the sexes was consistently uneven, with boys receiving significantly more.
- Girls later identified as experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties were more likely to internalise their aggression – by acts of isolation or deliberate self-harm and were frequently overlooked or shuffled between services.
- Girls who did externalise their difficulties were more likely than boys to be excluded from school or to drift out of the system with no follow up.
- Girls' emotional and behavioural difficulties typically emerged at adolescence and the incidence of emotional disturbance; particularly depressive disorders continued to increase into adulthood and thus impacted on the next generation.

- Literature regarding emotional and behavioural difficulties has traditionally focused on the deviant behaviour of working class boys, with very little specific reference to girls. (Arnott & Martin, 1995, p. 3)

In 1995, as a London committee member of the Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (now Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association), I co-organised a conference for educational psychologists, mental health workers, and social workers from a number of inner London boroughs to discuss growing concerns about adolescent girls' behaviour. At this conference, I proposed that the historical focus on the physically overt behaviour of boys had led to a lack of understanding and intervention for girls at risk of developing seriously aggressive behaviour (Arnott & Martin, 1995). The proceedings, published by the Association (Rimmer, 1995), included papers from the other speakers: a prominent African Caribbean psychotherapist (Grant, 1995); a clinical psychologist and president of the Association (Bennathan, 1995); another head teacher of an inner London school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Steel, 1995); and the national team manager (special education) for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (Chorley, 1995).

Bennathan (1995) suggested that because girls tend not to behave in overtly aggressive ways at primary school, they do not attract teacher attention and consequently do not receive support when it is most likely to be effective. This opinion was echoed by all of the other speakers, whose papers emphasised the importance of early intervention for children at risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties and seemed to confirm Malcolm and Haddock's (1992) findings that boys "make trouble" for teachers and "get results" in terms of referral to support services (p. 1). The papers by Grant (1995), and Arnott and Martin (1995) all suggested that the aggressive behaviour of adolescent girls, particularly girls of African or Caribbean descent, was generally perceived by teachers to be more threatening and disruptive than that of adolescent boys. Chorley (1995) pointed out that support services were dominated by boys and she reminded the gathering that girls had a legal right to education until the age of 16. Papers by both Bennathan (1995) and Grant (1995) suggested that many of these girls become young mothers, lacking education and support, and many suffered ongoing problems of

poverty, domestic violence, depression and other mental health issues (see Rimmer, 1995).

On returning to New Zealand in 1998, I noted a growing public awareness of female aggression and my professional reading indicated that this concern was also evident in countries such as Canada (Pepler, 2003), Finland (Bjorkqvist, 1994), and the United States (Brown, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1997). Interest appeared to be driven by a growing perception that more girls were becoming more violent and this perception continues to be reinforced today by repeated reference in the daily news, on television, radio and in the newspapers (Brown, Burman, & Tisdall, 2001). The increasing perception of an escalation of aggressive behaviour by growing numbers of adolescent girls sparked something of a "moral panic"[2] among the middle classes (Ringrose, 2006) and spawned a rash of both academic and populist literature. Despite these concerns, it appeared that special education services and social services remained dominated by male referrals, and special schools, support centres and residential institutions were overwhelmingly populated by males (Goodkind, 2005; Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001). Thus, females who committed seriously aggressive behaviour at adolescence have generally not received any effective prior intervention while at primary school and tend to drift out of secondary schools with little or no support (Osler, Street, Lall, & Vincent, 2003).

The need for research

In common with researchers from a range of disciplines, including criminology, psychology and sociology, in a number of countries (see, for example, Brown et al., 2001, in Scotland; Leschied, Cummings, Van Brunschot, Cunningham, & Saunders, 2000, in Canada; Moffitt et al., 2001, in New Zealand; and Motz, 2008, in the United Kingdom), my previous studies have highlighted the lack of reliable historical data about girls and aggression. As will be illustrated in Chapter 2, many of these studies have suggested that bald statistics are unreliable and do not reflect the complexity of the issues that contribute to the perception of an increase in adolescent female aggression. In her study of girl gangs in Scotland, Batchelor (2001) suggested that the

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[2] This term will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

various media have had an enormous effect on the public perception of an increase in adolescent female aggression. Other contributing factors that will be explored throughout my study are: changes in (a) popular culture; (b) girls' developmental stages; and (c) in parenting behaviours. There have also been significant changes in societies' expectations of girls' behaviour and corresponding changes in the legal and judicial systems.

Both qualitative and quantitative studies such as Leschied et al. (2000), Moffitt et al. (2001), and Motz (2008) have indicated that the outcomes for girls who behave aggressively are likely to be poor, as are those of their offspring. Consistent with my earlier research findings, these writers suggested that girls who have behaved aggressively often miss out on formal education and become isolated from their peer group. They further suggested that such girls have an increased tendency to drift into intimate relationships with older, deviant males, have a potential to develop drug and alcohol-related problems, and are likely to continue the intergenerational cycle of aggression within the family or "behind closed doors" (Motz, 2008; Pepler, Moore, Motz, & Leslie, 2002). Early intervention for both boys and girls has been found to be far more cost effective than managing the effects of aggression at a later stage (Chorley, 1995), but despite an increase in research literature, there remained a lack of understanding of the social contexts for female aggression, especially at a local school and community level where such girls are either ignored or demonised (Pate, 2002). Further research in the New Zealand context was therefore needed to inform parents, educators and other agencies about the risk factors and interventions that are particularly relevant to girls. All of these issues are explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Research focus

Most of the research about girls and aggression has been based on quantitative data analysed and interpreted by adult academics (Brown, et al., 2001; Carroll-Lind, 2006; Pepler, 2003). Several studies in North America, Britain and Australia, particularly from the field of criminology (see, for example, and Batchelor, Burman, & Brown, 2001; Chesney-Lind, 1997) have explored the views of girls involved in aggressive behaviour; however, there is a shortage of such first-hand data in New Zealand. As has been noted and will be further illustrated in the next chapter, most studies of

aggression have been concerned with the behaviour of boys or have sought to find differences between male and female aggression. Thus, most of the interventions are based on an understanding of boys' aggression.

Girls who are "loud, loutish, often drunk and disorderly, out of control and looking for fights" (Chesney-Lind, 1997, p. 125) are increasingly presented by the media as a new source of the "youth problem", yet rather than seek to understand the phenomenon, media reports portray these young women in highly gendered ways, where their sexuality and lack of femininity are emphasised. They are frequently described as ladettes or blokettes and their behaviour interpreted as a function of masculinity or a lack of femininity (Ringrose, 2006). An understanding of the social contexts for adolescent female aggression must be informed by the understandings of the adolescent female participants (Batchelor et al., 2001).

This doctoral study thus set out to offer insights from the perspectives of adolescent girls in New Zealand (who had been identified by their schools as displaying aggressive behaviour) in regard to the following questions:

- Did a selected group of adolescent girls, whose behaviour had been identified by others as aggressive, think that girls generally were becoming more aggressive and if so, what might have contributed to this?
- In this context, how did the participating girls interpret "proper" adolescent girl behaviour and "proper" adolescent boy behaviour?
- How did they view themselves and their own behaviour in relation to these issues?

Through a series of individual, video-recorded conversations, the study thus explored the thoughts and feelings of a small group of adolescent girls about how they felt about having been identified by their schools as aggressive. What had they done that could be described as aggressive? What did "aggressive" mean to them? Under what circumstances did they justify aggression? How did they think girls should behave? How did they think boys should behave? What did it mean to them if people said girls are behaving like boys? This study set out also to explore possible reasons for the

perception that girls are becoming more aggressive and the suggestion that girls who behave aggressively are behaving like boys.

Organisation of chapters

Chapter 2 investigates the international literature related to girls and aggression. It is divided into four parts. Part A defines some of the various terms used to describe aggressive behaviour and places the study in the context of my previous research into female adolescent aggression (Arnott 1998; Arnott & Martin, 1995). It then identifies the main themes to emerge from research conducted before 1995, followed by an exploration of themes that have emerged from research since the turn of the century, including that conducted in New Zealand. Part B explores the literature relating to the perception of an increase in aggressive adolescent female behaviour. This discussion includes an examination of court statistics from a number of countries and possible reasons for their misinterpretation, including the very significant role of the media. Part C explores issues underpinning the contention that girls who behave aggressively are trying to be boys, and Part D discusses literature that supports the use of students' own perspectives on aggression and gender roles.

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical influences that typify the philosophies which inform my current study, and I explore theories of adolescent development and of gender identity at adolescence in detail.

In Chapter 4, I explain the research design and approach and present the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. This chapter includes an explanation of the process for recruitment and selection of participants. It clarifies the characteristics of the sample by describing the schools and students who participated. The particular ethical requirements for a study such as this, which involved children, are also explained.

Chapter 5 presents detailed 'pen-portraits' of the participants, Chapter 6 describes the findings from the informal conversational interviews that were held with the participants in relation to their views on adolescent aggression, and Chapter 7 describes the findings from the informal conversational interviews in relation to the girls' views on gender and aggression.

In Chapter 8, I use the tools of discourse analysis to further investigate the findings from a poststructural theoretical perspective, while Chapter 9 presents the conclusions of the study, explains its limitations, and includes recommendations for further study.

2. Literature Review

This chapter draws on research from a wide range of disciplines, including developmental psychology, social psychology, psychiatry and criminology, in order to explore the perception that there has been an increase in the severity and frequency of adolescent female aggression. To situate the literature into the changing sociocultural context, it is presented in four parts.

Part A explores research into adolescent girls' aggression from pre- and post-2000, beginning with findings from a study that explored one London borough's responses to, and provision for, girls who experience severe emotional and behavioural difficulties (Arnott & Martin, 1995). Literature from post-2000, including that specific to New Zealand, is then reviewed.

Part B explores the apparent public perception of an increase in the severity and frequency of adolescent female aggression. It describes court statistics in New Zealand and other countries and how changes in legal systems and personnel may have affected these. It also discusses views of female aggression as presented in popular culture and the role of the media, before examining changes in society's expectations of male and female behaviour.

Part C. turns to literature relating to the voice of the child, because in New Zealand, as in most countries, explanations of violence are generally adult perceptions, derived from studies of men's violence (Moffitt et. al., 2001). Very few have asked "the girls themselves what they think about aggression and what their experiences of violence and of using violence are" (Brown et. al. 2001, p. 1). Consequently there is still relatively little known about girls' motivations towards, and expressions of, different forms of violence.

I conclude the chapter by drawing the research together to indicate what is needed to ensure clarity of understanding about the aggressive behaviour of teenage girls and to indicate what is needed to address the deficits in early identification and intervention for those girls at risk of aggressive behaviour at adolescence.

Part A: The nature and extent of adolescent female aggression

The literature review draws on research from a range of disciplines and theories, each with its own terminology and interest base. Therefore, before exploring the literature related to girls and aggression, this chapter will first describe the various definitions of terms that are used in the literature and give some reasons for the range of understandings.

Definition of terms

Aggression

Defining the term aggression is fraught with difficulty and has been the subject of many studies, each with its own particular theoretical basis. As part of the "nature–nurture" debate, theories have ranged from aggression as an instinctive behaviour – the opposite of Eros, the love force – to behaviourist theories such as social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), which suggests that exposure to aggressive models, social approval, or other rewards are the main cause of aggressive behaviour. Both Bandura and Dodge and Coie (1987) emphasised the importance of cognitive processing in the biased responses of aggressive youth; that is, aggressive adolescents tend to infer aggressive or hostile intent more readily than non-aggressive adolescents. As will be explained later in this chapter, most recent theories on aggression are informed by neuropsychological research which emphasises the complex interactions between genetic predisposition to aggression (nature) and maladaptive environmental experiences (nurture) (Connor, 2002). Although some aggressive acts are "instrumental" (Connor, 2002), as in armed robbery, when the goal of the behaviour is other than the discomfort of the victim, it is more often assumed that aggression is a hostile act of intent; that is, aggression has as its goal the injury of the person to whom it is directed. Thus, in my study, the term aggression refers to any behaviour that is designed to cause hurt or harm to another.

From the Latin *aggressio*, meaning to attack, the word aggression has evolved into a wide range of interpretations and thus generates a wide range of responses from the various agencies that work with youth; for example, teachers, the youth justice service, the medical fraternity and psychological services (Connor, 2002). Each of these disciplines has its own vocabulary and role in responding to aggressive behaviour. The

following definitions help to explain how some of the terms are used in throughout my study.

Overt/covert aggression

Aggression is frequently thought of as a physical act of hostility such as physical violence or intimidation. However, aggression may also be expressed in "covert" behaviours, such as stealing or fire setting (Connor, 2002). Similarly, aggressive behaviour may be a direct attack, as in a threat or actual assault, or an indirect attack, such as the spreading of rumours or malicious gossip. This latter form of aggression is sometimes referred to as relational or social aggression. These terms are explained in greater detail later in this chapter.

Antisocial behaviour

The term "antisocial behaviour" encompasses a wide range of behaviours. It is often used to describe aggressive behaviour including overt and covert, direct and indirect behaviours. Moffitt and colleagues (2001) use the term as an umbrella, to cover all aspects of aggression whereas Curtis, Ronan, Heiblum, Reid, and Harris (2002) link antisocial behaviour in New Zealand to drug-related offences, violent offences, property damage, and property abuse.

Conduct disorder

Conduct disorder is a clinically defined neurodevelopmental disorder which begins in early childhood and tends to affect males more than females. It is generally life-persistent. The New Zealand Ministry of Health accepts the American Psychiatric Association definition for conduct disorder; that is:

> To be diagnosed with a conduct disorder a young person must have committed at least three violations in four categories of aggression (aggression towards people and animals, aggression towards property, deceit, theft, and serious violation of rules) in the previous twelve months, the latest within the previous 6 months. (American Psychiatric Association, 1994)

Delinquency

The term "delinquency" implies that the antisocial behaviour involves illegal or criminal acts. It is often coupled with the word juvenile when referring to young offenders and refers to serious offences that involve police contact. In New Zealand,

The Church Report (2003) defined behaviours that were likely to lead to delinquent behaviour, including lower than normal rates of compliance to the task requests of parents and teachers, hyperactivity, lower than normal rates of task completion, a collection of task avoidance skills which change as the child grows older, a set of coercive behaviours (e.g. tantrums) which the child uses to get his or her own way (these also change as the child grows older), a set of antisocial reactions to corrections, stop requests, teasing and other mildly aversive responses from other people, bullying, socially inept attempts to play with and converse with peers and, as the child grows older, a range of delinquent (illegal) activities (p.33).

Violence

The term "violence" is often used interchangeably with aggression. Although generally associated with the "overt and observable use of physical force" (Artz & Nicholson, 2002, p. 2), many studies assert that emotional or relational aggression also constitutes violence (Batchelor, 2001; Pepler et al., 2002). Totten (2005) states that, "of all the forms of youth violence, emotional abuse is the most common" (p. 1). One way that violence differs from aggression is that it does not necessarily involve a living agent: "A hurricane may be violent, but only animals, primates and human beings can be aggressive" (Connor, 2002, p. 4).

Adaptive/maladaptive aggression

Several studies (Batchelor et al., 2001; Connor, 2002; Totten, 2005) suggest that intentional, aggressive behaviours arise from "a complex set of social, material and gendered circumstances" (Batchelor et al., 2001, p. 8). Aggression therefore is not always maladaptive or inappropriate, but may be adaptive; that is, a valid act of survival for self or others. Connor (2002) gives the example of an adolescent who runs away from home to escape abuse and has to fight off other street people who may attempt to attack her or steal her possessions. Similarly, mothers are known to act aggressively if they feel that their offspring are threatened. My study is similar to the study by Burman and colleagues (2000), in that it is interested in the social situational, individual and experiential factors which may affect girls' decisions to act violently.

Research from before 2000

As several authors have pointed out (Arnott, 1995; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Leschied et al., 2000), before 1995, most studies on aggression in children and adolescents

focused on overt or physical aggression; the kind most commonly associated with boys. Where girls were mentioned, it was generally as a comparison with males; male aggressive behaviour was the "norm" by which all aggressive behaviour was measured (Batchelor et al., 2001). In 1992, Measor and Sikes noted that "for many years the main concern of researchers was male pupils from a working class background who were seen to be disadvantaged in and by schools" (1992, p. 2) and in 1984, Purvis stated that, "it is only in recent years that women as well as men have been the topic of systematic investigation by sociologists and as a consequence, there are considerable gaps in our knowledge" (cited in Burgess, 1986, pp. 98–99). However, as early as 1974, Maccoby and Jacklin wrote that:

> We have been emphasising male aggression to the point of allowing females to be thought of, by implication, as either angelic or weak. Women share with men the human capacity to heap all sorts of injury on their fellows. And in almost every group that has been observed, there are some women who are fully as aggressive as the men. (p. 247)

Despite this caution, the "gaps in knowledge" at that time were evident in the lack of awareness and provision for young women who experienced emotional and behavioural difficulties. Arnott and Martin (1995) studied the identification of and provision for young women with emotional and behavioural difficulties in one London borough. They found that boys outnumbered girls in all types of special education provision, but most noticeably in the school for children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties where the boys outnumbered the girls by 43:1 (Arnott & Martin, 1995). Similar statistics were common in England at that time (Malcolm & Haddock, 1992) despite the sharp increase in post-puberty referral patterns for both special education and social welfare support of girls (Arnott & Martin, 1995). As mentioned in the introduction, this research adopted a psychological perspective, and concentrated on the fact that primary school teachers tended to refer little boys whose behaviour disrupted the class, thus removing the perceived problem, rather than attending to the less overt behaviours of little girls (ibid.). Semi-structured interviews with the local primary school principals and support agencies suggested that although teachers were aware of girls' behavioural difficulties, these were perceived to be more manageable and less disruptive than boys' behaviour and therefore did not warrant external intervention (ibid.). Secondary school principals, however, described girls'

aggressive behaviour as far more difficult to manage than that of boys, indicating that girls tended to control their environment by persistently flouting school rules: opting out of certain lessons, smoking, and challenging the authority of teachers – especially male teachers. They added that these girls generally left school, either voluntarily or because they were encouraged to do so, well before the official school leaving age, indicating that by the time the girls reached secondary school it was too late to intervene. The social services and mental health services in the borough reported that many of the young women referred to them for support in early adolescence had left school early because of their non-compliant behaviour, or because of pregnancy. Resources were therefore allocated almost exclusively to primary school-aged boys, while girls' difficulties were generally tolerated or ignored. Research by Malcolm and Haddock (1992) supported these findings, suggesting that girls who experience risk factors for adolescent onset aggression may simply not be noticed at primary school because they do not behave in overtly aggressive ways and their behaviour does not disrupt the class; "not only do boys receive more positive teacher attention but they are generally likely to be noticeable by their 'acting out' behaviour when troubled. When girls are distressed, their unhappiness is more likely to be displayed in withdrawn or internalised behaviours" (p. 98). Referring to the tendency for girls to be overlooked in terms of special education support and thus to drift out of the system, Chorley (1995) reported that:

> Inspections have highlighted the vulnerability of girls in terms of numbers and access to a broad and balanced curriculum. We must continue to uphold the fact that all pupils, including girls with EBD [emotional and behavioural difficulties], have an entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, which includes the National Curriculum. (p. 34)

The developmental psychology literature of the time described two distinct types of severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. The first type, known as conduct disorder, was described as far more common in young boys than in young girls, and had a tendency to be life persistent. It was usually exhibited in externalised behaviours such as "stealing, hitting, lying, non-compliance, arson or inflicting severe, even fatal injury on others" (Chazan, Laing, & Davies, 1994, p. 19). The second type of severe emotional and behavioural difficulty was described as adolescent limited antisocial behaviour which was as prevalent in girls as boys and tended to be of relatively short

duration. Ollendick and Prinz (1994) observed that "there are disproportionately higher rates of specific disorders for boys (e.g., conduct disorder) and girls (e.g., internalising; depression)" and that "although girls' adjustment problems typically don't merit clinical attention until adolescence, boys are frequently referred during childhood" (p. 46). The literature suggested that adolescent limited aggressive or antisocial behaviour was almost as common in female adolescents as male; in fact, it suggested that at age 15 there was very little difference between the antisocial behaviours, not including conduct disorder, of males and females (ibid.).

One type of behaviour that was identified as more common in girls than boys was associated with acute emotional disturbance, generally characterised by "socially withdrawn, anxious, highly introverted or neurotic" behaviours (ibid., p. 19). Arnott and Martin (1995) found that "girls' emotional and behavioural difficulties typically emerge at adolescence and the incidence of emotional disturbance particularly depressive disorders, continues to increase into adulthood and thus impacts on the next generation" (p. 23). The psychology literature at this time indicated that girls who internalised their difficulties at primary school were more likely to turn their aggression inwards and self-harm at adolescence (Ollendick & Prinz, 1994). Studies at this time also highlighted the link between childhood sexual abuse and disturbed behaviour at adolescence (Lennox, 1991). The literature suggested that girls who have been sexually abused in childhood were typically bound by a conspiracy of secrets (Lloyd, 1992; Steel, 1995). These researchers suggested that, internalised emotions frequently emerged as anger when the girls reached adolescence and that was then acted out as aggression towards self or others (Steel, 1995). This theory was supported by an unpublished British government report which stated that more than 80% of the girls in secure accommodation had been sexually abused. The report went on to say that these young women were particularly at risk as they have "often developed an explicit pattern of sexual behaviour … i.e. involvement with older men, prostitution, continual changing of sexual partners etc" (Social Services Inspectorate, 1994, p. 2).

Studies from this time also emphasised the gender socialisation processes that occur as girls and boys are exposed to powerful role models within families, schools and peer groups (Davies, 1984; Kavanagh & Hops, 1994; Lloyd, 1992; Usher & Nicholson, 1992). I will discuss in depth in the next chapter, sex role theory, theories of social construction of gender dualisms, and socialisation processes that contribute to

normalising gender differences as ‘natural’. Suffice here to note that the preceding studies pointed out that little girls are more likely to be rewarded for stereotypical behaviours such as being quiet, good and kind whereas little boys are more likely to be rewarded for being adventurous, boisterous and competitive (Lloyd, 1992). Arnott and Martin (1995) suggested that, in extreme circumstances, “the family is the context in which girls internalise pathology and boys are trained in antisocial or aggressive behaviours, and school experiences appear to reinforce this process” (p. 27). This 1995 study noted that boys were frequently rewarded by their larger peer group for resisting authority and engaging in illegal acts, whereas girls generally spent more time indoors, interacted in smaller groups, had one or two “best friends”, engaged in more “turn taking” and displayed much less overtly aggressive behaviour. The socialising influence of television and other media was also referred to, as “it is perhaps hard to conceptualise a male hero that has not committed illegal acts and been involved in violence, from James Bond to Indiana Jones” (Burns, 1992, p. 117) whereas “ideal” females were portrayed as ever smiling homemakers, clever cooks and loving mothers.

For many years, feminist researchers have challenged what they described as the pathologising of girls’ behaviour, suggesting that this view is more a reflection of the expectations that society has of appropriate female behaviour than of females repressing their emotions. For example, when reflecting on the judgements made about the sexual behaviour of girls, Hudson (1989) stated that “as long as boys’ sexual behaviour is heterosexual, their sexuality remains unproblematic; it is natural and thus does not warrant attention” (cited in Lloyd, 1992, p. xi). Davies (1984) claimed that girls’ lack of overt aggression merely demonstrated more subtlety, stating that “girls presented different or greater problems in their heightened, longer lasting reactions to both ‘affront’ (whether from peers or teachers) and to attempted or actual, disciplinary treatment from teachers” (p. 14). She suggested that “if problems arise, they [girls] will not so much actively kick out at or avoid the institution, but they will be concerned to assert and protect their individual status” (ibid.). Some researchers suggested that girls were less likely to express their dissatisfaction with school in aggressively disruptive behaviour, but more in a subversive manipulation of time and space. Lloyd (1992) stated that “although about half of the girls in this study were seen by their school as extremely disruptive, it became clear that the girls saw ‘bother’ [trouble] mainly as a result of persistent everyday misbehaviour – talking, smoking, not wearing ‘suitable’

clothes, lateness and some absence and generally resisting the attempts of the school to contain them" (p. xi). While concurring that far fewer girls than boys act in overtly aggressive ways, many writers pointed out that the girls who did "act out" were considered unnatural (Arnott & Martin, 1995; Davies, 1984; Malcolm & Haddock 1992). They suggested that girls who acted in overtly aggressive ways challenged teachers' beliefs about suitable behaviour and elicited more severe consequences for their behaviour than if they were boys. "Exclusion from school, rather than referral to specialist services, seems to be the more probable consequence for this group of young women" (Arnott & Martin, 1995, p. 27).

Edwards (1983) criticised the early focus on "biologistic and psychologistic" explanations of sex differences in incidence and forms of criminal behaviour noting that:

> the small number of females who on occasion did catch the attention of criminal justice personnel, and even less frequently of academic sociologists and criminologists, were almost invariably treated as a special category, whose behaviour had to be explained in quite different, individualistic and non-social terms. (Edwards, 1983, p. 389)

Her seminal paper on "Sex Roles" highlighted the problems that such a focus has had for sociological research and questions the value of such a conceptual approach to studies of sex and gender. This criticism is also further explored in the next chapter.

A further problem in the role theory approach for specifically New Zealand studies was proposed by Middleton (1993) who noted that the "American liberal feminist portrayals of girls' socialisation in a sex-role stereotype of simpering passive, suburban femininity (Frieden, 1963) did not describe the reality of the boisterous, tomboyish New Zealand girl" (Middleton, 1993, p.32, cited in Court, 2005a, p. 13).

As early as 1989, New Zealand feminist writer Bird (1992) studied the issue of girls taking positions of authority at primary school. Bird's study highlighted the various authority positionings taken up by boys and girls and concluded that, although fluid and "constantly in a state of flux" (ibid, p. 149) girls' authority in the classroom appeared to stem from their positioning as teacher helpers and holders of knowledge

and school rules, whereas boys relied far more on physical force to assert their authority. Bird found that not only did boys "take up space" in the classroom and reject girls' attempts to join in their sports games in the playground, they also inflicted physical abuse on the girls by pushing them to the ground, or poking their bottoms. She suggested that this gender specific behaviour may well represent "early forms of typically gendered adult patterns" (ibid, p. 164).

Some developmental psychologists, for example, Björkqvist & Niemela (1992) and Crick & Grotpeter (1995), supported the view that females can be as aggressive, if not more aggressive, than males. In 1995, Crick developed the theory of "relational aggression", first identified and studied in Finland by Feshbach in 1969. This theory challenged the assumption that girls are not as aggressive as boys, suggesting that when relational aggression is measured in addition to overt aggression, levels of aggression are more or less equal between the genders. In the early 1990s, Björkqvist and Niemela sought to disprove the male bias in previous research into aggression concluding that "women are as aggressive as men as far as the motivation to hurt is concerned" (1992, p. 14). To justify this claim, they conceived a particularly female, indirect style of aggression "where boys fight physically, girls manipulate" (ibid.).

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) suggested that girls have not been found to be aggressive in previous studies because researchers have been looking at the wrong kind of aggression. They argued that when children wish to hurt another child, they choose a method that they think will attack the goals most valued by that particular peer group. They suggested that girls typically value social interactions and interpersonal relationships and thus employ relational aggression, including the spreading of malicious rumours, gossiping, excluding from social activities, withholding friendship and exclusion from social groups (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). They suggested that boys, on the other hand, are more likely to value physical dominance and are therefore more liable to settle differences by physical means. They further maintained that because relational aggression is difficult for an outsider to observe, only the peers themselves know if they or a classmate is being excluded from a social activity, and it frequently goes unnoticed. Supporting the earlier findings of Bjorkqvist and Niemela (1992), these researchers found that relationally aggressive children direct many of their aggressive behaviours towards their non-aggressive friends, whereas overtly aggressive children tend to behave aggressively towards children who are not part of

their friendship circle. Relationally aggressive children reported higher levels of intimacy in their friendships, gleaning important, private information about the other child, which could put the non-aggressive friend at risk. Crick and Grotpeter also found that relationally aggressive children demanded high levels of exclusivity in their friendships, effectively reducing the non-aggressive child's access to alternative sources of friendship.

Research from 2000

By the turn of the century, international academic interest in female aggression had grown (Batchelor, 2005), and major studies in, for example, Canada (Leschied et al., 2000), New Zealand (Moffitt et al., 2001), Scotland (Burman, Brown, Tisdall & Batchelor, 2002), and the United States (e.g., Chesney-Lind & Brown, 1999) began to explore issues of aggression specific to young women.

Moffitt .Caspi, Rutter & Silva, (2001) analysed findings from a longitudinal study of 1,000 males and females in Dunedin, New Zealand Although their findings generally concurred with the "robust rule that that males are always and everywhere more antisocial than females" (p. 246), they also support the theory that there are certain situations that increase the potential for girls to behave as aggressively as boys. As with the earlier research described, these findings described two main forms of antisocial behaviour: the first a neurological disorder which has been previously described as "conduct disorder" and the second a less severe form associated with social relationships. These research findings stated that conduct disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder, most commonly experienced by males, which is relatively rare, life persistent, and has early childhood onset. They described the second form of aggression as adolescent limited, of short duration, and as common in females as males. Moffitt and colleagues found that "sex differences with this form are negligible; for example, the antisocial activities of males and females are especially alike when alcohol and drugs are involved, near the time of female puberty, and when females are yoked with males in intimate relationships" (Moffitt et al., 2001, p. xvi). The connections between these three circumstances are clear, as

> The social stimulus consequences of females' puberty for their peer relationships, the opportunities and contextual motivations that promote illicit activities surrounding drugs and alcohol, and the special situations

> and assortatively mated offender relationships are of key importance, because this constellation of interpersonal circumstances exerts a powerful influence to make the antisocial behaviour of males and females the same. (Moffitt et al., p. 244)

The Dunedin longitudinal study (Moffitt et al., 2001) cited findings by earlier researchers (as cited in, for example, Caspi et al., 1993; Cohen et al., 1992; Zoccolillo, 1993), to support the hypothesis that girls' aggression is likely to emerge at puberty, and this Dunedin study is, in turn, supported by more recent research from neuropsychologists such as Dahl (2003), Gluckman and Hanson (2006), and Ridley (2003), who claim that aggression in both sexes is due to a complex interaction between genetic predisposition and known environmental risk factors. These researchers suggest that risk factors coincide at puberty, and the younger the girl experiences puberty, the greater the potential mismatch between her and her peer group. Gluckman and Hanson (2006) proposed that early puberty is particularly significant as this exacerbates the gap between biological, cognitive and social maturity. Young women who are physically capable of becoming mothers, yet who lack life and relationship experience and whose brains are not yet fully developed, are particularly at risk. As Magnusson (2000) stated:

> Without the ability to reason, plan and understand long term consequences, those experiencing early puberty are especially vulnerable and in both boys and girls, early pubertal development has been linked to increases in deviant behaviour including more norm violations, sexual precocity, contact with the law and truancy. (Cited in Miller, 2004, p. 21)

Moffitt and colleagues (2001) also identified the use of drugs and alcohol as one of the circumstances likely to exacerbate risk of aggression in adolescent girls. Drug and alcohol abuse has been linked to aggression in both males and females (Alcohol and Public Health Research Unit, 1995; Fulde, quoted in "Alcohol Link to Rise in Attacks by Girls", 2007; Needham, 2002). The Dunedin longitudinal study (Moffitt et al., 2001) suggested a number of reasons females may be particularly susceptible to the effects of these stimulants, including a generally smaller body frame and lower tolerance. Moffitt and colleagues also suggested that female reasons for drinking alcohol may differ from those of males, in that females are more likely to use alcohol to boost their social confidence (ibid.). Commenting on an increase in the number of

drunk and disorderly girls presenting at the emergency department of Sydney's St. Vincent's Hospital, Fulde, emergency director at the hospital, stated that "Women tolerate alcohol less. The disinhibition will then mean it disinhibits their control. They'll start swearing, act aggressively and they'll fight. And they'll cause fights" (quoted in "Alcohol Link to Rise in Attacks by Girls", 2007). Moffitt et al.'s findings (2001) support Fulde's statements in the media and also his comments about the connection between illicit drugs, and "sex trafficking" (p. 241), which may lead to further antisocial contacts and activities. They suggested that at puberty, the effects of alcohol and drugs combined with a mismatch between physical and social maturity means that young women are especially vulnerable to the other risk factors associated with aggressive behaviour, including the attention of deviant older males (Moffitt et al., 2001).

Moffitt and colleagues (ibid.) also pointed out that females are more likely to express their aggression within intimate relationships, or, as Pepler et al. (2002) put it, "behind closed doors". It is only recently that the extent of female instigated domestic violence has been reported and acknowledged (Connor, 2002). Some studies now suggest that women initiate domestic violence as frequently as men (Goodyear-Smith, 2004; Motz, 2008). Moffitt and colleagues (2001) presented several hypotheses to support this premise. These included the "differential association theory of peer influence on antisocial behaviour" as identified by Sutherland and Cressy (1978, p. 242). The Dunedin data indicated that "young women's delinquency is strongly exacerbated when they partner with an antisocial mate … and … females and males who have an antisocial history are quite likely to pair off selectively" (Moffit et al., 2001, p. 242).

Motz (2008) drew together several earlier studies which concur with the Dunedin findings. As she stated:

> Interviews of the perpetrators of abuse against children conducted in the USA have found that mothers or "mother substitutes" were found to be responsible for 47 per cent of the physical abuse cases studied while 39.2 per cent of the incidents involved fathers or father substitutes (Gil, 1970) and females [are] more likely to use physical violence against children than males. (Gelles, 1980) (As cited in Motz, 2008, p. 75)

Many studies suggest that females tend to use aggression and violence within the confines of the home, so that when women are violent, the aims or targets of their violence are far more likely to be members of their family, including their children (Moffitt et al., 2001; Motz, 2008; Pepler et al., 2002). When referring to the abuse of children, Motz pointed out Kennedy's (1997) contention that female abusers are not always overtly aggressive but may instead incite the partner to abuse or refuse to believe that their partner has abused their child or children. In New Zealand, Paterson, Carter, Cowley-Malcolm, Gao, & Iustini, (2008), reported that 50% of the 1,400 Pacific Island women surveyed in a Pacific Island health study "admitted to violent behaviour in the home, with nearly 50% saying they had attacked their partners by kicking, biting, strangling or using a weapon" (p. 1). It is somewhat ironic that, as a result of the publicity given to the suggestion that females may be as likely to be perpetrators of domestic violence as males, websites have been established to support the "new victims of domestic violence" (see, for example, SAFE [Stop Abuse for Everyone], http://www.safe4all.org/).

The Dunedin longitudinal study referred to earlier (Moffitt et al., 2001) emphasised the many similarities between male and female aggression, yet other contemporary writers have highlighted the many differences in both the causes of aggression and the way that aggression is expressed. As noted earlier, there is considerable correlation between girls' childhood victimisation, both physical and sexual, and adolescent aggressive behaviour and this issue is also raised by more recent studies (see, for example, McKnight & Loper, 2002; Motz, 2008; Pate, 2002). Some of these studies indicated that aggression for girls may be adaptive, and should be viewed as a means of avoiding subsequent abuse or victimisation (Brown et al., 2001; Campbell, 1993; Pate, 2002). Other studies have suggested that females who behave aggressively see themselves and all females as less important than males, and view other females as competition for the attention of "their" male partner (Artz & Nicholson, 2002). Similarly, Ayduk, Downey and Kim (2001) suggested that aggression in females is frequently linked to fear of rejection: a theory supported by Hennessy and Wiesenthal (2005), who noted that fear, anger and perceptions of provocation have been found to heighten the potential for female aggression. Totten (2005) supported the view that female violence is:

> qualitatively different from that of men: whereas male violence tends to be more frequent, serious and utilitarian, female violence is more often contextualised in significant factors related to self defence, anticipation of an upcoming physical or sexual assault, and prior victimisation by physical and sexual abuse. (p. 51)

This last point is echoed by Motz (2008), who also supported the theory of gender-specific aggression, suggesting that "mothers who were themselves neglected or abused in childhood can re-enact destructive patterns with their own children" (p. 71).

A Canadian review of the literature regarding female adolescent aggression (Leschied et al., 2000) partially supported the theory that girls can be as aggressive as boys, given certain circumstances, but suggested that "it is in the emerging set of differences that the implications for these findings reside" (p. 36). These writers referred to Crick and Grotpeter's (1995) work, cited earlier, pointing out that the degree of female aggressiveness has been underestimated in previous studies, largely because the particular forms of aggression relevant to girls' peer groups have not been assessed. Referring to studies by Crick and Dodge (1994, 1996) and Pakaslahti and Keltikangas-Jarvinen (1997, 1998), they stated that "aggression with girls is more likely to be reflected in indirect or relational as opposed to overt forms" (p. 37). Batchelor (2001) expanded on this argument, stating that "a common understanding of violence is of an intentionally harmful, interpersonal physical act such as punching or kicking [but this was] challenged by many of the girls that we spoke to, who maintained that verbal behaviours (such as name calling, threats and intimidation) were often intended and experienced as potentially more hurtful and damaging than physical violence" (p. 1). Artz and Nicholson (1997) stated that "girls more than boys, are socialised … to value and define themselves within relationships" and so girls who manipulate others to attack the victim or, by other means, make use of social structures in order to harm another person are seen as acting in aggressive ways (cited in Leschied et al., 2000, p. 37).

As previously stated, female aggression challenges stereotypical notions of femininity, and thus historical studies of aggression and violence have simply ignored female aggression. The result of this bias is that there is limited analytical vocabulary to understand female violence that is not grounded in male behaviour. Females who do

behave aggressively have been variously described as “unfeminine”, “unnatural”, “unhinged”, “hysterical” and “pathological” (Brown et al., 2001). In the United States, the rising awareness of relational aggression has sparked a rash of publications, both academic (e.g., Artz & Nicholson, 1997; Burman et al., 2002), and popular (see, for example: Dellasega & Nixon, 2003; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). This publicity has generated something of a moral panic illustrated by the cover story of the *American School Board Journal* of 2002: “How Girls Hurt: The Quiet Violence in Your Schools”:

> Look at the pretty girl with the honey blond hair, the one always in the middle of an adoring orbit of friends, the one with the seemingly endless supply of outfits from Abercrombie and Fitch. She has everything, all right, but popularity isn’t always what it seems. She and other adolescent girls live in a world where best friends can become enemies over night, where one look from another girl can mean the difference between isolation and belonging. It’s a world where no-one tells you why you can no longer sit at the lunch table with your friends, where secrets are traded like currency. (Vail, 2002, p. 1)

Ringrose (2006) criticised the emphasis on relational aggression, suggesting that typical girls’ behaviour is pathologised and demonised as a new “moral panic” about girls’ indirect or relational aggression and reinforces the notion that females repress their aggressive tendencies. In a reflection of the research from Arnott and Martin (1995) cited earlier, Ringrose suggested that the claim that girls repress or internalise aggression sustains the polarisation of gendered behaviour.

> From what began as a feminist inspired challenge to male biased science on aggression, we find a developmental literature on girls’ relational aggression that constitutes a near total objectification of the girl for whom gender differentiated behaviour is invented through scales, that pathologises subjects via their approximation to relational aggression. (p. 411)

Citing Austin (2005) and Walkerdine (1993), Ringrose claimed that “through this discourse, femininity is repathologised, any expression of aggression is wrong and violence is reconstituted as ‘other’ to the feminine” (p. 407). Gonick (2004) suggested that “the vulnerable girl has recently been replaced by the mean girl in public

consciousness" (p. 395) and Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) added that the new focus on adolescent aggression and mean girls comes as a backlash to years of feminist research claiming that women are more nurturing, caring and relationship oriented than men.

The lack of historical data to help understand the issues of adolescent aggression from a specifically female perspective is a common theme across professional disciplines. The research from before 2000 focused on the differences between male and female expressions of aggression. It indicated that girls tend to express aggression internally or as self-harming behaviours such as cutting the body, abuse of drugs, alcohol or other substances, and at-risk sexual behaviour or prostitution. Because female aggression is generally not as obvious or overt as most male aggression, girls tend not to be identified as at risk of serious aggressive behaviour until adolescence. Early research indicated that almost all of the girls who behave aggressively at adolescence have suffered maltreatment, often in the form of sexual abuse, as young children. Further, this early research suggested that girls' aggressive behaviour is often pathologised and they are referred for treatment rather than punishment.

As suggested earlier, the New Zealand socio-cultural context is of particular significance to studies of gender in this country. Bird's (1992) research into the gendered social dynamics of a New Zealand primary school has been described, as well as the issue of New Zealand's "boisterous tomboys" as noted by Middleton (1993). This current study suggests that Polynesian culture is also an important factor in the developing subjectivities of the increasingly diverse female youth population of New Zealand. It is not the intention of this study to assume insider knowledge of Polynesian cultures; however, it does draw on writings from both Maori and Pasifika women to illustrate the particular issues faced by girls in those cultures. Although only approximately 15% of New Zealand women identify as Maori, for many years Maori women have comprised over 50% of the female prison population in New Zealand (NZ Department of Corrections, 1995, 2003). Bald statistics are notoriously misleading, as will be described later in this chapter, but the imbalance of ethnicity within the New Zealand prison population is significant, particularly given the traditional high status of Maori and Pacific Island women within their own cultural groupings.

In both Maori and other Pacific Island cultures, women have traditionally held considerable status within the family and society in general (Malia, 2001; Pere, 1988; Ralston, 1993); however, Maori and Pacific Island women have long featured in the lowest echelons of New Zealand health and welfare statistics (Smith, 1997). The demise of Mana Wahine and Samoan female status following hegemonic, Christian colonialism has been documented by several writers (see, for example, Jackson, 1976; Meleisea, 1992; Smith, 1997; Tupuola, 1996). Colonialism imposed middle-class Victorian England values onto these indigenous cultures, whereby women's domestic roles in the household, or nuclear family were encouraged and men were expected to be the breadwinners (Tuala-Warren, 2002). Women were certainly discouraged from entering the public or political arena.

This point was emphasised by Smith, (1997), who described how, since colonisation, Maori women have been defined in terms of their "otherness" – that is their "differences to Maori men, Pakeha men and Pakeha women" (p.33). While highlighting the wide range of possible subjectivities within the term Maori woman, she detailed how institutional discourses of education, spirituality, social and family structures have eroded the status of Maori women. As in the example given above, Smith claims that Maori women were denied their connections to the wider family and traditions as they were trained to adopt the manners and behaviours of the colonising Pakeha. Quite simply

> The colonial state constructed Maori women as a group requiring domestication. Through education, Maori girls were trained to fit the state categories of 'wives' or 'domestic workers'… An openly espoused purpose of Maori education was to train Maori lads to be farmers and Maori girls to be farmers' wives. (Smith, 1997, p. 44)

Dispossession of wider whanau connections, language and beliefs via institutional practices such as schooling and the demands of a capitalist driven economy threatened to subsume Maori women's identity through both assimilation and integration policies. However, strong Maori women have continued to maintain traditional values and are leading the struggle to reassert "mana wahine" (Smith, 1992, p.37); see, for example, Durie (2003), Irwin 1997), Jackson, (1976), Pere (1988), Smith (1992) and Tangaere (1997). Maori designed programmes such as Te Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa

Maori are examples of initiatives designed to support the cultural identity of Maori children and increasing numbers of female Maori academics are leading the way in international forums of indigenous people's rights. Similarly, in Samoan society, both male and female heirs have access to matai (chiefly) titles and Callister (2010) explained that economic development of entrepreneurial schemes mean that "today the number of women who have been bestowed Matai titles is increasing … the number of registered women titleholders has doubled in the last three years" (Samoan Observer 2005, p. 5, cited in Callister, 2010).

The second part of this section has explored the literature from 2000. By this stage, academics in a number of western countries were beginning to explore the perception of an increase in adolescent female aggression. In New Zealand, findings from the Dunedin longitudinal study were published; raising some interesting new questions about antisocial behaviours specific to female adolescents, and studies in Canada and Australia and Scotland urged the inclusion of the voice of the subjects of the research. The Dunedin study (Moffitt et al., 2001) identified three specific conditions directly related to adolescent girls and aggression. These are puberty, drugs and alcohol, and intimate relationships. Researchers from a range of disciplines, across a range of countries, have been cited to illustrate the increasing demand for further research into gender-specific early identification and intervention processes. In the light of this demand, the next part will explore why there is a growing perception that there has been an increase in the severity and frequency of adolescent female aggression.

Part B: The perception of an increase in the aggressive behaviour of adolescent girls

The shortage of reliable historical data about girls' aggression, and the lack of clarity about the various terms used to describe aggressive behaviour, mean that it is not easy to quantify an increase in adolescent female aggression. Most researchers agree that the number of female perpetrators of serious acts of aggression remains comparatively small (Leschied et al., 2000; McIvor, 1998) yet there is a growing perception that more girls are becoming more aggressive more frequently (Batchelor, 2005; Ringrose, 2006. The role of the media is significant and this is discussed in more detail in the next part. However, the unreliable nature of published data and the confusion between news and opinion suggests that that public perception of female youth aggression may differ

from reality (Duncan, McPhail, & Caldwell, 2007). It seems likely that a "moral panic" (Ringrose, 2006, p. 407) has been generated, which is reinforced by "sensational incidences of isolated girl violence, held up as a dangerous risk of uncontained feminine aggression" (ibid.). American feminist criminologist Chesney-Lind noted that "as young women are demonised by the media, their genuine problems can be marginalised and ignored. Indeed, the girls have become the problem" (cited in Pate, 2002, p. 5). Batchelor (2001) noted that "the media fondness for relying on simplified statistics and atypical cases precludes any discussion of the complex sociospecific contexts of violence in girls' lives" (p. 4).

Moral panics develop when the behaviour of a particular group or subculture is seen as a threat to society's values and interests (Cohen, 1972). These fears are generally unfounded or are exaggerated and inflamed by the way that they are presented in the media (Chesney-Lind & Brown, 1999. New Zealand has experienced a number of moral panics, as described by Shuker and Openshaw (1991). From Victorian times, "larrikin, delinquent or riotous youth represented 'folk devils'" (p. 105) and each generation has had a marked tendency to hark back to "the good old days when youth were supposedly more compliant" (ibid.). Moral panics invoke increasing social controls, as society demands that the government "do something" to protect "their" children from contamination: "Seduction of the innocent" is the "catchcry of those wanting greater regulation and control (Shuker & Openshaw, 1991, p. 11).

The role of the media

As stated, the phenomenon of female adolescent aggression is relatively rare and certainly not obvious. It is unlikely that many people will have had sufficient direct experience of serious adolescent female aggression to inform the perception of a significant increase in frequency and severity. Public perception is more likely, therefore, to be influenced by various media (Carter & Weaver, 2003; Gauntlett, 2002; Klomp & Van de Ven, 2003). Media effects theory is a universal term for the search for a link between media content and the behaviour of recipients. The rapid rise of mass communication since the 1920s, via radio, television and cinema, generated interest from groups of academics, marketers and policy makers but it was the voice of the "concerned citizens" that most strongly promoted media effects theory. As stated by Hartley (2002):

> The effects model came about to describe the aims of those who sought to investigate the effects of sexual and violent content in popular film and television, comics or popular music on adolescents, women and other supposedly vulnerable groups. (p. 81)

Early models of media effects theory suggested that the process was akin to brainwashing; that is, the recipient was a "blank slate" and had no agency choice about their beliefs. It is this belief that drives moral panics and judiciary responses described previously (Shuker & Openshaw, 1991). Many theories have developed under the main umbrella of effects theory, and there are many sceptics of the degree to which human behaviour is influenced by the media (Goldstein, 2001). There are two main theories, however, that have particular relevance to public perception and the media. The first is the theory of "accustoming" also known as the "Snark Syndrome" (Byrne, 1993), whereby detailed reporting of violent offences so accustoms the reader to the behaviours that they believe the violence to be unexceptional in society. An example of this theory is the regular, repeated, cautionary headline warning the reader of "the rising tide of female violence" (Burman et al., 2002, p. 1). The claim that more girls are linked to violent crime has been made repeatedly. An example of this from just one New Zealand newspaper, the *Dominion Post*, over the four years of this study include: "Girls Going Bad" (2004); "Alarm over Rise in Violent Crimes by Young Women" (2004); and "More Girls Linked to Violent Crime" (2006). It is significant that the newspapers offer no supporting evidence for these sensational claims, apart from anecdotes and personal prejudices. Sensational stories are frequently maintained and "serialised" by printing irrelevant material from overseas, as in "Girls Behaving Badly", an anonymous report in the *Dominion Post* of 2006. The sensational claim in the headline of this short article was based on an innocuous American report; an "analysis of recent studies, which showed girls typically use drugs and alcohol to boost dented self-esteem and self confidence" (p. 1). Research from Leschied et al. (2000) supports the theory of accustoming, noting that a combination of high profile cases covered in the media and more girls being seen in Youth Court in the United Kingdom for violent offences has "created a sensationalist aspect to the coverage" (p. 3). In New Zealand, Duncan et al. (2007) found that media content are saturated with accounts of crime, control and criminal justice, and that "If it bleeds, it leads" (p. 1); that is, the more violent and dramatic the incident, the greater the likelihood of the media

headlining the story. An example of such coverage is a Fox News item from 2001, which claimed that "the gender equality efforts over the last twenty years – coupled with a general increase in mean-spiritedness – have pressured girls to become more aggressive to the point of violence" (Beaucar, 2001, p. 1).

The second theory relating to public perception and the media is that of "frames of reference". This approach proposes that detailed reporting of serious violent offences means that individuals perceive less serious forms of aggression as normal. Thus the frequency of reporting serious crimes of aggression perpetrated by females is interpreted as a reflection of a broader tendency towards everyday aggression by females (Groebel & Smit, 1997, cited in Groebel, 1998). A recent example of this has been another string of diverse articles in the *Dominion Post* newspaper that have focused on adolescent girls and alcohol. These articles do include a serious discussion of the issues ...notably of information from a recent press release from Wellington Hospital (Quigley, 2008) which supports anecdotal evidence of a significant increase in the number of young women admitted for alcohol-related difficulties. However, as Nichols (2008) points out, such serious articles about girls and alcohol are frequently printed alongside trivial and sensational front page headlines such as "Blokettes Told to Behave like Ladies" The Dominion Post front page article was published next to a photograph of an anonymous group of scantily dressed young women, laughing and waiting to cross a busy road in the entertainment area of the city, at night. Magazines and newspapers also relate details of individual cases of serious aggression as entertainment, with little investigation into the circumstances of the people involved. For instance, the 2003 June 14 issue of *New Idea* magazine featured a shallow and sensational article entitled "Women Who Kill", ironically presented in its "good read" section (Ramsland, 2003). The next part of this literature review will expand on this notion of sensationalising and popularising aggressive adolescent female behaviour, demonstrating how the images of physically aggressive females are distorted and represented in current popular culture.

Popular culture

The moral panic about the behaviour of young people is related to the challenge that they present to the cultural behaviours of the "establishment" (Shuker & Openshaw, 1991). These behaviours, and the fear that they engender, are also related to changes in

popular culture. The "perceived negative effects of film, comics, videos or pop music" are seen by some as "seduction of the innocent" (Shuker & Openshaw, 1991, p. 105). These writers suggest that the advent of new technology has provoked horror from the ruling classes, who call for greater control and censorship "in the public good" (ibid.). The current perception of an increase in adolescent female aggression has been fuelled by media responses to popular culture and the increasing use of technology by young people. Television New Zealand breakfast news ran the following headline on June 9, 2008: "Barbie Bitches: Mean Girls in the Schoolyard". According to school principals, reality television and cyber bullying have given rise to a new trend, the Barbie Bitches syndrome, making teen girls as "tough as nails". Despite the attempts by the president of the New Zealand Secondary Principals' Council to put the issue into perspective, stating that girl bullying was relatively rare, the interviewer focused on the prolific use of mobile telephones and the Internet by schoolgirls as "proof" of this "syndrome".

The increased visibility of young women's aggressive behaviour may contribute to the perception of an actual increase, exemplified by characters in film, on television and in advertising: As mentioned earlier, there is some debate about the effect of television violence on children's behaviour (Pinker, 2002). Nevertheless, there has certainly been an increase in the media portrayal of females as violent (Angier, 1999) and "legitimate" violent female behaviour is presented daily, via the international media; for example, the television news footage of females in the armed forces of Britain and the United States during the recent war in Iraq. The media predilection for enhancing news stories to boost sales (Duncan et al., 2007) is illustrated by the story of the young, female United States Marine rescued from a Baghdad hospital. Fabricated claims of her heroic involvement in active combat ran for several weeks before being disproved (*Dominion Post*, June 23, 2003). Women have also featured as terrorists and suicide bombers as scenes of international terrorism become increasingly part of the evening news broadcast and the entertainment programmes (see, for example, *Dominion Post*, February 1, 2002; *Dominion Post*, November 15, 2005).

Advertisers and marketing companies have long used gender stereotypes to sell products and services (Quart, 2003) and in the United States, peer-to-peer marketing among teenage girls is big business. Quart claimed that "girls are more likely than boys to convey their tastes to their friends verbally. Girls are also more likely to use pop stars and clothes to anneal their fragmented self-esteem" (p. 59). She reported that

"the outraged lieutenant governor of Illinois … called for a boycott of a company … when the teen retailer started selling thongs featuring cherries and saying things such as 'wink wink' and 'eye candy' to preteen girls" (p. 13). In describing the advertisement for a popular video game, Carter and Weaver (2003) commented, "The power of the promotional image is dependent on a woman adorning herself in a fashion that tells the gamer she is bad, dangerous and enjoys violence" (p. 128). This comment was written about the video game "Return to Castle Wolfenstein", but could describe almost all fictional female champions from Xena in the *Warrior Princess* series, to Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* and the Bride in *Kill Bill*. Despite the aggression and violence demonstrated by the characters, their sexual features are exaggerated and the salacious link between female aggression and sexual titillation is reinforced (Carter & Weaver, 2003). Isolated cases of young women involved in traditionally male pursuits such as binge drinking and drag racing are glamorised and sensationalised. Feminist criminologists refer to this kind of behaviour as "the search for equivalence", arguing that these sensationalised categories of risky girl behaviour are having increasingly devastating effects on girls (Chesney-Lind & Irwin, 2004; Worrall, 2001).

Court statistics

Court statistics would appear to support the perception of a significant increase in aggressive behaviour by young women, yet the fact that more young women are being drawn into the criminal justice system is not necessarily a reflection of an increase in adolescent female aggression (Batchelor et al., 2001; Duncan et al., 2007). In many Western countries, including Canada, the United States, Scotland, England, Australia and New Zealand, statistics indicate that there has been a marked increase in the number of female adolescents convicted for violent behaviour (that is, aggressive behaviour in the most overt, direct and maladaptive manner that is more generally associated with males) (Moretti, DaSilva & Holland, 2004). In Canada, during the 1990s, the reported violent crime rate for female youths increased twice as fast as for male youths (Stats Can 1999, cited in Leschied et al., 2000). Statistics from the New Zealand Ministry of Youth Affairs (McLaran, 2000) suggest that more girls have been involved in more crimes of violence, more dangerous driving offences and more binge drinking than ever before (ibid.). A joint statement by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, cited in this document, reported that: "Concern has been expressed, particularly by practitioners such as the New Zealand Police, that offending

by young females is becoming more serious and violent" (MacLaran, 2002, p. 2). However, the New Zealand Youth Court statistics (Ministry of Justice, www.justice.govt.nz/youth) show that the number of proved cases for female offending, in general, has remained relatively stable over the past 10 years, but within this figure, the rate of proved cases of violent offending has risen by almost 400%.

An increase of 400% sounds dramatic; however, as indicated earlier, statistics can be misleading. For example, the actual number of young females apprehended for aggressive behaviour is very small; therefore any numerical increase will appear as a very large percentage increase (Batchelor, 2001; Pate, 2002). As previously cited, on November 4, 2006, the *Dominion Post* ran a story with the headline "More Girls Linked to Violent Crime". This story made only one brief reference to girls and gave no details of the increase alluded to in the headline. A short time later, as "the newspaper printed extracts from an article in the Ministry of Justice journal "Just Published" (Chong, 2007), including a comment by Justice Beecroft, (Chief Youth Court Judge) that:

> Youth offending (14–16 year olds) has stabilised in the last five to eight years; it has increased no more quickly than total offending and, for the last 14 years, has remained constantly at about 22% of overall offending; of total youth offending, only a small percentage constitutes serious offending; most youth crimes are carried out by a small group of "hard core" offenders, who number less than 15% of total youth offenders; and of the 15% of "hard core" offenders 85% are male. (Chong, 2007, p. 2)

These figures are consistent with international studies which suggest that crimes of violence are committed by "a very small group of males who display high rates of antisocial behaviour across time and in diverse situations" (McLaran, 2002, p. 17). The 400% increase in proven cases of violent offending referred to earlier represents an increase of just 65 cases, from 23 to 88 over a period of five to eight years (ibid., p. 12). In a similar story from Canada, Pate (2002) recounted an article from a Canadian provincial newspaper which cited a 200% increase in female crimes of aggression. On investigation, she found that the actual increase had been from one case to two cases over a period of three years. Despite an apparent increase in the number of young women apprehended for serious offences, the New Zealand Ministry of Justice statistics summary (Child and Youth Offending Statistics in New Zealand 1992 to

2007) states that “when the population increase is taken into account, the apprehension rate for both young males and young females actually declined over the period” (Cited in Chong, 2007, p. 2).

In New Zealand, as in many other countries, reported incidences in the number of young women convicted for crimes of violence have increased, but much of the research literature has suggested that these figures are unreliable (Chong, 2007; Pate, 2002). What is apparent is an increase in the circumstances that have been identified as likely to correspond with adolescent female aggression, as identified by the Dunedin longitudinal study. Puberty is the time when serious aggression is most evident in females and this is occurring at an increasingly early age (Gluckman & Hanson, 2006), escalating the potential gap between physical maturity and the cognitive ability to make sensible decisions. Alcohol abuse is reported as another major contributing factor and several studies report an increase in hospital admissions of girls as young as 13 years for alcohol poisoning (Needham, 2005; Quigley, 2007). This issue has become particularly noticeable since the lowering of the drinking age and the introduction of sweet “alco-pops” (Arnott, 2008). Party pills and the easy availability of cannabis in New Zealand exacerbate this issue (ibid.). The physical changes that occur at puberty conspire to make girls look older than they are, increasing the differences between them and their age peers. It also increases the opportunity for access to drugs and alcohol and the likelihood that girls will become involved in relationships with older males; another indicator for aggressive behaviour. As Moffitt et al. (2001) stated, “The social stimulus consequences of females’ puberty for their peer relationships, the opportunities and contextual motivations that promote illicit activities surrounding drugs and alcohol, and the special situation of abusive intimate relationships and assortatively mated offender relationships are of key importance” (p. 244).

Feminist researchers, such as Batchelor (2001), Pate (2002), and Ringrose (2006), have suggested that an increase in conviction rates of young women is more a reflection of the increasing criminalisation of young women’s survival skills, or self-defence, than a significant change in the behaviour of the girls. Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) refer to the “criminalization of minor forms of youthful misbehaviour” (p. 55) and Pate (2002) and Motz (2008) cited inequalities in support systems for young women and systemic bias in the judiciary system as further factors to be

considered. Pate claimed that that the relaxation of traditional social controls has led to increased use of the juvenile justice system as a way of managing the "unmanageable" behaviour of adolescent girls (2002, p. 2). Earlier, Pearson (1997) had suggested that cultural beliefs about the gendered nature of violence in the United States have historically influenced the police and judiciary. She claimed that:

> Women commit the majority of child homicides in the United States, a greater share of physical child abuse, an equal rate of sibling violence and assaults on the elderly, about a quarter of child sexual abuse, an overwhelming share of the killings of newborns, and a fair preponderance of spousal assaults. (p. 7)

However, the prevailing perception in the 1990s was that: "Violence is masculine. Men are the cause of it, and women and children are the ones who suffer" (ibid.). Therefore violence committed by females was seen as self-defence or the result of "battered women's syndrome": the rare result of provocation or mental illness. Pearson coined the term "chivalry justice" and claimed that male judges tended to view females as less dangerous than their male equivalents and more redeemable. By contrast, Summers (2002) described the attitudes of male authority figures towards the female settlers in Australia within strict moral codes. Women were either "good", that is, chaste, nurturing or maternal, performing male-determined roles of how a woman "should" behave, or they were the antithesis of this and therefore "bad" (p. 197). Summers explained that any females who failed to conform to the "God's Police" image of femininity were quite literally condemned to the role of "Damned Whores". Young women incarcerated for minor misdemeanours were denied education and the opportunity to equip themselves for independence and thus forced into prostitution as this "is practically the only way they can earn a living" (p. 208). Ironically, whether "God's Police" or "Damned Whore", a woman was not regarded as an adult capable of thinking for herself or earning a respectable living. Celia Lashlie (2002) hypothesised that an increase in the number of females with authority in the judiciary and the police in New Zealand has recently led to women being treated as "fully functioning adults who are responsible for their behaviour" and that the female prison population is growing as a result (p. 90).

The stereotypical images of "good", or gender-appropriate female behaviour, and "bad", or unfeminine female behaviour, pervades literature and dominates all aspects of life. For a number of reasons, including male dominance of historical studies of aggression (Miller, 2002; Motz, 2008; Pearson, 1997), aggressive girls have been seen as "other" (Ringrose, 2006) and individual females who have been convicted of crimes of aggression have been variously demonised or pathologised (McKnight & Loper, 2002). Throughout history, characters such as the notorious British "moors murderer" Myra Hindley and New Zealand "baby killer" Minnie Deans have been depicted as the epitome of evil, at once feared and despised. Serious aggression is still regarded as a naturally male pursuit, described in terms of physical violence, and the females who do behave in this way have been labelled in masculine terms. Many academic studies into the topic of girls' aggression (see, for example, Batchelor, 2001; Pate, 2002; Pepler, 2003) suggest that because "most explanations of violence are based on studies of men's violence ... female violence is either 'masculinised' or seen as a manifestation of madness, hence the view that violent women must be either trying to be men or just crazy" (Burman, et al., 2002, p. 1). These insights alert us to the persistence of a problematic gender dualism, within which distinctions between men and women, masculinity and femininity are maintained or re-created. The gender stereotype that classifies men as violent and women as nurturing is an example, with downstream effects on the framing of research investigations and their interpretations such as have been described here.

Feminist researchers challenge the assumption that more girls are behaving more aggressively and call for further research into the aetiology and social contexts specific to female aggression. They point out that the denial of female potential for aggression and the historical lack of academic interest on the topic have meant that there is a severe shortage of gender-specific early intervention and support strategies for those few girls at risk of serious aggressive behaviour (Pearson, 1997). I will discuss the theoretical background relevant to this issue and the problem of gender dualism, in the next chapter.

Part C: Why ask the girls?

In New Zealand, as in most countries, most explanations of violence are based on studies of men's violence (Moffitt et. al., 2001), and very few have actually asked "the

girls themselves what they think about things and what their experiences of violence and of using violence are" (Burman et. al., 2002, p. 1). Consequently, there is still relatively little known about girls' motivations towards, and expressions of, different forms of violence. Ringrose (2006) blamed a backlash against feminism for the current "moral panic" about adolescent female aggression, claiming that "the dual dynamic of both fear and repudiation of feminism (painted by McRobbie) is indicated by the enormous panic girls' aggression incites" (p. 419). All of the theories discussed in part A of this literature review are based on adult perceptions of and interpretations of girls' behaviour. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli "subscribe to an exploratory research process that involves a politics of commitment to hearing the voices of students which are often silenced in schools" (2005, p. 2) and the aim of my study is also to understand aggression from the perspectives of six early adolescent girls whose schools have identified them as behaving aggressively.

Carroll-Lind (2006) highlights the poor record that New Zealand researchers and policy makers have in listening to children and young people. She says, "Young people, because of their age and immaturity are often treated as incapable of rational judgement in describing violence" (p. 7). She cites Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12:

> 1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child
>
> 2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rights of national law. (United Nations General Assembly, 1989)

In their study, Batchelor et al. (2001) aimed to portray "the everyday understandings, conceptualisations and experiences" of girls from a cross section of backgrounds (p. 126). Their findings emphasise the importance of researching the ways in which girls "understand, experience and use violence" (p. 131) and question the relevance of

adult-led agendas and intervention programmes that do not take account of the agendas of the girls with whom they work. These theories will be explained in more detail later.

Like the Glasgow study cited earlier (Burman et al., 2002), my study is concerned with "the everyday understandings, conceptualisations and experiences" of girls from a cross section of backgrounds (Batchelor et al., 2001, p. 126) who have been identified by their school as behaving aggressively. Not only is the involvement of the participants a legal requirement under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but it also makes common sense. As most historical studies of aggression were conducted by male researchers and are really about the aggressive behaviour of boys, it is likely that most interventions are based on an understanding of boys' aggression and girls who are "loud, loutish, often drunk and disorderly, out of control and looking for fights" (p. 125). Aggressive young women have been described as "ladettes" or "blokettes" and their behaviour interpreted as a function of masculinity or a lack of femininity (Ringrose, 2006). To gain an insight into the social environment in which these girls live, and their understandings of aggression from the viewpoint of aggressor and victim, it is important to ask the girls themselves. An understanding of the social contexts for adolescent female aggression must therefore be informed by the understandings of the adolescent female participants (Batchelor et al., 2001).

Conclusion

For most young women, adolescence is a time of optimum health, fitness and energy, as well as emerging intellectual capability (Gross, 1996; Hines & Paulson, 2006; Lerner, 2002) and these individuals maintain close and warm relationships with their parents. However, young women who have already the experienced risk factors for aggression described in part A, and those who experience early puberty, exacerbating the gap between their physical, sexual maturity and their cognitive development, are particularly vulnerable. It is this relatively small group of "at risk" young women that contributed to what Dahl (2003) described as "the soaring rates of serious accidents, suicide, homicide, aggression and violence, use of alcohol and drugs, emotional disorders and health consequences of risky sexual behaviour" (p. 17).

While there is general agreement that males far outnumber females in terms of antisocial and aggressive behaviours, regardless of culture (Baillargeon et al., 2007;

Batchelor, 2005; Moffitt et al., 2001), since the mid-1990s there has been a growing perception that females are becoming more aggressive and that this aggression is becoming more violent and overt (Arnott, 1995; Batchelor, 2005; McKnight & Loper, 2002; Pate, 2002; Ringrose, 2006). This perception is supported by court statistics which indicate an increase in the number of females charged with serious offences of aggression in countries such as England, Scotland, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Batchelor, 2001; Leschied et al., 2000; McLaran, 2002; Pate, 2002). Over the past 20 years, however, all of these countries have been subject to social change and expectation including changes in girls' developmental stages, changes in popular culture, and changes in parenting behaviours. Societies' expectations of girls' behaviour have also changed, with subsequent changes in the laws and the judicial system (Pate, 2002). The literature review demonstrates that the various media have played a large role in developing and legitimising this perception, to the extent that they have created new labels, such as "ladettes" or "blokettes", implying that aggressive behaviour is a masculine act and thus girls who behave aggressively are trying to be male (Burman et al., 2002). Finally, this review presents literature to support the inclusion of the voice of the participants in the research (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). It suggests that because most historical data about aggression is about teenage boys' behaviour, and because most of the available data is interpreted from an adult perspective, there is a lack of understanding of the social contexts for adolescent female aggression and the beliefs and experiences of the young women who have been described as aggressive.

The prognosis for young women who behave aggressively is grim and it is more likely to be grim for their offspring and so on into the next generation. Earlier identification and intervention for such young women may help to break the cycle of aggressive behaviour, because "avoiding the issue of women's violence represents as much of a threat as we previously felt talking about it did" (Miller, 2000, p. 209). Helping teachers and other authority figures to recognise and understand the particular circumstances of young women at risk of seriously aggressive behaviour is the first step. Keeping these girls in school and offering early intervention and support to them and their families, may help avoid the ongoing cycle of aggression and abuse.

The literature review has focused on the themes that are central to the perception of an increase in the severity and frequency of adolescent female aggression. It emphasised

the importance of listening to first-hand experiences of young women identified as displaying seriously aggressive behaviour. The following chapter will explain the theories that have been drawn on in the studies that I have reviewed and that, during the course of this study, I decided would be useful for analysis of my participants' accounts.

3. Theoretical Explanations

This chapter offers some theoretical explanations that may shed light on the perception that more adolescent girls are behaving more aggressively. Part A explores some of the major theories of adolescence that have contributed to the commonly held beliefs about teenage boys' and girls' behaviour. Biological and sociological explanations for teenage aggression are explored as are more recent neuropsychological theories that encompass both.

As Part A of this chapter explains, all of the theories explored have described adolescent male aggressive behaviour as far more common and also more overtly aggressive than adolescent female behaviour. Part B of this chapter explains theories of gender construction to examine this claim. The complex interaction between genetic and environmental influences on gender identity and the way that this is expressed are explored through a variety of theories. My dissatisfaction with these traditional theories, based on my own life experience and my journey through the literature, led me to explore feminist poststructuralist theory, which is explained in Part C.

Part A: Theories of adolescence

Each of the following theories has contributed to the understanding of adolescent development and behaviour that prevails today, and reflects the values, roles and perceptions of its time (Gross, 1996). While acknowledging that biological and social changes affect the way that adolescents view and present themselves, some underlying wider social perceptions remain; most notably that adolescents are "difficult". While some perceptions endure, others change over time and from one culture to another. In 2002, Elkind commented that:

> The adolescent is a gift of nature, but our perception of adolescence is always a social construction. As a social construction, adolescence always reflects the values roles and perceptions of the prevailing society. When

> these values roles and perceptions change, so too does our manner of viewing adolescence. (Cited in Lerner, 2002, p. 97)

At the beginning of the 20th century, psychologists emphasised the influence of "nature" on human development. One of the most influential figures in early studies of adolescence and human development was G. Stanley Hall (1904). His theory of recapitulation represents his belief that human psychological development recapitulates the biological and cultural stages of human evolution (Gross, 1996; Lerner, 2002). He saw himself as the "Darwin of the mind" (Dixon & Lerner, 1999, p. 40) and he attempted to apply Darwin's theories of evolutionary development to his own psychological theory. His theory represented adolescence as "a period of transition from being beast like to being human like (i.e., civilized and mature)" claiming that "early adolescence is thus the infancy of man's higher nature, when he receives from the great all-mother his last capital of energy and evolutionary momentum" (Hall, 1904, vol. 2, p. 71). Because of this great surge in development, Hall described adolescence as a time of "sturm und drang" (storm and stress), which "mirrors the volatile history of the human race over the past 2000 years" (Gross, 1996, p. 537). Although Hall's specific recapitulation theory was heavily criticised and not widely adopted, the phrase "storm and stress" has endured to become synonymous with the notion of adolescence as a time of turbulence, and has contributed to the development of other theories of adolescence (Lerner, 2002). For example, Freud's (1905) psychoanalytic theory portrays adolescence as a physical state in which the sexual maturation – the genital stage of children – unbalances their personalities, driving them to seek independence and "detachment from parental authority" (Freud, 1905, cited in Gross, 1996, p. 538).

Nurture theories, on the other hand, emphasise the importance of experiential and environmental influences on behaviour and view behaviour as a conditioned response. For example, McCandless (1970) proposed a nurture explanation of storm and stress. His drive reduction theory suggests that human behaviour is driven by internal needs, such as hunger, pain avoidance or sex. He suggests that human beings develop habitual responses to the drive state by the conditioning effect of other people's reactions to our behaviour. At adolescence, the sex drive emerges and McCandless argued that as societal responses to adolescent sexuality differ for males and females, we are channelled into developing habits that are socially prescribed as sexually appropriate.

He interpreted the storm and stress of adolescence, therefore, as the result of a gap between the emergence of the sex drive and the development of socially prescribed habits to diminish it.

Bridging the nature–nurture divide are several "nature–nurture interaction theories" (Lerner, 2002, p. 42). The most influential is Erikson's (1963; 1968) psychosocial theory of development. This theory proposed that human beings progress through eight stages of biologically determined development but that it is impossible to progress from one to another until the individual is biologically, psychologically and sociologically ready. At the transition point from one stage to another, people undergo a different crisis. At puberty, the crisis is the struggle to develop a sense of identity: to know one's role in society and the values that one believes in. Erikson believed that adolescence marks the transition from a childhood world view of dependence to that of an adult, one who will be responsible for others.

It is generally agreed that Erikson's work generated the "lifespan approach" to human development (Gross, 1996; Lerner, 2002). The lifespan approach proposes that human development occurs across all phases of life and is influenced by social, cultural and historical changes. This approach emphasises the diversity between people and ongoing changes within a person. The unique nature of each individual's developmental pathway depends on a combination of biological, psychological and social factors. (Lerner, 2002, p. 24).

Erikson himself was heavily influenced by the work of anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, whose work was in part a response to the "nature" theories of Freud. Gross (1996) also cited Benedict (1934) and Mead (1942), each of whom noted that while children of all cultures make a transition from dependence on adults to relative independence, the manner in which this happens varies enormously (Gross, 1996; Lerner, 2002). Furthermore, Gross cites Schlegal and Barry (1991) who examined teenagers in 186 pre-industrial societies and found that 60% of those cultures have no name for adolescence and that most children progress smoothly through the various stages of development into adulthood. In over half of these countries, adolescent antisocial behaviour was absent and in the others, it was very mild. Gluckman and Hanson (2006) have also recently pointed out that in many pre-industrial societies, adolescence is formally ended by a "right of passage" into

adulthood and for many girls, this comes soon after the onset of menarche, when they are married and assume the role of wife and mother.

Gross (1996) discussed a number of significant psychosocial theories that were developed by Erikson's contemporaries, writers such as Blos (1967) and Bowlby (1973). In 1967, Blos described adolescence as a necessary "second individuation process" where adolescents "disengage" from their dependence on the family unit and form their own sense of self. He suggested that the adolescents' urge to hang out in groups, take risks, experiment with drugs and alcohol and other such stereotypical behaviours are all part of this process. Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory suggests that those who become particularly dependent on peers may lack emotional support at home. Steinberg and Silverman (1986, cited in Gross, 1996, p. 538), developed this theory by suggesting that boys are more likely to "trade their dependence on family for dependence on the peer group", and that "girls are more autonomous with respect to their parents and also more resistant to peer pressure".

The association with deviant peers has, therefore, long been cited as a major contributing factor to adolescent aggression (Steinberg, 2004), although this belief has been challenged by some recent researchers. For example, Mrug, Hoza, and Bukowski (2004) have claimed that choosing to associate with aggressive peers is a reliable predictor of future aggressive behaviour, whereas simply being chosen by disruptive peers does not appear to affect future behaviour. They surmised that "by selecting certain peers as friends, children may choose to spend more time with these peers: admire and imitate their behaviour; and allow them to shape their behaviour through reinforcement" (p. 64). These authors explained that there is limited and so far unreliable research into the influence of peer behaviour on girls, and cited two studies which show disparate results. The belief in peer influence, and the so-called "generation gap" between the values of adolescents and those of their parents has also been challenged by other contemporary researchers (Gross, 1996; Lerner, 2002) who have claimed that young people are likely to select friends who share the dominant values of their parents. Further, "although adolescents spend increasingly more time with peers, than with parents, and the influence of peers may actually increase across adolescence, parents remain central in the adolescents' world" (Lerner, 2002, p. 19).

Most recently, advances in technology and the neurosciences have resulted in research that suggests that the gap between sexual and social maturation makes young female adolescents particularly vulnerable to low self-esteem, poor body image and the advances of deviant male peers (Connor, 2002). The mismatch between sexual maturity and cognitive development means that young female adolescents lack the ability to make sensible decisions, particularly when under stress or faced with multiple problems to solve (Dahl, 2003). It has been argued that, as with young males, chemical changes in the brain make the young female adolescent particularly vulnerable to risk taking and other emotionally charged activities (ibid.). In addition to obvious physical changes, the effect of these hormones on the brain drives the development of psycho-sexual function, the concept of self and sexual identity. Those who have experienced family conflict, poor attachment, neglect, and emotional, physical and/or sexual childhood maltreatment are more likely to have a fragile and insecure sense of self, to experience difficulties in relationships and to be attracted to and by deviant peers (Marcia, 2001). These girls are also more likely to undergo early puberty, thus exacerbating the effects of the gap between sexual and social maturity (Connor, 2002). A combination of the above factors makes the young adolescent female particularly vulnerable to excitement and the stimulating effects of drugs and alcohol, according to Dahl (2003). Increased exposure to deviant peers provides greater peer modelling and social reinforcement for antisocial behaviours (Connor, 2002). Further, girls with antisocial tendencies before adolescence may use their appearance to gain access to a pseudo-adult world where delinquency "appears to offer an effective means of knifing off childhood apron strings" (Caspi et al., 1993, cited in Miller, 2004). In Western cultures, this is a time when parental pressures and supervision may diminish allowing greater opportunity for at-risk girls to act in antisocial ways (Connor, 2002).

The preceding theories all assume that adolescence is part of a natural progression of sequential steps from infancy to old age, variously conditioned by contextual socialisation processes. However poststructural theory suggests that adolescents are not naturally predisposed to particular behaviours, nor are they passively shaped by others. Rather, each individual is an active agent who takes up a range of possible subject positions which vary widely across and within class, race, culture and context. This theory will be further developed later in this chapter.

Part B: How do we become gendered beings?

The previous part of this chapter described the range of theories that have contributed to an understanding of the term ‘adolescence’. The nature–nurture discussion about human behaviour is continued in this part B, which focuses firstly on theories of sex and gender differences and progresses to explore the different possibilities suggested by a poststructural approach. The following theories have all contributed to an understanding of gender identification, and help to explain why young women who behave aggressively are seen by many in society as abnormal and why systems for early identification of aggression and resources for intervention are targeted at boys.

Essentialist biological theories

Several theories have proposed that there is an essential difference between the sexes that is natural and inevitable. For example, from evolutionary biology it has been proposed that:

> There is a female human nature and there is a male human nature and these natures are extraordinarily different … Men and women differ in their sexual natures because throughout the immensely long hunting and gathering phase of evolutionary history the sexual desires and dispositions that were adaptive for each sex were for the other tickets to reproductive oblivion. (Symons, 1979, cited in Pinker, 2002, p. 461)

Most of these theories are based on the premise that the more defined or extreme the gender definition of that partner, the more suited they would be to their selective role in life – hunter gatherer or mother and child-rearer. These theorists suggested that humans are biologically driven to seek reproduction with the sexual partner most likely to produce strong, healthy offspring (Pinker, 2002). According to this theory, females are programmed to try to look young and fertile, with signs of good health such as clear skin and shiny hair, while males are programmed to seek money or power, in order to attract said partners (ibid.).

As noted by Symons (1979, in Pinker 2002), essentialist theorists believed that there is a core personality trait that is either male or female, a biological or psychological determinant to the different behaviours of boys and girls. They have argued that genetic and hormonal differences cause males and females to adopt gender-specific

behaviours. For example, Islamic feminists, who adopt an essentialist stance regarding gender, believe that womanhood is a "god-given characteristic" (Franks, 2002, p. 1). Many cultural feminists also subscribe to the view that certain behavioural traits are "wired into" children from birth, while these hypotheses are disputed by those constructionist theorists who argue that random infant behaviour is reinforced by social response, as "gender appropriate" behaviour is rewarded (Burn, 1996; Galliano, 2003). Essentialist theorising maintains that males and females have evolved differently in respect to reproduction and mating, and a process of natural selection has favoured males who can overcome the female resistance to sex. An implication here is that it is natural for males to control their female partners. Even if one were to accept the fact that males have evolved to become more dominant, there are clear cultural differences in how individuals express their dominance, however. It is not always associated with aggression or greater strength: artistic or creative ability, civic reputation, or as in Britain, the ability to maintain a "stiff upper lip" can also be significant. Thus the characterisation of aggression as primarily "male", or as a "natural" masculine trait, is simplistic. Given the limitations of these essential nature theories of gender differences, scholars drew on research into social behaviours to find other explanations of how gender is constructed, with masculine and feminine characteristics and behaviours as opposite and sometimes also complimentary. The following theories could be viewed as "nurture" theories.

Social construction and socialisation theories

Social construction theory takes a critical stance to that which is generally taken for granted (Franks, 2002). Whereas the biological essentialist assumption is that sex differences between male and female translate unproblematically into universal gender differences between masculinity and femininity, socialisation theory proposes that different versions of masculinity and femininity are socially produced at different times and in different places (Oakley, 2005). Rather than linking gender differences in a determinate way to biology whereby the pervasiveness of gender difference stereotypes are regarded as 'natural', socialisation theories propose that

> Societies socialise their members into gender roles and expectations and they associate various traits or qualities with gender categories. The very fact that these roles, expectations, traits and qualities vary from society to

> society and over time indicates the real but often hidden, disjunction between sex and gender. (James and Saville-Smith 1989, p. 3)

By this reasoning, "to be a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, is as much a function of dress, gesture, occupation, social network and personality as it is of possessing a particular set of genitals" (Oakley, 2005, p. 8). Indeed, there are many examples of trans-gendered males throughout history and across cultures; for example, the Greek eunuchs and the Italian castrati. The removal of their sex organs was a deliberate act to enable them to perform particular roles, but this did not necessarily change their gender identity. Many of them held enormous power or could gain access to power via their capacity to earn vast amounts of money. Similarly, females such as Joan of Arc, Queen Elizabeth I and Margaret Thatcher were renowned for their assumption of power, although they did not need to undergo surgery to do so. Thus it is evident that the mere possession of particular sex organs did not naturally constrict an individual's gender-related behaviours.

Various theories have been developed to explain how gender differences are learned and maintained. From the 1950s, within the influence of social role theory, psychologists have studied how children are socially conditioned into complying with gender specific behaviours. Structural functionalist theorists such as Parsons (1954) believed that learned roles and practices, (for example, females are homemakers and males are income earners), were necessary for society to function successfully as a whole. These theorists believed that if people deviated from their prescribed roles, there were social control mechanisms that would stop the deviance, ultimately at the legal level or, in most cases, through the stronger mechanisms that the social system has to maintain order. For many years, this belief in functional behaviourism replaced the study of genetics.

The behaviourist assumption is that children's behaviour can be trained and shaped by a system of rewards and punishments and children develop a belief that certain behaviours are appropriate or not by the ways that others respond to them and from the messages that they receive from the media. Thus, if a child's deviation from expected gender role behaviour is met with disapproval, they are less likely to repeat that behaviour. Conversely when little girls are praised for behaviours that comply with the socially expected norm for little girls and little are boys praised for complying with the

socially acceptable behaviours for boys such behaviours will be reinforced and repeated.

Of particular relevance to my thesis is an oft quoted experiment described by Ridley (2003) and Galliano (2003) which demonstrates how pervasive gender specific behavioural expectations are. In this experiment, a group of research participants were shown a videotape of a group of toddlers dressed in identical snow suits and left playing in the snow. Three groups of adults were then respectively informed that they were (a) all boys, (b) boys and girls, and (c) all girls. Those told that they were all boys tended to excuse any aggressive behaviour on the grounds that "boys will be boys", whereas the participants in the other two groups expressed consternation that the girls were either giving or receiving aggression. This condoning of male aggression and condemnation of female aggression would undoubtedly be transmitted to the children concerned.

However, Ridley (2003) suggested that many of the assumptions made linking behaviour to social learning may be challenged. For example, although abusive parents tend to produce abusive children, and neurotic parents produce neurotic children, he suggested that this is just as likely to be the result of genetic inheritance as social conditioning. Ridley cited the numerous twin studies that have shown almost no effect of shared environment on personality. He dismissed the claim of socialisation theorists that different parenting styles result in different behaviours in children as confusion of cause and effect, stating that there is increasing evidence to show that what socialisation theorists have described as parent-to-child effects are actually child-to-parent effects or the application of child agency.

A further example of socialisation theory was described by Burn (1996), who explained that the ways in which humans are conditioned to comply with gender expectations are via "normative" and "informational" pressures (Burn, 1996). Normative pressure, she suggested, results from the fear of social rejection. For example, peer acceptance exerts normative pressure a state that is perceived by social psychologists as critical to healthy adolescent adjustment (Martin & Fabes, 2001). Smith and Leaper also emphasised the importance of peer acceptance, stating that "peer acceptance is likely more fundamental to adolescent adjustment than is their gender conformity" (2006, p. 73). Studies within this theoretical approach have argued

that gender polarisation is reinforced by the conditioning that occurs through same sex play, and that young children are socialised by their same-sex peers to conform to stereotypical *sex role* behaviour (ibid.). In regard to "adolescent self-perceived gender typicality", Burn (1996) further suggested that any deviation from stereotypical gender-role conformity at adolescence was likely to attract the label homosexual, especially for boys and the derogatory use of terms such as "fag", "queer", and "gay". Burn (ibid.) suggested that it is the desire to avoid such stigmatising labels that encourages conformity to gender roles.

The second form of conditioning described by Burn (1996), is that of, informational pressure, which refers to the fact that human beings develop a sense of self and of gender-appropriate behaviour by observing and mimicking others. Burn (1996) stated that:

> In regard to gender roles, when we look around us and see men and women doing different things, and hear others emphasise how different men and women are, we assume it is so and conform to these expectations. (p. xx)

In most cases, the terms 'sex-role' and 'gender role' have been used indiscriminately by social constructionists, suggesting at once that gender specific behaviour is both natural (essentialist) and socially constructed. In both cases, the polarisation of male/female, masculine/feminine is seen as inevitable and unproblematic.

Although taken up enthusiastically by many female sociologists as a means of "making women visible" (Edwards, 1983, p.387) sex/gender role theory has attracted an increasing number of criticisms. As stated previously, the language used to describe the concept of sex or gender roles inevitably implies a fundamental difference between male behaviour and female behaviour, perpetuating the notion of gender dualism that is challenged in this thesis. The term 'role' also supports Parson's functionalist approach to gender, whereby males and females are conditioned to adopt specific behaviours in order to maintain established social structures. Several writers point out that 'sex role' theory has traditionally focussed on women, and in doing so it has "concentrated almost exclusively on the family setting and, and more specifically on the internal processes of the family" (Millman, 1971, p.773, cited in Edwards 1983, p. 386), once again reinforcing the notion of gender dualism. Additionally, gender role theory implies that female deviance, whether criminal or psychological is:

> rarely if ever portrayed as rational, creative, heroic or inspired by serious social and political motives. It is more probably seen as 'derivative of their acting as women' and interpreted both by sociologists and by most members of society as a direct and simple outcome of women's 'narrowly sex-stereotyped roles' (Millman, 1975, p. 253) which in turn are reflections of their basic biological and sexual characteristics. (Edwards, 1983, p.396)

Furthermore, the over-emphasis on socialisation as the source of role conformity and social order has diverted attention from issues of power (Bernard, 1973, cited in Edwards, 1983, p.386) which will be explored in the next section. As will be further developed later in this chapter, some theorists have maintained that gender is performed and that gender roles may be taken on or discarded at will (Meade & Weisner-Hanks, 2004). However, Thorne (1993) argued that the dichotomous nature of individual gender categories and identity – one is either a girl or a boy, never both – may constrain an individual's choices because of the strength of dualism on one's ways of thinking about gender.

Feminist poststructuralists proposed that the assumption of dualism must be challenged within a poststructuralist approach, and Davies (1989) maintained that a poststructural approach "allows me to recognise the multiple discourses (belief systems) in which I participate and to see myself differently constituted through each of them" (Davies 1989, p. 139).

Some feminist writers have criticised this approach, on the grounds that poststructuralism has been a major stumbling block in the progress of gender equality. Oakley, for example contended that:

> The arguments of postmodern feminists have especially weakened the political uses of gender, since such arguments suspend the categories "women" and "men", and refute "the grand narrative of gender difference (Butler, 1990; Nicholson, 1990, Wittig, 1992). Both sex and gender are reduced to "performative" aspects of life, a reductionism which is fatal for gender, in particular, rendering it (as Hoff, 1994, put it) a "postmodern category of paralysis". (Oakley, 2005, p. 4)

However, as will explained in the next section, many feminist researchers find that poststructuralist analyses enable them to develop a far broader range of possibilities for understanding issues of gender and power.

In summary, then, while most social constructionist theories have moved away from an essentialist, biological view of gender dichotomy, as I have been indicating, these theories often still reinforce a binary approach to understanding gender, with clearly defined expectations for both masculinity and femininity. As Burn (1996) pointed out in her summary of conditioning theories, normative pressure stems from our desire to be liked and informative pressure stems from our desire to be right. According to these theories, girls who behave aggressively, and thus step outside of the culturally accepted gender norms, are not bound by the conventional need to be liked and accepted by their peers and do not fear the reactions of adults. They either do not notice or do not care about the fact that aggression is a trait more commonly associated with males and in terms of my study, such theorising reinforces the fact that girls who behave aggressively, a behaviour which is generally more evident in males, are abnormal.

My study was interested in the perceptions of the girls who have been identified as aggressive. Did they understand that their behaviour was outside of the norm for girls? Did they care? How did they perceive others reactions to them?

Despite Oakley's (2005) political concern about the potential weakening of the "feminist emancipatory project" (p. 4), I thought, as I read more about feminist poststructuralism, which clearly challenges notions of gender dualism, that this was potentially a very useful approach for the interpretation of my study.

Part C: Feminist Poststructuralist Theory

Feminist poststructuralists believe that male/female dualism pervades every aspect of human life, and this supports and maintains the power imbalance between men and women (Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000, 2001; Court, 2001; England, 2002; Middleton, 1998). As stated above, it was my dissatisfaction with theories related to prescribed gender roles together with their reinforcement of gender dualism, which led me to explore feminist poststructuralist approaches to understanding gender. Poststructural analyses have been widely used by feminist researchers for a number of years because

they provide different possibilities for understanding girls' socialisation "which go beyond seeing girls as primarily disadvantaged and socialised within oppressive patriarchal structures" (Jones, 1993, p. 157).

In this section, I will first explain the terminology used in poststructural analyses and then describe how a poststructural approach to gender identity at adolescence informs my study of adolescent female aggression.

Discourse, power and subjectivity

In accordance with the theory proposed by Foucault (1980), poststructuralists have pointed out that:

> The human subject is produced in the discursive practices that make up the social world (as opposed to a pre-given psychological subject who is made social or socialised). This means that we need an understanding of how, what Foucault (1977) called the micro-physics of power, actually works to form the discourses through what it means to be a subject within different social practices is produced and regulated. (Walkerdine, 1999, p. 4)

Court (2003) explained that feminist poststructuralist researchers (for example, Davies, 1989,1993; Fraser & Nicholson, 1990; Hekman, 1990; Jones, 1991; McNay, 1992; Weedon1987) have used the term 'discourses' to refer to "historically, socially and culturally specific bodies of meaning that exist in and are shaped by language, practices and representations (p.85). Thus, at a general level, discourse refers to a body of meaning, regardless of the form of its transmission, which may be through language, beliefs or behaviour, and may be conscious or unconscious; that is, taken for granted. The process of *discourse analysis* is used to "tease out the strands of meaning, underlying assumptions and belief systems embedded within a certain discourse" (ibid.). When applied via a feminist poststructural approach, discourse at a macro level refers to such bodies of meaning and knowledge that are embedded within language, institutional or organisational practices and representations (Court, 2007, p. 2). Such macro discourses are the very systems of organisational power, such as social policy that become taken for granted or accepted as "common sense". Foucault (1980) referred to macro discourses as "regimes of truth" and consequently the words of those in power are generally taken as "self-evident truths" whereas the words of those not in power are dismissed as irrelevant, inappropriate, or without substance (van Dijk,

2000). Such dominant truth regimes "powerfully shape personal identities, behaviour and social relationships and societal institutions (O'Neill & Morgan, 2001, p.264). Thus these macro discourses affect the micro levels of discourse and the way that individuals perceive themselves as subjects in the world as well as how individuals can take up particular discourses and speak through them. Poststructural feminists contend that it is the "range and social power of the existing discourses and our access to them and the political strength of the interests they represent that shape our lives and practices" (Court, 2001, p. 112).

Poststructural feminists have thus highlighted the ways in which people unconsciously modify their "ways of being" and their behaviour according to the range of discourses in circulation and available to them in particular social groups or situations. Hence, poststructural feminists typically do not refer to any one identity; rather they refer to a range of possible subjectivities (Court, 2007). As Davies (1989) explained, "It becomes possible to locate myself as adopting a variety of discursive practices depending on the context, the interactive others and the task at hand" (p. 139). Whereas in socialisation theory, the focus is on the process of shaping the individual that is taken by others, in poststructuralist theory, the focus is on the way each person actively takes up the discourses through which they and others speak or write the world into existence "as if they were their own" (Davies, 1993, p. 13). Thus it is the possibility of agency in the process of becoming or being masculine or feminine or of performing gender which enables an escape from the pervading dualism of male and female (Barvosa-Carter, 2001).

The concept of subjectivity is a 'slippery' one and Jones (1997) described the difficulty that many of her students experience when grappling with the apparent contradictions in Davies' argument regarding agency. She believed that it is difficult for them to comprehend the "doubled/complex sense of 'being (a) subject' within the poststructuralist framework which proposes a subjectivity which is 'precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1987, p.32). However, Davies emphasised that awareness of and reflection on the particular discourses that construct our ways of being in the world enables "the possibility of new ways of thinking and new forms of subjectivity" (ibid. p. 39). Jones claimed that Davies' explanation of agency implies a humanist belief in a

'self' who is constant and free to choose her particular ways of being in the world, however, as Weedon (1987) explained

> Although the subject in poststructuralism is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. (Weedon, 1987, p. 125)

The use of pronouns such as "I", "we" or "you" reinforces the concept of agency being free or personal choice. As Davies and Harre (1990, p. 62) explained, "We tend to assume it is possible to have made a set of consistent choices located within only one discourse". In other words, clues within the choice of words or associated actions evoke for the listener images of known storylines and positions within these stories. Their response to this dilemma was to coin the phrase "positioning" to describe how conversations reveal the way that humans 'position' themselves according to the discursive practices available to them, thus

> An individual emerges through processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. (Davies & Harre, 1990, p.46)

As such, girls can not be seen as simply socialised into their appropriate gender roles – they position themselves. In practical terms, working within a poststructuralist analysis of her research, Paechter (2006a, p. 14) identified the gender learning that occurs in "localised communities of masculinity and femininity practice". She likened the process of learning which takes place within these communities of practice to that which occurs in groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, where group members gradually develop the knowledge, understanding and ability to be full members. Paechter explained that:

> As full members they have also acquired an understanding of the world and ways of behaving in it that is aligned with those of other group members. They have taken on the norms and values of the group, its ways of living, its understanding of the identities of its members. (p. 14)

Where segregation by gender occurs, Paechter argued "other social definitions get squeezed out by heightened awareness of gender as a dichotomy and of "the girls" and "the boys" as opposite and even antagonistic sides" (p. 15). Paechter noted, however, that gender boundaries need not be rigid and that membership of multiple communities of practice is possible and desirable as "an individual … can take up/ perform/ inhabit several ('memberships') at different places and times" (ibid.). In this way, she suggested, ways of being masculine or feminine become "local and negotiated" which explains why "hegemonic masculinity can have many forms in different contexts, and in which 'being feminine' can encompass both the 'surrendered wife' (Doyle, 2001) and the ladette" (Paechter, 2006a, p. 15).

Feminist poststructural theory emphasises the intersections of gender with inequalities of class or race, arguing that a focus on the binary difference between the sexes simplifies the complex nature of power differentials (Bird, 1992; Court, 2003; Jones, 1993; Smith, 1997). Jones (1993) explained that "girls become 'girls' by participating within those available sets of social meanings and practices – discourses – which define them as girls" (p.159), hence while some teachers may position boisterous girls as "tomboys, naughty or difficult", others may see them as "admirably stroppy or competent" (ibid.).

Because of the range of discourses available to girls from different socio-cultural backgrounds being a successful woman may evoke very different images. As Jones explained,

> In rejecting school work, (McRobbie's, 1978) working class girls may be seen as simultaneously resisting the feminine subject position of the docile and 'asexual' schoolgirl, while accommodating to a sexualized feminine positioning which, in their view, provides better prospects for securing a reasonable future than hoping for credentials which they are unlikely to get. (Jones, 1993, p.160)

In Chapter 2, I referred to Pere's description of growing up in a rural Maori community, where girls were expected to be as strong and active as their brothers. However, Jones (1993) and Court (2003) have explained that within a typically Pakeha dominated schooling system; such behaviour may be viewed as unfeminine and undesirable. Smith (1997) eloquently described the ways in which colonisation has

disempowered Maori discourses of gender equity, spirituality and whanau, contributing to the failure of a Pakeha education system to meet the needs of Maori girls, who may position themselves and be positioned by their teachers as 'other'. By the same token, students from predominantly Pacific backgrounds may be exposed to cultural discourses of power and authority that are located within the wisdom of their elders. Thus a 'good' student is one who listens placidly and accepts the knowledge that is conveyed by the teacher. As Jones (1993) stated, these girls may be positioned by some teachers as 'lazy' and not 'good'.

This study is interested in the beliefs and opinions of girls whose behaviours have been identified by their schools as aggressive. It will be interesting to note the various discourses that these girls have been exposed to and the consequent subject positions that they have adopted.

Summary

For many years conventional wisdom in western countries held that adolescence was inevitably turbulent (Gross, 1996; Lerner, 2002). Developing a sense of self and of one's own values was seen as a major task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968) and puberty has been described as a time when biological and social risk factors may exert both reciprocal and cumulative effects on adjustment. It has been suggested that for some individuals this may exacerbate existing risk factors for aggression and result in the stereotypical "sturm und drang", or storm and stress, associated with that stage of human development (Hines & Paulson, 2006; Lerner, 2002). However, this stereotype has been challenged by contemporary researchers who claim that the majority of young people make a successful transition from childhood to adulthood (Gross, 1996; Hines & Paulson, 2006). For example, United States-based research indicates that less than 10% of families with adolescents experience serious relationship difficulties, and that only 15% to 30% of adolescents experience serious developmental difficulties (Hines & Paulson, 2006). Indeed, in some cultures, the transition from child to adulthood is marked by a "right of passage" that clearly defines changes in relationships, and family and social responsibility with no apparent angst or confusion (Gluckman & Hanson, 2006). What all of the later theories acknowledge is that although biological factors affect adolescent development, this is also heavily influenced by experiences and relationships with other people (Coleman, 1995).

Psychologists believe that growing independence means that young people have to measure their self-image and values against those of a range of socialisation agencies, such as family, school, peer group and mass media (Gross, 1996). Thus, in order to develop a coherent sense of self, we have to assess our self-image in a range of social situations, in the light of our growing understandings of societal values. Poststructuralists argue that identity is formed by the exposure to a range of interactive discourses and that adolescents are both 'made subject' by/within the social order while being active agents/subjects within/against it (Jones, 1993, p.160).

Moffitt et al. explained that although it is now accepted that most young people will manage to negotiate the transition from child to adult with few, if any, major difficulties, it is likely that the risky behaviour of girls who already experience risk factors for aggression when they enter puberty will be exacerbated (Lerner, 2002; Pepler et al., 2002). Those most vulnerable to negative outcomes will be those who experience the simultaneous occurrence of early pubertal maturation, extensive involvement in deviant peer groups and increased conflict within family interactions. It is likely that different expectations for the behaviour of teenage girls and boys influences the judgements made about their behaviour or in poststructuralist terms, children are positioned and position themselves according to the dominant discourses available to them within any particular socio-cultural context.

This discussion of gender theories, and whether or not human beings are biologically predisposed to one gender or the other, suggests that strong differential socialisation processes are set in motion from birth and most children are left in no doubt as to which gender they belong to and how people of that gender should behave (Burn, 1996). This theory appears to be logical as, in some cultures, aspects of gender-specific behaviour are policed rigorously from the time a girl is five years old. In all countries, new parents immediately examine the external sexual organs of the child to determine that it is either a boy or a girl, frequently celebrating the birth of a son and bemoaning the birth of a girl (Burn, 1996; Oakley, 2005). The label "male" or "female" generally stays with the person throughout their lifespan and many people develop behaviours that are consistent with cultural expectations for their sex. To what degree these "stereotypical" behaviours are biologically predetermined or culturally acquired is the question to which researchers of many disciplines have sought answers (Gross, 1996; Ridley, 2003). Contemporary theories are informed by advances in neuroscience and

evolutionary psychology, and most researchers now accept that both nature and nurture are involved in the process of determining gender-specific behaviour.

What gender socialisation theorists and researchers have been saying is that while most people conform to gender norms "almost automatically", individuals vary in the degree to which they conform (Burn, 1996; Oakley, 2005). Poststructuralist feminists point out that "As children learn the discursive practices of their society, they learn to correctly position themselves as male or female … (Jones, 1993, p157). Children who do not position themselves within the prevailing discourses may be subjected to degrading sexual comments particularly after puberty, when they may be positioned as "fag" or "dyke" (Batchelor, 2005). However, at an early age such girls are often labelled "tom*boys*" and as such, may be viewed indulgently by adults their peers (Oakley, 2005; Reay, 2001; Van Volkom, 2003*)*. As Jones explained,

> Girls perceive (in their wide observations from media, family, everyday life) the positions, including silences – that are available to normal women, and usually regulate their own desires and behaviours within those parameters. This is not simply false consciousness which can be altered with some feminist education; it is not a choice between being liberated and being oppressed. Rather it is a choice between being 'okay' or 'normal' and being 'weird', between being on the margins or in the centres – albeit the marginalised centres reserved for women. (Jones, 1993, p.161)

Feminist poststructural theory provides a framework for analysis that transcends deterministic notions of gender dualism and accepts and celebrates the many contradictions that are inherent in the concept of disruptive, aggressive adolescent girlhood. My study aims to discover how adolescent girls who have been identified by their schools as behaving aggressively understand that behaviour in the context of the discourses that are available to them.

4. Research Design and Procedures

The review of the literature associated with female adolescent aggressive behaviour suggested that there was little research data available before the turn of this century; in particular there was very little awareness of the topic in New Zealand. During the course of my study, a number of studies were published about female aggression, but these tended to be from overseas and mainly in the area of criminology or in specific areas such as relational aggression. There were significant gaps in research from New Zealand; particularly those that included the voices of girls whose behaviour had been described as aggressive. I was particularly interested to find out the views of New Zealand girls; their understandings and experiences of adolescent female aggression. My study therefore set out to consult the subjects of the topic; that is, a diverse group of young adolescent girls whose behaviour had been described as aggressive.

The previous chapter identified the theoretical perspectives that informed this study and contributed to developing my interest in the social constructions of adolescent aggression and gender. After reading gender theory and research analyses, I became particularly interested in talking to girls on the cusp of adolescence for more reasons than just to explore the question of aggression. I was interested in what these girls viewed as proper or desirable adolescent girl behaviour and proper or desirable boy behaviour, and how they viewed their own "aggressive" behaviour in relation to this.

The questions that emerged out of my readings formed the basis of my study and shaped the direction of this work:

- How did this selected group of adolescent girls, whose behaviour had been identified by others as aggressive, understand aggression, and what were their experiences of this?
- What did they understand to be proper or desirable adolescent girl behaviour and proper or desirable boy behaviour?
- How did they view themselves and their own behaviour in relation to these things?

- What were the main similarities and differences between them?

In this chapter, I explain why I adopted a qualitative approach to investigating the issues that are the focus of this study. Qualitative interpretive researchers aim to understand situations from the perspective of the "actor" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) and the aim of my study was to contribute to a clearly identified gap in the New Zealand research literature – the absence of the voices of adolescent girls' whose behaviour had been described as aggressive. My reasons for choosing to talk to some girls, therefore, included generating authentic data to inform my ongoing interest in the public perceptions of acceptable masculine and feminine behaviour, while also fulfilling my commitment to hearing the voices of those who are the subject of the investigation (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Opie, 1992). As a practitioner, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the issues pertaining to adolescent female aggression, to inform others who work in the field of adolescent behaviour.

As well as explaining and justifying my qualitative case study research design, I explain why a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis, together with a reflective journaling process, was employed. In describing the methods that were used, I show how the ethical issues that arose were addressed throughout the study.

Research approach

Arguments about the relative merits of qualitative versus quantitative research, the so-called paradigm wars (Oakley, 2005), have been exhausted by previous studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Oakley, 2005; Opie, 1992). Many contemporary authors agree that what matters most is (a) "the steps researchers take to minimise the chances of their research findings simply reflecting their own selective perception", and (b) "the fit between the research method and question" (Oakley, 2005, p. 209). Consequently, it is now common for researchers to use mixed methods of enquiry to reflect the specific requirements of their studies (Oakley, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). In New Zealand, quantitative data was gathered in the Dunedin longitudinal study (Moffitt et al., 2001), usefully clarifying various misconceptions about adolescent females involved in antisocial behaviour. While this Dunedin study made specific some of the risk factors and consequences associated with adolescent female

aggression, Moffitt and colleagues (2001) suggested that for a more thorough understanding of antisocial behaviour, such behaviour needed to be considered from a wider range of perspectives, including that of the girls themselves (Moffitt et al., 2001). Before discussing in detail the particular methods used in my study, some more discussion of qualitative research follows, to help frame the overall approach that I have adopted.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research encompasses "a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 1) and I have attempted to capture some of this rich mix throughout my study. Qualitative approaches to enquiry developed initially from the work of the early 20th century anthropologists, in parallel with developments in sociology at the Chicago School during the 1920s and 1930s. At least in part, both disciplines espoused the importance of "studying social life in 'natural' settings" (Finch, 1998, p. 186). Moustakas lists such approaches to human science research as:

1. studies of human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative approaches;
2. focusing on wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts;
3. searching for meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations;
4. obtaining descriptions of experience through first person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews;
5. regarding the data of experience as imperative in understanding human behaviour and as evidence for scientific investigations;
6. formulating questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement and personal commitment of the researcher; and
7. viewing experience and behaviour as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21).

These approaches to qualitative research have informed and supported the decision to gather rich data about a particular social phenomenon, in this case the perception of an

increase in the aggressive behaviour of adolescent girls, and to illuminate it through the first person accounts of a small group of selected participants. It is also consistent with the theoretical perspective of constructionism as described in Chapter 3. As a researcher, then, I was not so much interested in gathering "facts" and determining a causal chain of events. Rather, I was interested in gathering and understanding "the meanings that people attribute to their actions and the processes by which such meanings are constructed, negotiated and shared in the course of human interaction" (Finch, 1998, p. 186).

Nor was I, by this research, attempting to produce measurable, quantitative data or findings that could be generalised across contexts. On the contrary, I aimed to gather and present snapshots of the experiences and perceptions of some individual girls from a diverse range of social and cultural backgrounds and from this to develop insights into the complex mix of circumstances that may be contributing to some adolescent girls' aggressive behaviour. Thus, the study set out to listen to the views of some girls who had been identified as aggressive and to present these views for consideration alongside other findings in this field.

Research design: Case study

Qualitative research encompasses a range of research approaches and methods, including "case study, politics and ethics, participatory inquiry, interviewing, participant observation, visual methods and interpretive analysis" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 2). A case study approach, using some of these methods, was chosen for this study, as described below.

Clearly the focus of my study and the kinds of issues that I wanted to discuss with some adolescent girls (such as family relationships, their own experiences of aggression, and personal beliefs about such behaviour) are sensitive. If useful data were to be obtained, a trusting relationship between me, the researcher, and the girls as participants would have to be developed and maintained. This would not only take time, but potentially generate an enormous amount of data. For reasons of sheer manageability, then, the number of participants needed to be limited and the scale of the case study kept small.

Case studies, particularly small-scale studies have been criticised by some as a "methodological cop-out" (Atkinson & Delamont, 1985) and as "non-technical" and providing "little basis for scientific generalisation" (Yin, 2008, p. 10). Critics maintain that case study research has a "low reliability in that it is not generally representative or generalisable beyond the specific case" (Martin, 1998) and in education, that it consists of "pedagogic research into singularities". However, although bounded in specific ways, a small case study can be "rich in information – rich in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question" (Patton, 2002, p. 54). Further, a basic tenet of qualitative research is a belief in phenomenology, that each person perceives the world in different and idiosyncratic ways. Thus, case study researchers are not seeking to measure a priori facts, but are aiming to "discover and document what it is like to be participating" (Parlett & Hamilton, 1971, p. 89, cited in Martin, 1998, p. 3). In this study, I was interested in the perspectives of a diverse group of young women whose behaviour has been described as aggressive, to find out, among other things, whether they thought girls are becoming more aggressive. What did that term mean to them? How did each of them feel about that description being applied to them? What sorts of behaviour did they consider aggressive? Yin (2008) argued that "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 2); to "explore", "explain", "describe", and "illustrate" (p. 15) such situations. I chose to use a case study, or "illuminative" approach to research (Patton, 2002) for these reasons: to gain insight into the particularly complex social phenomenon of adolescent female aggression while retaining the integrity of each individual participant and the "holistic and meaningful characteristics of [their] real life events" (ibid. p. 3). The next section describes why I drew on some aspects of grounded theory as I developed my approach to data collection and analysis.

Grounded theory methods

While elements of a number of theories, including theories of adolescence and poststructuralist theory, have contributed to my understandings of gendered dimensions of adolescent behaviour (as explained in chapter 3), grounded theory informed my thinking about research methods. Consistent with the case study approach described, grounded theory methods allow the researcher to perceive the world from the participants' perspective and to attend closely to the empirical world he

or she is studying. Yin's (2008, p. 13) statement that case studies are useful for "explaining, describing, illustrating, exploring and evaluating situations" is consistent with the grounded theory approach of "discovering, verifying, and making meaning" (pp. 23–24).

Grounded theory is a qualitative approach that sifts and sorts data from a range of categories and the concepts that emerge describe and explain the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasised the importance of remaining close to the data and not forcing these into preconceived categories, or ignoring data because it does not fit pre-existing categories. As I did not want to impose my own perceptions of aggression on to the participants, I was thus persuaded to use a grounded theory approach for data collection and management, although the analysis of the findings relied on a combination of conversation analysis and poststructural theory. By remaining close to the realities of the participants (rather than testing a preconceived hypothesis), I would be better able to deduce "what is going on" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 239) in regard to their beliefs and perceptions about the aggressive behaviour of adolescent females. Each round of conversations followed themes that had emerged previously and as the participants began to trust me and the process, I probed more deeply into their beliefs and perspectives.

Putting 'I' in the text

In all qualitative research (including a grounded theory approach), it is assumed that the background assumptions, experiences and interests of the researcher will inevitably influence the types of questions that are asked and the ways in which they are interpreted and the resulting data shaped. I explained earlier that I had attempted to put my personal bias aside during the process of the research; however, as Charmaz (2006) explained, "Grounded theorists often begin their studies with certain research interests and a set of general concepts. These concepts give you ideas to pursue, and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic" (p. 17). My interest in the behaviour of young women who experience severe emotional and behavioural difficulties was kindled in 2002, by a surge in media exposure of the phenomenon, but it was also influenced by my emotional response to the shallow nature and stereotypically sexist discourse of many of the articles that I read. As explained in the introduction, I have had many years' experience of working closely with adolescent

girls whose behaviour was seriously aggressive, to the point where they were a danger, both to themselves and others. I had also undertaken academic research on related topics for a number of years and my growing interest in poststructural analysis alerted me to the complexity of the issues and to the potential contradictions in the girls' stories. It was inevitable that I would approach this current research with a certain set of assumptions gained during my prior experiences and thus my approach was to *use* these experiences as "points of departure to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees and to think analytically about data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 17). In 2006, Charmaz suggested that grounded theory enables the researcher to make conceptual sense of large amounts of data as it is being gathered, and thus it provided a perfect data management vehicle for my investigative case study.

To sum up thus far, then, grounded theory methods were drawn on in this study as an approach to gathering, sifting and sorting the vast quantity of data generated over time from the 30 conversational interviews. While attempting to withhold my own perceptions of aggression and gender during the course of the data gathering, I was nonetheless able to note my personal responses to the girls' comments in my journal for later reflection and analysis. The developing themes from the conversations enabled me to return to topics that were significant for this study and probe into them more deeply as my relationship with the girls developed and the girls became more willing to relate personal experiences and to reflect on their emotional responses. Sections of the video recordings were used to remind the girls of their original comments. It was the integration of themes and impressions that I checked out with each participant during and following the conversations and cross-checked during the initial analysis process. I will explain at the end of this chapter how I later undertook further analysis of research data by drawing on insights from theories of gender, adolescent aggression, and poststructuralism.

Informal conversational interviews

Consistent with the approaches described above, data were gathered through a series of interviews over an extended period of time (Patton, 2002). As the purpose of interviewing is "to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (ibid. p. 278), in this study the lead topics of conversation were designed to try to "gain insight into the participants' world view, to discover their thoughts, feelings and intentions in order to

see things from their perspective" (ibid.). It was anticipated that determining the thoughts and feelings of a diverse group of young women and the establishment of rapport with a middle-aged researcher would take time and flexibility on the researcher's part. Holstein and Gubruin conceptualised what they called the active interview (as cited in Patton, 2002). They took a constructionist perspective, emphasising that the interview is a social interaction with interviewers and interviewees sharing in the construction of a story and its meaning; that is both are participants in the meaning-making process. Thus, I reasoned, a set of prescribed questions would not fully elicit the participants' perspectives on aggression. The most likely method of capturing authentic data related to the general research questions of this study seemed to be the pursuit of "information in whatever direction appear[ed] to be most appropriate" (Patton, 2002, p. 278). Hence a flexible informal conversational interview (ibid.) process was employed as I aimed to co-construct meaning with the participants from the understanding that they brought to and I inferred from the interview data.

This method has no predetermined format for questions, nor any requirement to follow the same topic or language for each participant, as "questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of things" (Patton, 2002, p. 288). This enables greater flexibility and a more personal response to each participant, allowing them to lead the conversation wherever possible. Oakley (2005, p. 221) supported this method of data collection, stating that the "feminine" preference for a "relatively intimate, non-hierarchical relationship" between the interviewer and the interviewee is not only preferable, but necessary for the gathering of any useful information. There are sociologists who claim that "proper" interviews require objectivity and scientific detachment; however, Oakley argued that the polarisation of beliefs about "proper" and "improper" interviewing represents the "widespread gender stereotyping which has been shown, in countless studies, to occur in modern industrial civilisations" (Oakley**,** 2005 p. 221**).** She compared the assumption that rigid adherence to detached objectivity on the part of the interviewer, and the notion that this is more scientific and therefore superior, with the widespread belief that the stereotypical "male" qualities of rationality and scientific objectivity are superior and desirable.

Guided by other studies (see Oakley, 2005; Patton, 2002), I decided to spread these conversations over a period of two months, in order to encourage the development of rapport with the participants so that they trusted me sufficiently to talk openly about their experiences and feelings. There were no standardised questions in these conversational interviews; rather (following the approach of grounded theorists), the framework for each was based on the themes that developed out of the questionnaire or the preceding interviews. Thus, the process of conversing with the participants during a series of informal, conversational interviews was planned to allow the data gathering process to be flexible and responsive to the participants, to enable clarification of meaning by both parties, and to allow rephrasing of questions to enable participants to expand upon their first responses and to ensure the development of shared understanding between me, as researcher, and the participants.

Use of video

I chose to video record the interviews for a number of reasons, primarily to aid the process of immersion in my data and to allow me to observe the participants' total communication, including their body language and linguistic nuances. This close observation of each conversation was intended to alert me to areas where vague or inconsistent responses were given so that I could later probe more deeply into them (Patton, 2002). The magnitude of the data generated by videoed open-ended interviews can be daunting for some researchers; however careful observation and attention to detail was considered vital for gaining authenticity in this study. Belenky and colleagues (1986) described the value of using videos to record interviews, stating that "the very process of recopying the women's words, reading them with our eyes, typing them with our fingers, remembering the sounds of the voices when they were spoken helped us to hear meaning in the words that had previously gone unattended" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, p. 17).

Ethical considerations

Unlike most of the previous studies discussed in the literature review concerning girls' aggressive behaviour, this case study research explored the beliefs and perceptions of some girls whose behaviour was identified and described by their school principals as aggressive. Research of this nature is subject to the "Massey University Code of

Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants" (Massey University Human Ethics Committee, 2004). As the research also focused on and involved children, there were additional requirements under section 18 (p. 16) of the ethical code. This study was subsequently reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 06/22, 2006.

From the beginning and throughout each stage of the research, I was very aware of the ethical issues raised by such a study. In the following pages, I will explain within my descriptions of each stage of the research process, the ways I addressed the following principles for ethical research:

- respect for persons;
- minimisation of harm to participants, researchers, institutions and groups;
- informed consent;
- respect for privacy and confidentiality;
- avoidance of unnecessary deception;
- avoidance of conflict of interest;
- social and cultural sensitivity to the age gender, culture, religion, social class of the participants; and
- justice, defined by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (2004, p. 13) as the "ethical principle of distributive justice requires the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research within a given population".

The next sections describe how I selected the participants and gained their informed consent, gathered and analysed data, including explanations of how I addressed the above ethical principles.

Selection of participants: A three-stage permission process

As stated earlier, the focus of this current study is to contribute to a clearly identified gap in the New Zealand research literature (i.e., the voices of adolescent girls' whose behaviour has been described as aggressive). Thus, the participants in this research

were selected because each was of an age that matched the profile for girls most likely to display adolescent aggressive behaviour as described in the literature review, and had also behaved in ways that their school principals described as aggressive.[3] After ethical approval was obtained, a three-stage permission process was used to select the students who participated.

Schools

First of all, I contacted the principals of all four of the city's state intermediate schools catering for 13-year-old female students and made appointments to visit and explain the research. All of the principals demonstrated interest in the research, commenting that they had noticed an increase in the severity of girls' aggressive behaviour, but when asked to nominate specific candidates for the research they found this difficult. They explained that these girls had moved or progressed to secondary school and that they had no current students whose behaviour matched the description given. I was able to contact only five girls nominated by intermediate schools.

Because of the small number of potential participants, and also to ensure a wider spread of decile ranking, I then contacted a random selection of full primary schools and two private year 1–13 girls' schools. Some of the schools had very small numbers of girls at that age level and others claimed not to have any current students who matched the profile that I described. The private schools both indicated that their students were too busy to participate in my research.

Following the telephone conversations, I visited the interested principals of eight schools, four of whom agreed to participate and suggested current female students who met the criteria for inclusion in the project. Having discussed the parameters of the research and the potential involvement of the school, I left an information sheet and permission slip (see Appendix A) for the board of trustees of those schools and in all four cases, the principals indicated their board of trustees' consent and willingness to participate by returning the signed permission slip and agreeing to contact the parents/caregivers of the identified students. The participating schools were two

[3] According to the definition in the literature review.

decile[4] 7 state intermediate schools, one decile 10 state intermediate school, and a decile 2 state full primary school. All were co-educational.

Parents/caregivers

The second stage of the selection process began with the four school principals contacting the parents/caregivers of their choice of potential participants by telephone, to briefly explain the purpose of the research and to seek their permission for me to telephone them. One parent (from the full primary school) withdrew at this point. The parents of all students referred were telephoned and appointments made to meet with me. In most cases this involved a home visit; however, one mother met me in the city, close to where we both worked and one chose not to meet at all – she received her information directly from the principal of the school. I talked through the research purpose and process with each mother (in three cases both mother and father, and in four cases, including the young woman herself). I provided an information pamphlet and permission slip (see Appendix B) with stamped, addressed envelope. I asked them to think about the research and, if they were happy, to discuss it with their daughter. If they were still in agreement and their daughter was happy to meet me, the parents returned the signed permission slip in the envelope provided.

Girls: Gaining their informed consent

Stage three of the selection process involved meeting the girls and gaining their informed consent. Having met and gained written informed consent from at least one parent of each girl (except one, whose mother I spoke to on the telephone and who returned the slip via the school); I arranged to meet each girl, according to the parameters set out in the ethics application. Ethical informed consent does not mean merely telling the girls what will happen; rather it means involving them in a conversation that explains all of the implications of agreeing to undertake this research project and inviting them to question any ambiguity. A meeting was set up at the school, in accordance with the ethics application requirements, at which the research was explained to the girls, both verbally and by way of an explanatory pamphlet (see

[4] A school's decile indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socioeconomic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socioeconomic communities. Decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.

Appendix C). The girls ranged in age from 11 years and 11 months, to 13 years and 1 month. Two of the girls came from the same decile 7 co-educational state intermediate school, two from another decile 7 co-educational state intermediate school, one from a decile 10 co-educational state intermediate school, and one year 7 girl from a decile 2 co-educational state full primary school. Three of the girls identified as New Zealand European, one as Maori, one as part Maori/part European, and one as Samoan. Despite the fact that I had no intention of using the data to make comparisons between any particular ethnic or socioeconomic group, I wanted the participants to represent as wide a range as possible to avoid any one particular group dominating the research. No attempt was made to generalise from these findings, however, as the small number of participants in this study precluded the use of cultural or demographic data for analytical purposes.

As two of the participants identified as Maori, the local kaitakawaenga[5] of the Ministry of Education was consulted about the correct local protocols. One participant was Samoan and I discussed any specific protocol for working with Samoan young people with the principal of the school that she attended.

During the first round of meetings with the participants, when I was explaining the study, I attempted to develop a pleasant, non-threatening ambience that would help the girls to relax and chat comfortably and honestly. I explained my background and why I was interested in the topic, sharing some of the newspaper headlines that had generated this interest. I then described the research method; that is, how I proposed to gather the information that would inform my study, detailing the commitment required of the participants as well as the time frames envisaged. The young women were told that they had the right to refuse a question or withdraw from the research at any stage, should they so wish. I assured them that I would respect their privacy by ensuring that they remained anonymous.

After hearing my explanations of the study, all of the girls chose to participate and they were asked to sign a consent form, stating that they understood the purpose and processes involved in the study and that they understood their right of refusal or withdrawal. The girls all chose pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Throughout

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[5] Kaitakawaenga Maori offer a free advisory service to help meet the needs of Maori individuals.

this study they are therefore referred to as Aleysha, Kiwi, Mojo, Sharnee, Sophie and Tui. I requested their permission for the conversations to be video recorded to help me to recall the details of the discussion which would be clarified with them. I gained each participant's consent for this and assured them that they would be given their videos at the completion of the study. They were asked if they would like to receive a summary of the findings and I noted this for future reference. They then completed a short questionnaire (see Appendix D).

Collecting data

Questionnaire

I acknowledge that questionnaires are not a suitable method for gaining authentic insight from research participants, primarily because of their mechanistic, unidimensional approach to the complex study of human behaviour. They lack "organic qualities" (Oakley, 2002, p. 37), and have been criticised as only considering aspects of the "truth" – those facets of the person that the researcher is interested in (Opie, 2002). However, after the information and consent processes were completed at my first meeting with each of the girls, I used a questionnaire. This was not intended to probe beneath the surface in search of "truth"; it was designed as a low-key introduction to the topic, providing an authentic activity for our first meeting and an opportunity for each girl to become familiar with me as a researcher. It also served as a means of gathering aspects of background information that would be tedious, formal and potentially intrusive if collected verbally. I was present when each participant completed the questionnaire, and so was able to explain its purpose, and to clarify any questions that the girls had. Participants were assured that they did not have to answer any of the questions if they chose not to. The issue of anonymity was once again discussed and participants reassured about the security of data storage and disposal.

Following the initial introduction and consent meetings with each of the participants, I collated the information from the questionnaires, entered key information into the QSM qualitative research software programme NVivo 7 (non-numerical unstructured data indexing) and noted any immediate impressions in my diary. With the formalities dealt with, it was then possible to proceed with less formal discussions or conversations that would enable me to gather the girls' stories and glean insights into the social circumstances underpinning each girl's behaviour and beliefs.

Informal conversational interviews

In deference to ethical considerations, the conversational interviews were held in school time, in the schools' interview room or guidance suite. Each conversational interview was approximately half an hour long. Holding the interviews at school kept the process transparent, therefore presenting no mystery and in my experience there are many occasions when students of this age spend time outside of the classroom and so this may not have been seen as unusual. It must be acknowledged, though, that there is no guarantee for this and the teaching staff were asked to ease the process by observing as much sensitivity to the occasion as possible.

The videotaped sessions were particularly useful for authenticating the data. I was able to show the girls sections of their previous conversation and to ask them to clarify or elaborate on what they had said. By reviewing and reinterpreting the previous conversation the participants not only clarified their meaning, but also clarified the thinking processes that led them to that understanding (Bruner, 1986). As described earlier, viewing the videos helped me to recapture the detail of the conversations, including the unspoken communication and as video technology is part of the young person's culture (Goldman-Segall, 1998), I used it to help to establish rapport (ibid.) with the participants. In this study, all of the girls enjoyed helping with the process of setting up the equipment, an activity that also served to "break the ice" at the start of each session. The promise of the completed recordings at the end of the study was a key motivator for one participant in particular. Additionally, videotaping the interviews provided an element of security for the interviewer and interviewees.

I had initially intended to cover the data gathering process in three rounds of interviews over two months, but added an extra round of interviews and extended the duration of the process to enable me to enhance the relationship that I had developed with each participant and to gather more personal, in-depth information. In all, five rounds of conversational interviews were held over a period of three months.

Refining topics/themes within ongoing analyses

I began using the NVivo7 software programme as a way of initially managing the girls' details and creating a profile that I could build up over time. Subsequently I entered details of each conversation into the programme. I then identified patterns and trends from each conversation and tracked those for each girl over the course of the

conversations and across the girls after each round, creating an interweaving of ideas and concepts. As I was doing this, I also noted my impressions and hunches into a diary, recording useful data for the reflective journaling process that will be described later in this chapter.

The topics for the first round of conversations were derived from the responses in the questionnaires. I did not use precisely formulated questions but had prepared a list of topic headings and ideas to be explored under each heading. As the series of conversations developed, so the topics became more refined as they were informed by my observation of the videos and perusal of the impressions noted in my diary. Thus, from a broad, objectified discussion of aggression and gender, the conversations became more "risky"; as I probed more deeply into the girls' personal experiences and beliefs, these threads became more specific and detailed. For example, one of the threads was the girls' understandings of what constituted aggressive behaviour, what sort of people they associated with aggressive behaviour, whether it was it ever acceptable to behave aggressively, and if there was a difference between males and females behaving aggressively. I asked if they were able to describe an incident in which *they* had behaved aggressively, and if so, what had happened as a result of that incident and how they felt afterwards.

No conversations were identical in length or composition, but followed a meandering pathway determined by the girls' responses. I generally began each conversation by referring back to a remark that the girl had made during the previous conversation – usually showing them a clip from the video to illustrate this. Sometimes this was for clarification, sometimes as an ice breaker and sometimes merely as a link to the previous conversation. Keeping the conversations on track was frequently an issue as one girl in particular enjoyed relating long and intricate stories. As Opie said, "It became clear that the flow of the interview related closely to interactive processes and power issues as well as my skill in interviewing, particularly my skill in encouraging participants to further develop issues generated in response to earlier questions" (Opie, 1992, p. 71). I found myself balancing my need to probe the research questions with a responsibility to "make [girls'] voices heard, without exploiting or distorting those voices" (Olsen, 2004, p. 359). This posed issues of interpretation that from a poststructuralist perspective are because "as we try to get to the bottom of language and meaning we find that we are lost in the play of discourse – not by any means an

unrewarding experience, but one that can be frustrating for those who want to know exactly what is going on" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477).

The process of interpreting the conversations was also influenced by my belief that knowledge is socially constructed and thus that the girls' depth of understanding would have developed during the process of the conversations. Olsen explained that, "In a certain sense, participants are always 'doing' research, for they, along with researchers, construct the meanings that become 'data' for interpretation" (Olsen, 2004 p. 364).

Using NVivo and reflective journaling in ongoing analysis

As described, data collection and management used a grounded theory approach and was coded using the Nvivo 7 software programme, and I also used a process of reflective journaling (Darr, 2005). As noted earlier, an in-depth analysis of the emerging themes was later undertaken in relation to the theoretical perspectives described in Chapter 3.

Reflective journaling is a method of reflecting upon learning that is consistent with the QSR process described in the previous paragraph. Qualitative research software products are different to statistical or quantitative software, which analyze data using numbers. QSR software helps to access, manage, shape and analyze detailed textual, audio and visual information. It has purpose built tools for classifying, sorting and arranging information, providing a pathway for exploring trends, finding meaning and arriving at answers. Concepts are generated by recording the development of ideas and insights while reflecting on the subject content and one's personal experiences and perceptions. This helps to develop levels of understanding and by analysing the learning at each stage of this process; the researcher establishes directions for further investigation. In my journal for this study, I used the DIEP (describe, interpret, evaluate, plan) formula (Study & Learning Centre, RMIT University, 2007) to collect, reflect and analyse my ideas. The formula comprises the following steps:

- D – Describe objectively what happened; answer the question what did I do, read, hear, see etc?
- I – Interpret the events; explain what I saw and heard, new insights, new connections with other learning and feelings, hypothesise and answer the question "what might this mean?"

- E – Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of what was observed; make judgements clearly connected to observations made. Evaluation answers the question, "what is my opinion about what I observed or experienced? Why?
- P – Plan how this information will be useful to me. What are my recommendations?

Potter and Wetherell (1987) support such journaling of repeated cycles of (re)coding and (re)analysis that occur as an analyst "moves towards new and more refined ways of interpreting a text". They stated that:

> Keeping a diary of ideas/interpretations was a useful aid in this process. Ideas often occurred while the authors were doing other things. These could be written down and then tested against the transcript. (p. 161)

Although during the interviewing and analysis cycles I did not undertake a formal process of discourse analysis, as explained earlier my personal characteristics and ways of viewing the world inevitably influenced the way that I interpreted the girls' conversations (Bozic, Leadbetter, & Stringer, 1998, p. 66). Discourse analysis, or the "study of language in social contexts" (ibid. p. 65) explores discourse beyond conventional linguistic interpretation; it explores how "forms of communication actively create the way we understand the social world" (ibid.). In other words, it was essential for me to repeatedly compare what the girls said with how they said it, in what context they said it, what expression was on their face and in their body language as they said it and the feelings that I experienced while they said it in order to more fully understand the attitudes, values and beliefs that each participant, including me, brought to the study. This kind of analytic process is consistent with the grounded theory approach to a small case study that I had undertaken; indeed Bozic et al.(1998) comment that "This cosmopolitan stance is typical because DA [discourse analysis] encourages the use of a wide range [of possible viewpoints] in the interrogation of meaning and function" (p. 66).

As themes began to develop, and I began to probe more deeply into the girls' belief systems and experiences, I also began referring back to the literature, reflecting both on what the girls were telling me and on what I had earlier read, thought and written about. I realised that in this way, "all aspects of the study continued to inform, question

and review each other" (Opie, 1992, p. 69). Despite my careful attention to checking and rechecking my data, I was acutely aware that none of my impressions were completely reliable. As Opie (1992) said, "Theoretically there is always something more that could be said and a further changing and different perspective from which the text could be read" (p. 76).

Summary

By using a case study approach with grounded theory methods of data collection and management via a series of informal conversational interviews and video technology, this research hoped to gain insight into the "dreams, fears, attractions and repulsions, opportunities and limitations, beliefs and myths" (Moffitt et al., 2001, p. 244) of a diverse group of young women whose behaviour has been described as aggressive. As Moffitt and colleagues suggest, the subtle nuances that may help explain the influential social contexts for adolescent female aggression will not be uncovered by merely gathering quantitative data such as "counting delinquent peers" (p. 244). Following ethical guidelines, I asked the young women themselves, "What is going on here?" and investigated the similarities and differences in their thinking, feeling and behaving, video recording each session for future reference and analysis. The data generated from the initial questionnaire and the conversational interviews was entered into the NVivo 7 qualitative analysis software tool and a process of immersion in the data, comparison and reflection and coding and categorising enabled themes and concepts to develop. The resulting themes were later explored, using a process of poststructural analysis as described in Chapter 3. Ethical issues were taken into consideration and it was hoped that the process of discussing the participants' difficulties and aspirations would assist them to make more informed decisions about their future behaviour.

The following chapter will introduce the participants, using data gleaned from the initial questionnaire and subsequent conversations.

5. Introducing the Participants

The following profiles offer a brief introduction to the participants. Most of the descriptions were gleaned from the introductory questionnaires; however, some details from subsequent interviews have been added to give a clear picture of each of the young women involved in this study. The names used to identify the girls are the pseudonyms that they selected at the start of the investigation. Italics are used to indicate direct quotations from them, with the name of the girl quoted given in parentheses after, where needed. I have included some detail of findings and analysis in this chapter in order to do justice to the girls and enhance the readers understanding of the process that we undertook. However, a more detailed account of the findings and analysis is presented in the next chapter.

At the start of the interview process, the girls ranged in age from Aleysha at 11 years and 11 months, to Mojo, who was the oldest at 13 years and 1 month. The girls' views on gender roles and aggression are described in detail in the next chapter; however, it is interesting to note that they all presented stereotypical notions of gender at the beginning of the interview sessions, and all but Aleysha qualified their original statements later, indicating that they put no limits on their own behaviour and that girls can do anything that they want. Not only that, but they added that girls who did conform to stereotypically girly behaviour were lacking in some way. All of them mentioned a significant strong female role model in their lives. In terms of aggression, there was unanimous agreement that people were not born aggressive but that early childhood experiences and family environment were responsible. Drugs, alcohol and deviant peers were also mentioned as strong influences of aggressive behaviour. They believed that *people can change*, stating that they could *see a psychiatrist* (Sophie); *go to anger management* (Sharnee); *go to a counsellor* (Kiwi and Tui). All of the girls had older siblings with whom they had arguments and *play fights*. All stated that these were often serious fights in the past but explained that they considered this to be part of normal family life. They all said that *you grow out of it* and that they get on better with their siblings as they get older.

The following profiles of the participants are provided to give more information and background. Readers can refer back to these as they examine the findings in the following chapters. All students will be identified by their self-selected pseudonym.

Aleysha

Age: 11 years 11 months
Ethnicity: Samoan
Attended: Decile 2 co-educational full primary school

Aleysha was younger than all of the other girls; at the time of the interviews she was in year 7 whereas the others were in year 8, and she had not started menstruating. Aleysha is Samoan and bilingual and stated that she was very proud of her culture, and enjoyed visiting family in Samoa every year. When this research was conducted, she was attending a decile 2 full primary school, surrounded by much younger and smaller children, whereas the other participants were all at intermediate school, surrounded by a large number of other emerging adolescents. At the first meeting, Aleysha initially presented as sullen and uncooperative, stating that she thought that she had been suggested for the project because the school considered her to be very violent. However, following my explanation, she quickly warmed to the idea of being interviewed, laughed easily when I joked with her and enjoyed helping me to set up the video camera. She was very interested in the video and computer and wanted to have her videos as soon as possible.

Physical features

Aleysha was tall, and was physically well developed, appearing to be strong and athletic, and older than her years. At our first meeting, she covered her body with loose *boy clothing*; baggy trousers and a loose sweatshirt over her school shirt. She walked with a pronounced swagger and had one trouser leg rolled up and a bandana tied around her wrist. She had long, thick, black hair which was neatly tied back and a very expressive, blemish free, face. At subsequent meetings, Aleysha chatted freely and no longer affected the style that she had first presented; she giggled and covered her face when talking about gender issues, especially when referring to fa'afafine – yet ensured that I pronounced this Samoan word correctly. She was embarrassed by the topic of menstruation, explaining that she had not *had it yet*. When I asked about her girlfriends

she stated that *we don't talk about it.* Most of Aleysha's responses were very definite and concrete, leaving no room for qualification. She was happy to set up the video equipment and clearly enjoyed seeing and hearing herself on the video recordings, asking me several times when she could have a copy of them. Aleysha would be ready and waiting when I arrived at school and often initiated the conversations. She generally began to yawn and shuffle after about 20 minutes, but stayed for the full half-hour, until the final interview which was interrupted by two of her friends who peered in through the window.

Family background

Aleysha lived with both of her parents and three siblings (two brothers and one sister), in a block of state housing flats close to her school. Aleysha told me that both of her parents were in work and that she was expected to help around the house and had responsibility for doing the vacuum cleaning. She spoke of her mother respectfully, telling me that one of her brothers was recently taken back to Samoa by their mother as she was concerned about his behaviour and acquaintances. Most of the extended family lived in Samoa and Aleysha talked fondly of her visits to Samoa. There appeared to be some uncertainty in Aleysha's life as the family frequently talked about going back to Samoa and on one occasion she revealed that they were moving to another town and that she would go to a different school for year 8. However, her comments also indicated a strong affiliation to her family and culture and she did not appear to be unduly stressed at the thought of a move, explaining that she had *cousins* there.

Friends and interests

Most of Aleysha's interests and activities had a cultural focus and appeared not to be centred on school. She spoke proudly of her Samoan culture, and said that she enjoyed *hanging out with friends* of both sexes who were all Samoan and belonged to the same church youth group. She believed that she got on with others better than most girls of her age. She enjoyed sports, especially volleyball and beach cricket, although she did not belong to any formal sports teams at school. Aleysha described herself as *strong* and explained that others wanted to follow her. The final conversational interview overran into morning break and Aleysha's friends were anxious for her to join them so

came to the widow of the room we were in to attract her attention. This was too distracting for her and unfortunately we did not manage to complete the session.

Kiwi

Age: 12 years 8 months
Ethnicity: New Zealand European
Attended: Decile 7 co-educational intermediate school

Kiwi presented as the most mature of the participants in both looks and demeanour. Her responses were far more considered, and she spoke very softly and was difficult to hear at times. She had a tendency to pause and seek for the exact word to explain her meaning, frequently looking at me to ensure that I understood. She spoke intelligently and was very articulate despite seeming to be quite shy and reticent at our first meeting. Kiwi reported that she was worried at first about the idea of being referred for this project, as people might think that she was *still naughty*[6]; however, she said that she found the topic interesting and felt that she had grown out of her previous behaviours.

Physical features

Kiwi was slimmer and generally smaller than the other girls but was still of athletic build. She had light brown hair and blue eyes and smiled frequently. She obviously took pride in her physical appearance, wearing a little make-up and having her hair fashionably styled and her school uniform neatly pressed. Her eyebrows were shaped and she wore rings on one finger and an "Alice band" in her hair. She started menstruating at approximately 11 years 5 months; earlier than the other girls, though not precociously so. When I asked about her friends' pubertal development, she said that two others had *started* and that it was not a major issue for them, adding that she would support *anyone who was freaked out*. Her favourite pastime was shopping for clothes, which was another indication of her growing maturity. She referred to *guys* with a smile and demonstrated little time for *geeks* who *play chess*.

[6] *(italics mean direct quote)*

Family background

Kiwi had a complex living arrangement. Her parents were separated and she spent alternate weeks with her mother in one suburb and with her father in the neighbouring city. She had two stepbrothers who were her stepfather's children and she said that her *dad's girlfriend has a set of twins.* Her grandmother was a very high profile feminist in the city and a strong female role model whom Kiwi obviously respected and spent regular time with; she took Kiwi and her cousin shopping, which was obviously a big treat. Kiwi said that she got on with her parents, siblings and other kids better than most girls of her age, although later in the interviews she divulged that she had frequently had physical fights with her siblings in the past. She viewed this as normal, saying that *you stop doing it as you get older* and it is different from fighting with other kids. She was adamant that she would *never hurt anyone*.

Friends and interests

Kiwi was very interested in sport – specifically soccer and netball. She played for a local soccer club in a mixed-sex team, and wanted to continue this when she went to secondary school. She was disappointed that the teams had to be single sex once the students progressed to secondary school, a fact that Kiwi found *stupid*. She intended to go to a co-educational college and was looking forward to this as the school had a very successful soccer tradition. Kiwi also enjoyed basketball and netball and played for school teams. She reported that she spent more time at these activities than most girls of her age, but was at about the same level of ability.

Kiwi read magazines to help her to *decide what to wear*, liked reading about movie stars and was interested in fashion. She listed going to town, to the beach and the movies as her main hobbies, with shopping high on the agenda. Boys were also a major topic of interest and she told me shyly that she had a boyfriend. Kiwi described herself as having lots of friends with whom she socialised out of school for several hours a week. They seemed to drift around in groups, which were sometimes mixed sex and sometimes single sex. She said that there were lots of groups at school, that these were mixed boys and girls and that mostly they walked around talking. She said that they had names for some of the groups and described *guys* who like to play chess as *geeks.* Kiwi had the same best friend for two years, since starting at intermediate

school, and said that they do not fall out although she knows that other friends do – usually about boys or *people saying things about them.*

Mojo

Age: 13 years 1 month
Ethnicity: Maori and European
Attended: Decile 7 co-educational intermediate school

Mojo stated that she was not aggressive; however, she qualified this shortly afterwards by stating that she would be if *someone else started it.* Mojo reported that she did not mind being recommended for this study because she thought that it might be interesting. Mojo's responses were efficient, using few words to express some very definite opinions. Mojo was challenging, frequently arriving to meet me late and eating. When I did not seem to mind this she stopped doing it, although she did explain that she was always hungry and that she loved chocolate. Mojo had a high opinion of herself, was proud of her sporting prowess and also told me that she should have been placed in a higher year group as she had *covered most of the work already* at her previous school. Although slightly older than the other girls, Mojo did not share their interest in boys and was scornful of sexual partnerships, saying that *13-year-old girls should act like kids* because *they are way more at risk than boys*. Although going on to an all girls' secondary school, Mojo was adamant that she would still *hang out with guys at [R]* (boys' school).

Physical features

Mojo was stocky and strong-looking, appearing athletic and fit. Although older than the other girls, Mojo was slower to develop physically and emotionally. For example, she maintained a boisterous, competitive, spirit that was demonstrated in her relationships with others. She did not have her first period until age 12 years and 10 months and her body showed little signs of secondary sexual development; that is her body was still chunky and her breasts were not evident. This may have been deliberate concealment as she maintained that the worst thing that a girl could be called was *slut*. Girly girls were *stupid* and *they wear mini skirts and stuff* (laughs and shrugs) *and short, short shorts.* Mojo's shorts were knee length. When I asked her who should be

in control in a relationship, Mojo responded, *the girl – she can shrug the guy off sometimes, make decisions.*

Family background

Mojo lived with her mother and sister following a move to the city at the end of the previous year. She described herself as the strong one in the family, and said that she got on with her mother and sister better than most kids of her age get on with their families. She did not mention her father. Mojo took responsibility for several chores around the house, including *cooking tea*, which she said she did better than most. When I asked her about her father she did not respond – just saying that he did not live with them. Mojo's descriptions of family relationships were confusing; she referred to her *sister* who was already at college, but she was actually referring to a close friend who would *look out* for her when she arrived. She also spoke respectfully of an *aunt* who was a lawyer living in another city and had recently become a grandmother although Mojo grimaced when mentioning the baby. When I commented on that she said, *I'd like to have babies at some stage but not now, maybe when I'm 23. My sister had one, she wasn't going to have one 'til she was 25*. Relationships with her older sister were fraught with fighting over such things as the television remote control; however she felt that such fights were normal and different to fights with other people *'cause you love them and don't intend to hurt them.* When Mojo had been in trouble over a fight at school, she told me that her mother had not minded as she did not like the other girl; however, Mojo's mother contacted me several times during the course of the interviews, wanting a progress report on the research and advice on how to manage her two daughters.

Friends and interests

Mojo's main interests were sporting. She belonged to netball, badminton and swimming clubs and saw herself as better than most girls of her age at these activities. Badminton was her most time-consuming interest, with practices several evenings a week. She spent a lot of time out of the home playing or practising sports or watching others dance *hip hop*, attending a church youth group or *hanging out* down town with friends of both sexes. She enjoyed reading teenage magazines because *they are funny*. She especially enjoyed reading about others' *embarrassing moments* and also found

the questionnaires about bodies and medical advice interesting. Mojo applied to be a youth representative on the advisory panel for the Commissioner for Children, and asked me to be a referee for her, but unfortunately she was not successful. Mojo claimed to have only two or three close friends but did spend a lot of time doing things with them outside of school hours. Some of these friends were at college and some of them were boys. She rated her relationship with other kids as *average*.

Sharnee

Age: 12 years 8 months
Ethnicity: Maori
Attended: Decile 7 co-educational intermediate school

Sharnee presented as a warm and engaging young Maori woman who talked about being loved and secure within her relationships. She was a keen sports person, though unable to play at the time of this study because she was recovering from a car accident. Sharnee appeared to be very confident and although she talked about being the *baby* of the family she also spent a lot of time *hanging out* with her older siblings and their friends and her conversations indicated that she was far more *street-wise* than the other girls. For example, she could talk more knowledgeably about youth gangs and drugs and alcohol. However, her comments were often naive and I perceived them to be hearsay rather than based on direct experience. Like Kiwi, Sharnee felt that her behaviour was not aggressive but that she had been *naughty* last year. She described how she and Kiwi had been painting their faces and throwing chairs in class *'cause we were bored.* Sharnee clearly enjoyed the sessions with me, being ready when I arrived and reluctant to go back to class and she told long and detailed stories to illustrate her opinions.

Physical features

Sharnee was a well-built, athletic young woman with a plump and mature physical appearance and a ready smile and giggle. She had a very expressive face and accompanied many of her comments with gestures and eye actions. She first menstruated when she was 11years and 10 months old and was a little shy when mentioning that she and her friends did not *talk about it.* Sharnee told me that she had

her first boyfriend when she was 11 years old. She appeared to be confident in her body and enjoyed playing sport *for the fun of it,* especially when playing rugby with boys. Many of her interactions involved play fighting and rough and tumble games with her family.

Family background

Sharnee lived with her mother, father, two brothers, two sisters, one brother's girlfriend, and a cousin. She had three other sisters who did not live at home. Both parents worked. Sharnee said she had a close-knit family, where she had always been a daddy's girl and said that she was *clingy* to her dad and older brothers. She described fighting with one sister, and teasing and play fighting with her brothers: *Yeah, well, if my brother found out that I was going out with a Samoan guy – 'cause I'm Maori, but I've got Samoan mates, um we call them Bungas – or coconuts or something like that. And if he'll find out and he'll tease me – saying "you're going out with a Bunga ha ha ha" and he'll keep teasing until I break up with him. So I just hope he never finds out.* I asked Sharnee what she did when he teased her, and she replied, *I go "don't worry about it, shut up". Or my mum will go "Leave her alone". He'll go "she's going with a Bunga" and she'll go, "Well you've got Bunga mates".* At this, Sharnee laughed. Sharnee had a large extended family living in the country and described how her sister had dropped out of school to stay on the farm and ride horses, *'cause she loves horses*. She said that this was acceptable in the family, who did not consider missing school to be a big issue.

Friends and interests

Sharnee said that she had lots of friends of both sexes and all cultures and that her main interests were sport and socialising with friends and family. She played netball and rugby and perceived herself as playing better than most girls of her age. She had a good sense of humour, claiming that she was *good at sleeping!* Sharnee said that she liked playing with animals and one of her *chores* was walking the dogs. She also enjoyed *visiting people.* Sharnee mentioned several times that she liked helping people

and talked about maybe being a nurse or working with animals. Another interest of Sharnee's was her Maori culture, specifically kapa haka[7] and the main problem that she had at school was with the leader of the kapa haka group who had a different interpretation of some of the waiata (songs) from her parents and whanau. She claimed to have been a *tomboy at primary* and still *hangs out* with her brothers and other *guys* as well as girlfriends, some of whom were at college. She said that she had a *best* friend who was not the same as the one that she had last year: *She went to a different school*. She said that best friends *don't lie to you, they don't talk behind your back, they stick up for you* and that when friends did fall out it was usually about a boy. Sharnee said that there was a lot of jealousy over boys. She reported getting on with other kids better than most kids of her age, and despite the obvious closeness of her family, she rated her relationship with parents and siblings as average. Sharnee reported that she enjoyed playing sport and hanging out with boys because *the boys just make us laugh*. When I asked who should be in control in a relationship she responded, *both of them!* and laughed – surprised at the question. She went on to explain: *'Cause the girl can't be in charge 'cause the guy would get all whakama* (embarrassed) a*nd the girl would get crazy if the guy was in charge, so its best for both to be in charge.*

Sophie

Age: 12 years and 5 months
Ethnicity: New Zealand European
Attended: Decile 7 co-educational intermediate school

Sophie was, in many ways, a typical early adolescent who appeared to be very physically self-aware; for example, she frequently played with her hair, and occasionally gazed at the video camera. Unlike the other girls who mentioned sport, she said that the best thing about her was her eyes. She reported that she did not mind being recommended for this study and enjoyed being interviewed. On one occasion she said: *Can't you keep me longer 'cause it's maths and I hate maths.*

[7] Maori performing arts, involving traditional song and dance.

Physical features

Sophie was tall, confident and athletic looking with a ready smile – particularly once her dental braces were removed. She suffered from facial acne and said that the one thing that would get her really mad was *people saying things about my pimples*. She had her first period at 12 years of age. It was interesting to observe Sophie's physical development over the three months of our acquaintance. She had physical signs of adolescence, such as a feminine hour-glass figure, braces on her teeth and facial acne and also showed emotional signs of puberty such as a recent fascination with boys and dating. She talked shyly about a boy teasing her and calling her *mouse, because I'm small,* although she was actually tall and strongly built. She had initially presented as a typical early adolescent and said that she was definitely not a girly girl. She described such girls as *girls who wear mini-skirts and like pink – boys like them*. By the final interview, Sophie had bleached her hair to a lighter blonde, was wearing a skirt rather than shorts, sported a pink cellphone and told me gleefully about flirting with boys.

Family background

Sophie lived with her mother, father and older brother. Both of her parents worked. Sophie's older brother was looking for work. Sophie described him as *skinny and lazy* and stated that she got on with him less well than most girls of her age get on with their brothers. She made a vague reference to him associating with a youth gang and said that she had fought with him in the past, describing punching him and him punching her back. She said that she got on with him better recently. I asked her how it was resolved and she replied, *I usually tell mum and then he got a new girlfriend*. I then asked whether she thought that everyone fought with their siblings and she responded, *not everyone*", although she felt that fighting with siblings was natural – and not the same as fighting with other kids because *you wouldn't just punch someone else – you can resolve it with your brother*. Sophie's grandmother was a professional social worker and a strong role model who was well-known in her community. Sophie told me that she used to not get on with her grandmother, as she was jealous of the time that the grandmother spent with her cousins. Grandmother had since explained to her that her aunt and cousins had particular needs and Sophie said that she now understood and got on better with her grandmother.

Interests

Sophie enjoyed physical activity and perceived herself to be better than most girls of her age, particularly at swimming. Her main interests were in sport and she listed netball, swimming and bike-riding, but was also interested in soccer, though she said she was *no good at it*. She did not belong to any teams or clubs but talked about telephoning her friends and organising them to meet at the park to go *bike-riding* and also said that she enjoyed *dancing*. She said that she did not have any regular household chores, but that she helped her mother around the house.

Sophie seemed to have a wide circle of friends, including at least two *best friends*. These friendships had fluctuated over the past year and she described several fallings-out, which seemed to be more to do with her developing maturity and interests than any specific incident, although she did talk about girl fallings-out being to do with *jealousy over boys*. Sophie demonstrated the maturity gap between her and another girl at school by saying, *she used to be my best friend, now I just find her annoying*. She indicated that girls in her group talked about who they had had fights with, or who had annoyed them, but stated that *boys are on top for most teenage girls*, describing the attributes that she saw as attracting boys, such as dress style and make-up. Sophie related a story in her final conversation whereby she had been *play fighting* with a group of boys and clearly enjoyed the flirtatious nature of this and became afraid when the boys' female acquaintances appeared on the scene.

Tui

Age: 12 years 5 months
Ethnicity: New Zealand European
Attended: Decile 10 co-educational intermediate school

Tui had transferred from a small catholic primary school to a large intermediate school at the end of year 6 and said that she had found this transition very difficult. She reported having lots of friends and no issues with aggression at her previous school, stating that, *I used to look after the little kids at my last school, I love little kids*. Tui indicated her wish to go to an all-girl, Catholic secondary school as she found boys a distraction (for other girls) and irritating. Tui was initially worried about being selected

for this study as she thought that meant that she was extremely violent. After the explanation and *talking it over with mum*, she agreed as she thought that it would be interesting. Tui was very forthcoming and thoughtful in her responses to my questions.

Physical features

Tui was tall and well developed, fit and athletic looking. At the time of the interviews she was wearing corrective braces on her teeth and her body language, for example covering her mouth when speaking, suggested that she was very self-conscious about this. She began menstruating only one month before the first interview, at 12 years and 4 months, and her physical development appeared to be far ahead of her cognitive and emotional development. She talked about being stronger than both of her brothers and able to *beat them up*. She seemed to be genuinely confused by the other girls' more advanced interest in sex and boys

Family background

Tui lived with her mother, father, and two brothers. Both of her parents worked. Tui reported ongoing teasing and fighting with one of her brothers who called her a rat and she stated that *I hate my brother. His friends are cool; I can get them to gang up on him.* Tui described her relationship with her parents and siblings as worse than average for a girl of her age. Yet she had no regular household chores and she delayed one interview because she had gone on a shopping trip to Sydney with her mum and aunt. When I asked her who she would talk to about any problems that she had, she said emphatically: *My mum.*

Interests

Tui's main interests were physical. She enjoyed all sports, especially those that involve swimming, and had been part of a school water polo team that qualified for regional championships. She perceived herself to be better than most at netball and although softball was her favourite sport she reported that she was *average*. Tui also enjoyed sewing and cooking and said that she was better at these activities than most girls of her age. She enjoyed reading teenage magazines but found that they were often *too adult, like a miniature Woman's Day* with stories written by *23-year-olds*. She preferred to read about *embarrassing moments* and real-life stories, although she found

Dolly Doctor interesting because *it tells you about your body*. Tui reported that she had one or two close friends but that she got on with other *kids* less well than others of her age. She claimed to have had lots of friends and no issues with aggression at her previous school, but found the combination of puberty and change of school and social group hard. She described the confusion and disappointment that she had felt when her friend O spread unpleasant stories about her and began calling her names based on her advanced body development. She later described *girly girls* with disdain: *They don't really play sport at all – some would, but just netball and stuff, the kind of sports that you don't get muddy like, you know.* She considered that boys were the most common topic of conversation with the girls and fallings-out were often about boys and jealousy, for example *she stole my ex*. She stated, *When friends fall out they bitch at each other and say nasty things*, for example, *bitch, fat cow*. She reported an ongoing feud with one girl who used to be her *best* friend. Tui described several groups at school; the *cool* group was always on the quad talking, while Tui and her friends practised sport and went "hyperactive".

Summary

All of the participants in this study were well developed and enjoyed a wide range of physical activities. Five out of the six were physically bigger than their age peer group although none of their sexual development was precocious. They all appeared to be confident, sporty and comfortable in their bodies, although Sophie and Tui were conscious of their dental braces and acne. Four of the girls lived with both parents; however, the other two did not appear to be unduly bothered by the family structure. All of the parents were working and, apart from Tui, the girls said that they got on well with their parents and siblings. Tui indicated that things were changing as she became more mature. All of the girls claimed to have a lot of friends and all but Tui said that they got on with their peers either better or the same as most girls of their age. All of the girls said that they spent at least three hours a week socialising with friends of both sexes, out of school hours. None of the girls appeared to have any worries at school or otherwise, although Tui said that she found relationships with some of the girls and teachers difficult. All said that they had initially thought that I was interested in them because they were aggressive, meaning violent, and they all felt that boys were more aggressive than girls.

These topics will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, which presents the girls' beliefs and observations on the two main themes of aggression and gender.

6. The Participants' Views and Experiences of Aggression

The previous chapters have explained that this study was inspired by the relatively recent and rapidly expanding, media promoted discourse of the "laddette"[8] and girls' increasingly aggressive behaviour. I have a professional, academic and personal interest in this topic, and an ongoing concern for girls at risk of developing severely aggressive behaviour at adolescence and so I wanted to know what lay behind this current development. I was aware that most of the studies about girls and aggression have been informed by adult discourses and that the young women who behave aggressively, although not an homogeneous group, may share some common and different belief systems about the subject, and could therefore illuminate the topic from the inside-out. I thus resolved to investigate the views of those most directly involved; that is, the girls who had been identified by their schools as aggressive, as described in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 has explained the theories that have influenced my understandings in the areas of this research and Chapter 4 described the methodology and subsequent processes that I undertook to gather and analyse data. In Chapter 5, I painted a pen-portrait of each girl based on my relationship with her.

In Chapter 6, I present my study's findings about the girls' expressed beliefs and experiences in relation to the main theme of aggression and in the next chapter I present their beliefs and experiences related to the theme of gender. Each of these two chapters is subdivided according to (a) the girls' general observations and beliefs and then (b) the girls' personal understandings of their own behaviour in relation to the same aspects. In this chapter, each topic is discussed in relation to the literature on adolescence and aggression, and in the next chapter, in relation to the literature on gender, adolescence and aggression. Because the participants mostly referred to gender and aggression as natural sex roles, in these two chapters, the literature referred to is

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[8] As described in the literature review.

generally from theories of psychology, where both gender and aggression are considered from this perspective. The quotations selected and links made to the literature are based on my interpretation of each conversational interview. Italics indicate direct transcription. Discussion of the research findings in relation to the identified risk factors for female adolescent aggression will be presented at the end of this chapter.

Part A: The participants' views about aggression

Defining aggression

Chapter 2 of this thesis has explained that each academic and professional discipline, for example psychology, criminology and sociology, has its own interpretations and understandings of the term aggression (see Connor, 2002). It is generally assumed by all of these disciplines that aggression is not just expressed through physical acts such as hitting or punching, but can also be expressed indirectly, as verbal or social and relational aggression (Raskauskas, 2007). Indirect aggression is common and the hurt caused to the recipients is as potentially severe as an act of physical aggression (Batchelor, 2001, Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Owens, Slee, & Shute, 2000). The literature has also described verbal and social aggression as a predominantly "female" trait (Bjorkqvist & Niemela, 1992; Leschied et al., 2000) and thus it has already been described in some detail in Chapter 2. In this study, I explained "aggression" as "any behaviour that is designed to cause hurt or harm to another", emphasising that I was not merely referring to physical violence, but to a wide range of aggressive behaviours. This information was conveyed to the principals, parents and participants in person, verbally and by way of the information pamphlets and consent forms (see appendices B and C). Throughout the data gathering process, I asked open-ended questions to remind the participants to think more broadly as well as more deeply; for example, "How else do people show aggression?" Or "Can you think of a time when someone was hurt but not by hitting?"

Despite this caution, all of the girls initially interpreted "aggressive behaviour" as physical violence: *bad, hitting, punching, violent* (Sharnee); *fighting, beating up* (Sophie); *kicking, punching, fighting* (Mojo); *punching* (Tui) *pushing and hitting* (Kiwi) and *abusing, hitting* (Aleysha). This last comment was the only one that hinted

at non-physical aggression, but when probed, Aleysha explained that she meant physical child abuse: *Yep, it came on the news the other day, eh? I watched it. It was about that lady who smacked her little kid. She pushed him over the couch*. News stories about child abuse were later raised by many of the participants, and thus the topic is discussed separately later in this chapter.

Although issues of aggression in relation to gender are the focus of the next chapter, it is worth noting here that the participants identified physical aggression with boys, for example, *hitting, swearing, yelling* (Mojo), *fighting, getting really angry at people for nothing* (Tui). As Kiwi summed up, *I think that boys are more – like, physical*. Consistent with the literature which indicates that "indirect aggression is normative among females across a number of cultures" (Owens et al., 2000, p. 357), the participants initially associated non-physical aggression with girls. Indeed, many studies (for example, Artz & Nicholson, 2002; Brown et al., 2001; Leshied et al., 2000) have reported that girls find "social or indirect aggression to be just as hurtful as physical aggression" (Owens et al., 2000, p. 357). When she started thinking about what other behaviour might be considered aggressive, Tui was clear that girls *saying things*, was worse than physical aggression. The other participants said similar things, that girls in particular *have got the mouth to be smart* (Sharnee), and that girls' fallings-out were generally *bitchy* (Sophie). Kiwi said verbal aggression meant *lie, call nasty words like slut. Gossip, talk to friend – spread rumours*. Owens and colleagues (2000) report that much of this "bitching" can be explained by jealousy and that it is often the popular girls who become the victims; as Sophie explained, *they don't like it if you get too popular*. Mojo and Sharnee both pulled faces as they named the *popular bitchy girls* as a group at their respective schools.

Sexual put-downs were considered most aggressive or hurtful and the terms *slut* and *bitch* were used as an example by most of the girls: *Slut or something like that* (Tui), *I hate her; she's a bitch* (Sophie), *stupid slut*! (Sharnee); *fat bitch* (Tui). Asked if this had been the same at primary school, Kiwi and Sophie commented that things had changed: *Yes, and no – it was more like bickering – now it involves jealousy* (Kiwi); *yes they used to say things like "we never want to be her friends again", but now it's like – bitch, everyone hates them* (Sophie). Sharnee commented that *it's different – they are younger – don't understand. It will be the same at secondary school* (that is, girls will continue to fall out over boys). Fighting over real or desired relationships

with boys is a common feature of adolescent female aggression (Swift, 2009) and girls walk a very fine line between "being labelled too promiscuous, too boy crazy, too easy, too much of a slut and rejected by both male and female peer**s".** and being "labelled too butch, too tough, too aggressive, too asexual and rejected by both male and female peers" (Swift, 2009, p. 13). This topic is explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Another term commonly used by the participants was "mocking", a word that has been adopted by the girls' generation of young people, but which has retained much of its original meaning. That is, the girls used the term in a specific youth-culture way, meaning sarcastic, scornful or disrespectful, but also used it to refer to teasing, as in *my brother would mock me and I'd mock him back* (Kiwi). The girls all used the word "mocking" frequently: for example, when talking about things that cause people to behave aggressively, Sophie said *mocking parents* and Sharnee mentioned *hard out mocking*. When asked what sort of things people said to hurt each other, Aleysha asserted: *Abuse the family – yeah, mock the family*.

Factors that may contribute to people behaving aggressively

All of the girls thought that aggression was the result of environmental influences and also a matter of choice and controllable. Therefore, they associated aggression with "bad"; as Aleysha said, *they're not born bad*. Mojo asserted that *they choose to be aggressive* and Sharnee thought that *it's because of their family*. They suggested that people who behaved aggressively should *go to jail* (Aleysha), *go to anger management* (Sharnee) or *go to counselling* (Tui). The girls raised the following factors which they believed contributed to adolescent aggression: environment/family, with a strong association with child abuse; associating with delinquent peers, namely gangs; and the effects of drugs and alcohol. Interestingly these topics relate directly to the main risk factors for aggression at adolescence that are mentioned in the literature and have thus been described in detail in Chapter 2.

Child abuse/maltreatment

On the question of why people behave aggressively, most of the girls suggested that it was to do with early childhood experiences, although none of them mentioned sexual abuse explicitly. For example, Kiwi said, *it's about what things are done to them in childhood*. Others mentioned that living in a family where violence was the norm

would make people aggressive: *Sometimes it's in the family* (Sophie); *the older boys and girls are more aggressive* (Sharnee). The girls all referred to child abuse as physical hurting and were able to describe incidents that they had read about. Sophie commented: *That is what usually gets the children beaten* (drugs and alcohol). The girls all appeared shocked by this behaviour and felt that children should be safe from abuse. For example, Sharnee was aware of several stories about child abuse and became emotional when recounting details of one case, saying: *Ah, in the newspaper there was this lady who had a 3-year-old son, and, he wet the bed and so she beat him – just because he wet the bed. He was only three! There should be a law against something like that*. The participants' observations on parental violence were concrete: the parents should *go to jail* and the children *should be given to someone else* (Aleysha) or *should go to another family* (Sophie) or *should be sent away* (Tui). Mojo told the story of a little girl who had been tortured and killed by the males in her family and she was scathing of women who *allowed the men to beat the children*.

Previous studies have found that the vast majority of adolescent girls who behave aggressively have a childhood history of maltreatment, particularly sexual abuse (Arnott, 1998; Grant, 1995). In 1995, Boswell found that 91% of all 10- to 17-year-olds who had committed the most serious offences had experienced abuse or loss in their earlier life.

Associated with abuse, the girls also expressed strong opinions about parents smacking children. At the time of data collection, the New Zealand government was in the process of passing anti-smacking legislation and public debate on the issue was very emotional. On the one hand, the research literature has found that simply punishing children physically does not prevent aggressive behaviour but teaches children that it is normal (Connor, 2002). Some critics of this behavioural method of behaviour control claim that physical punishment is more for the relief of parents' anger and frustration (Donnellan, La Vigna, Negri-Shoultz & Fassbender, 1998. Exponents of smacking believe that it is more immediate and effective as a short-term intervention (Connor, 2002). The participants certainly represented many facets of the argument and only Aleysha believed that children should be smacked, saying: *I think that sometimes kids do do wrong and have to have some punishment*. All of the other girls considered that smacking made children scared but most thought that it would not change the behaviour. Kiwi asserted that *it doesn't work* and Tui said: *No, it works in a way, but it*

is not a good way. Kids think that if they just do one thing wrong they'll get hurt. Kiwi's lack of aggressive experiences is illustrated by the following response when asked about smacking: she replied that it should be banned *'cause it scares the children and the kids think like, they're evil*. She said: *It is such a shock when someone hits you. Even when your parents do it – you just don't expect it.* Mojo thought that the new law was a good idea – *I like that idea, it is mean to hit your kids* and Tui said that being hit *makes them scared or hate their parents; not want to come home.* Although none of the girls thought that this behaviour had increased, Mojo thought that *some women are weak and allow the men to abuse the children.*

Gangs

On the topic of why people behave aggressively, Sophie and Sharnee mentioned the local youth gangs and stated that the behaviour of the gang members was violent. Associating with delinquent peers was named in the literature as a contributing factor for aggression at adolescence (Coie & Dodge, 1988; Caspi & Moffitt, 1991), and the popular image of youth gangs is directly associated with drugs and violent crime (Klein, 1995). I thus decided to pursue the topic further with each of the participants.

Tui said that she did not know anything about gangs or gang behaviour: *Not much – nothing really* – but thought that they went around *doing graffiti*. Kiwi thought that they were aggressive because *they do stuff, walk around with gang words*. Sophie, Sharnee, Mojo and Aleysha were more forthcoming. Aleysha responded enthusiastically with: *Gang groups? They cause a lot of trouble – more than the normal and like they never split up – stick as a team … they always stick together.* Mojo believed that *they kill people – I've heard really bad things about them, drugs – dangerous* and Sophie mentioned vaguely that her brother had been involved with the Crips youth gang but *since he's left school he thinks it's stupid*. She added: *They fight with each other – sometimes it is about talking behind each others back, sometimes it's about drugs.* As usual, Sharnee told a long story to demonstrate her familiarity with the topic: *Well, the Crips and the Bloods hate each other – because of the colours – or because they are in a different kind of gang group. Bloods are the same as Mongrel Mob, Crips are Black Power. It is not a race thing. Samoan gangs are called RSB [Respect Samoan Blood]*. She then described how gang members' families get caught up in the violence, referring to the recent high profile shooting of a gang member's child by a rival gang.

In 2002, Miller defined a youth gang as:

> A self formed association of peers, united by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership and internal organisation, who act collectively or as individuals to achieve specific purposes including the conduct of illegal acts and the control of particular territory or enterprise. (p. 21)

Apart from the illegal and territorial components of this description, it could equally apply to any of the sports teams that the girls belonged to. Indeed, most adolescents tend to socialise together in mixed-sex groups post-puberty and before pairing off into more exclusive relationships (Gluckman & Hanson, 2006; Moffitt et al., 2001) but most do not fall into the category of youth gang as defined above. As the girls in my study introduced the topic of gangs, we discussed how gangs differed from normal groups of *kids who just happened to hang out together*. They were all very clear that gangs were very different and very male dominated (an issue that is supported by the literature; see, for example, Batchelor, 2001) and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Aleysha commented: *Girls in gangs, I don't think its a good idea – first of all, they should be only boys, because um guys can do a lot of harm to girls – that's because some girls are weak – yeah, and umm its just not normal for girls to be in a gang*. This was typical of the other girls' statements.

Tui believed that gangs were *violent with different attitudes* and Mojo observed drily that *regular kids don't kill people*, and Kiwi felt that *gangs are more aggressive and fight – friends just have fun*. Aleysha felt that boys in gangs *show off – stand out, try to be cool* and she told a story about one bandana-wearing boy at her school who had *punched a hole in the wall*. Sharnee suggested, however, that *whole families are involved, kids in gangs go for each other – killing, hitting – they think it's cool*. While some of the girls' statements about gangs were very general, others, such as those concerning male dominance, gang loyalties, the association with drugs, alcohol and aggression, are consistent with the findings from a number of studies (Moffitt et al., 2001).

Groups of friends, on the other hand, *hung out* together because of their interests, such as *sport* or *make-up and fashion* or *chess*. Each of the participants described various cliques of friends in their schools, with labels such as *popular bitchy girls, and the popular boys*; *up-tights, nerds and geeks*. Tui thought that there were *lots of little*

groups and Mojo named several groups, but separated girls from boys and Maori from other cultures. Each girl described a "normal" group as mixed sex and age, physical, sporting and social: *they are mixed*; *we're all really mixed up*; *the sporty ones* (Tui).

In the literature, developmental stage was also seen as a factor in relation to friendships (Gluckman & Hanson, 2006; Moffitt et al., 2001) Earlier studies have indicated that before puberty, little girls are more likely to have a circle of "best friends" (Lloyd, 1992). Each of my study's participants was keen to list the characteristics of a best friend: *You have to be able to trust [them]. Tell secrets and that* (Sophie); *They don't lie to you – they don't talk behind your back – they stick up for you* (Mojo); and *Being really close to them – like being there for them – stick up for them, hang out with them, knowing them really well – share things with them that you wouldn't share with other people* (Sharnee). When I asked what, if anything, changed this, most of them mentioned fallings-out over boys, but Tui observed: *Puberty – some grow up before others.*

Drugs and alcohol

In most cases the discussions around gangs progressed into a conversation about drugs and alcohol because, as Tui remarked, *they do it in bars* (get drunk and fight). Issues of effects of drugs and alcohol on the behaviour of young people have been explored in depth in the literature review, with Moffitt and colleagues (2001) naming abuse of drugs and alcohol as one of their three significant risk situations for aggression, particularly in young women. Other accounts from medical staff in New Zealand and Australia describe the increase in the number of young women, some as young as 13, presenting with alcohol and drug-related difficulties and very aggressive behaviour. A combination of risk factors makes the young adolescent female particularly vulnerable to excitement and the stimulating effects of drugs and alcohol, according to Dahl (2003), most noticeably the mismatch between their physical/sexual development and their ability to make sensible decisions. The percentage of girls who drink is on the rise faster than boys, and the average age of their first drink is now 13. Also, these girls tend to drink spirits, often mixed with sweet cordials and known as "alcopops" or "girlie drinks" (Hill, 2004), which are very high in alcohol, whereas boys tend to drink beer. If girls match boys drink for drink, they are consuming far more alcohol per volume and become vulnerable to the effects of alcohol more quickly. Hill (2004) commented that "These troubling trends make the aggressive marketing of so-called

'alcopops' even more dangerous" (p. 1). Research from New Zealand (Greenaway et al., 2002) found an association between adolescent alcohol misuse and violent offending. These findings also showed that the earlier a young person starts to drink alcohol, the more likely they are to drink hazardously and experience problems with alcoholism. Many of the girls in my study had stories about drugs and alcohol; however these appeared to be second hand and none appeared to have had direct experience of being with someone who was very drunk or using drugs, For example, Aleysha said confidently: *They'll go, 'oh I want a hit' … so they don't think, they just hit and no-one can stop them* and *It puts another person in there, being aggressive*. Sharnee said: *If they use, um cocaine or something like that it will make them high, and they won't go to sleep or something* and *Alcohol? They just can't stop themselves from hitting when they are on alcohol*. Tui said: *Well, if you're not even on it, people fight over it – and if you're on it you feel like uh, drugged. If they have taken it before, they get addicted to it and want it that much*. Kiwi's response was interesting in that she referred specifically to girls and alcohol, stating that: *It gets them drunk and they lose their memory. They don't know what they are doing – and it makes them do other things that they don't normally do* and Sophie commented: *Girls get beaten up because they've been drinking or are on drugs*, adding that *more girls are binge drinking these days*.

Influence of media

When we were discussing social influences on aggression at adolescence, the participants in my study appeared to have little awareness of media constructs of adolescent aggression. When we talked about how magazines, movies and television shows might influence young people's behaviour, some of the girls thought that this was indeed the case –*quite a lot*, as Mojo put it – and Sophie suggested that those adolescents who did copy aggressive behaviour from films or television were *trying to be cool – trying to be known – create an identity*. Kiwi was not sure, saying *I think so* whereas Tui observed, *not at all, because, like gangs are usually out late and they don't really see that kind of violence in the movies*. Sharnee commented that it *depends what movie*. She related a synopsis of the film of the life of American rock band 50Cents. She said that this was an *anti-drug movie* and implied that the media also portrayed good messages. When Aleysha just noted *oh, about 50Cents, about 50Cents, the gang movie*, I misheard her and questioned "50% are influenced by gang movies?"

Aleysha found this extremely funny and covered her mouth with her hand as she giggled, then repeated loudly and clearly, *50Cents, the gang movie!*

The literature review described "media effects theory" whereby adolescents may see the aggression and violence portrayed by film stars as attractive and thus emulate that behaviour (Hartley, 2002). Other scholars have argued that the general public is influenced by the frequency of the stories and the sensational way in which specific characteristics are highlighted and repeated (Price, 2002) and thus young people are recruited into aggression or other ways of being, by the repeated exposure and normalisation of the behaviour (Burn, 1996).

However, in their 2001 study of girls in Glasgow, Burman and colleagues found that violence by girls was not a major social problem, despite the prevailing media discourse that girls were behaving as aggressively as boys. Referring to the subsequent press coverage on release of the findings from that study, Batchelor (2001) reported that "Newspapers went so far as to misquote the research to support their assumption that violence by girls is increasing" (p. 247).

Views on whether female adolescent aggression is increasing

This was one of the suppositions that inspired my study and, as the literature review explains (see, for example, Pate 2002), it is a complex question and one that Batchelor (2001) rejects. The participants in this study tended to give simple responses. For example Mojo felt that *stress and alcohol* have made people become *more aggressive – more when older* and Sophie said, *I am hearing more about gangs and killing more this year*. Sharnee thought young people were becoming *more aggressive – four or five years ago there was not much in the movies or on TV about killing*, and Tui said *less, but they are doing more stupid stuff*. Aleysha did not think it had changed.

Part B: The participants' beliefs about their own behaviours in relation to their expressed observations on aggression

Many similarities and contradictions will become apparent as I recount the girls' beliefs about their own behaviour in relation to both the literature and to their own stated beliefs about adolescent aggression as described in the previous section. Part B

of this chapter explores the participants' views of aggression from their personal experiences as both perpetrator and victim of aggressive behaviour.

The participants' views on being recommended for a study on aggression

Part A has described the participants' initial understandings of the term aggression, explaining that all of the girls initially interpreted aggression as violence and male. As such they were dismayed that they had been recommended for the study as this would mean that their principal saw them as violent. For example, Kiwi in particular said that she was concerned about her behaviour being described as aggressive because this would mean that she was violent. Tui said that it made her feel *like different to others, like really violent* and Sharnee said that it meant she was *bad*. Sophie and Mojo also expressed concern but said that they were interested in the topic and were happy to be part of the research. As the study progressed and the girls considered aspects of their own and others' behaviour, they came to acknowledge that "aggression" covered a wide range of activities, including verbal and relational aggression. As they relaxed with me over the course of the conversational interviews the girls talked about their own histories of physically aggressive behaviour and their experiences of other forms of aggression. Only Kiwi gave an unqualified *no* to the question about whether or not she saw herself as aggressive, commenting, *I never hurt people.*

It is quite likely that the girls did not consider their behaviour to be aggressive, per se, as they recounted isolated incidents that were generally justified in one way or another. Thus, although Aleysha initially presented herself as *different from those other girls* – she walked with a swagger, wearing a gang bandana tied round her wrist and had one trouser leg rolled up in the manner of a local youth gang – she appeared to enjoy talking with me and having her comments and opinions valued. She had initially been reluctant to take part in the study, but at the same time was clearly interested in the topic and I felt that she was pleased to have been identified as knowledgeable and important.

The relevance of context is also evident in the girls' understandings of aggression. All of the participants had a history of fighting with older brothers, or in Mojo's case, older sister, but did not rate this as unusual or violent. This is consistent with the findings from a major Scottish study into girls' violence, which found that 59% of

aggressive incidents reported by girls occurred in their home (see Burman et al., 2002). However, reporting on the same Scottish study, Batchelor (2005) later reported:

> Physical fights with brothers and sisters within the home were not seen as 'violent" in the same way as fights taking place between other young people outside the home, no matter how serious. (p. 2)

Without exception, each girl in my study described fighting with siblings, claiming that this was very different from fighting with anyone else. Even Kiwi admitted that she used to fight with her brother, but claimed that *he used to punch me but I never hurt him*; however, she did add that she would say *mean things*. Aleysha described arguing and sometimes fighting with her siblings, but stated that this was *way different* to fighting with other people: *We only play fight with my sister but it's not actually fighting*. I asked her to describe play fighting and Aleysha, (covering her mouth and giggling) said: *We just tickle each other – and roll around*. Tui described fights with one of her brothers which appeared to have been more serious and violent. She recounted biting him and smiled gleefully as she told me about being able to beat both of her brothers up. Sharnee claimed to be *really clingy to all the boys in my family* but also described numerous physical fights that she has had with her brothers and her older sister and Sophie said that she used to fight with her brother *all the time*, but that *he is starting to be nice again as he gets older*. Mojo recounted several fights that she had with her sister, over such things as the television remote control. Like Sophie, she explained that they did not do this any more as they had grown up and *you realise that life is too short for fighting*.

Another difference noted by all of the girls was that aggression by siblings was more acceptable as, *You wouldn't just punch someone else – you can resolve it with your brother* (Sophie), *'cause you love them and don't intend to hurt them* (Mojo), and *'Cause you can walk away from friends – you don't really care* (Sharnee).

What made the participants feel aggressive?

When describing what made them feel aggressive, the girls mostly referred to being the targets of verbal aggression or *people saying things* that were designed to attack their self-esteem. Sophie explained that "things" referred to *comments about my pimples*, Tui said that she was called *fat bitch* because she was *bigger than everyone*

else and Aleysha said that being called *silosi* or *boy* made her feel really angry and aggressive. Raskauskas (2007) commented that such relational or social aggression includes psychological attacks such as humiliation, rumours and damage to either self-esteem or status (p. 2). When taking about their responses to these attacks on their self-esteem, the girls all mentioned incidents of physical aggression; for example, Aleysha added, *well, you get called it so you act like it*. Mojo commented that verbal aggression or insults *makes me want to kick or punch – just angry* and in response to continuous taunting by one girl in particular, Tui said *so I went up to her and I punched her*. Sharnee commented, *I would go ... and throw stuff at her. I'd yell back at her and she'd yell back at me and I'd yell back at her and she'd yell back at me ...'til it comes to a fight, or something like that* and in response to teasing from a boy Sophie said, *I grabbed his fist and threw it back at him and then I punched him in the chest* (Sophie).

Owens and colleagues (2000) pointed out that "Boys were much more likely to say that they felt angry when victimised, while girls reported more often feeling sad" (p. 362). It is interesting to note that the girls my study rarely mentioned feeling victimised or sad in such situations; on the contrary, they all said that personal insults made them feel angry. Tui was the only one to explain that personal insults had resulted in confusion and hurt and this was when a girl that she had perceived to be her friend began to call her names and to spread rumours about her. Research suggests that "having few or no friends, being new, being unassertive and perhaps being a little different" are ingredients for vulnerability (Owens et al., 2000, p. 372). Tui was new to her school and so had no friends there. She was also physically well developed and sporty, which set her apart from the dominant "girly" group; however she was definitely not unassertive and her reaction to the spiteful and hurtful verbal aggression that she suffered was to lash out physically. She explained that she *never had problems at my last school – it was a small school and we were all friends*. When asked if she thought that things would be difficult at secondary school, she commented insightfully, *I hope not – everyone will be new. My old friends from [St B's]* (previous school) *will be there.*

Several of the girls justified their aggression in terms of self-defence. Mojo said that she had learnt to *blank* people who insulted her, saying *I'd pretend they were invisible*; however, she stated several times that *if someone else starts it* she would *finish it* and that when she felt angry she would *kick and punch things – unless someone else*

started it. She described one incident where *she just came up to me and grabbed my shirt and tried to punch me, so I turned around and punched her back. And then I kneed her in the stomach, then I kicked her on the ground*. This was described with some relish, but when I enquired how she had felt during this exchange, she commented in a very matter-of-fact way: *She tried to punch me first so I hit her back*. Aleysha said that if she was insulted or physically hurt she would definitely *pay them back* and *get into a scrap – punch*. Such justification is described by Blackstone's theory of social self-defence as "the private punishment theory" which justifies defensive force because it "inflicts punishment on a deserving wrongdoer" ("Justification: Self-defence – Theories", n.d.).

Aleysha was the only girl to say that being around aggression *makes me want to join in* whereas the other girls tended to ignore it or try to stop it. For example, Mojo said, *I'd stop it, but make sure I didn't get hurt* and Tui commented that she just felt *normal* and would do *nothing*. Kiwi said, *Sometimes I just stay there; I want them to stop* and Sharnee said *I like watching. Sometimes I'd stop it*. Aleysha's response to excitement is explained by Dahl (2003) as a specific result of biological changes that occur with puberty. He described the effects of hormonal changes on the behaviour of adolescents, stating that "studies of sensation seeking – a measure of how much an individual wants to experience risks, thrills, excitement and intensity – reveal a developmental increase that is specifically linked to puberty" (p. 18). It is possible that Aleysha's age and comparative lack of maturity contribute to this difference.

What did the participants do about their angry feelings?

All of the girls were able to tell me about an occasion when they had been really angry and how they had dealt with those feelings. Mojo said, *Makes me want to kick or punch – just angry* and Tui said, *Pull his hair out – I get in trouble*. Mojo added that she would walk away *unless someone else started it* and Kiwi and Sophie both said that they would *storm off* but agreed that they would allow friends to comfort them. It appeared that, apart from Kiwi, the participants in this study were volatile and had histories of physical aggression, but also that they were changing and learning how to manage their feelings differently. When asked directly "Are you getting more aggressive?" the girls all said *no*, that they were getting less aggressive and more mature. This is in contrast to the literature on aggressive behaviour which suggests that

girls' aggression is not evident until puberty and it increases in severity until at age 15, the sexes are equally antisocial (Moffitt et al.). When referring to fighting with her brothers, Tui said that *it all stopped when I was seven*. She then explained that was with her older brother and that she is still fighting with the younger one but expects to grow out of that. Sophie said, *my brother and I don't fight any more* and Mojo insists that she does not fight (unless someone else starts it), but now she *snobs them*. This behaviour is different from the typical girl behaviour described by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) and Owens et al. (2000) as none of it could be called covert. The literature also suggests that girls are likely to bear a grudge (Artz & Nicholson, 2002) and take a long time to get over their fallings-out, but these girls appear to calm down very quickly. For example, when I asked how long it took for the girls to calm down, they all responded *not long*, varying from Tui's *five minutes* to Mojo's *not long, 20 minutes, I go and eat chocolate*.

The participants' comments on their social life and aggression

Associating with delinquent peers is one of the most common risk factors for aggression at adolescence (Moffitt et al., 2001), but none of the participants in this study appeared to be part of an antisocial coterie. Out of school, the participants all spend several hours a week socialising with friends in mixed-sex groups but these are mainly sports oriented. The girls' groups that they belonged to seemed to fluctuate, and fallings-out occurred frequently; *sometimes a boy* (Kiwi) and *about boys, who likes who* (Mojo). However, the fallings-out do not last long and *they talk about each other then fall out and then a day later they get back together again* (Sharnee). When asked how this happened, Sophie claimed that *time sorts it out* and Tui that *we can bitch to each other and they all work to get us back together*", whereas Aleysha claims that *one says sorry. One of us tells them to say sorry*. This typically female way of resolving conflict is described by Owens and colleagues who found that "a common way for girls to resolve conflict is by employing a one to one strategy … a girl will typically telephone one member of the group to try to work through the problem" (p. 371.

Moffitt et al. (2001) found that girls who were likely to behave aggressively at adolescence tend to be rejected by their social group and form precocious, intimate relations with aggressive males – frequently older than themselves. We therefore

discussed what happens when one of the friends gets a boyfriend. The girls were adamant that this would not change their group friendships, commenting that *it has already happened* and *she didn't change, we stayed as a group* and *yeah, nothing changes really*. Kiwi said: *It's not really exclusive*. Only Sharnee said: *She forgets about her friend – it's full on with the boy*. The participants all sneered at the *popular girly, girls' groups* who are interested in *boys – how to get them,* and although Kiwi and Sharnee already had boyfriends, these relationships did not appear to be exclusive – they maintained a mixed-sex social group. As explained in Part A, most young adolescents give up their single-sex groupings to socialise in mixed-sex groups before forming intimate and exclusive relationships. The girls in this study emphasised the platonic nature of the social groups and sports teams that they belonged to and Kiwi sadly complained that she would have to play in a single-sex soccer team the following year.

The participants' views about the role of the media

Part A discussed the influence of the media on the behaviour of adolescents and none of the girls had firm opinions on this. When I asked directly about their own interest in the various media, they did not appear to have much interest in magazines, films or television, but rather they spent much of their free time socialising or playing sports. However, when, I asked the girls if they had a favourite actor or role model in the media, they all (apart from Tui, who said, *I don't really have one*) replied with enthusiasm. The favourite characters and actors that they selected were far from aggressive and unlikely to be negative role models. Aleysha named *Beyonce – because she is a big, black girl with a powerful voice*, Sharnee said *Jessica Alba – she is really pretty,* whereas Kiwi named *Jennifer Anniston, because she is a funny, good person.* Sophie said *Tasha, she is really cool. She's more into nature than anything else*, and Mojo said that she enjoyed lots of characters but she mostly watched the *Disney channel*. Favourite male characters were also selected for their sensitivity rather than their aggression: Aleysha thought that *Kim on Home and Away* was *cool and doesn't hit like other boys do eh, he's kind*. Sharnee mentioned *Arnold Swartzeneger because he is helping and kind and Brad Pitt because he is really hot! Caring too* – a view supported by Kiwi's comment, *Brad Pitt because he is sensitive and caring*. Mojo preferred *Stingray – he acts like a kid but he's funny*.

Summary

This chapter has described the findings about adolescent aggression that emerged from the course of informal conversational interviews that were held with each of the six participants. It has described the main themes of the interviews and discussed these in the context of the research about adolescent female aggression. Many of the girls' comments were consistent with the literature; for example, their insight regarding the different sociocultural groups in their respective schools; but many were also naïve, demonstrating an innocence that belied the principals' suggestions that they fitted the criteria for my study. Although the girls all mentioned relational and verbal aggression as triggers for their anger, the responses that they described were not typical according to most of the research literature. Similarly, the literature suggests that girls who are likely to be aggressive at adolescence are rejected by their social group and form aggressive intimate relationships with deviant older males, often including the abuse of alcohol and or drugs (Moffitt et al., 2001). This behaviour is said to become evident at puberty and that it increases throughout adolescence (Mrug et al., 2004). It was clear from the conversational interviews that the participants in my study did not fit these risk factors for aggression and that for the most part, they were happy and comfortable in their peer groups and loved and comfortable in their families. As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the girls all referred to aggression from a 'natural sex role' perspective and so the literature that has been drawn on for this chapter is also from theories that support such reasoning. However, as Chapter 8 will demonstrate, when viewed from a feminist poststructural perspective, the inconsistencies and contradictions evident in the girls' conversations indicate that their views and experiences are shaped by a number of often contradictory discourses at play in their worlds.

The next chapter will present the girls' observations and experiences regarding adolescent aggression and gender.

7. Participants' Views About, and Experiences of, Gender-specific Behaviour at Adolescence

The previous chapter has described the participants' views on adolescent aggression from both general and personal perspectives. This chapter presents their views about gender and adolescence. Part A describes the girls' opinions about gender identity and gender roles from a general perspective as applied to any adolescents, and Part B concentrates on their views about gender specific behaviour from their own experiences. As with Chapter 6, the girls' responses are discussed in relation to the literature review and theory chapters. Because of the way that the participants conversed about gender, I have interpreted their conversations in this chapter via social construction theories, and gender role theory. As indicated, the next chapter, Chapter 8, adopts a poststructural theoretical stance and uses the tools of discourse analysis that were described in Chapter 3, to review both my own world view and the various discontinuities and contradictions in the beliefs and opinions expressed by the participants.

Gender role theory

The girls in my study were adamant that there were specific behaviours that were suitably "female" and specific behaviours that were suitably "male", and that gender-specific roles were increasingly "policed", especially for boys, with the onset of puberty. When discussing aggression, the girls also expressed a belief that behaviours were learnt; that is, rather than there being an innate, biological reason for specific behaviours, the girls all stated that a person's behaviour is the result of their childhood experiences and that, as Aleysha maintained, *They are not born bad* and Sharnee commented, *It's because of their family*. Tui elaborated on this theme, saying that, *it depends on how aggressive the family or the people that you actually live with actually is.* These beliefs are consistent with gender role theory, which has been explained in Chapter 3 as a social conditioning process whereby children adopt specific gender roles according to the modelling and reinforcement that they see and receive. Thus the

child typically follows the examples of its parents, siblings and teachers and little girls learn how to be a girl by receiving approval for displaying feminine traits such as gentleness and helpfulness, whereas boys learn that they are expected to be tough, energetic and boisterous (Burn, 1996; Oakley, 1972). Chapter 3 (1996) described the "normative" and "informational" pressures (Burn, 1996) that come to bear on children's gender identity; such as peer group pressures and media role models, and explains how institutions such as schools and work places teach humans appropriate ways of behaving, according to their gender (Oakley, 2005). Thorne (1993) described the ways in which children's playground games reinforce that binary. By this reasoning, gender stereotypes are reinforced as children learn how to be "proper" boys or "proper" girls and, as Thorne (1993) explained, "if boys and girls are different, they are not born but *made* that way" (p. 2). Thorne described several theories that have been suggested for the initial bonding that occurs between children of the same sex, pointing out that "once same-gender groups are formed, other processes come into play, such as the dynamic of group loyalty, stereotyping of the other group and the teasing of individuals who try to violate the patterns of separation" (p. 60).

Part A: Participants' views of desirable adolescent girls' and boys' behaviour

Gender role stereotypes

Gender role stereotypes are the generalised beliefs that particular behaviours are more characteristic of one sex than the other. As stated above, this topic initially produced fairly consistent and conventional responses from the participants, whereby they described male and female behaviour as polar opposites. The girls firstly observed that whereas being feminine meant *acting ladylike* (Aleysha) and Sophie observed that it meant *wearing nice pink skirts and having nice hair*, Kiwi believed that males should *be strong and you know, go running, use weights and that – act like more serious, like they take things seriously*. Aleysha's comments continued to be the most stereotypical. She maintained that boys were supposed to *act like a boy should*, explaining that they should be *manly*, and adding, *there are no fafas* (fa'afafine – effeminate) *boys in our school*. She believed that females should always be *there for the children* and when I asked if this included teenage girls, she said that they should *look out for the younger ones*. By contrast, boys should *play rugby and look after the girls*. These comments are

consistent with gender role theory as described in Chapter 3 and epitomised in the "pop psychology" book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* (Gray, 1992). This book suggested that whereby men are aggressive, rational, dominant, and objective (or in Gray's terms, Martians value "power, competency, efficiency, and achievement", p. 1), women are passive, intuitive, submissive, and subjective (or in Gray's terms, Venutians value "love, communication, beauty, and relationships", p. 1). These gender-specific traits were described by sex role theorists as necessary to achieve balance and harmony in society.

In the 1950s, Parsons suggested that the norms and values of society are learnt by children and reinforced throughout adult life in order to support the functioning of society as a whole. Parsons believed that the feminine role was an expressive one, whereas the masculine role, in his view, was instrumental. He believed that expressive activities of the woman fulfil "internal" functions; for example, to strengthen the ties between members of the family. The man, on the other hand, performed the "external" functions of a family, such as providing monetary support. In 1972, Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosencrantz investigated the gender role attributes associated stereotypically with males and females by college students at the time. They found that, for example, women were considered "not at all aggressive" but that men were "very aggressive". In addition, women were considered "very conceited about appearance" but men were "never conceited about appearance" (see Appendix E for the full list).

From a different perspective, in her description of how social processes construct gender roles, Oakley (2005, p. 36) described the family "artefacts of gender" that "separate the girls' world from the world of boys". These include clothes, toys, and literature. She cited Wallum's (1977) analysis of the Sears Roebuck Christmas toy catalogue, which found that 84% of the toys portrayed as suitable for girls fell under the heading of "preparatory for spousehood and parenthood" whereas none of those portrayed for males did so. Although many believe that this has changed over the intervening years, the 2008 Christmas catalogues from major toy retailers (e.g., Fisher Price in America and David Jones in Australia) are highly criticised by feminist contributors to the web site "Feminista" (http://media-feminista.blogspot.com) for their sexist bias. In some cultures, the separation of sexes into male and female categories is rigidly imposed via customs such as dress codes, and social expectations are constantly

reinforced by cultural practices. For example, in strictly Islamic countries, Muslim women are required to cover their heads (and frequently their whole bodies) when in public, and in Malaysia there is a chain of stores in every shopping mall, called "The Girls' Shop" where everything in the windows is pink or purple.

Burn (1996) cited research by Thompson and Pleck (1986) who referred to the "gender role strain paradigm" whereby traditional masculinity ideology consists of three sets of norms: toughness, success status, and anti-femininity; "men are expected to be physically strong and masculine, highly competent and knowledgeable (and) able to solve their own emotional difficulties and avoid showing vulnerability". Conversely, women are socialised to value the romantic relationship and seek harmony and intimacy within it and perform traditional female traits such as "nurturance, being kind, gentle, affectionate and other-centred" (p. 255). As we continued talking, the girls in my study were critical of boys who did not conform to gender expectations, that is play rugby or other team sports. Mojo and Sophie referred to them as *geeks*, Sharnee called them *faggy*, *gay* and Tui and Kiwi both referred to *gay*. However, the girls in my study were judgmental of their female peers who did conform to gender stereotypes. Sophie described them as *girly girls* who *wear mini –skirts, and make-up and like pink and have their hair in a pony*, and Tui said they *scream and flirt with guys.* At times, all of the participants in my study were universally scathing of this behaviour; as Sharnee put it, such girly girls are *posh, soppy and shallow.* Use of language such as this suggests an intersection of gender with other structures such as race and class; topics that will be explored further in the next chapter.

Social life

Associating with delinquent peers has been identified as one of the most common risk factors for aggression at adolescence (Moffitt et al., 2001) and several researchers have suggested that girls who behave aggressively tend to be rejected by their peer group and become attached to antisocial males (Gluckman & Hanson, 2006; Moffitt et al., 2001). However, none of the participants in this study appeared to be part of an antisocial coterie. Out of school, the girls all spent several hours a week socialising with friends in mixed-sex groups that were mainly sports oriented. The groups that they belonged to seemed to fluctuate, though, and although fallings-out occurred frequently over, *sometimes a boy* (Kiwi) and *about boys, who likes who* (Mojo), the

fallings-out did not last long and, according to Sharnee: *They talk about each other then fall out and then a day later they get back together again.* When asked how this happened Sophie claimed that *time sorts it out* and Tui said that *we can bitch to each other and they all work to get us back together.* Aleysha claimed that *one says sorry. One of us tells them to say sorry.*

As stated, Moffitt et al. (2001) found that girls who were likely to behave aggressively at adolescence tend to be rejected by their social group and form precocious, intimate relations with aggressive males – frequently older than themselves. I therefore asked the girls what happened when one of the friends gets a boyfriend. Most of them were adamant that this would not change their group friendships, and Sophie said, *it has already happened and she didn't change, we stayed as a group and yeah, nothing changes really.* Kiwi said, *it's not really exclusive* and only Sharnee said, *she forgets about her friend – it's full on with the boy.* The participants all sneered at the kind of girls that Mojo identified as *popular girly, girls' groups who are interested in boys – how to get them*

Puberty and gender intensification

As noted in the literature review, several theorists (see, for example, James & Saville-Smith, 1989; Oakley, 2005) have suggested that schools reinforce gender stereotypes, as "particular options about how to understand and practise masculinity and femininity are constantly reaffirmed institutionally" (MacNaughton, 1994, p. 160). Lerner (2002) suggested that at puberty "there may be increasing pressure by key socialising agents – for example peers, media and even family members and school personnel – for boys to act more masculine and for girls to act more feminine, that is, to show behaviours consistent with the stereotypes (p. 171). Thorne (1993) challenged the notion that children and adolescents are passive recipients of gender socialisation processes, stating that she had been "impressed by the ways in which children act, resist, rework and create; they influence adults as well as being influenced by them" (p. 3) and Arnott and Martin (1995) found that boys were frequently rewarded by their larger peer group for resisting authority and engaging in illegal acts, whereas girls were expected to spend more time indoors, interact in smaller groups, have one or two "best friends", engage in more "turn taking", and display much less overtly aggressive behaviour.

Several of the girls in my study commented on the pressure to conform to more stereotypical gendered behaviour as they reached puberty. For example, Kiwi observed that *at intermediate [school] things change; you see all the other girls and want to be like them* and Sharnee described a girl that she knew, saying *'Cause she's hanging round with guys a lot – she's got no sisters – she's been brought up by her mom and her step dad, she's started walking out with guys and stuff like that and doing guy things. I reckon she'll just change 'cause she's started hanging out with us girls now. So she'll just change, 'cause she'll see that the girls she hangs out with are different.* Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005, p. 20) refer to this monitoring by peers of "what is appropriate or inappropriate, who is to be included or excluded, what is 'cool' or 'uncool'" as the "policing" of gender roles that intensifies at adolescence.

Citing Hill and Lynch (1983) and Lynch (1991), Lerner (2002) the hypothesis associated with gender intensification theory as a belief that as young people progress through puberty, changes in physical appearance and in sexual maturity influence self-expectations and the expectations of other people around the adolescent. Many studies (see, for example, Bandura, 1997; Simmons & Blyth, 1987) support this notion. In the conversational interviews in my study, most of the girls amended their original statements about typical female and male behaviour; as Sharnee said, *13-year of girls, well, they are still young – should have fun* but *13-year old guys – oh my God, they act all tough but really they're not tough*. Sophie interpreted a situation where some boys had enacted a play fight on the stairs as an attempt to impress the girls with their "manliness". Others made comments such as *girls should be able to behave how they want* (Mojo) and Tui commented the girls should behave *however they want to behave.* Kiwi suggested that, *um, maybe getting more ... independent. It changes*. Only Aleysha maintained that 13-year-old girls should be *not perfect*, but *good.* When I asked her to explain what "good" meant, she said, *not fight, do the work.*

Sexuality

Interest in boys

Despite their scathing comments about "girly girls" and their interest in attracting boys (for example, Sharnee's observation that such girls are overly concerned about their appearance – *Oh I'm so neat or my nail's broken or something like that* – and Mojo's description of the *popular bitchy girls – boys like them*), much of the girls'

conversations revolved around boys and the fact that interest in boys develops during puberty. Essentialist theorists argue that this is the "normal" course of events as hormonal changes drive the urge to seek exclusive, heterosexual relationships (Gross, 1996), but feminist writers such as Summers (2002) described the social pressures on girls to marry and produce children.

For the most part, the girls in my study considered that before puberty girls could act as they chose but that it was "normal" for older girls to behave in a manner that attracted boys; as Sophie commented, *most teenage girls are into boys*. However, she noted the changes that occur at puberty, stating that *year 7 girls don't really like the boys but the boys (year 8s) like them*. Tui commented that, at puberty, *you start to like boys and stuff* but boys *don't go out with tomboys*. Kiwi referred to *guys* with a shy smile, telling me that she already had a boyfriend. And Sharnee told me that she had her first boyfriend at age 11. Arguments about boys were common, according to Sharnee, who remarked that there was *a lot of jealousy over boys*, adding that when friends fell out, it was *usually about a boy*. Artz and Nicholson (2002) observed that many girls view other females as competition for the attention of "their" male partner, and arguments between girls frequently referred to their sexuality or lack of it. Harris, Aapola & Gonick (2000) suggested that "young women learn that it is their sexual attractiveness to men that gives than legitimacy and value" (p. 382) and Thorne (1993, p. 155) commented that "larger institutional forces bound up in structures of gender, sexuality and age", make adolescence an especially difficult time for girls.

Martino and Pallota-Chiarolli (2005) suggested "many girls found it easier being in a girls' school because the absence of boys translated into school being a more safe and comfortable place for them when they did not have to worry about the way they looked or impressing boys" (p. 19). However, even when boys are not physically present, male expectations of proper femininity affects girls' behaviours and some girls found that the absence of boys actually increased the "bitchiness" among the girls. In my study, the powerful influence of boys over girls' behaviour was noted by Sophie, who observed that *there's this boy at school who didn't want to go out with a girl 'cause she was a tomboy. That's mostly what the guys are like at our school. Judge them on what they look like, basically*. Sharnee noted that girls begin to conform to stereotypical looks and behaviours because *guys don't really like tomboys and so they think, I wanna be liked, or something. 'Cause most guys go out with girly girls*. The participants

observed that the importance of appearing attractive for boys is reinforced by teenage magazines which the girls variously described as being mainly concerned with *boys! What they look like and how to get one*. (Aleysha), *how to behave, how to make yourself look pretty* (Sharnee), and *boys, make-up, what's in style, advice, what's happening to other girls, boys* (Sophie), whereas Mojo commented *I don't know, friends, boys*. These issues were explored thoroughly in the literature review, which examined the role of the media in constructions of male and female violence and aggression. The "pornification" of young girls by the media; encouraging them to wear make-up and dress in a sexual manner, was highlighted by Artz (1998) who suggested that it is misogynist beliefs about the role of females that promotes images of girls and women as sex objects. She stated that such images "predominate on television, in the movies, and particularly in rock music and the videos that promote it" (p. 204).

Compulsory heterosexuality

As has been noted, the "policing" of gender roles intensifies at adolescence. The previous part noted the pressures that come to bear on both boys and girls as "they assess and give meaning to the physical changes of puberty, teaching one another new meanings and skills partly gleaned from the larger worlds of the media and market (Thorne, 1993, p. 154) but, as indicated by the participants' in my study, the pressure to conform to heterosexual norms appears to be far more powerful for boys than girls. While most of the girls in my study suggested that girls can transgress traditional gender roles, they were more definite that boys should not behave in effeminate ways. Mojo thought that boys who were not masculine were called names, *maybe 'cause its unnatural to like the same sex – creepy!* Sophie said: *There's someone in our school that everyone thinks is gay but – he shouts things like (high pitched) "hello" and comes up and hugs you and stuff.* And Kiwi said: *They talk funny and oh, you know, cross their legs;* however, she added that *they can be quite funny – but gay guys are cool – funny.* Commenting on the behaviour of a boy at her school, Tui said, *I think he might be gay, or it doesn't mean he IS, but he acts like it.* She then added, however, *and it doesn't matter if he is.* When taking about one boy's aggressive behaviour, Mojo said: *And he made this guy called [D] scream and cry, but I think [D's] a little bit puffy.* Sophie commented that *lots of girls at our school are really silly; guys aren't really silly – like they'll be silly when they're in a group but round the girls they're cool. Like today, when we were walking down the stairs, they were having a fight –*

they were punching each other – but it was pretend fighting – just showing off to the girls.

While the girls in my study named different ways of being a girl, for example, *the popular bitchy girls,* and *girly girls*, none of the participants used homophobic terms, such as "dyke", to describe girls. In fact, they were very critical of girls who were overtly heterosexual. Mojo commented that the worst thing that a girl could be called was *slut or something like that* – a belief shared by all of the participants. As discussed earlier, girls walk a very fine line between being described as "nice girl, or "bad girl", "frigid" or "slut" and Reay, (2001, p. 53) found that the girls in her study "took up varied positions in relation to traditional femininities. Yet, despite widely differentiated practices, all the girls at various times acted in ways which bolstered boys' power at the expense of their own". This confusion was particularly evident when the girls talked about girls in gangs. None of those girls were seen as tough or masculine; rather, as Sophie put it, girls joined gangs for the *yukky stuff – sex and stuff*, adding *the boys are in charge, the girls wear mini skirts – they have to look sexy* and Kiwi thought that girls in gangs *probably just want to do the sex and all that really*. Sharnee commented that *they don't mind what's going to happen to them.* Eggleston's (2009) New Zealand research into youth gangs is salutary here, stating that:

> In contrast to the girlfriends on the periphery of the youth gang, if women "crossed the line" and attempted to function in "men's space" as members, they lost their traditional female supporting role. Such women were forced into a degrading sexual role by the members who conceptualised them as "rootbags" who could be used and abused without respect, with gang rape being the most violent and unusual example of this.[9] (p. 27)

The tensions noted above between girls' gender role expectations and judgements of sexualised appearance and behaviour have been described by Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005) as an example of "the anxiety provoking discourses of the body … to be seen as 'properly female' requires girls to emphasise their heterosexual desire,

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[9] While the participants in my study did not believe that there were girl gangs or that girls should be part of a gang, however Eggleston found that there were two all-girl gangs in South Auckland who had a reputation for extreme violence and carrying weapons, but this was seen as very unusual and they were heavily outnumbered by the male youth gangs.

without actually doing too much heterosexual activity" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005, p. 101).

Aggression and gender

As mentioned in the last chapter, the girls in this study were all very definite that boys are more aggressive than girls. For example, Tui commented that *girls aren't really violent and follow males' influences*, and all acknowledged that things change as girls get older and that it was *not normal* for teenage girls to play rough games or fight. Tui felt that boys *play rugby, like to get muddy – and aggressive, yes* and Aleysha said that *they* (boys) *beat people up – they're violent* Sophie said that *guys will fight – girls usually don't they bitch*. Mojo commented on the acceptance of male violence as natural, saying *boys play rugby and are aggressive because they fight. Yes, the guys at our school are having fights at the moment. Someone went to punch someone and they got their knuckles, like they punched the glass and the glass broke and … no-one's really said anything about it – and now they're friends again. But he hurt himself and then he came on all proud, like "I did this" and that kind of stuff* (demonstrating how he punched the glass). *He likes to start fights – he's always starting fights.*

The normalisation of male aggression is reinforced by various media. Burns (1992) observed, "It is perhaps hard to conceptualise a male hero that has not committed illegal acts and been involved in violence, from James Bond to Indiana Jones" (p. 117). However, the media attention given to high profile cases of Internet and mobile 'phone bullying, resulting in serious harm or even suicide by the victim, has normalised the phenomenon of female relational aggression (Owens et al., 2000). When I explained to the participants that my definition of aggression covered verbal and relational aggression Sharnee commented that *girls have got the mouth to be smart*. Sophie said that *girls bitch and guys fight.* The research supports Mojo's point, as Owens and colleagues pointed out, "Boys were much more likely to say that they felt angry when victimised, while girls reported more often feeling sad" (p. 362). Mojo commented that *boys get more angry than we d*o. However, Mojo also described fights with her sister where she *kicked, punched, screamed and yelled* over such things as the choice of television programme. This mismatch between what Mojo said and what she did will be discussed further in Part B. None of the participants made the connection

between their own admitted aggression and their general statements about males and females. For example, Kiwi remained adamant that *girls don't do it*.

All of the participants mentioned the role that males played in domestic violence, supporting Pearson's (1997) statement that the prevailing discourse of the 1990s was that "violence is masculine. Men are the cause of it and women and children are the ones who suffer" (p. 7). As described earlier, many females were seen by the participants in my study as "weak", allowing their male partners to abuse them and their children (Mojo, Sharnee, and Aleysha).

Part B: The participants' observations and reflections on their own gendered behaviour

When discussing the composition of friendship groups and the activities that they enjoyed, the girls had initially stated that there were differences in the things that boys and girls engaged in. However when discussing their own preferences and activities, Tui and Sharnee commented that the groups were *mixed* and Mojo said *well, the cool group is always on the quad talking. Then there are the up-tights, the nerds and geeks and the middle group like me.* She considered herself to be more *together* than other girls and, like Kiwi, enjoyed playing rugby with the boys. Tui noted that the *cool group has even gender, our group only eat lunch with the boys then the boys go outside and play rugby, the girls stay in or just walk around.* When discussing her friends, Sharnee said *most of them are silly, um quite silly – and ... um ... yep and make jokes all the time – laugh a lot, I mean, I laugh quite a lot.*

Despite their obvious sexual interest in boys, the girls were ambiguous about their relationships; as Sharnee commented rather sadly: *Then there's another mate of mine. He's not really my mate, but we used to be best mates but then I found that he just wanted to go out with me so I said like "whatever". I thought about it and then went "ok" but I never actually went out with him. We used to be close mates! So I don't want to become something else to him*. As mentioned in Part A, the participants all had friends of both sexes and enjoyed "hanging out" as mixed-sex groups. Sharnee commented that *the boys just make us laugh*, and they all described their enjoyment at engaging in what they had previously described as "typical" boy behaviour. For example, commenting on her lunchtime activities, Sophie said *well, we talk about who*

we like, boys or netball, or we just go for walks; however, she also related a story about play fighting in which she said *boys are funny, they always have play fights and stuff like that, like girls don't have play fights – except once with [M] she said "brilliant" so I chased her 'til I got her down on the ground, then she pulled my legs and tripped me up as I was walking away ... it was real funny.* Kiwi observed, *well, some of the girls hang out with well known boys and sometimes we play rugby together – or sitting down in the classroom – we've got a table tennis table in our classroom.* Conversations with her own girlfriends centred on *guys, fashion, what to buy* whereas Mojo and her friends were more interested in *food and chocolate – random things, "Home and Away"* and Aleysha stated emphatically that she was *not like those other girls,* who *gossip and try to attract boys.* Sophie said that she was anxious to be popular with *guys and girls* but felt, *they don't want to hang out with you if you are popular – they change – become more bitchy.* This dilemma is described by Owens and colleagues who quoted Eder's 1985 research which "discovered a cycle of popularity whereby popular girls moved up in social status and then became resented, being seen as 'stuck up' or 'snobs' and so lost their popularity … for girls, self-esteem was tied to their interpersonal relationships whereas for boys it seemed to be tied to things such as athletic achievement" (p. 363).

Transgressing gender roles

Using a social construction perspective, this part of Chapter 7 will explore how the participants in my study transgressed traditional gender roles. As has been noted several times in this thesis, there is more variety within sexes than between them, although the focus of academic research into the social relations of children and youth has traditionally focused on boys in comparison to girls. Thorne (1993) discussed many situations in which boys and girls interact socially, particularly within family settings, and describes the transgression of gender roles as a "continuum of crossing" (p. 121). She suggested that much of the boys' crossing was "playing at" the activities of girls and was intended not as a joining in of the game but was designed to interrupt and disrupt the girls' games. Genuine crossing of the gender divide by boys leaves them at risk of being described as "sissy", "an unmitigated word of contempt" (ibid., p. 111). Conversely, "tomboys" were described as "girls who claim some of the positive qualities associated with the masculine" (ibid.).

Tomboyism

Several of the girls in my study claimed that they had been tomboys when they were younger but that their behaviour was changing as they reached adolescence. For example, Sharnee noted, *I was one at primer* and Kiwi said, *me and my brother, I used to mock him and be like a tomboy, but now I don't like it.* Sophie whispered confidentially, *I am tomboy inside, but I don't dress like it*. Tui was clear that this was because *boys don't go out with tomboys*. Aleysha maintained that she is still a tomboy and described her behaviour in such terms, frequently mentioning her inclination to wear *boy clothes*, behave like a boy and attesting that *some girls treat them* (tomboys) *differently, 'cause they know they'll get bashed.* However, even Aleysha noted that *as you get older start to recognise what girls do and you follow them.*

It is interesting to note that tomboyism is very common in young girls (Burn, 1996; Morgan, 1998; Thorne, 1993; Van Volcom, 2003), and tomboyism appears to be a normal and a significant part of most women's childhoods (Morgan, 1998). In contrast to aggressive girls, tomboys do not appear to suffer from discrimination or social isolation; on the contrary, they often enjoy the best of many worlds and are accepted in a range of social groups (Oakley, 2005; Reay, 2001). The literature therefore suggests that being a tomboy is viewed as a positive thing for girls, and does not mean that girls sacrifice their involvement in typically female occupations and play (Burn, 1996; Oakley, 2005; Von Volkom, 2000). Rather, "Tomboyism is about doing boy stuff, not rejecting girl stuff" (Morgan, 1998, p. 797). This topic is revisited and further explored in the next chapter. All of the participants in my study demonstrated behaviours consistent with Morgan's seven major categories of tomboy behaviour: sports, rough and tumble play, toys, role playing, mannerisms and companions. As discussed in Chapter 5, the girls' preference for sporting activities was a strong theme in the conversations, despite the many comments that boys play sport – mainly rugby, and girls sit around and gossip. As described in the girls' profiles in Chapter 5, all of the girls were physically fit and, apart from Kiwi, had large muscular bodies. Sophie commented, *I'm actually starting to get into more like boys' sports – like I really want to learn how to skateboard and I like playing soccer – and running – I'm quite fast at running – so I love running. I'm not becoming more girly I don't think. But I'm starting to like, go with boys and stuff*. She also proudly showed me her pink cellphone

and had lightened her hair which she tied in a "pony" – a style that she previously associated with "girly girls".

All of the participants in this study had older brothers, a feature which the literature suggests is common for tomboys (Van Volcolm, 2003), and all of the girls described teasing and fighting with their older brothers and this rough and tumble physicality may contribute to the ease with which they transgress traditional gender roles. Van Volkom (2003) claimed that "young girls' observation of their brothers' masculine behaviour may lead to an increased likelihood that the girls would adopt similar behaviours" (p. 610). She referred to previous studies which indicated that girls are more likely to be influenced by a sibling than are boys and that "although older siblings may assume the role of teacher and helper, they are also more aggressive toward their younger siblings" (ibid.). Many studies refer to the power differential between males and females, and Van Volkom (2003) suggests that girls with brothers adopt some of that power for themselves. Reay (2001) goes further, suggesting that tomboys actually reinforce this power differential by their adoption of "masculine" behaviours; demonstrating their belief that, "girls can be good, bad – or best of all they can be boys" (p. 163).

During the interviews, we discussed who should have the power in girl/boy relationships, and Tui and Sophie felt that it should *be equal.* However, Sophie observed, *I don't really think any of them should – they should share the power – but it's usually only the guys that have it, because girls can't really beat up their boyfriends.* Aleysha was adamant that it should be *the boy; he should take care of the girl.* Kiwi said, *probably the boy, 'cause they are stronger than us. They are always having fights and standing up for girls – girls are more laid back.* When I asked how boys demonstrate that power, Sophie said, *Well they usually handle the money – the girls spend the money but the guys handle it – they might say – no, you can't buy that. And guys with money will probably just go and buy drugs, 'cause guys don't really have to spend their money on things if the wife buys their clothes and things. Like, girls should have control of the money because guys go and spend it on things that aren't useful.*

In talking about their own relationships with boys, however, they were very definite that *the boys just make us laugh, and they've all got their own silly ways* (Sophie).

Sophie described a particular incident in which she had been flirting with a group of boys, *But – um – there was one guy there and he told my friend to f-off the skate walk – skating park – and she's like "Oh – OK –sorry" and he said like, "Sorry's not good enough" and he is to me like "Fuck off you slut" and stuff. And then he like threw a bottle at me and like – it missed me and it smashed.* I asked how she reacted to that and she described how she *went up to him and I was like – he like swung a punch at me and I grabbed his fist and threw it back at him and then I punched him in the chest – and then I pushed him into the duck pond and then he like started laughing and he is like, "you seem pretty strong" and I was like "leave me alone" and we walked off.* Despite their previous comments about boys being stronger than girls, this was typical of the way that the girls managed aggressive situations with boys. Issues of power and relationships will be explored further in the next chapter.

Summary

Clearly the girls in this study were aware of the gender role processes that occur within families, at school and among peers. In describing the "proper" or "desirable" behaviour of other girls they tended to give stereotypical answers that reinforced notions of dualism. However their descriptions of their own behaviours, interactions with brothers and other boys, and the pride that they showed in their physical achievements demonstrated that they were quite comfortable assuming a range of roles, depending on the particular context. In Chapter 3 I explained that gender role theory has been criticised by several researchers who found it deterministic, claiming that it reinforced notions of gender dualism. The next chapter therefore will explore the girls' behaviours, comments and observations from a poststructural perspective and present implications from the various themes using the tools of discourse analysis. Intersections of gender with class and ethnicity will also be explored.

8. A Poststructural View

As I have explained in earlier chapters, over the course of the conversational interviews with the girls in my study, they made clear distinctions between their personal behaviour and what they described as ‘proper’ girl behaviour. Also, as we progressed, several differences between each of the girls became evident to me, as did conflicting beliefs within each individual’s comments. I became increasingly interested in these contradictions and turned to poststructural theories that use discourse analysis to interpret their varied language and behaviour.

Discourse analysis

At a very general level, discourse refers to a body of meaning, regardless of the form of its transmission. Transmission of a discourse may be through language, beliefs or behaviour, and may be conscious or unconscious; that is, taken for granted. Social scientists and others have long used the process of discourse analysis to “tease out the strands of meaning, underlying assumptions and belief systems embedded within a certain discourse” (Court, 2007, p.2). When applied via a feminist poststructural approach, discourse at a macro level refers to “historically, socially and culturally specific bodies of meaning and knowledge” that are embedded within language, institutional or organisational practices and representations (Court, 2007, p. 2; Davies, 1989; MacNaughton, 1994; Paechter, 2006b). Such macro discourses have become embedded in systems of organisational power, such as social policy, and can become taken for granted or accepted as ‘common sense’. Foucault (1980) referred to macro discourses as “regimes of truth” and consequently the words of those in power are generally taken as “self-evident truths” whereas the words of those not in power are dismissed as irrelevant, inappropriate, or without substance (van Dijk, 2000).

Poststructuralists argue that individuals experience multiple and frequently contradictory discourses as they grow and develop, “rendering them at one moment powerful and at another powerless” (Walkerdine, 1981, p. 4). In this sense,

> Young girls of primary school age are presented with and inserted into, ideological and discursive positions by practices which locate them in meaning and in regimes of truth. (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 87)

Thus Jones description of the "production of girls" (1993, p. 157) suggests that 'a girl' is a "subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time (she) speak(s) or think(s)". (Weedon, 1987, p.32)

Poststructural feminists understand individual subjectivity to be constituted within discourses that "offer a range of subject positions which individuals can take up as part of their own ways of being" (Court, 2007, p.84). Thus, in discourse analysis, the term 'positioning' is used to describe how conversations reveal the ways that humans 'position' themselves and others according to the discursive practices available to them. However, the question of how much humans are able to exert agency, that is, consciously change the subject positions that they present, has long been a topic of theoretical debate among poststructural feminist writers. Court (2003) and Kelly Pomerantz & Currie (2005) argue that reflecting on the discourses that shape their subjectivities enables individuals to consciously reject or adopt particular ways of being. Thus, as Davies (1991) wrote:

> Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted. It is the freedom to recognise multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity. (Davies, 1991, p. 51)

Jones (1997) argued that individuals cannot choose a discursively constructed subject position for themselves, because the subject *is* the "discursive practices which produce it" Jones, 1997a, p.43, cited in Court, 2003, p.104). She suggested that "there is an easy slippage from meaning or discourse determining possibilities, to 'people' determining them via discourses, especially when our concern is for 'real people'" (Jones, 1997b, p. 264). This 'slippage', she argued, is in danger of reinforcing the social constructionist perspective of a 'real person' who is 'made' (becomes a girl). In response to Jones' argument Davies (1997) wrote:

> What seems most powerful to me in poststructuralist theory is precisely the fact that we are taken up/over/under by contradictory discursive practices. As humanists we can engage in extraordinary feats to convince ourselves of our unitariness. As feminists we can use the confusion to sharpen our reflexive gaze and resist our take up in discourses we find undesirable; as poststructuralists we can find the ways in which 'the injunction to be a given gender takes place' (Butler1990). (Davies, 1997, p. 285)

As Davies and Harre earlier argued:

> An individual emerges through processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. (Davies & Harre, 1990, p.46)

Paechter (2006a) used the analogy of "localised communities of masculinity and femininity practice" to explain how individuals take up their gendered subjectivities. She explained that within local contexts, individuals gradually develop an understanding of the dominant discourses available to them, and that "other social definitions get squeezed out by heightened awareness of gender as a dichotomy and of 'the girls' and 'the boys' as opposite and even antagonistic sides" (p.15). She went on to suggest that individuals are not bound by any one particular discourse, however and that gender boundaries need not be rigid. Membership of multiple communities of practice is possible and desirable as "an individual … can take up/ perform/ inhabit several ('memberships') at different places and times" (ibid.). In this way, she suggested, ways of being masculine or feminine become "local and negotiated" which explains why "hegemonic masculinity can have many forms in different contexts, and in which 'being feminine' can encompass both the 'surrendered wife' (Doyle, 2001) and the ladette" (Paechter, 2006a, p. 15). As Gee also noted:

> There are innumerable discourses in modern societies: different sorts of street gangs, elementary schools and classrooms, academic disciplines, and their sub-specialities, police, birdwatchers, ethnic groups, genders, executives, feminists, social classes, and so on and so forth. Each is composed of some set of related social practices and social identities (or positions). Each discourse contracts complex social relations of complicity, tension and opposition with other discourses. (Gee, 1996, p.10)

Despite this multiplicity of sometimes contradictory discursive possibilities, Court (2003) pointed out that some subject positions have come to be seen as more 'natural' than others because of the normalisation of particular discourses. Such dominant discourses become institutionalised, taken for granted and embedded in common sense ways of thinking, speaking and doing things (Court, 2002; Reay, 2001), and this can "limit or 'regulate' our understandings of possible ways of being and interacting with others within particular social orders" (Court, 2003, p. 84). Of particular relevance to this current study are the powerful macro discourses of 'gender binary oppositions' (constructions of males and females as fundamentally different, with each representing the polar opposite of the other) and 'gender-specific aggression' (meaning that violence and aggression are natural masculine traits), These discourses may have influenced the ways in which the school principals positioned the girls whom they suggested as suitable candidates for this study and indeed, the subject positions available to the participants themselves. However, as I will show in this chapter, the girls also expressed their understandings of themselves as subjects within a range of different positionings in social orders of school, family, sports teams and other social groups.

One such social order was the relationship that each girl developed with me as a researcher. The conversational interviews with each of the participants were held at school and with the agreement of the various Boards of Trustees and school managers and I, the researcher, was a middle aged, middle class teacher with access to their parents and principals. Within poststructural theory this presents an issue of power relationships as the participants may have viewed me as an authority figure for whom they had to present the "right" answer. As explained in Chapter 4, I attempted to reduce this possibility by spending time getting to know the girls and giving them time to get to know and trust me, I dressed informally, used my first name and made the video tapes accessible to the girls so that they could check the accuracy of their comments. I assured them that I did not report back to parents or principals on any individual's comments. Nevertheless, the girls' comments may well reflect that power imbalance and it is possible that they would have different conversations with other people. Despite this caveat, through discourse analysis of those conversations I have been able to highlight some of the multiple ways in which the girls were positioned by and through the discursive practices to which they were exposed.

Chapter 8 will now revisit the findings from the study to examine the girls' expressed beliefs and observations, noting their similarities and differences, from a poststructural feminist perspective. It will identify and illustrate a number of emerging micro discourses and demonstrate how the pervading macro-discourses of gender dualism and gender differentiated aggression, can be seen to have contributed to the girls' apparently conflicting statements and beliefs. Paechter (2007) explained that "children make sense of their own gendered identities through constant negotiations with the masculinities and femininities that are constructed in the spaces and relationships that they inhabit" (p.22) and thus the contradictions, beliefs and opinions expressed during the girls' conversations with me, indicate how differences of culture, ethnicity, maturity and social class have also affected the different subject positions that each girl presented. Despite obvious differences between the girls, I have noted throughout this study that the participants' main similarity is their physical presence and this appears to be a significant feature of the findings. Therefore the final part of this chapter explores the influence of the girls' bodies on their various subjectivities and world views.

Gender binaries - the perception of gender-specific behaviour as normal

The literature review and theory chapters both established that gender binaries pervade every aspect of human life and that this dualism supports and maintains the power imbalance between women and men (Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000; Court, 2003; England, 2002; Middleton, 1998). Moreover, Davies (1989, p. 5) explained that "As children learn the discursive practices of their society, they learn to correctly position themselves as male or female". West and Zimmerman (1987) questioned whether humans can ever *not,* as they put it, "do gender". They argued that "society is partitioned by 'essential' differences between women and men and placement in a sex category is both relevant and enforced" (p. 137). It is not surprising therefore that the participants described male and female behaviour as 'naturally' different because society is structured to reinforce this gender binary. The conformist discourse of 'proper' girl and boy behaviour, as expressed by all of the participants, was that girls should be feminine and boys should be masculine. The extreme form of each 'gender-specific' behaviour was taken to be the norm. For example, Kiwi was clear that 13-year-old *girls should be feminine,* that is; *enjoy shopping and fashion* whereas boys

should *be strong and you know, go running, use weights and that.* According to Kiwi, *the proper way for a girl to behave is mature; they should do their work and not be naughty* and deviating from such *feminine* behaviour would imply that she was *weird.* Aleysha stated that 13-year-old girls should behave *as a girl should*, adding that the thing that would make her really angry was being called *silosi* or boy, thus implying like Kiwi, that it was 'unnatural' for girls to behave in any way other than the conventional understanding of gendered childhood. When discussing proper girl and boy behaviour, Mojo was also very definite about gendered behaviour saying that *girls are girls and boys are boys*, although she rejected the desirability of "feminine" behaviour adding, that being feminine was *rubbish* and that *acting like a girl* meant being *into shopping.* Walkerdine (1999) explained that the models of childhood from within developmental theory privilege a particular model of normality that is mirrored by these girls' statements, that is: "normal boys are naughty and playful, not violent. Normal girls are well behaved, hard working and asexual" (p.89).

Sharnee was clear that *boys can't be girls and girls can't be boys* but then she differentiated between the biological definition and chosen behaviour, insisting that *they should be able to act how they like* particularly in relation to her own *naughty* behaviour. Sharnee also commented, however, that *the guys should have a big build* then added *they walk like that with their chest out – act all tough.* Only Tui consistently said that there was no particular way that boys and girls should behave, she said *nah – there is no particular way for a girl to act or a boy to act.* This statement reveals the way that Tui positioned herself as a female equal to males and is supported by her later descriptions of fighting with the boys in her family and of excelling at physically demanding sports such as water polo. Both Tui and Mojo epitomise Wilkinson's (1999) description of "a masculinised new woman, at ease with male attributes" (p. 37, cited in Reay, 2001, p.155).

Good girls, girly girls, sporty girls and tomboys

Paechter (2010) commented that "stereotypes of macho masculinity and girly-girliness seem to be seen by children as default positions" a view expressed more strongly by Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie (2005) who suggested that "emphasised femininity … is the most culturally valued form of femininity, albeit not necessarily the most prominent pattern amongst … girls" (p. 229). Although there was a general consensus

that boys should be big, strong, play sport and do weights, each of the participants cheerfully described the range of girl groups in their respective schools and these groups were loosely described in a similar way to Reay's (2001) Spice Girls', 'Nice Girls', 'Girlies' and 'Tomboys'. For example, when talking about groups at school, Tui said that *there are lots of little groups* naming *girly girls* and *sporty girls* Sharnee also described a range of girl groups at her school but said that her friendship groups were *mixed* and that *we all just hang out together – some of them are into sport and some are pretty girly*. Mojo also described a number of different groups at her school including *popular bitchy girls – boys like them.*

Reay (2002) later explained that there has been a significant shift in the construction of femininity over the past few decades, which has opened up and extended generally held understandings of acceptable female behaviour in both public and private spheres. As well as illustrating their own range of subject positions, each of the participants in my study described several groups of girls at their particular schools, and several female figures in their lives, such as teachers, mothers and grandmothers, whose beliefs and behaviours did not fit within the conventional discourse of 'normal' femininity that they had previously described. When referring to the different groups of girls in their schools, most of the definitions assigned to these various groups related to physical manifestations such as choice of clothing, ways of speaking and the kinds of games that the girls chose to play.

Good girls and girly girls

Sophie was very clear that "girly girls" *wear mini skirts like pink stuff, wear lots and lots of pink stuff and they wear different things and do their hair differently, like they usually have their hair in a pony.* Conversely, she consistently said that *boys should be tough and play rugby.* Tui said that *the cool group has boys and girls; our group only eats lunch with the boys then the boys go outside and play rugby and the (good) girls stay in or just walk around.* Like Sophie, she said that girly girls *wear mini skirts and stuff and short, short shorts.* Mojo asserted that *good girls don't smoke and stuff like that.*

While the girls in my study tended to refer to 'good girls' and 'girly girls' as being closest to the 'norm' described earlier, they also referred to such girls in a derogatory

way – encapsulating, as Reay (2001) put it, "the limited and limiting discourse of conventional femininity" (p.155). Indeed, the girls' verbal commitment to conventional femininity was generally at odds with their professed interest in sport and with their scathing comments about 'girly girls'.

In my study, good girls and girly girls were frequently named as *bitchy* in contrast to the *cool boys* who *play rugby. Sophie said that lots of girly girls fall out about guys and bitch at each other, they fight then get back to being best friends again* whereas *the cool boys play rugby.* Tui described girly behaviours scornfully; *girly girls don't play sport at all – don't like muddy things* and spend their time *screaming and flirting with the guys.* Sharnee was scathing about *girly girls*, saying that *they are really stupid, like when they break a nail they are like – 'aarrgghh – I've broken my nail I'll have to get another - and I'm like - huh? They are posh and like 'oh, I'm so neat' – all soppy and shallow*.

As in Paechter's 2010 study, the 'good girls' and 'girly girls' were seen as polar opposites to the 'tomboys' and were generally derided. There was, however a clear shift towards a more accepting attitude of girly behaviour as the participants approached puberty. As their bodies developed sexual characteristics such as the classic 'hour glass' shape, Sophie and Kiwi in particular had begun to adopt some of the aspects of a girly girl subject position, although, reinforcing Paechter's point about simultaneous membership of multiple 'communities of practice', they also maintained a sporty girl interest in physical recreation. The shift from one subject position to another was not therefore fixed and immovable, but rather a contextual variant. Paechter (2010) described this as being "a bit tomboy" or a girl who sees herself as "tomboy sometimes and girly girl others". Paechter went on to say that this does "not so much describe a mixed or androgynous identity as one that varied according to circumstances" (p. 227). As Reay had previously explained:

> There are many different ways of performing femininity and the particular forms femininity takes are powerfully shaped by the roles women and girls adopt and the context in which they perform these roles. Reay, 2001, p.155)

Sporty girls and tomboys

The participants generally referred to themselves as sporty girls or tomboys – either by name or by describing their physical presentation and all of the girls presented as confident in their physical abilities and their potential for leadership. As well as being indicative of the girls' range of subject positions, this viewpoint may well relate to culturally specific norms, as New Zealand culture has traditionally viewed physical prowess and sporting ability to be not just acceptable in females but desirable. Maori women and pioneering European women were expected to work alongside the male members of their families and New Zealand is one of a few countries in the world where female sport is reported and celebrated in the media.

Without exception and despite Sophie's and Kiwi's evolving interest in fashion and boys, the girls in my study rejected the discourse of "emphasised femininity" (Connell, 1987) and rejoiced in their physical presence and sporting prowess. Mojo was very clear that she was not at all girly and that **her** main interests were *sports*. She belonged to *netball, badminton and swimming clubs* and she was confident that she was *better at all sports than other girls* of her age. Sharnee was *into sport*, and enjoyed playing *netball and rugby*. She seemed to be very confident in herself and happy to be different. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the discourses of her family and Maori culture seemed to be strong influences on her behaviour. A confident sportswoman, tall and strong, Sophie described herself as better than most girls of her age at netball and swimming, although she did not belong to any clubs or teams. Aleysha spent much of her spare time playing *volley* or Samoan *cricket* with other young people from her church. At times, Aleysha walked with a pronounced swagger and she told me in the first interview that she liked to be thought of as *a leader* and was proud that other girls considered her to be cool.

The previous chapter explored the concept of tomboyism and found that a common understanding of the term was consistent with explanations given by the girls in this study. Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum (2002) suggested that tomboys are "highly interested in sports and boys' toys and … lack interest in stereotypically female play activities" (p. 333). The girls in my study certainly illustrated this suggestion.

Sophie described *tomboys* as *girls that like sport, like rugby, don't like girly clothes or make-up and things – wear black and blue – not pink.* Likewise, when discussing tomboys, Kiwi commented, *tomboys are not really into make-up and shopping –*

they're more into sport and don't really care what they wear. They do but – well, they don't wear mini-skirts and all that. Although by the end of my conversations with them, both Kiwi and Sophie had began to adopt more "girly" behaviours and dress, both were adamant that they would continue to play "boy" sports such as soccer and rugby. Their comments demonstrated that they clearly differentiated between the subject positions of girly girl and tomboy, yet they happily took up both. Their descriptions of their behaviours indicated a tomboy subjectivity yet their interest in pink and girls' clothes and make up shows that at other times they took up a girly girl position. Reay (2001) noted that it was unusual for girls to move between identities but when it did happen it was indicated in part through dress. Paechter (2010) also noted that "The body as a dressed and decorated object is thus used by children, in school and out, as an indicator of gender and (therefore, in their constructions) of behaviour" (p.133). This point was illustrated by Aleysha: when I asked her what the word tomboy meant to her, she described *one that wears boy clothes and the behaviour, how it's like a boys – they like act all tough, think they're tough.* Aleysha was clear that *I'm not like those other girls.* She was clear that she was *a tomboy*, adding *if you get called it* then *you start to act like it.* This subject position appeared to be situational however, as it was not the one that she assumed within the family or at church and she assured me that she had not behaved in such a way *at primary.* I assumed that when she was younger and in different situations, there were other discourses available and other positionings of her by others and by herself. The Samoan culture clearly influenced the range of discourses available to Aleysha, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. At school, Aleysha's manner of dress and physicality supported her assertion that, at school, she had indeed taken up the subject position of a *tomboy;* she wore a baggy sweatshirt which concealed her body shape and had her hair pulled tightly back in a bun, wore baggy jeans with one leg rolled up and a bandana tied around her wrist in the manner of a youth gang. Despite this mode of dress, when I asked directly about gang behaviour she denied that subjectivity, asserting, *I don't really know – 'cause I'm not in a gang*.

Although the oldest of the participants, Mojo was physically less mature, having begun menarche only two months before our first round of conversations and while her body was strong and athletic, she showed no obvious sign of developing secondary sexual characteristics such as noticeable breasts. However, when I asked if she was a tomboy,

she laughed and said *nah*, adding, *because when they are tomboys they are normally still developing.* Despite this assurance, Mojo appeared to me to have taken up a tomboy subject position. Like Aleysha, she dressed in a manner consistent with the tomboy subjectivity described earlier; choosing to wear her school uniform as knee-length shorts and baggy sweatshirt, instead of the short shorts or skirts and blouses worn by most of the girls at her school. At each meeting she presented herself in a manner that made her look and sound tough and most of the stories that Mojo told about herself involved her prowess at sport or at fighting. She described a tomboy as *a girl that dresses up as a boy – walks round as a boy, likes to do the kind of things that boys do. Like hurting people and stuff like that.* I wondered if she thought that all tomboys go around hurting people and she answered *yeah, some of them do – some of them just like to look tough.* Mojo's and Aleysha's assertions that tomboys *like to look tough* is interesting, given their own physical presentations and it is possible that the comparatively late sexual development of their bodies has influenced the constitution of their social identities and behaviour as they positioned themselves and were positioned by others (Paechter, 2006a). Mojo's comment that *tomboys are still developing,* is therefore appropriate and insightful. Mojo enjoyed reading teenage magazines *because they are funny* rather than for the information on how to make herself attractive to boys. This is in contrast to Kiwi and Sophie's comments about reading magazines for the *fashion and make-up* articles.

Tui presented as a confused and amiable child in a large, though not obviously sexually mature body. Like Mojo, Tui did not use the word tomboy to describe herself, but when I told her that one of the other girls that I was talking to had mentioned tomboys and asked her what she thought of the term, she reflected that tomboys, were *girls who like pokemon,* adding with feeling, *some girls don't like it but it's none of their business.* This is a definite alignment with the subject position of tomboy as described earlier. She told me proudly about her sporting success, saying that she played softball, and was in a suburban representative team. She was in school team for a swimming tournament and told me proudly that *there was a water polo team at my last school; it was intermediate age but I got in the team when I was 7.* Unlike Kiwi, Sharnee and Sophie she appeared to present a constant subjectivity and was strong and confident in her way of being in the world and appeared to be rather confused by the fact that teachers and other girls at her school seemed not to value her physicality.

In her classic study of preadolescent gender play, Thorne (1993) observed the crossing of gender boundaries that was negotiated during the course of the day and across different settings, in a number of predominantly white elementary schools in America. She described a range of conditions that influenced the likelihood of children crossing gender boundaries, including the fact that it was less problematic for girls than boys. Girls whose physical appearance was asexual (such as Aleysha, Mojo and Tui) and those with obvious sporting prowess (all of the participants in my study), were better able to negotiate such crossing. As Moore (2003) commented, "the key to successful crossing was avoiding sexualised meanings" (p.174). All of the girls in my study negotiated the 'crossing of gender boundaries', particularly regarding their interests in sport, but this was demonstrated most easily by those girls whose bodies had yet to develop sexual characteristics.

Thorne (1993) also noted that, as well as the children's physical characteristics, settings which limited the number of same sex playmates were more likely to enhance the possibility of crossing gender boundaries. Tui, and Mojo had both moved from very small full primary schools and Aleysha still attended one, whereas the other girls had spent two years in very large intermediate schools that were age limited. Thus, the range of same sex peers from whom to select playmates was more limited for Tui, Mojo and Aleysha. Tui said that *I changed schools and had a really hard time fitting in to this school. The kids here are all the same age group and there are 600 instead of 250.* A sporty girl, she was used to joining in activities with the boys at her previous school, but this was more difficult at her new school where, *at lunchtime, the boys go out and play rugby, the girls stay in or just walk around.* Crossing gender boundaries was therefore more difficult at her new school where she experienced the somewhat limited discourses of femininity presented by the girls.

Consistent with the findings by Thorne, Moore (2003) commented that in her study, "children generally marked boys' gender boundary crossing as more deviant than girls' crossing, but the specific features of the recreational context shaped just how "deviant" the kids defined these crossings to be, if at all" (p.175). She noted that the normative power dynamic of "straight, white, hegemonic masculinity" (ibid.) is one reason for this. During our conversations, Tui stated plaintively, *I don't see why girls can't rescue a guy* and Aleysha commented that the boys *look after the girls*, both implying that

although they may not personally be inhibited in their gendered behaviour, they accepted that it was more 'normal' for males to be positioned as 'protectors'.

Some researchers (for example, Bailey et al., 2002; Ruble &Martin, 1998) have suggested that tomboyism is linked to genetic inheritance and that girls who present as tomboys are likely to have mothers with higher levels of the male hormone testosterone. By this measure they assume that tomboys will present as more aggressive than girls who are not tomboys. However, none of these studies is conclusive and in their 2002 study, Bailey and colleagues did not find significant links between tomboyism and aggression. The socialisation theories described in Chapter 7 suggested that tomboyism was a learned behaviour; however poststructural theory would suggest that the girls in my study were negotiating different discursive ways of 'being a girl'.

Spice girls: the fine line between girly and slut

Reay (2001) described spice girls as those who "tread a fine line between acceptable and unacceptable 'girl power' behaviour" (p. 161). The disruptive behaviour of these girls frequently involved overt heterosexuality and sexualised teasing of the boys; behaviour that they claimed was "giving as good as they got". Whereas such behaviour by boys is frequently described as 'normal' this behaviour is generally seen to "run counter to traditional forms of femininity" and is seen as "inappropriate" in girls (ibid.). Indeed, the teachers in Reay's study described such girls as "scheming little madams", "real bitches", "a bad influence" and "little cows". Unlike the girls in Reay's (2001) study, none of my participants described themselves as spice girls, although they did label girls who displayed overtly sexual behaviour in much the same way as the teachers above. Such girls were described as *bitchy, screaming and flirting with the guys,* whereas the girls in my study generally preferred to be on an even footing with the boys, playing *rugby* or *volley* or *riding bikes*. Although most of the participants in my study were developing a more sexualised subject position, their comments seemed to me to be generally naïve regarding sexual issues and their clothing and interests reflected a lack of concern about looking particularly trendy or sexually desirable. When discussing how 13-year-old girls should behave, they all thought that they should act *like girls* and Aleysha was adamant that they should be *not perfect but good – as they should act for their age.*

Chapter 2 described the plethora of literature about the sexualisation of little girls; especially those to do with marketing products for children that include highly sexualised clothing - including brassieres and thongs - for pre-pubescent girls (see, for example, Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Quart, 2003; Thorne, 1993). However, in accord with the poststructural stance taken in this chapter, Willett (2008) argued that "girls are given a number of often contradictory discourses upon which to draw and against which to position themselves" and "girls and women (may be) seen to have agency to resist (to some extent) the hegemonic discourses of the fashion industry" (p.420). In my study, there was a clear rejection of girly girl subjectivities expressed by Mojo, Aleysha and Tui, and despite Kiwi, Sophie and Sharnee at various times taking up the girly images presented by the media and advertising agencies, none of these girls appeared to be totally swayed by those images.

To make a different, but related point, in contrast to the judgemental and homophobic way that the girls described 'unmanly' boys (for example, "faggy"), none of them used derogatory terms such as "dyke" to describe 'unfeminine' girls. In fact, they were critical of girls who were overtly heterosexual. Mojo commented that the worst thing that a girl could be called was *slut or something like that* – a belief shared by all of the participants. This issue was particularly evident when the girls in my study talked about girls in gangs. None of those girls was seen as tough or masculine; rather, as Sophie put it, girls joined gangs for the *yukky stuff – sex and stuff*, adding *the boys are in charge, the girls wear mini skirts – they have to look sexy* and Kiwi thought that girls in gangs *probably just want to do the sex and all that really*. Sharnee commented that *they don't mind what's going to happen to them.* It would appear that the girls' revulsion of overt female sexuality, their enjoyment of 'boy' sports and their conviction that boys should be manly and strong (not *faggy* or *gay*) all serve to maintain the conventional discourse of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity which will be explained in the next section.

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept introduced by Connell (1987), but used by some poststructural feminists to describe the normative ideal of masculinity within which boys and men are 'supposed to' position themselves. Although not necessarily the most prevalent masculinity at a given time, it is the most socially endorsed and in most Western societies, hegemonic masculinity is associated closely with heterosexuality, authority and physical toughness. A decade ago it was described as "mobilise(d)

around physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty, control, assertiveness, competitiveness" among other qualities such as "objectivity and rationality" (Kenway & Fitzclarance, 1997, p.121, cited in Skelton, 2002, p.172). The form of hegemonic masculinity that is more recently in vogue is that projected by the African American performers of hip hop and 'gangsta rap' music, such as 50 Cents, Crime Mob and C-Murder, which includes lyrics such as:

> This ain't RNB, this is Gangsta Rap,
> Bitches get smacked, bustas get jacked,
> Front if you want you get lay on your back
> It's about guns and drugs and hoes and club. (Ice T, 2006)

Thus, as Turner (2006) wrote: "Mainstream hip-hop and rap legitimises the hegemonic powers". Whatever form it takes, hegemonic masculinity is accorded more power than all forms of femininity and predominates over other modes of masculinity. Sophie demonstrated her disgust at the attitude of the boys at her school who chose girlfriends on the basis of their girliness, saying: *There's this guy art our school who didn't want to go out with a girl 'cause she was a tomboy. That's what the guys are like at our school; judge them on what they look like basically.*

Hegemonic masculinity is definitely heterosexual and several of the girls' comments reflect the belief that boys' deviation from this form of masculinity was unnatural, particularly in relation to sexuality. Boys who were not 'manly' were described by Sharnee as *faggy* and she said that: *I know a guy that my cousin was going out with but he used to be gay and my cousin didn't know that and we were, like going "hey hey" and started mocking him – and he was like going "oh no, no"*. Despite Mojo's own, masculinised behaviour, she still condemned boys who did not act within the dominant heterosexual version of masculinity, saying *we have two people (boys) here who act like girls* adding *it's unnatural to like the same sex – creepy*. Without exception, the girls described their preference for playing 'boy sports' and derided the popular girls whose "emphasised femininity" was "oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of [males]" (Connell, 1989, p.183). In these ways, the powerful discourse of hegemonic masculinity was not only supported by the girls in my study, it was also performed by them (Cheng, 1996; Hayward, 1997, cited in Skelton, 2002). In her

study of gender discourses, girls' cultures and femininities in the primary classroom, Reay (2001) cited Fine and Macpherson (1992, p.197) when suggesting that "girls can be good, bad or – best of all – they can be boys" (Reay, 2001, p. 162). Many of the comments of the girls in my study support this notion – especially those of Mojo and Tui - but, it would seem that they were only endorsing 'boy' behaviour that was constituted within the dominant discourse of hegemonic masculinity. As I will show in the next section, though some of the girls opinions about the best ways to be a girl changed as they approached puberty.

Puberty and change

When describing the transition from child to woman that occurs at puberty, Thorne (1993) argued that:

> Girls are pressured to make themselves 'attractive' to get a boyfriend, to define themselves and other girls in terms of their positions in the heterosexual market. Although boys also enter into this market, it is less defining of their status and presumed futures, and, given the structuring of heterosexuality, it is they who tend to have the upper hand. (Thorne, 1993, p.170)

Although at various stages of development, all of the girls in my study were approaching the transition point between girl and woman, and most of them were struggling to come to terms with the changes in the way that they were thus positioned by others. Their families on the whole still regarded them as little girls, but at school they were all challenged by the conflicting subject positions of nice girl, spice girl, girly or tomboy (Reay, 2001). Despite the fact that they all had at some stage identified as tomboys and still enjoyed playing 'boy sports', Sophie, Kiwi and Sharnee all had boyfriends, wore make up and told me of the changes that were occurring in their relationships as a result of puberty.

In fact, apart from Aleysha, all of the girls subscribed to the discourse that, as Tui noted *things change at puberty – you start liking boys and stuff.* Sophie was also clear that puberty and boyfriends went together, saying that *most guys go out with girly girls.* Indeed, by the last interview, Sophie was wearing a mini skirt, had pink accessories and had her bleached hair *in a pony*. During the fourth round of

conversations, she told me that *I just got a new 'phone; it's a new pink flip one* (shows me), *my friend took a photo – look my favourite boyfriend.* I asked her whether that meant that she was a girly girl. She grinned and said, *Yeah, I love pink.* Sophie appeared to switch between the conflicting subject positions of tough girl and girly girl and was very physically self-aware. Tall and athletic, her body was sexually developed, with a classic "hour glass" shape and obvious breasts. She had corrective braces on her teeth and suffered from teenage acne. The initial questionnaire asked the participants to name the best thing about them, and whereas the other girls all talked about qualities such as loyalty to family and friends, sense of humour and kindness, Sophie said *my eyes*. Sophie demonstrated her negotiating of conflicting subject positions saying at one time, *I don't think I am becoming more girly but I am starting to like going with boys* and at another that she wanted to get into more *sports such as rugby and skateboarding*.

Kiwi noted *you change as you grow up. Me and my brother I used to mock him, be like, um, a tomboy, now I don't like it. At intermediate you see all the other girls and want to be like them.* She described herself as having *grown out of* her youthful *naughty* behaviour and expressed surprise that she had been referred to me as having displayed aggressive behaviour. The various "ways of being" that Kiwi talked about demonstrate her transition from child to teenager. Many studies (Morgan, 1998; Reay, 2001; Thorne, 1993) suggest that most tomboys begin to position themselves as more conventionally feminine when they reach puberty. Thorne (1993) referred to this transition as a "continuum of location and activity" and according to her comments, it seemed that Kiwi was able to take up either her "good girl" or "tomboy" subjectivity according to the context of time and place.

Sharnee was also clear that things change as girls reach puberty, saying *they just change – I know a girl who wants to be a tomboy 'cause she finds herself ugly, but she's very pretty. 'Cause she's hanging round with guys a lot – she's got no sisters – she's been brought up by her mom and her step dad, she's started walking out with guys and stuff like that and doing guy things 'cause she was brought up like that. And then if you were to go "oh you're a tomboy" or something, she'd go and start wearing her brothers' clothes.* Sharnee added *I reckon she'll just change 'cause she's started to hang out with us girls now. So she'll just change 'cause she'll see that the girls she hangs out with are different.*

I was interested in Mojo's opinions about growing up, and how they were supported by her behaviour and dominant subject position. For example, she stated that *maybe, like, 17 is time for more grown-up behaviour*. Mojo's statements suggest that, despite her comments about tomboys, she was still developing her interest and views, and positioned herself and other 13-year-olds as children.

Summary

Many of the opinions related by the participants in this study focused on differences between "proper" girl and "proper" boy behaviour, despite the fact that, as indicated earlier, these opinions were frequently at odds with their own acknowledged behaviour. In this way they demonstrated Jones' (1997) point that "In their daily lives, girls (or women) may engage several meanings or positions simultaneously, and may 'take themselves up' in contradictory positions" (p.159). Although the label tomboy has been used to describe the crossing of gender boundaries by the girls in my study, Bailey and colleagues (2002, p. 333) point out that this definition implies a consistent rejection of conventionally feminine subjectivities. As they say, "individuals can be male-typical in some respects and female typical in others" - a statement that is clearly illustrated by Sophie in particular. Like the girls in my study, Reay (2001) and Moore (2003) found that the girls in their studies negotiated varied positions in relation to conventional femininities. Each of the girls appeared to slip between subject positions, depending on the particular discourse of the social order in which they found themselves. As they reached puberty, the girls' comments appeared to indicate that they saw a move to greater girliness as a "natural and inevitable part of growing up" (Paechter, 2010, p. 231), but unlike the girls in Paechter's study, these girls did not believe that such progression meant an inevitable abandonment of their sporting pursuits and 'boyish' behaviour. Sophie, arguably the most girly of them claimed that she wanted to take up even more extreme boy sports when she attended high school. Despite the girls' regular crossing of gender boundaries, their comments all indicated that such crossing was not appropriate for boys who were meant to conform to the normative pressures of hegemonic masculinity.

Discourses of aggression at adolescence

Gendered aggression: Boys fight/girls bitch

The girls were referred for my study because their school principals suggested that their behaviour fitted my description of aggression. The previous section has described the girls' various ways of constituting themselves, according to contexts that include "the characteristics of actors, audience, situations and behaviours which allow or encourage children to … incorporate more flexibility into their gender boundaries" (Moore, 2003, p.175). These girls have been described by me and generally by themselves, as tomboys – indicating that they frequently crossed gender boundaries, particularly in relation to their interests in physically demanding sports; but my discussion has also showed that 'being a tomboy' was not a constant state and that the girls constituted themselves in a range of subject positions.

Bailey and colleagues (2002) questioned the traits that distinguish tomboys from other girls, saying that "tomboys may be male-typical in their interest in sports and their aversion to dresses, but are they also more physically aggressive than other girls?" (p.333). This is an interesting question that seems to assume there are 'normal' gendered differences in aggressive behaviour. In the next section I will therefore explore the girls' conversations in relation to such views of gender specific aggression. The conventional discourse of physical aggression portrays it as a male-typical trait (Moffitt et al., 2001) while the dominant discourse of female aggression suggests that females are more likely to engage in verbal or relational behaviours which "include psychological attacks such as humiliation, rumours and damage to either self-esteem or social status" (Raskauskas, 2007, p. 2). Within the normalising of these related discourses, the relatively few females who behave physically violently have always been considered an anomaly and they have been demonised by the media and in popular culture (Arnott & Martin, 1995; Brown, et al., 2001; Ringrose, 2006). Indeed, as I showed in my literature review, various forms of aggressive behaviour by females have been confused and generalised by the media (including self-harming behaviours such as alcohol and substance abuse) so that "when 'other' girls do figure in the mean girl story, it is through sensationalised incidences of isolated girl violence, held up as a dangerous risk of uncontained feminine aggression" (Ringrose, 2006, p. 407). One explanation of female aggression that has been suggested is the biological one of hormone imbalance; that is, girls who behave aggressively may have been exposed to sex-atypical hormone levels (testosterone) in early development (Bailey et al., 2002). I

was unable to find any research findings to support this hypothesis, nor was it indicated by the physical characteristics of the girls in my study.

The girls' comments certainly did support, however, the predominant view of aggression as enacted differently by boys and girls. A common theme throughout the conversations was that boys punch and girls bitch. As Sophie put it, *guys will fight, girls usually don't; they bitch.* According to Kiwi, if a girl was being aggressive, she would be *slamming doors, throwing stuff around. Sometimes hurt someone – but girls don't really hurt people as much as guys do.* Boys' aggression was described by her as *hurting people or punching things, getting into trouble* and this was okay if *he wants to do it in his room, not hurt anyone. Take it out on the house.* Mojo stated that *boys get more angry than we do,* an opinion supported by Sharnee, who also described boys' aggression as *hitting, going mental – yelling, and punching people. They are stronger than girls,* whereas she thought that *girls have the mouth to be smart*. Tui said that *girls aren't really violent unless around males influences.* These distinctions between "acceptable" male and female aggression demonstrates the girls' understanding of the conventional gender-differentiated discourses of aggression, although Tui begins to hint at a possibility of contextual variance.

The dominant discourse of relational female aggression (Batchelor, 2001; Leschied et al., 2000; Moffitt et al., 2001) was also illustrated by the girls when they described the things that made them feel aggressive; it was almost always *someone saying something*. For most of them, this included attacks on the reputation of their family or individual members of their family and for Sophie, Aleysha and Tui in particular, it involved jibes at their self-esteem. With Sophie, this was her pimples or facial acne, for Aleysha it was her lack of conventional femininity and for Tui, it was her physical size. Tui described female aggression as *say[ing] nasty things like bitch, fat cow, fat bitch* and suggested that this was because she was *bigger than my friends*. Aleysha was verbally abused because she was large but also her sexual subjectivity was attacked by being called a boy.

Crossing gender boundaries of aggression

As stated, physical aggression has been described as a normative male behaviour. However, apart from Kiwi (who said she *never hurt anybody*, even when fighting with

her brother - she maintained that *I never hurt him,* despite the fact that he would *punch and hit* her) all of the girls described a time when they had 'crossed the gender boundary', 'performing' in ways that are more generally associated with boys and acting in a physically aggressive manner. In some cases this was very serious as in Aleysha's description of *fighting with the knife* and Mojo's description of the fight where she had *got her down on the ground and punched her.* Tui described very violent episodes of fighting with her brothers where she gleefully recalled *they scratch and hit me and I bite them – they have loads of scars on their arms* and Sophie also happily described fighting physically with another girl and throwing bottles at boys in a skate park. These girls all described physical aggression as a male behaviour yet did not seem to see the disjunction between their stated beliefs and their own behaviour. Like the girls' other gender boundary crossing behaviours that were described in the previous section, it appeared to me that their aggressive behaviours were situational and although the girls could acknowledge them in one context, they were also clear that they were girls, and that girls were not physically aggressive. Clearly then,

> Gender, like deviance is situated. The meanings of gender, like the meanings of deviance, is changed by context, given the characteristics of the actors, audience, situations and the meanings given to actual behaviour. (Moore, 2003, p.195)

One way of understanding the somewhat paradoxical contradictions between the girls' stated beliefs about gender and aggression and their own behaviours can be opened up by thinking about how they described and variously justified their aggression in different contexts and situations. In the next section, I look at how their comments reveal some varying influences on them of dynamics of family, culture and class.

Intersecting influences of family, culture and class at home and at school

Thorne's (1993) research was based on girls from predominantly white cultural backgrounds, but did not focus on the influence of these factors; however in her study of "Race, Risk and the Emergence of Gender Boundaries", Moore (2003) found that class and racial composition were crucial characteristics of the settings for crossing gender boundaries. Children learn and experience different ideas about gender from settings such as the wider family, siblings, relatives and friends Citing Connor, 1995;

Corsaro, 1997; Thorne, 1993 and West and Ferstermaker 1995 Moore said, "Notions about appropriate gender vary by race", although

> Race categories themselves and practices for assigning category membership are situated phenomena: not merely natural or obvious but interpretations of physical features and ancestry shaped by the larger historical and social trajectories, as well as particular situations in which actors and audience find themselves. (Moore, 2003, p.175)

Kiwi, Tui and Sophie lived in culturally dominant, white, middle class, nuclear families and were all able to articulate their beliefs and feelings clearly to me, as a member of the same cultural group; Kiwi was extremely articulate, with a vocabulary that demonstrated her middle class background and several times asked for clarification of a word or expression that I used. Similarly to Reay's (2001) "nice girls", she presented "as hard-working and well behaved exemplify[ing] the constraints of gendered and classed discourse which afforded [her] the benefits of culture, taste and cleverness" (p. 60). Despite their own verbal skills, Tui and Sophie expressed confusion and some consternation over the verbal aggression of other girls, but cheerfully recounted stories of the physical fights in which they had been involved. Contradictions were also evident when they somewhat gleefully described how they could be physically aggressive, but emphasised that they did not want to be positioned as aggressive by others. For example, Sophie said, *I think, I think I'm stronger than I really am. I know I think in my head – oh yes, I can beat her up – but, when it comes to it, I'll be really scared and I won't want to. But apparently I'm, like, tough – I look tough but I don't act like it.* Both Sophie's and Tui's conversations indicated that they enjoyed feeling powerful and in control, yet Sophie was aware that this did not fit the subject position of girly girl that she had begun to take up as she progressed through adolescence.

Moore (2003) and Thorne (1993) both noted that the crossing of gender boundaries is more likely to occur in settings where there are fewer same sex peers with whom to engage so it may be significant that Kiwi, Tui and Sophie, who all lived in nuclear families, had not problematised their physical fighting with their brothers. It is likely that these girls had transferred their 'straightforward' sibling physically aggressive behaviour from the context of home to that of school. When she talked about her

school relationships, however, Tui had appeared baffled and confused by 'O's unpleasant verbal comments about her size and responded by lashing out physically, and although Sophie had apparently tried to join in the verbal abuse directed at her, she generally resorted to physical violence. These boundary crossing aggressive behaviours appeared to have affected the girls' relationships with other girls in their schools and consequently their friendships fluctuated. Sophie said, *'H' used to be my best friend, now I don't really like her* and on another occasion, *'A' follows me round too much – she used to be my best friend now I just find her annoying.* Both Tui and Sophie seemed to be more comfortable playing sport or, in Sophie's case, riding her bicycle with the boys.

As I noted earlier, Sophie told me that as girls reach puberty, they *change and become more bitchy* – a term of abuse that she used frequently. However, she also said that she called her friends *bitch* as a joke. She did not seem to understand that there was a contradiction here, saying that *everyone calls people bitch. It means dog.* On another occasion, she said *I call my best friend my bitch – like she's my other half – I say this is my bitch but it's just a joke. I'm like – to my friend, "you bitch" and then we laugh about it.* While Sophie referred to the word "bitch" as *the worst thing that you can say to somebody,* when positioning herself within her Pakeha (white European) youth culture subjectivity, she used this word almost as a term of affection. Perhaps it was a consequence of her unawareness of these incongruities that she appeared to have had few long-term friendships and that those friends she did have were a year younger than her and therefore also relatively new to the school. This suggests that Sophie's lack of consistency in constituting herself as an adolescent girly girl may have widened the social gap between her and her peers.

Tui's presentation of herself as a sporty tomboy was different from the dominant femininity presented by most of the girls at her school which was more streetwise and *into boys* - and she appeared to find this both confusing and challenging. Growing up with two brothers and having a strong and physically able body had clearly influenced Tui and she showed considerable insight when she said that aggression *depends on how aggressive the family or the people that you actually live with actually are?* However, she claimed that sibling fighting was *different from fighting with girls* as *with my brothers you have kind of just got to know that they're brothers – but girls!* Her statement suggests that she either did not understand "girl" aggression because she

had not experienced it before her change of school or that she was disgusted by the behaviour and the subject position of emphasised femininity that the other girls presented.

Mojo, Aleysha and Sharnee lived in working class families in poor socio-economic areas, had large extended families and Mojo and Aleysha experienced some difficulty in putting their beliefs and feelings into words. Not only did this inhibit their ability to express themselves, but it is likely that it also affected their relationship with me. It is possible that, as young Maori and Samoan girls they had difficulty finding the appropriate language in which to express their feelings to me; a member of the dominant white middle class culture.

Mojo lived in a small state housing flat with her mother and sister but frequently referred to a number of *aunties* and *sisters* that were either members of her extended family or were friends. Carr (1998) suggested that girls inevitably identify with their mothers, but Mojo appeared to have little respect for her mother or her sister and as previously stated, she had assumed a subject position akin to 'man of the house' Mojo's unmarried sister had had a baby at age 16 and Mojo was adamant that she would not want to have a child until she was *at least 23.* Although she had no brothers, she epitomised Reay's statement above about tomboys, and described numerous occasions where she had crossed gender boundaries and adopted a subject position of 'masculine' aggression. This macho subjectivity was also performed at school and Mojo spoke sneeringly about girly girls and "gay" boys. Mojo described the physical fights that she had had with her sister, but like the other girls, she was clear that these were *not the same as fighting other kids, 'cause you love them and don't intend to hurt them*. Mojo said that she was looking forward to going to an all girl school, where her *sister* (an older girlfriend) would *deal with* anyone who challenged her. This adoption of a friend as a *sister* reflects the discourse of family most closely associated with Polynesian culture and Mojo had indeed identified herself as part Maori.

Sharnee lived in a large extended family where I noticed that her Maori culture was very evident and clearly had a powerful influence on the way that she positioned herself and was positioned by others. She had strong family values and frequently told long and revealing family stories to illustrate the point that she was making. She had been steeped in Maori cultural identity all of her life, including her schooling where

she belonged to a Maori culture group. One of the aggressive incidents that Sharnee had had been involved in was with the teacher leader of this group and was about the interpretation of a particular Maori waiata (song). Sharnee's family evidently had a different interpretation from that of the teacher and Sharnee was adamant that her family was right and the teacher wrong.

Consistent with traditional Maori culture (Pere, 1988), Sharnee also presented as a story teller. Unlike the other participants, she would expand on an idea and give examples to support her stated beliefs and many of these stories involved physical abuse of women and children. She expressed pride in the fact that her Samoan boyfriend protected her and did not hit her and then went on to tell a long story about how Maori boys beat up their girlfriends – identifying her cousin as one such victim.

Sharnee was close to her father and had been taken by him to watch her brothers play rugby – a physically aggressive game that presented her brothers as a source of family pride. As Sharnee intimated, this potentially created competition for father's approval and influenced Sharnee's own aggressive behaviour as she said, *he used to take me to watch my brother play rugby and I'd be like "oh, I wanna do that"*. She had regular fights with brothers and sisters and described this as *normal* family behaviour. When talking about gangs, she said, *Whole families are involved; kids in gangs go for each other – killing, hitting – they think it's cool.*

Sharnee's culture played a major role in her constitution of subject positions. Her opinions and beliefs appeared to be framed within a Maori context, where women traditionally held equal status with men and gender boundaries were more flexible. Middleton (1998) cited Rose Pere (1991) who has written on the Maori association of positive concepts with females, pointing to the description of women as whare tangata (the house of humanity). So it is interesting to note that despite Sharnee's claim to be *clingy* to the boys in the family, she also demonstrated great respect for her mother (who *organises everything*) and also for her *aunties.*

Of all of the girls in my study, however, Aleysha's positioning seemed to be most influenced by her family and culture. Aleysha's parents migrated to New Zealand from Samoa when she was a baby and maintain strong ties to the rest of the aiga, returning to visit almost every year. Aleysha's positioning of herself within the family therefore

has much to do with her traditional Samoan culture. Family life in Samoa involves a large extended family and all Samoan community elders, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, older children and family friends have an important role in bringing up the younger children. Children are expected to show respect and obey all family members that are older than them, and brothers are expected to look after their sisters (see "Parenting in a New Culture", www.spectrumvic.org.au (n.d.), hence Aleysha's comments about girls *look[ing] after the younger children* and *boys look[ing] after the girls*. During our conversations, Aleysha's mother was presented as a strong woman who had taken the oldest son back to Samoa because she was worried about his behaviour; and presumably the repercussions of this for the whole family. The discourse in Samoan society positions individual children as less important than the self-esteem of the whole family and community (ibid.).

Aleysha engaged with me as an interested participant in the research but also demonstrated that she did not want her Samoan friends to see her in that mode. Tiatia's (1998) study provides valuable insights here into negotiations of her Samoan and local "Kiwi" way of being. She suggested that the New Zealand-born Samoan young person developed a "Westernised self" in response to the differing expectations of the home and school environments. All participants in her study presented different subject positions at home to those they presented at school. Although one was necessarily more "Westernised" than the other, this was not perceived by them as one presentation being a "true" self, and the other, by default, "false". These girls explained that they felt both selves to be true, or rather that the ability to act appropriately in different contexts did not necessarily threaten a sense of self. This was seen by them as a fluid and normal process whereby they used their "insider" knowledge in both groups in different circumstances.

The Samoan church plays an important role in Samoan family life, educating children and supporting their extended families (Tiatia, 1998). The Samoan church featured in Aleysha's conversations, and she spent much of her spare time socialising with other Samoan young people who were part of her congregation. Despite her physical presentation of the tough tomboy subject position, the cultural discourse of Samoan society was evident in Aleysha's serious comment that she *hope[ed] to have a good life*, an expression that I found puzzling until I discovered research which suggested that in Samoa, moral beauty, or "tausala" is held in higher esteem than physical beauty

(Mageo, 1998). In regard to sexuality, Aleysha had commented that *boys should act – not girly – there's no fafas in our school – like there are some boys we call fafas, like we tease them, but it's only a joke.* However, she mentioned that *in Samoa there's lots of fafas – they just choose to be like that.*

As with the other girls, Aleysha's physicality and the disparity between her physical size and her social/emotional maturity emerged during the course of our conversations. Aleysha's size and physicality would not be unusual in a traditional Samoan setting, where such disparity between size and maturity is very common (Bahr & Prendergast, 2007), but in a school with a large number of nationalities, including many tall thin Somali and small-framed south-east Asian pupils, she was particularly different and possibly because of this and the cultural discourses that those children and teachers had lived through, was positioned as "other" and as a threat. It is perhaps interesting to note the study of female aggression described in Chapter 2, which found that a large percentage of Pacific Island women surveyed in Auckland, admitted using physical force against their children and partners (Paterson, J., Carter, S., Cowley-Malcolm, E., Gao, W., & Iustini, L, 2008). Aleysha was clearly positioned by other children and teachers at school as aggressive because of her Samoan ethnicity – her physical size and the reputation that Samoan women have as aggressive. When referring to tomboyism, she stated that *if you get called it you start to behave like it* and it would appear that the subject position that she had taken up at school was more in response to this positioning by others than by her actual cultural identity.

Relational aggression

The crossing of gender boundaries that was described in the previous section is also relevant in the ways that the girls expressed their aggression physically. In the conventional discourse of gendered behaviour, physically aggressive behaviour is not associated with females and is thus deemed abnormal, yet all of the girls, with the possible exception of Kiwi had taken up physically aggressive subject positions and not the more conventionally female style of relational aggression. Indeed, many of them appeared to be confused by relational aggression and their response was to hit out physically. The one aspect of relational aggression performed by at least two of the girls was the passing of racist comments. Social aggression is covert and is usually expressed verbally. Sophie unconsciously demonstrated social aggression in her

frequent racist comments, which were most likely constituted within the family. During the course of our conversations, she made several derogatory comments about Maori, separating them from others when talking about the various groups at school and naming Maori when referring to aggression or child abuse. Another such racist comment was made when referring to the association of drugs and alcohol with aggression Sophie claimed that *like if you're a stay at home mum and you can't think of anything else to do – like it's generally the black people* (embarrassed look). *They're the ones you hear about all the time.* When describing her 'friend' C, she said *well, like, if someone gets smart to her or something, she's like "I'll beat you up". She's – I think she's Maori.* I asked if she ever had fights with this girl and she said *no, I just called her a bitch and that she should stay away from me.* Like Sophie, Sharnee practised social aggression by way of racist comments – although she made a joke about it. For example, she said, *if my brother found out that I was going out with a Samoan guy –'cause I'm Maori, but I've got Samoan mates, um, we call them Bungas – or coconuts or something like that. And he'll find out and he'll tease me – saying "you're going out with a Bunga ha ha ha" and he'll keep teasing until you break up with him. So I just hope he never finds out.* These are further examples of the girls' contradictory subject positions and indicative of Sophie's difficulties in making and maintaining friendships.

Righteous aggression constituted within intersections of family, culture and class

The girls in this study all described incidences wherein aggression was justified and in several cases the discourse was one of righteous aggression. Since William Blackstone identified the three "great and primary rights" of individuals in 1766, it has been accepted that an individual has the right to "protect himself (sic.) with force, if necessary" (www.cato.org.), and Mason (2006) argues that "individuals assess their own experience and vulnerability to violence by identifying and managing the situations and groups of people that pose a threat to their personal safety" (p. 127).

The conventional discourse here, of self-defence, which was invoked by most of the girls, is one where aggression is justified on the grounds of protecting the individual from verbal or physical attack and all of the girls described occasions where they had acted in this way. For example, despite Kiwi's concern that *People might think you are weird* and her insistence that *I don't think it (aggression) is right. I think it's wrong,*

she added that *if you're being hurt you know, probably you should run off, but self-defence is ok.* This statement also supports the conventional discourse of female aggression – Kiwi suggested that it was "weird" or unnatural for girls to behave aggressively unless they are threatened. Indeed, Totten (2005) affirms this discourse stating that "whereas male violence tends to be more frequent, serious and utilitarian female violence is more often contextualised in significant factors related to self-defence" (p. 51). This discourse was echoed by Tui, who was very straightforward about her physicality and that her response to her brothers' insults or jibes was to physically attack, as she had done also at her new school where she had been subjected to verbal and social aggression. She said: *Well lots of times my friend and me, you know, [O] – me and her had heaps of fights and well, we haven't been friends for ages. We used to be on and off like – every day or two – but not now. My mum says – you know – "your friends suck", because she's been texting my dad all this horrible stuff, and she's been ringing her friends to text me stuff – friends that I don't have their numbers so I don't know what to do. And then one time, a wee while ago, she was like – naming – we were in the classroom and she was like naming all these swear words about me, "fat bitch, cow, arsehole" and stuff like that across the room – and then – and so I went up to her and I punched her, and then walked out of the classroom.* I asked Tui how she felt after that incident and she said *regretful.* I asked if that was because she had hit someone, but she indicated that it was more that she had been punished unfairly, saying: *Oh not so much that – you know – I knew I was going to be in a lot of trouble, you know. I kind of felt as though she should have got told off as well.* Tui's physical aggression described above is in marked contrast to the subject position of teacher helper that she had taken up at her previous school. There she had *looked after the little kids,* because, as she said, *I love little kids.* She appeared to me to understand that her different ways of behaving were contextual, as when telling me about the aggressive incident where she was the only one to be punished, she added, *Anyway, I don't care. They can think what they want anyway. They don't know – they don't know you.* Later she explained that she was looking forward to leaving this school and going on to a girls' high school ('O' was going to a mixed sex school) which had strong rowing and rugby teams and where she felt that her physicality would be appreciated

In several of our conversations, Mojo, Sharnee and Aleysha all presented an account of their behaviour which was framed within a discourse of righteous aggression in defence of their families. Their comments indicated that they not only felt justified in defending their own person from attack, but extended this justification to include defending their whole family from insult or abuse. Although like Tui, Mojo was adamant that if *someone else starts it*, she would *finish it*, she also appeared to have taken up the position of family protector, stating that one thing that would make her feel really aggressive would be *when they talk about your parents or something like that.* Far from denying her aggression, she appeared to be proud of it and cheerfully related incidents where she had defended either her own honour or that of her family. Her descriptions of fights that she had been in with her sister and other girls, indicated that she felt such behaviour to be justified and when I asked if her mother was worried by this she said, *No, she didn't really care – she thought it was good – she didn't like the person that I did it to and I don't like the person either.* Mojo appeared to believe that her mother would approve of her aggressive behaviour as justified and that this kind of righteous aggression was an acceptable family discourse.

Sharnee was also clear that the thing that would make her behave aggressively was if someone *abused the family – yeah, mock the family.* On another occasion she said *someone talking about my sister or my little brother.* Her response would be to *go to the punch bowl* (velodrome) and *yell at them – stupid slut.* Several times Aleysha mentioned that the thing that made her feel really angry was *when someone mocks the family or calls you a name.*

Chapter 3 explained that some feminist poststructural researchers in education emphasise the importance of examining intersections of gender with inequalities of culture, class or race, arguing that a sole focus on the binary difference between the sexes simplifies the complex nature of power differentials (Bird, 1992; Court, 2003; Jones, 1993; Smith, 1997). Mojo and Sharnee identified as Maori and Aleysha as Samoan and for the analysis that is being developed here, it is significant that both of these cultures are "honour" cultures with very powerful discourses of mana, family loyalty and responsibility (Smith, 1997; Tuala-Warren, 2002). In Polynesian societies, honour or "mana", with its reverse attribute of "shame" is as important as the culture of law and "It covers a great variety of concepts like virtue, reputation, esteem, integrity and veracity" (Kuschel, Takiika & Kiu, 1995, p. 10). The status of an

individual's or a family's honour is strongly based on the maintenance of a good reputation and "offences such as humiliations and insults, have an especially strong impact in honour cultures" (Mosquera, Manstead & Fischer, 2002, p.143). In such cultures, any attack on the honour or reputation of the individual or family results in withdrawal of social approval and provokes intense emotional reactions which may result in physical aggression (ibid.). Within these cultural contexts damage to one's honour requires resolution. In Samoa, honour may be restored by the practice of ifoga and in New Zealand, by Marae Justice. Both systems involve an indication by the offender of sincere remorse and regret (Tuala Warren, 2002). However if such damage control is not available through traditional channels, it is possible that young Samoan or Maori such as Aleysha, Sharnee and Mojo, will seek to restore their honour by retaliation – either with verbal insults or physical aggression.

Jones (1993) explained that "girls become 'girls' by participating within those available sets of social meanings and practices – discourses – which define them as girls" (p.159). However, as Smith (1997) pointed out, Maori (and Pacific Island) girls grow up in an Anglo/European culture that defines them not only as 'other' to the dominant culture, but also positions them as failures. In fact all socio-economic measures in New Zealand indicate that Maori and Pacific Island women are the most disadvantaged, or, as Smith put it, "at the bottom of the social heap" (p.42). This is a far cry from the subject position of proud, strong and boisterous female portrayed by Pere (1992) and explained in Chapter 3 of this study. Smith (1997) illuminated the impact of colonisation on the status of Maori and Maori women in particular and described four strands of mana wahine discourse that address "Maori issues from a Maori woman's perspective" in order to "develop (possibly) a new set of strategies to deal with the subtleties of ongoing oppression" (p.38). In her discussion of the "discourse of the state" Smith (1997) explained that Maori women were constructed as a group requiring domestication; this is a notion at odds with the specific positions that women held in traditional Maori society (Pere, 1992). It is worth noting also that currently in New Zealand, as in many countries, labour market pay differentials between males and females and different ethnicities persist, and as Hyman (2004) stated, women, Maori/Pacific employees, and new migrants are overrepresented as "low income earners, many of them part time and/or casualised" (p. 1). In the light of these historical and continuing political and economic factors, as Maori women have

struggled to reassert their mana, righteous aggression may well describe their response to years of what Smith called "colonial oppression" (1997, p. 50). On the other hand, as Smith also explained, "The whanau discourse seeks to empower young Maori women by reconnecting them to a genealogy and a geography which is undeniably theirs". This is one discourse that was available to both Sharnee and Mojo and the subject positions of powerful, "stroppy" young Maori women appear to be ones which they were taking up enthusiastically.

The influence of the physical body

As noted throughout this current study, the participants were identified as aggressive primarily because their behaviour did not fit stereotypical images of "good girls". All of them were or had been until recently, the kind of girls referred to in the literature as tomboys. They were all physically "stroppy" sportswomen and although some of their behaviour could be described as aggressive; on the whole it was certainly not extreme. Had boys behaved in the same way, it is unlikely that they would have been recommended for a study such as this. I have noted throughout that all of the participants' bodies were healthy, strong and well developed, but although the girls were physically self-aware, their attitudes and behaviour were not as mature as their bodies appeared to be. This has contributed to confusion by adults who have expected them to behave differently and thus positioned them as "other" (Paechter 2006b). As Chapter 2 noted, a number of studies have commented on the effect of puberty, particularly early puberty on girls' behaviour and most of these have focused on risk factors for aggression. The gap between girls' sexual and cognitive/emotional development (see, for example, Moffitt et al, 2001; Gluckman & Hanson, 2006) has been highlighted as a major risk factor. In fact, at various times during the course of our conversations, individual girls commented on the effect that puberty has on girls' relationships and behaviour. However, there is little academic research information available on the effect that physical size and sporting ability has on girls' self-image and subjectivity. What is available is mostly from a medical or sports psychology discipline and does not explore the effect that these physical features have on the way that girls position themselves and are positioned by others.

Several feminist academics have become interested in the influence that the body has over behaviour and of perceptions of normality (see, for example: Paechter, 1996;

2010; Walkerdine, 1999; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). My interest in the girls' physical development was enhanced by my own experience as a "big girl". At 11 years old, I was an accomplished discus thrower, netball and hockey player and on Saturdays I preferred watching soccer matches with the boys to going shopping or playing with other girls. I was much taller and broader than other girls of my age and my feet were so large that shop assistants laughed when my mother tried to buy school shoes for me. Like the women in Thorne's (1993) study and the accounts of girls in the research by Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005), I was acutely embarrassed by this and struggled to reconcile my developing sexual awareness with my physical prowess and interests. I rebelled against the attempts of my girls' grammar school to turn me into a "lady" and found myself positioned by teachers as precocious, un-intellectual and potentially aggressive.

Thorne (1993),Walkerdine (1999), Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005), and Paechter (2006b) have all explored issues of children's developing sexuality from a feminist poststructural perspective and pointed out that children's sexuality and bodies generally have traditionally been shunned by feminist researchers (Paechter, 2006b). Walkerdine (1999) pointed out that "with regard to sexuality, almost all attention has been focussed on adult women" (p. 11) and Paechter argued that "researchers working in gender and education need to take much more account of the specificities of children's bodies" (p. 121). Reflecting my own experience, I noted that Paechter described the Cartesian binary of mind and body, a distinction that is evident in Descartes' (1968) philosophy, which "seemed to underlie a distinction between sex and gender … enveloping not just the way we see ourselves and others as sexed and gendered beings, but how we approach schooling" (p. 122). I have argued that for the girls in this study, their physically developed bodies were a contributing factor in their aggressive "tomboy" behaviours; many of which would have been unremarkable if enacted by a boy. By applying poststructural theory to the conversations that I had with each girl, it would appear that despite their different responses (compare Tui's total rejection of the "feminine" with Sophie's aspirations to "girliness"), their physical bodies had a major effect on how they and others positioned them. Paechter notes that, "our bodies permit and limit the identities, including the gender identities that we can perform. It is easier to enact superfemininity if you are slightly built, harder if you are six feet tall, overweight, have facial hair or muscular shoulders" (p. 131). Paechter also

notes that whereas researchers studying children will generally note differences in sex, race and class, they do not "generally tell us if they are tall or short fat or thin, blond, muscular or otherwise, particularly if they are of primary age" (p. 132) although this physicality has an enormous and "self reinforcing" influence on our gendered identities (Bourdieu, 2001, cited in Paechter, 2006a, p. 131).

As I read more about poststructuralist theory, I began to see how in my initial approach to this current study and my personal world view had been shaped by my own experiences as an unusually large and physical young girl, positioned by teachers and classmates as "other" to the preferred, conventionally feminine developing adolescent. My understandings about girls and aggression were also informed by the discursive practices (language and behaviour) of the severely aggressive adolescent females with whom I had worked in the past. As one of my supervisors suggested, I realise now that I had become desensitised to aggression and viewed the aggressive behaviour of the participants in this study as merely ongoing tomboyish "rough and tumble". Being aware that their physicality was an issue, I did not relate it to their own perceptions of "identity, behaviour and gender/race/class understandings and performances" (Paechter, 2006a, p. 131).

Unlike the severely aggressive behaviour of the girls that I had worked with in London, whose world view and gender identity was limited by their abused and abusing experiences, the girls in this current study had a range of potential discourses to draw on, and their aggressive positioning was but one of their many subjectivities. Most noticeably, despite their differences they all had access to very strong examples of femininity in their mothers and grandmothers and apart from Mojo, they had all grown up with access to the discursive practices of older brothers, and all had rich social experiences with groups of friends and relations within family, school, sports groups and church systems. Carr (1998) stated that most social psychological theories of gender assume that girls will inevitably identify with their mothers, but the girls in this study were also clear that traditional discourses of femininity were limiting.

Summary

To begin with, the participants appeared to tell me what they thought an adult investigating their aggressive behaviour should know, but as they warmed to me and

our relationship developed, I believe that they became more relaxed and less cautious when relating their stories. In many cases they expressed beliefs consistent with gender discourses of dualism but when relating stories of their own personal behaviour it was clear that they rejected these and behaved in ways that suited them as individuals. As Davies and Harre explained:

> A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in. (Davies and Harre, 1990, p. 46)

The participants in my study had been exposed to a number of discourses regarding gender and aggression and despite initial agreement with the conventional macro discourses; it was clear from subsequent conversations that they had taken up a number of subject positions which fluctuated according to a particular context. For example, Sophie's desire to be positioned as a girly girl and therefore attractive to boys was at odds with her physicality and enjoyment of sports. This complexity may be seen in the following quote:

> Hierarchies of social class race and sexuality provide additional layers of complication. They form structural and cultural contexts in which gender is enacted in everyday life thereby fragmenting gender into multiple masculinities and femininities. (Reay, 2001, p. 66)

Studies into tomboyism tend to assert that such 'masculinised' behaviour is a normal part of most women's growing up (Morgan, 1998). These studies suggest that girls who present as tomboys grow out of such behaviour as they reach adolescence. However in my study only Kiwi and Sophie indicate that this might be the case and they were not really convinced, as they both stated emphatically that they want to continue to associate with boys and play physically aggressive sports when they went to secondary school. Other studies have described the recent recognition of females as

perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse and female aggression is also evident in the abuse that women inflict on themselves such as rigid dieting or substance and alcohol abuse – a subject commented on by several if the girls in this study. It would appear then that the constant repositioning of one's subjectivity enables females to be at once vulnerable, bitchy, empowered and physically aggressive, according to the particular context in which they are operating. As Davies and Harre (1990, p. 47) argue, "The contradictions one experiences between the constitution of various selves actually provides the dynamic for understanding". They use the metaphor of an "unfolding narrative" (ibid.), in which we may be constituted in one position or another, in one narrative or another within a story, or perhaps stand in multiple positions or negotiate new ones by 'refusing' the ones that have been articulated by posing alternatives.

In their study of the process of "Becoming Schoolgirls: the ambivalent project of subjectification", Davies, Dormer, Gannon, Laws, Rocco, Taguchi and McCann (2001) referred to the "embodied and emotional detail through which (they) became (and go on becoming) subjects" (p. 167). Making some similar points to Paechter's (2006a) analogy of apprenticeship within a community of practice, they describe the processes by which they had learned to take up the subject position of "appropriate" and "valued" schoolgirls. By sharing their diverse remembered pasts, they described how each had submitted to the dominant discourses of school and teachers, yet had mastered sufficiently the practices of becoming a 'good' schoolgirl. However the autonomy that each achieved was dependent on the very discourse to which they had submitted. "Subordination", they wrote, "is thus the precondition for resistance and opposition. We submit in order to become masters of autonomy, to become schoolgirls who depend on teachers for recognition and at the same time and through the very act of submission come to the possibility of seeing otherwise" (p.181). To support this theory they cite Butler's assertion that

> The more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and it is this paradoxical simultaneity that constitutes the ambivalence of subjection. Whereas one might expect submission to consist in a yielding to an externally imposed dominant order, and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, it is paradoxically marked by mastery itself …; the lived

> simultaneity of submission as mastery and mastery as submission is the condition of possibility for the subject itself. (Butler, 1995, pp.45 – 46, cited in Davies et al., 2001, p. 168)

In relation to this study, the participants were all girls on the cusp of adolescence, and in process of constituting themselves and being constituted as experiencing subjects in a wide range of social groups and situations, via the discourses available to them. In each of these situations they can be understood as having at once submitted to and simultaneously mastered the "conditions of possibility" made available in each social order. These experiences help to explain the many different yet legitimate ways that the girls saw themselves or positioned themselves in the world. Thus as each of the girls in my study drew on a range of beliefs and personal experiences in order to make sense of her comments, it became clear to me that, rather than these experiences being consistent and developmental, they were clearly situational and fluid.

One of the most significant factors common to all of the girls was that of their body size and physicality and I believe that much of the girls' aggressive behaviour and the way that others perceived this behaviour were directly linked to their physical presence. Aleysha's comments reveal the effect of gender dualism on her sense of self-esteem and the discourses that were available to her through the three main contexts of the family, school, and church. She appeared to be most comfortable and at ease when presenting herself as a traditional Samoan girl, a church goer, a roly-poly sister and family member and a dutiful daughter. However, as noted in the previous chapter, much of her behaviour indicated that at school, she could also present herself as a tomboy and an aggressive bully. More contemporary feminist writers (Paechter, 2006b Thorne, 1993; Walkerdine, 1999) have noted the lack of attention paid to the body in discussion of gendered behaviour and recommended that:

> If we can conceive of sex/gender in this way and thus change our research practices to understand embodiment as a fundamental part of identity, then this should help us to undermine the dualisms of male/female, sex/gender and mind/body. This may in turn lead us to a more effective conceptualisation of what it is to be sexed, or gendered, and how this affects how we construct and enact our identities. (Paechter, 2006b, p. 133)

The various and changing subject positionings not only reflect the girls' contradictory and shifting beliefs, but also their responses to me, the middle-aged, middle-class female researcher. It is likely that each girl was, to different degrees, positioning herself favourably with me and trying to give me the 'right' answer; telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. Indeed, Davies and Harre (1990) described 'positioning' as:

> The discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one positions oneself. (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 48)

It is likely therefore that I too reframed the conversations according to my own experiences and world views, although attempts were made to verify meaning by reviewing the videotaped conversations with each participant.

Despite these caveats, in ways that I will suggest in the next and final chapter, the poststructural approach has been more useful than the interpretations I developed within the mainly psychological theories to do with sex role socialisation, used in Chapters 6 and 7, to analyse the conversations that were held with the participants in this study. The next chapter will also recommend the "reconceptualising of the gendered body" (ibid.) as an area for ongoing research in New Zealand, will explain the limitations of my study, and offer a concluding statement about the question of a growing perception that increasing numbers of girls are becoming more aggressive.

~~2.~~9. Conclusions and Implications

This study was impelled by two distinct concerns I felt about media claims that (a) adolescent girls were becoming more aggressive and (b) the subsequent media assumption that girls were behaving like boys; to the point that such girls were labelled "ladettes" or "blokettes". Earlier studies indicated that much of the research literature about adolescent aggression focussed on working class boys and where girls' behaviour was mentioned, it was simply used as a comparison to that of boys. However, more recent studies, for example, The Dunedin longitudinal study (Moffitt et al., 2001), suggested that although fewer girls experience *early* onset aggression or conduct disorder, there is little difference between the sexes in *adolescent* onset aggression. Moffitt and colleagues suggested that there is "no point" in further research into sex differences, but recommended that the focus shift to "uncovering the secrets behind the power of interpersonal contexts to elicit antisocial behaviour" (p. 243). As such, they recommended qualitative research that goes beyond "merely counting delinquent peers" but explores the adolescents' points of view, their "dreams and fears, attractions and repulsions, opportunities and limitations, beliefs and myths" (p. 244).

When I began this study in 2002, the limited research into girls' aggression that *was* available tended to explain it from an adult perspective, using adult experiences and values to interpret the behaviour. However, more recent studies into adolescent behaviour, such as those by Batchelor (2005) and Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005), "subscribe to an exploratory research process that involves a politics of commitment to hearing the voices of students which are often silenced in schools" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005, p.2). In order to address this issue and to gain a more valid insight into motivations and experiences of girls whose behaviour has been described as aggressive, I also believed that it was important to involve them in the research process. Therefore, I used a series of individual, video-recorded conversational interviews, to explore the thoughts and feelings of a small group of adolescent girls in a major New Zealand city, regarding the following research questions:

- Did this selected group of adolescent girls, whose behaviour had been identified by others as aggressive, think that girls generally were becoming more aggressive and if so, what might have contributed to this?
- In this context, how did the participating girls interpret 'proper' adolescent girl behaviour and 'proper' adolescent boy behaviour?
- How did they view themselves and their own behaviour in relation to these issues?

The research indicated that 13 or 14 years old was the time of life that girls were most likely to begin to behave aggressively, and so I approached all of the principals of schools in the city that catered for girls of this age. When I explained my research aims to the principals of those schools, they all stated that girls were certainly "more aggressive than they used to be". However, when I gave them my very broad definition of aggression, that is, **any** behaviour that is designed to cause harm to another person (including social or relational aggression[10]) and asked if they had any current female students whose behaviour fitted that description, only four out of ten could do this. These principals referred six girls between them, one of whose parents refused permission for me to talk to her and thus that principal referred a younger girl; so one of the eventual participants was only in year 7 and aged twelve.

It soon became apparent that there was a mismatch between my understanding of severe aggression and that of the principals who had referred the girls. Although it turned out that these girls had behaved aggressively, the serious incidents tended to be isolated and the girls remembered them and described them vividly. Also, the girls in my study had little or no experience of the risk factors for aggression at adolescence and tended to describe their own behaviour from the childish perspective of "naughty", or to excuse it as self-defence. However, I continued to explore issues of aggression with each girl, holding six individual conversations with each of the six girls, over a period of three months. Each session was video-taped to allow the girls to check for meaning and for me to check for clarification of meaning and body language. The video-taping proved to be a great ice-breaker and motivator as the girls enjoyed setting up the equipment and also viewing the tapes to watch themselves talking. The topics

[10] As described in Chapter 2

for each new round of conversations developed from the themes that emerged from the previous round.

Each round of conversations was analysed and themes identified and developed initially using social construction and gender role theories. This was because my initial approach to the study had been from a psychological perspective, guided by studies from feminist writes such as Oakley (2005) and Pepler (2002), Criminologists such as Batchelor (2001) and Chesney-Lind (1997) and psychologists such as Crick and Dodge (1996) and Moffitt and colleagues (2001). However, the many contradictions within each girls account and between each of the girls led me to seek a different approach and I began to read more widely; turning to poststructural theory as explained by writers such as Court (1997; 2002; 2007), (Davies, 1989;1993;1994) and Jones (1993; 1997). I then used the tools of discourse analysis to gain a deeper insight into the meanings implicit within and across the conversations that I had held with each of the six girls in my study.

I will next give a brief overview of my interpretation of the girls' views on each of the topics and then explain this from the perspective of poststructuralism.

Did the participants think that girls were becoming more aggressive?

The short answer to this question is "no", the adolescent girls who participated in this study were not aware of any increase in adolescent female aggression, nor did they give any indication that there were potential reasons for such an increase. None of the girls appeared to have had much first hand experience of severe female aggression, although most were able to describe fights that they had been involved in at school or at home with their siblings. Only one of the fights described to me was particularly serious; involving knives, and although two of the girls had received "stand downs" from school, none of them had been excluded. Apart from that one incident, it is unlikely that boys behaving in such a way would have been considered aggressive. In fact, the girls described these fights as just a normal part of growing up, assuming that most girls went through this stage and indicating that it was something that one grew out of.

Although the girls had noted an increase in stories of violence and gangs in the newspapers and on television, they did not associate this with female aggression. In fact, none of the girls had any knowledge of all girl gangs and described those girls who joined male gangs as "sluts" who were "just wanted to do the sex and stuff".

The girls did relate stories of predominantly female verbal aggression, but again, these were deemed to be part of normal, everyday life and they told me that they had not noticed a particular increase in such incidents. Comments such as "boys punch and girls bitch" were the accepted discourse, although curiously at odds with recounts of their own aggressive behaviour.

The girls all made links between aggression, child abuse and intra-familial violence. Rather than being directly responsible, females were described as "allowing the men to abuse the children". The girls were definite that people were not born "bad" but that aggressive behaviour was the result of "something that happened when they were children". Again, this was not something that they considered to be increasing, but was just something that happened to other people and outside of their own experiences.

What did the participants understand as "proper" girl behaviour and "proper" boy behaviour?

There were many conflicting comments made regarding these two questions, but over all, the girls tended to suggest that it was acceptable for girls to behave in a variety of ways, whereas boys should always be "masculine". Initially all of the girls expressed the belief that girls should be good, ladylike, work hard and generally behave like a child; that is, not be too "grown up" and that girls should not smoke, drink or fight. However, they were also scathing of girls who were not like themselves, that is, girls who were too girly, too good or too sexually aware. They all thought that boys should be strong, manly and tough and play rugby, yet also laughed at the antics of boys who tried to impress them by their overtly masculine behaviour. Generally, however, they were critical of boys who displayed effeminate behaviour, saying that it was "unnatural" and they used derogatory labels such as "fag" to describe boys who were not "manly".

Although each of the girls espoused notions of hegemonic masculinity as described in Chapter 8, they all said they admired male celebrities who were “nice’, “kind” or “funny”. They also spoke positively about women that they knew who did not conform to the “proper” female behaviours that they had previously described and, apart from Aleysha, insisted that girls could behave in any way that they wished.

How did the girls view themselves and their own behaviour in relation to ‘proper’ girls’ behaviour?

As described above, each of the girls gave a range of responses to the question about ‘proper’ girl behaviour and boy behaviour. Girls were meant to be “good” and “feminine”, as well as not too “good”, too “girly” or too “sexy”. While each girl expressed surprise and disappointment that their principal had referred them to me as suitable candidates for a study on aggressive females, each was also able to recount stories of their own aggressive behaviour. These stories were often accompanied by expressions of bravado and sly smiles or the girls tended to excuse their behaviour as childish naughtiness, or as self-defence. The girls all asserted that it was important to “stick up” for themselves and their families, when physical safety or reputation was threatened or attacked; in fact defending the family honour was a consistent theme despite the numerous fights that they had with their siblings. These fights were explained as different from fights with other people because they were more easily resolved. Although highly critical of social aggression and girls who “had the mouth to be smart”, each participant was able to describe a time when they had hurled insults at others and terms such as “bitch” seemed to be used as both an insult and a joke

All of the girls were “into sport” and their bodies were, as I have described throughout the study, large, strong and physically fit. This physicality appears to have been a significant influence on the way that the girls behaved socially. They described themselves as typical tomboys who enjoyed play-fighting, running around, riding bikes and playing “boy sports” such as rugby, soccer and water polo. Despite this, and a stated desire to play even more boy sports at high school, they also spoke about, and seemed resigned to, the changes in behaviour that occur at puberty. These changes were mostly to do with sexual development, a growing interest in boys and the ‘policing’ of gender by other girls.

At the time when I was conversing with them the girls were on the cusp of adolescence, and the range of personal observations seemed to reflect this transition. At various times they appeared to be boisterous 'Kiwi kids', confident athletes, tomboyish jokers and righteous aggressors as well as pseudo-sophisticated shoppers, girlfriends and loving and loved daughters and granddaughters

Conclusions

My initial conclusion was that the girls were simply boisterous tomboys whose behaviour had been incorrectly interpreted as aggressive by their school principals. The girls' own behaviour was presented in a very open, matter-of-fact way and I saw the contradictions in their statements about proper girl and boy behaviour – particularly in relation to their own behaviour - as merely a reflection of their developmental age. In fact the two girls who were most sexually mature were also the two who had started to behave in what they described as more "girly" ways. However, these girls were also adamant that they would continue to play "boy sports" when they got to high school and the most girly of all described a fight that she had been involved in during the very last week of the conversations. As the research progressed, the contradictions in the girls' comments became so marked that they became a major theme of the conversations and I began to look for other possible explanations for this.

Social construction theory had suggested to me that the girls' behaviour had been shaped by their family situations; five of the six had older brothers with whom they played and fought, and all had strong and rather unconventional mothers, grandmothers or aunties as role models. The girls themselves suggested that aggression was not something that people were born with; rather they were made that way by the family environment. Having taken their tomboy behaviours into primary school, they were initially described as naughty, but as their bodies grew larger and they transitioned into settings where there were more girls of the same age who behaved in more stereotypically feminine ways, the boisterous behaviour of the girls in this study was interpreted as aggressive. The policing of gender specific behaviour that intensifies at puberty was seen by me as more likely to occur at intermediate school where there were more children undergoing the physical and emotional changes that emphasise their sexuality and this was reflected in the girls' comments about 'proper' girl and boy behaviour.

This interpretation was supported by my professional experience of working with adolescent girls whose behaviour was aggressive to the point of criminal violence. All of those girls had been seriously damaged by childhood abuse and I believed that they had learned to behave aggressively as a result of this. By comparison, the behaviour of the girls in this current study was very mild. However, during a supervision session, part way through my analysis, one of my supervisors suggested that I had perhaps become desensitised to aggression because of my past experience and she suggested that I re-examine the transcripts and video tapes from a poststructural perspective. This approach employed discourse analysis which enabled me to examine the girls' conversations and behaviour more deeply. The complexity and contradictions that had become such a feature of the conversations, both within each girl's account and between the girls, became the key by which I was able to more thoroughly probe into issues of gender and aggression.

Poststructural theory suggests that a person's identity, including gender, beliefs and behaviours, is not a constant state of being, but rather a fluctuating range of relationships and experiences. There are dominant discourses or "regimes of truth" that present common-sense ways of interpreting the world, such as 'proper' male and female behaviour and the deterministic "risk factors" for aggression that were described in Chapter 2. However, as demonstrated by the conversations that I had with the six participants in this study, human beings experience multiple and frequently contradictory discourses as they grow and develop and are active agents in the constitution of their vacillating sense of self or subjectivity.

Intersections of class, culture and gender influence the range of discourses available to people and, therefore, the various ways in which people position themselves and others. The school principals' positioning of these girls as aggressive was undoubtedly influenced by their own 'regimes of truth' and it is likely that the girls' positioning of me influenced their initial responses to the questions about 'proper' girl and boy behaviour. However, as our relationships developed and they began to discuss their own behaviour, it became clear that their own experiences and relationships belied such stereotyping and they challenged it both verbally and physically. The theme of righteous aggression as expressed by all of the girls is a prime example of this.

It would seem therefore, that rather than there being a serious increase in the rate and severity of adolescent female aggression, the situation is far more complex. The media has a tendency to both simplify and sensationalise information, and to manipulate statistics to support whatever discourse the owners believe will appeal to their target audience. Public perception appears to have been provoked into something of a moral panic about girls' behaviour and the evolving nature of youth culture in general. This not new, however, and as demonstrated in the literature review, a discourse of moral concern about adolescents has proliferated for many years. Contemporary female youth culture, exacerbated by discourses of culture and social class, challenges the conventional discourse of "natural" femininity. The girls in this study demonstrate that individuals take up a range of subject positions, according to a particular situation or context and one person's interpretation of behaviour as aggressive depends on the experiences and discourses that they have been exposed to.

Limitations of the study

This study clearly has limitations and has raised as many questions as it has answered, leaving opportunities for further research into the topic.

As noted, the fact that I only interviewed six girls over a period of three months is an obvious limitation. I had attempted to select more girls but despite approaching all the schools in the city which accommodated that age group of girls, I was not able to find any others who fitted my description of aggression. I also note that the girls that I did manage to interview were from a range of socioeconomic groups and represented the main three different cultures within New Zealand. However, the sample group was so small that there is no possibility of generalising the findings beyond these six participants or of drawing conclusions based on culture, race, class or maturity.

As a middle-aged adult with her own beliefs, experiences and world views, the questions that I asked and anything that the girls told me were naturally filtered through those belief systems and interpreted according to my understandings. As Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005) stated; "researchers are implicated in a set of power relations that involve authorisation of particular realities" (p. 1). While I have attempted to represent the authentic voices of the participants, I am aware that this thesis "has become mine, my own, my rewriting … I am still coloniser, the speaking

subject now at the centre of my talk" (Trinh, p. 343, cited in Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005, p. 2). I have, however, throughout my presentations of the girls' comments, attempted to be explicit about how my relationships and experiences have influenced my positioning of them.

The individual participants presented a range of possible subject positions which varied from one conversation to another and according to the topic that we were discussing. While each of these was valid at the time, it is not possible for me to say that the girls' expressed beliefs and opinions were consistent from one interview to the next. As we talked they became more informed and thus became researchers into their own lives and experiences. This study represents, therefore, a snapshot in time of the organic and evolving stated beliefs of a few girls who may or may not have been telling me what they believed I wanted to hear.

Implications

The findings are inconsistent with the belief that gendered behaviour is natural or based on biological or sexual differences. It suggests that interpretations of behaviour are determined by the discursive context and the personal experiences and belief systems of individual 'actors' and 'audience'.

The sexual body is undeniably a vital aspect of how individuals constitute themselves and are constituted by others. The girls who were recommended for this study were all robust individuals who presented as physically able, and all but one had bodies that were bigger and stronger than those of their peers. The prevailing discourse associates such physicality in females as potentially aggressive and it is likely that these girls have assumed certain behaviours because of the way that they have been positioned by their teachers and their peers. As with the participants in my study, those who do not conform with preconceived notions of femininity and who present teachers and others with obvious physical challenges, may have many positive attributes that are overlooked because their vigorous conduct defies teachers' expectations of 'proper' girl behaviour. A greater understanding and acceptance of difference and the social changes associated with youth culture along with individuals' responses to these changes may help to provide a more enabling context for all girls. Teachers and teacher educators have a responsibility to keep up to date with social change, to

understand that girls take up a wide range of subject positions in different social contexts and that culture and class influence the range of discourses and thus behaviours, available to them.

Sociologists and educators such as Court (2007), Davies (1989, 1993); Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005), Reay (2001) and Thorne (1993), suggest that behaviour is a social construction but that individual agency enables human beings to "take up" various ways of being and make them their own. The contradictory discourses that were expressed by the participants in my study challenge simplistic discourses wherein 'good' adolescent girls should have similar desires, aspirations and behaviours. Policy makers in the areas of social development, health, education, police and the judiciary may need professional development to help them understand and positively support the needs of all girls in a wide range of contexts. This is particularly relevant when considering the effect that the negative positioning of girls by those in authority, has on their self-esteem and consequent behaviour.

Recommendations for further research

As noted, much of my research literature was taken from a range of disciplines, including psychology, child development, sociology and criminology and I believe that the journey into feminist poststructuralism informed and enriched my understanding, helping me to better interpret the conversational interviews that I held with each participant. Consequently, I would recommend that further research and theorising in fields of education, gender, human development and aggression extends beyond the boundaries of its own particular discipline. The following suggestions are possible areas of further research that could be carried out to address the limitations and implications of this study.

- Methodologies such as peer research (Nairn, 2004) could begin to address the issues of researcher/researched power relations that have been highlighted in the current study.
- It would be interesting to explore in more detail why the principals identified these girls as aggressive when none of them appeared to fit the criteria that I gave to the school principals; nor did they present with the common risk factors for female adolescent aggressive behaviour described earlier. In fact although

the aggressive behaviour of the girls in my study was certainly physical, it was considerably less severe and less violent than that of the girls whose behaviour I had previously studied.

- A follow-up study of the girls to discover how their behaviour developed and was viewed at secondary school; particularly as most were going on to single-sex secondary schools, could inform policy makers and primary school principals and teachers, enabling more appropriate identification of those girls who are seriously at risk of aggressive behaviour at adolescence.
- Media constructed discourses of aggression have contributed to a "moral panic" about the behaviour of teenage girls in New Zealand and many of these originated in other countries. Although statistics appear to indicate that more young women in New Zealand *are* committing increasingly serious crimes of violence than previously registered, these incidents remain comparatively rare. Dominant discourses of appropriate gendered behaviour contribute to the impression that more girls are "going bad" and it would be interesting to explore how those young women who have been convicted of violent crime perceive their own and others' aggressive behaviour.
- It is probable that cultural context has a profound effect on the behaviour and expectations of adolescent girls, their families and teachers. Further research into the cultural expectations of gender-specific aggressive behaviour and historical attitudes to aggressive behaviour by females during New Zealand's post-European history may help to illuminate the reasons for the differences between the girls in my study and those in studies from overseas.
- Despite globalisation, girls in New Zealand are presented with differing media images of desirable female behaviour via positive representations of female sporting competitions. Also, New Zealand women have historically taken up boisterous, tomboy subjectivities. It would be interesting to compare the impression of an increase in female aggression in New Zealand with that in countries where women are traditionally more constrained.
- Exploration of cultural attitudes to female aggression and race may provide insight into the perception of an increase in violent behaviour by girls in New Zealand. While cultural differences were not a primary focus of this study most

of the girls recently convicted of violent crime in New Zealand have been of Maori or Pasifika descent. The most violent of these cases have involved girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds and so the effects of cultural and economic power differentials are also worthy of further investigation. This is particularly significant as New Zealand's population becomes increasingly pluralistic and economically polarised.

- Further qualitative research into the drug use and drinking habits of adolescent New Zealand girls whose behaviours have been identified as aggressive would also inform policy makers and others. The Dunedin longitudinal study (Moffitt et al., 2002) identified alcohol in particular as a major factor in the aggressive behaviour of females. Recent studies in New Zealand indicate that young people are indulging in a culture of binge drinking – that is, consuming large quantities of alcohol very quickly with the sole purpose of becoming drunk. The relatively recent introduction of sweet, alcoholic, ready mixed drinks may well contribute to this culture and again is worthy of further investigation.

- Linked to the risk of alcohol abuse is the factor of early onset of puberty and the possible mismatch between girls' physical maturity and their cognitive capacity to make sensible decisions. Although this issue was not supported by the findings of my small study, further research into the average age of onset of puberty and its association to precocious sexual relationships and/or aggressive behaviour in New Zealand girls, would be useful for those working with girls at school, in social services or in health related services.

- Finally, research in New Zealand into female adolescent aggressive behaviour appears to have ignored the issue of girls' bodies and the effect that their bodies have on the girls' positioning of themselves and others as well as the way that others have positioned them. This study has concluded that the participants' embodied subjectivities contributed to their aggressive behaviour and therefore it would seem important to study the effect of girls' physical presence in a country that is supportive of female sporting prowess, has a long history of tomboyish behaviour and a female population that includes many large and physically able women.

Summary

At the beginning of this thesis I explained that I was motivated to undertake the study by my disquiet at a growing perception of an increase in the aggressive behaviour of female adolescents. This perception was fuelled by sensational media presentations of girls as precocious, highly sexualised, binge drinking, teenagers. Quantitative studies by researchers such as Moffitt and colleagues (2001) identified such behaviours as risk factors for aggression. Having many years experience of working with adolescent girls who experience severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, I was very concerned about the prognosis of such a development and set out to explore the validity of this perception of social change. Because such research was generated by adults with their own perceptions and experiences of aggression, I chose to investigate the topic from the perception of adolescent girls whose behaviour had been identified by their school principals as aggressive. I explored these girls' various understandings of gender and gender-appropriate behaviour; in particular aggressive behaviour

As the research progressed I became aware of the huge gap between the aggressive behaviour of the girls with whom I had worked previously and that of the comparatively naïve group of girls that had been recommended to me as suitable candidates for this study. None of the girls' behaviour seemed to fit the conventional discourse of severe adolescent aggression, nor had they experienced the causes and correlates of aggressive adolescent female behaviour that I found in the literature. I also wondered about the many contradictions evident in the girls' opinions and experiences – both within each girl's conversation and between the girls. I thus turned to poststructural theory in order to deconstruct the problems that I faced. I used the tools of discourse analysis to probe into and unpick the range of understandings, beliefs and subject positions presented by the girls at various times.

The six girls in my study varied in age and maturity, were from a range of sociocultural backgrounds, attended very different types of schools, presented a range of different behaviours and responses and yet their behaviours had all been described as "aggressive" by their school principals. The main factors that they shared were a physically large and able body, an ability and interest in a number of physically demanding sports and a tomboyish rejection of "girly" behaviours. Contexts of culture and class affected the discourses that the girls were exposed to and consequently the

subject positions that they had taken up. Although each girl was able to recount incidents involving her own physical and verbal aggressive behaviour these were situated in particular settings, with particular people and at particular times. The girls were also able to describe relationships and behaviours that presented very different subject positions that each took up according to the different situation that they were in, for example home, school, church and sports club. During their conversations with me the girls all displayed a strong sense of compassion and humour.

It has not been possible to give a definitive answer to my research questions, but I hope that the findings from this study have helped to illuminate the very complex nature of the issues involved in female adolescent aggression and provide an indication of some possible ways forward, so that all girls are recognised as complex embodied subjects with a range of potential beliefs and behaviours.

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Appendix A. Information and Consent: Boards of Trustees

A Girls' Eye View of Aggressive Adolescent Female Behaviour

Information sheet for boards of trustees

Hello, my name is Rosie Arnott and I am currently studying for a doctorate in education at Massey University in Palmerston North. I am also employed as a professional development facilitator for Learning Media Limited, and work with teachers in a number of secondary schools in Wellington. I am particularly interested in the aggressive* behaviour of adolescent girls, and why society continues to be shocked and perplexed by this. Police, schools, educational support services, mental health services and social services in Wellington have agreed that they are at a loss when dealing with girls' aggression (Arnott 1998, Klomp & Van der Ven, 2003) and this situation correlates with the findings of recent studies overseas. In many cases, aggressive girls are treated as de facto boys. I want to know what the girls think and I am writing to enlist your support by allowing me to interview students at your school.

I have long held an interest in the common differences in behaviour between boys and girls, and the various ways that New Zealand society responds to their difficulties. My previous research has looked at the gender-specific ways that boys and girls are treated; by their teachers, schools, and the police and court systems. Recently there has been an increase in the number of newspaper stories about girls behaving aggressively and claims of an increase in the number of girls who are found guilty of aggressive criminal behaviour. Many of these

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* In this study, aggression refers to any behaviour that is designed to cause hurt or harm to another. This definition is not limited to descriptions of violent physical aggression but also covers social or indirect aggression, adaptive as well as maladaptive aggression.

newspaper stories say that girls are behaving like boys and some have coined the term, "ladettes". I find this assumption interesting. I think that it is important to try to see the situation from the perspective of those whose behaviour has been described as aggressive and so this is what I want to talk to the girls about.

My work will be supervised by two approved Massey University lecturers:

- Dr Marian Court, Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Studies, Massey University College of Education, MRCourt@massey.ac.nz, ph: 06 356 9099, ext 8662; and
- Dr Juliana Raskauskas, Lecturer, School of Arts, Development and Health Education, Massey University College of Education, JLRaskauskas@massey.ac.nz, ph: 06 356 9099, ext 8621.

Participant recruitment

Potential participants will have an opportunity to discuss the project with their family prior to any approach from the researcher.

I will approach the boards of trustees of the four schools, via their respective principals. Having gained their permission to work with identified students, I will spend time with each principal to explain the project fully and enlist their support in identifying the participants. I will give them my definition of aggression and ask them if there are any students in the school whose behaviour could be described as aggressive according to that broad definition. If so, I will ask them, or their most appropriate representative, (for example guidance counsellor, deputy principal with responsibility for pastoral care), to contact the parents/caregivers of those girls, in order to gain their permission contact them. I will then arrange to meet with the caregivers who respond positively. At this meeting I will explain the project fully and ask for the caregivers' signed consent. If they are willing, I will arrange for a time to contact them to see if their daughter is willing to participate. When the caregivers have had an opportunity to discuss the proposal with their daughters, I will invite interested young women to meet me at school so that I can answer any of their questions and gain their informed consent to participate in the research. I will ask them to complete the questionnaire while they are with me.

The participants will be eight year 8 (12-year-old girls) whose school principals have categorised their behaviour as aggressive, according to the definition used in this research. This definition is not limited to descriptions of violent, physical aggression, but also covers social or indirect aggression, adaptive as well as maladaptive aggression. In an attempt to cover as many manifestations of aggressive behaviour as possible I want to interview a range of girls from different socioeconomic backgrounds and schools. These schools have been selected, with

assistance from my GSE psychologist supervisor, as likely to provide that spread. Two of the schools are co-educational intermediate state schools, with only year 7 and 8 students, one is a co-educational, full primary school, with students ranging from new entrants to year 8 and one is a private girls' school catering to students from new entrants to year 13. The four schools cover a range of decile (socioeconomic ranking), from 3 to 10. By working with students from a number if schools, I hope to avoid the cross-contamination that might occur if the girls compared notes on the interviews. By the same token I request that, if possible, schools select potential participants who do not socialise together. I have chosen eight girls to talk to as I believe that this will enable me to gather sufficient, in-depth information to carefully consider their similarities and differences, within my given time scale. There should not be any discomfort while talking about behavioural difficulties; in fact, talking about the events in retrospect may help the girls to assess their behaviour and its consequences. Reflecting on behaviour often helps people to make better choices.

If all parties are in agreement, I will interview the girls in the schools' guidance or interview rooms. This will provide an "authentic" setting for the discussion about behaviour that has been identified by the school, as well as providing consistency for the study and a safe, visible environment for both researcher and participant. In order to provide security for the participants, I request that the school support person (guidance person, deputy principal with responsibility for pastoral care) be available if necessary during the course of the interview.

I would ask that the school:

- select potential participants (according to the criteria described earlier);
- make the initial contact with caregivers;
- allow the student time out of class to meet with me;
- provide a suitable, visible space for the interviews to take place; and
- have a support person available to the student if necessary, during the course of and immediately after the interviews.

Project procedures

I plan to have three face-to-face, one-to-one interviews with each girl, in addition to the preliminary half-hour introduction and completion of the questionnaire. With the girls' consent, I will videotape each interview. I will use the information that I get from the questionnaires as the skeleton of the first conversations that I have with each of the girls. Analysis of each interview will provide the starting point for the next. By carefully examining the themes that emerge from each round of the study, I hope to be able to draw some broad

conclusions about the ways that the girls, whose behaviours have been identified by their schools as aggressive, think and feel about this. During the course of the study the questionnaires, videotapes and any notes that I take during or about the interviews will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home. Interview transcripts and any other data will be given unique identifiers that are password protected. When my study is completed, my supervisors at Massey University will ensure that any information is securely stored for the required five-year period and then destroyed. When I write up my findings, all participants will remain anonymous, as I shall give the schools and girls false names. If any of the girls, or their caregivers, wishes for a copy of the eventual findings they can let me know during or at any time after the study and I will make these available.

Participant involvement

I will spend one hour and three half-hour sessions with each girl, over two months.

Time	Activity
1 hour	Initial information meeting and completion of the questionnaire
30 minutes	1st interview
30 minutes	2nd interview
30 minutes	3rd interview

Participants' rights

The girls are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If they decide to participate, they have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study (at any time);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that their name will not be used unless they give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- ask for the video to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Support processes

If, at any time, a girl feels the need for support from a school or private counsellor, this will be arranged.

Project contacts

If you have any questions about the project please contact me, Rosie Arnott at 04 473 2933 (rosiemarnott@hotmail.com), or Dr Marian Court or Dr Juliana Raskauskas at Massey University College of Education, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 06/22. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8635, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz

A Girls' Eye View of Aggressive Adolescent Female Behaviour

Board of Trustees Consent Form

I, ……., representing the board of trustees of …….school, give permission for Rosie Arnott to conduct her doctoral research in this school, according to the conditions described in this information sheet.

The school will:

- select potential participants (according to the criteria described earlier);
- make the initial contact with caregivers;
- allow the student time out of class to meet with me;
- provide a suitable, visible space for the interviews to take place;
- have a support person available to the student if necessary, during the course of and immediately after the interviews.

Signed …….

Date …….

Appendix B. Information and Consent: Parents

Parents of girls who were asked if they wanted to take part in the study were provided with a pamphlet which explained who I was, the aims of my study, and how it would be carried out. It included information on the parents' rights, a consent form, and details for contacting me and my supervisors.

The pamphlet is included on the next two pages.

CONSENT FORM

Name of Research project:
Girls will be boys? What do you think?

- I have read the information sheet and have understood the details of the study
- I have had the chance to ask questions and these have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I can ask further questions at any time
- I understand that I can withdraw my daughter from the study at any time

☐ Yes, I give permission for:

_____
(please print the girl's name here)

to participate in this research project under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Full name (printed) _____

Relationship to child:

_____

☐ Yes, I would like a summary of the findings of the study

Postal address:

_____

_____

Email: _____

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

My name is Rosie Arnott and I am currently studying for a doctorate in education at Massey University in Palmerston North.

I am also employed by Learning Media Limited, as a professional development facilitator and work with teachers in a number of secondary schools in Wellington.

This research is supervised by Dr Marian Court, Senior Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, School of Educational Studies Massey University College of Education. Ph: 06 356 9099, ext 8662, and

Dr Juliana Raskauskas, lecturer, School of Arts, Development and Health Education Massey University College of Education ph: 06 356 9099, ext 8621, both at Private Bag: 11222, Palmerston North.

Any Questions?

- If you have any questions about the project please contact me:
- 04 473 2933
- Or email me at: (rosiemarnott@hotmail.com

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 06/22. If you have any concerns, about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr John O'Neill, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8635, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz

Thank you for considering this project.

Your time and interest is appreciated!

Massey University
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Te Kuperenga o Te Mātauranga

A girls' eye view of aggressive adolescent female behaviour

What do I Want to Find Out?

There have been lots of newspaper stories recently, claiming that girls' behaviour is getting more aggressive ((**In this study, aggression refers to *any* behaviour that is designed to cause hurt or harm to another. This definition is not limited to descriptions of violent physical aggression but also covers social or indirect aggression, adaptive as well as maladaptive aggression).** They even say that girls are behaving like boys. I am interested in this statement and I want to know what the girls, whose behaviour has been described as aggressive, think and feel about that claim.

Why is this Important?

Schools, parents, social services, police and courts need to know about girls' "aggressive" behaviour from the girls' perspective so that they can begin to understand why the behaviour occurs. They will then be in a better position to do something positive before the girl gets into trouble or someone else gets hurt.

Traditionally, aggressive behaviour by girls has been treated as surprising and extraordinary. Responses to the behaviour have included shock and horror and the girl has been sent for "treatment" to "fix" her. Lots of girls, whose behaviour is described as aggressive, are either excluded from school or just stop going to school.

Who do I want to talk to?

- Eight, year 8 girls whose behaviour has been identified by their schools as aggressive. I would like to talk to girls from a wide range of social backgrounds.

How will I select the participants?

I will ask Principals to contact the caregivers of potential participants to ask if I can contact them. I will meet caregivers, explain the project and ask if I can interview their daughters. If yes, I give them time to discuss the project as a family and then I will arrange to meet the girls so that I can explain the project to them.

What will they do?

- First of all, they will be asked to fill in a questionnaire about their behaviour. That will give me an idea of the things that I want to understand more about.
- Next, I will arrange to have three, in-depth, one-to-one conversations with the girls.
- All of the sessions will be at school and will be video-taped

How much time will this take?

- Each conversation will last about half an hour and they will be spread over a two month time period

Where will this take place?

- At school.

What will happen to the information?

- All participants and their opinions will be anonymous and all information remain confidential
- The videotapes will only be used for the purpose of this research topic.

Your Rights

- Massey University Human ethics Committee has prepared the following statement of participants' rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you agree to participate, your daughter has the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question
- Withdraw from the study at any time
- Access a summary of the results
- Ask for the video-tape to be turned off at any time during the session

If you choose not to participate, your relationship with the school will not be affected in any way.

- All video-tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office
- To protect your privacy, pseudonyms will be used instead of real names
- The video-tapes will be deleted after analysis. Tapes will only be seen by the researcher and if necessary by my supervisors, Dr Marian Court and Dr Juliana Raskauskas

- You are welcome to a summary of the results. If you want a copy of the results, please tick the box overleaf. Please include your contact details so that I know where to send the report when it is finished.

Appendix C. Information and Consent: Participants

The girls who were asked if they wanted to take part in the study were provided with a pamphlet which explained who I was, the aims of my study, and how it would be carried out. It included information on the parents' rights, a consent form, and details for contacting me and my supervisors.

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(please print the girl's name here)

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Signature: _____

Date: _____

Full name (printed) _____

Relationship to child:

_____

☐ Yes, I would like a summary of the findings of the study

Postal address:

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ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

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Massey University
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Te Kuperenga o Te Mātauranga

A girls' eye view of aggressive adolescent female behaviour

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- You are welcome to a summary of the results. If you want a copy of the results, please tick the box overleaf. Please include your contact details so that I know where to send the report when it is finished.

Appendix D. Participant Questionnaire

Massey University
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Te Kupenga o Te Mātauranga

A Girls'-Eye View of Female Adolescent Aggression

Please answer all of the questions as well as you can. Feel free to add any additional comments beside any of your answers. Your answers will be completely confidential and will be used only to help me to get to know you a bit before our first videotaped conversation.

1 What is your name?	First name	School	Last name	Nickname

2. What is your date of birth?	Day/month/year	
3. What is the ethnic group that you identify most closely with (please circle)	NZ European NZ Maori Samoan Tongan Chinese Other (please specify)	
4. Who do you normally live with? (please circle as many as are appropriate)	Both parents Mother only Father only Foster parents Step-parent (Please circle)	Other (please specify)
5. Do your parents/caregivers go out to work?		

6. Which sports do you most like to take part in. (e.g., swimming, netball,) None: _____	**7. Compared with other girls of your age, about how much time do you spend in each?** (please circle) less same more less same more less same more	**8. Compared with other girls of your age, how well do you do with each one of these?** (please circle for each sport) worse same better worse same better worse same better

9. Please list your favourite hobbies, activities and games (not sports or TV.): None: _____	**10. Compared to others of your age, how much time do you spend in each** (please circle) less same more less same more less same more	**11. Compared to others of your age, how good are you at each:** (please circle) . worse same better worse same better worse same better

12. Please list any organizations, clubs, teams or other groups that you belong to:	None _ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
13. Please list any jobs or chores that you have (for example, paper round, baby-sitting, cleaning house)	**14. Compared with others of your age, how well do you do these jobs?** (please circle) . less same better less same better less same better less same better less same better less same better

15. About how many close friends do you have? Do not include brothers and sisters (please circle) None One Two or three Four or more	**16. About how many times a week do you do things with any friends outside of school hours** (please circle) Less than one One or two Three or more	**17. Compared with others of your age, how well do you get along with:** (please circle) Brothers/ Sisters Worse Average___Better Other kids Worse Average_ Better Parents Worse Average___Better
18. Do you have any worries about or problems with school? (please circle) Yes No	**19. What are they?**	

20. Do you have any 0ther concerns or worries? (please circle) Yes No	**21. What are they?**
22. Please describe the BEST things about yourself	

Appendix E. Gender Role Stereotypes

Gender Role Stereotypes of Male and Female American College Students

Competency cluster (masculine pole is more desirable)

Feminine	Masculine
Not at all aggressive	Very aggressive
Not at all independent	Very independent
Very emotional	Not at all emotional
Does not hide emotions at all	Almost always hides emotions
Very subjective	Very objective
Very easily influenced	Not at all easily influenced
Very submissive	Very dominant
Dislikes math and science very much	Likes math and science very much
Very excitable in a minor crisis	Not at all excitable in a minor crisis
Very passive	Very active
Not at all competitive	Very competitive
Very illogical	Very logical
Very home oriented	Very worldly
Not at all skilled in business	Very skilled in business
Very sneaky	Very direct
Does not know the way of the world	Knows the ways of the world
Feelings easily hurt	Feelings not easily hurt
Not at all adventurous	Very adventurous
Has difficulty making decisions	Can make decisions easily
Cries very easily	Never cries
Almost never acts as a leader	Almost always acts as a leader
Not at all self confident	Very self confident
Very uncomfortable about being aggressive	Not at all uncomfortable about being aggressive
Not at all ambitious	Very ambitious
Unable to separate feelings from ideas	Easily able to separate feelings from ideas
Very dependent	Not at all dependent
Very concerned about appearance	Never conceited about appearance
Thinks women are always superior to men	Thinks men are always superior to women
Does not talk freely about sex to men	Talks freely about sex to men

Warmth-expressiveness cluster (feminine pole is more desirable)

Doesn't use harsh language	Uses very harsh language
Very talkative	Not at all talkative
Very tactful	Very blunt
Very gentle	Very rough
Very aware of others' feelings	Not at all aware of feelings of others
Very religious	Not at al religious
Very interested in own appearance	Not at all interested in own appearance
Very neat in habits	Very sloppy in habits
Very quiet	Very loud
Very strong need for security	Very little need for security
Enjoys art and literature	Does not enjoy art or literature at all
Easily expresses tender feelings	Does not express tender feelings at all easily

Note. These results are based on the responses of 74 college men and 80 college women.
Adapted from Broverman et al., 1972, p. 63, Cited in Lerner, 2002, p. 169