

Dominating Discourses, Imposing Ideologies: Embodiment and Femininity in a Canadian Young
Adult Literature Trilogy

by

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Abstract

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By Caroline Brunet

This thesis project identifies and analyzes a series of intersecting dominant social discourses of contemporary girlhoods in Susan Juby's Canadian Young Adult Literature (YAL) trilogy titled *Alice, I Think*. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed to illustrate the ways in which the protagonist is depicted as constructing her subjectivity through such discourses and the often oppressive ideologies they reinforce. Focusing in particular on femininity as it has been defined and theorized by feminist post-structuralism, the thesis project shows how the protagonist comes to embody those discourses through which she is constructed and constructs her sense of self. The concept of embodiment is central to this project insofar as it is used as a means to investigate this often contradictory and complex relationship between discourse and bodily-determined and inscribed identity. This thesis project also attempts to demystify and challenge the ideological messages that are reinforced and normalized through discourse within the trilogy. It argues that while the *Alice, I Think* trilogy purposefully calls attention to and acknowledges the oppressive and gendered ideas that these discourses construct and promote, it does not challenge in any meaningful sense the ways in which they privilege some girls and exclude others.

March 6, 2013

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Introduction

I began reading works in Young Adult Literature (YAL) around the age of fourteen. These were typically conventional love stories, each involving an initial tension between a teenage boy and girl, followed by resolution and a “happily-ever-after” ending. These types of books allowed me to escape from my immediate reality and delve into the “proper” romantic fantasy for girls my age. Indeed, such books construct a particular kind of world; one that, for example, often portrays its romantic heroines as heterosexual, white, English-speaking, able-bodied, middle-class, and appropriately “feminine” (McRobbie, 2009: 106). In this sense, these romantic stories promote and endorse the hierarchical power relations that Western society is based upon (Collins, 2000).

Although I still want books like these, for I enjoy delving into romantic fantasies that encourage me to consolidate my feelings and experiences with those of the characters, my goal in this thesis project is to convey the extent to which these stories are socially and culturally mediated and constructed through discourse (Davies, 1990-1999:80-81). I choose to study YAL specifically because it conveys a variety of powerful and complex cultural and social messages about girls, who are often its central characters (Younger, 2009: 7). It is some of these powerful ideological messages—and the discourses that construct them—that I engage with in this Master’s thesis project. In particular, I deconstruct those that pertain to the construction and maintenance of normative “white” femininity (Deliovsky, 2010). I also examine and explore the ways in which discourses of femininity—and other interrelated dominant social discourses of

contemporary girlhoods—are embodied in this particular YAL trilogy by its female protagonist.

Unfortunately, there currently exists a lack of academic focus on contemporary YAL, particularly in Canada. As Caroline Hunt (1998) states: “YAL critics seem oddly unaware of the existence of Canada” (236). Similarly, just as YAL lacks serious academic interest and criticism, so too does the relationship between embodiment and femininity in YAL. This is noteworthy because there has been an increasing amount of research on the subject of embodiment in a wide range of academic disciplines. For example, many scholars have begun to focus on the absence of the body from social theory and sociology and, in so doing, have also called for and created a more radical role for the body in theory (Csordas, 1996: 4). Chris Shilling (2003) is one of these scholars. He claims that classical sociology and social constructivist accounts of the body often leave it uninvestigated “as if the body itself either does not exist, or is constantly pushed to one side in its focus on other phenomena” (63). Shilling (2003) refers to this as an “absent presence” (7)—that is, an absence of the body’s materiality and the degree to which the mind is situated within the body (71). Other scholars have focused specifically on the ways in which different groups of women are embodied, particularly in light of the recent insights of postmodernism and post-structuralism (see, for example, Shildrick & Price, 1999; Bordo 2003; Davis, 1997; and Wendell 1996).

Despite these recent discussions on the body and embodiment, there still remains a lack of speculation about the connection between embodiment and socially and culturally constructed femininity in YAL. Although femininity has been discussed by a limited range of scholars who do theorize about YAL (see, for example, Younger 2009

and 2003; Christian-Smith 1994 and 1998; Motes 1998; Cross 2010), its ever-shifting ideological construction, according to Imelda Whelehan (1995), “has to be critically re-evaluated” (144). More research therefore needs to be done on the current social and cultural constructions of femininity as well as on the ways in which the relationship between embodiment and femininity are represented and negotiated in YAL in Canada.

To begin to fill this academic gap, this thesis project examines a popular Canadian YAL trilogy aimed at teenage girls who are roughly between the ages of fifteen and seventeen. The titles of these novels are: *Alice, I Think* (2000); *Miss Smithers*, (2004); and *Alice McLeod: Realist at Last*, (2005). Very generally, the *Alice, I Think* trilogy portrays and is written from the perspective of a fifteen-year-old, Alice, who, over the course of the novels, develops and matures into a seventeen-year-old. Accordingly, these books are primarily about the protagonist’s developing sense of self. The series is written by Canadian author Susan Juby, who is interested in young adult growth and development, claiming on her website that the *Alice, I Think* trilogy is a “homage to oddballs” (Juby, 2011). She also claims that it is about “a character who has the courage and integrity to find her own way and define herself independently of other people” (Juby, 2011). Juby, like her protagonist, was a “geek” when she was a young adult, which she claims she hid shamefully from others and even herself with drug use, sexual promiscuity, and the latest fashions (Juby, 2009). In this sense, Juby’s experience as an oddball resembles that of her protagonist’s.

Juby’s *Alice, I Think* trilogy has been immensely popular, as evidenced by its production into a Canadian Television series titled *Alice, I Think* (Slan, 2006). Following Allan J. Gedalof, Jonathan Boulter, Joel Faflak, and Cameron McFarlane (2005), I argue

that the *Alice, I Think* books are also popular because they are “well liked” and “well received” texts of everyday life (4, 5). The *Alice, I Think* trilogy can also be considered popular insofar as it circulates prevalent ideas, images, and values, many of which often simultaneously support and resist oppressive ideologies (Moody, 2006: 178).

The primary goal of this thesis project is to examine and analyze the dominant ideas that are promoted by means of discourse in this well-known trilogy. In particular, it aims to explore the ways in which the dominant discourses of adolescent/young adult development, dominant discourses of post-feminism, and those of normative “white” femininity (Deliovsky, 2010) are embodied and negotiated by the protagonist as a means by which she can construct and define a sense of self. In other words, it uses the concept of embodiment to explore the ways in which Alice is depicted as experiencing, negotiating, and resisting normative “white” femininity, among other socially and culturally constructed dominant discourses. Although often unconventional and socially subversive, Alice’s embodiment of femininity, among other dominant social discourses, ultimately enables the novels to reinforce and reproduce oppressive and patriarchal ideas about girls and girlhoods.

The term patriarchal is used frequently throughout the thesis to describe those ideas that exclude, dismiss, and devalue women’s varied experiences and voices over (white middle-class) men’s (Crow & Gotell, 2009: 11). Put differently, this term is used to call attention to and critique gender oppression, which privileges men over women (11).

Chapter 1 of the thesis presents a literature review, which is then followed by Chapter 2, the theoretical framework adopted for this project. A description of the

research methodology employed is presented in Chapter 3 and a summary narrative of each of the three books in the trilogy is included in Chapter 4. The analysis of discourse and the ways in which discourse is used by Alice to establish an embodied and “feminine” sense of self occurs in Chapter 5. In this chapter, the dominant discourses of adolescent/young adult development, post-feminism, and discourses of normative “white” femininity are identified and explored, followed by less prevalent—but equally important—secondary discourses. Under discourses of development, for example, these include: clinical discourses, educational discourses, dependence and the family, and those of puberty and maturity. Under discourses of post-feminism, these include: discourses of (hetero) sexuality, neoliberalism, and those of femininity. Under discourses of normative “white” femininity, these include: discourses of consumption, heterosexuality, romance, and discourses of ideal beauty.

In addition to contributing to an under-researched and under-valued area of study, this thesis project also has practical implications. First, it uses CDA to generate a better understanding of the representations and constructions of girls’ embodiment, especially in relation to dominant social discourses and cultural ideologies. Second, the thesis also has the potential to demystify the naturalized and normalized messages that are conveyed about girls in one Canadian popular YAL trilogy. Finally, this thesis project is politically oriented, especially insofar as it utilizes a critical feminist perspective to explore inequality and oppression based on gender, race and ethnicity, class, ability, sexuality, and nationality. At the same time, it is grounded in my own personal values and interests. Having recently been a teenage girl myself, I am interested in the cultural ideas that social discourses of contemporary girlhood construct as natural

and normal. My own reading of these texts, though uniquely informed, is one reading of many possible readings.

While the proposed thesis project makes valuable academic contributions, it should be acknowledged that it is also restricted in its scope. For instance, it focuses on representation and text and therefore does not explore the ways in which contemporary girlhoods are experienced by girl readers, despite that this deserves equal academic attention. In short, this project is not intended to explore the reception of the books under examination, but rather aims to explore the dominant messages conveyed in them.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The literature review that follows defines and discusses a variety of overlapping themes that are relevant to this thesis project. First, analyses of contemporary works of Young Adult Literature (YAL) are presented, followed by a more focused consideration of the bodily-related and located experiences of girls and young women such as puberty, adolescence, femininity and feminine beauty, sexuality, the female body, embodiment, romance, fashion and style play. Additionally, scholarly debates involving these themes are presented to highlight the pertinent and contested features of feminism and post-feminism, postmodernism and modernism, as well as social and cultural resistance, identity and selfhood, and notions of privilege/exclusion.

Young Adult Literature

Currently, there is a lack of academic focus paid to YAL, particularly in Canada. YAL may lack theoretical criticism in Canada because it is often not considered a genre separate from children's literature (Hunt, 1998: 224). Indeed, it "lags behind in its children's literature counterpart" (Hunt, 1998: 234). Hunt (1998) argues that YAL's lack of academic criticism may be a result of its marketing, for it is often considered solely a means to generate revenue—as opposed to a serious literary genre. Consequently, it is dismissed by many academics as illegitimate, beyond serious interest, and somehow inferior to "adult" and children's literature (229, 234). Caroline Hunt (1998), whose goal is to both clearly demonstrate the degree to which YAL is understudied as well as to reveal its prevalence as a literary genre of its own, does an excellent job highlighting the extent to which YAL is neglected and misunderstood by scholars.

Like Hunt (1998), Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000), who is also a YAL scholar, does take YAL seriously. For example, her study of a variety of YAL novels emphasizes the extent to which YAL is its own distinguished genre separate from children's literature. She argues that YAL, unlike children's literature, is often concerned with adolescents and their negotiation of social power and institutions (2). For example, adolescents learn about and negotiate various forms and levels of social power, including those related to the family, the school, the church, the government, death, and social constructions of sexuality, gender, race, and class (3). Trites (2000) also argues that research about YAL is important because YAL novels have become "a marketplace phenomenon of the twentieth century" (Trites, 2000:7). In other words, YAL has become increasingly talked and written about since World War II, when teenagers' economic and social autonomy increased and book publishing companies for young adults became a more attractive industry (9). But it was not until the late 1960's that YAL became known, at least in popular and mainstream culture, as a distinct literary genre (Trites, 2000: 9).

Trites (2000) also claims that YAL novels have an ideological function that is socially situated and power-entrenched (10). She argues that YAL's ideological function is based on the romanticized and humanist idea of growth (10, 19). This theme of adolescent growth in YAL has also been influenced by postmodernism and its undermining of modernist certainties and emphasis on the idea of individuals as socially constructed subjects constituted through discourse (16, 17). This idea of growth enables much YAL novels to "interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between the society and the individual" (20). It also allows YAL to depict adolescents'

institutional socialization as it occurs through the discourses and ideologies that are at work in each text (22). As Trites (2000) puts it: “much of the genre is thus dedicated to depicting how potentially out-of-control adolescents can learn to exist within institutional structures” (7). Trites’ (2000) work not only provides a succinct history and description of YAL, it also critically analyzes the social categories through which much YAL and its characters are shaped. Doing so enables popular ideas about YAL as an illegitimate and inferior genre of literature to be challenged and makes way for a new area of study that emphasizes the importance of YAL.

Like Trites (2000), Amy Pattee (2004) also views YAL as ideologically entrenched. Accordingly, she claims that YAL is based on socially shared meanings and ways of thinking about the world. However, she also emphasizes that “this does not mean that novels provide a mirror to the external world, or should be judged as useful cultural evidence according to how accurate a reflection of the world they generate” (252, as qtd. By Long, 1985). In other words, YAL should not be considered an authentic reflection of our social world, for it too participates in gendered, raced, and classed ways of thinking about the world. Pattee (2004) seems to suggest that we think about YAL’s ideological function in a poststructuralist manner—by, for example, viewing its cultural messages as aspects and constructions of, and not merely passive reflections of, our hierarchical social world.

A number of other scholars stress the importance of YAL. For example, Beth Younger (2009), whose work on the intersection of body image and sexuality in YAL will be discussed later on in this section of the literature review, states that examining YAL is important because it conveys a variety of powerful and complex cultural

messages. Likewise, Virginia Monseau (1998), who is interested in how high-school readers read and respond to popular YAL, states that YAL conveys various messages to the large number of teenagers and adults who read it (216). Monseau (1998) also insists that YAL scholars ought to scrutinize these messages and the representations portrayed in YAL novels because younger readers may miss them (216). Some of these elements, according to Hazel Rochman (1998) may include socially and culturally constructed ideas about race and ethnicity. For example, Rochman (1998) uses a South African perspective to argue that some YAL novels are concerned with multiculturalism, a trendy word that attempts to present authentic “ethnic” characters or groups but which, consequently, reinforces apartheid (25). However, there are YAL books, she claims, that go beyond racist stereotypes (and barriers) to portray the complexity and depth of characters (27). These books “unsettle us, make us ask questions about what we thought was certain. They don’t just reaffirm everything we already know” (Rochman, 1998: 28). Although Rochman (1998) seems to create a polarization between “good” books (those that challenge racist ideas) and “bad” books (those that reinforce racist ideas), she highlights the importance of three-dimensional characters that resist, as opposed to reaffirm, social status-quos.

Pattee (2004), like Rochman (1998), is concerned with YAL’s ability to resist social status-quos. For example, Pattee (2004) accounts for the ways in which YAL texts can challenge gendered ideas about girls (247). In her analysis of *When Jeff Comes Home*, a YAL novel by Catherine Atkins, Pattee (2004) argues that ideas about feminine social and sexual submissiveness are subverted. She explains that the novel’s protagonist is a male rape survivor who forces readers to confront the gendered connotations of the

concept of victim, wherein women are victims and men are aggressors (252). This text, Pattee (2004) argues, shatters “status quo world views we hold not only regarding victimization and sexual assault, but also concerning the differences in our perceptions of the sexes” (253). *When Jeff Comes Home* is therefore a socially subversive text that moves beyond dualistic ways of thinking about gender and race through its creation of a three-dimensional protagonist.

Feminist analyses of YAL are also common within contemporary YAL scholarship. Primarily focusing on gender, these analyses are, for the most part, concerned with the ways in which girls are represented and depicted in YAL. Bronwyn Davies (1993) employs this type of analysis. Although she examines gender in children’s literature, as opposed to YAL, her analysis is nonetheless applicable to the thesis. For instance, she is interested in the romantic storylines that infuse popular children’s texts, such as Robert Munsch’s *The Paperbag Princess*. Through an examination of popular children’s texts as well as children’s reactions to and readings of these texts, she argues that romantic discourse reinforces male/female dualism, ultimately teaching female readers about “how to position themselves correctly inside the male/female dualism” (145).

Young women, that is, learn the appropriate patterns of desire that are made available to them in the patriarchal gendered and the books they read (145). These books portray sex/gender distinctions as hierarchical and “natural” differences, with femaleness represented as oppositional and inferior to maleness. By introducing the possibility of thinking beyond male/female dualism, Davies (1993) encourages readers to embrace multiple genders and multiple subjectivities (147). She hopes that readers

will create new liberated readings of text (148). Using feminist poststructuralist theory in particular will help readers and scholars alike reveal a multitude of meanings within the discourses to which they have access, in books especially (148). Though each reader is positioned differently within existing social structures and the patriarchal gendered order, post-structuralism enables those who have access to this theoretical framework to imaginatively question and resist the “voice of truth” (Davies, 1993:154) in the texts that they are reading, often while simultaneously learning from, emulating, and taking this “truth” up as their own (Davies, 1993:154). For example, a reader is pressured to comply with the text she is reading and accept its ideological framework as “natural,” even if she is at the very same time questioning that naturalness (154). Moving beyond dualism towards multiple subjectivities involves not just inventing new ways of being but also positioning oneself within those very dominant discourses to which one has access (Davies, 1993:158, 169).

Similarly, Norma Pecora (2002) is also interested in the ways in which romance and femininity are depicted as inevitable experiences for girls (54). She focuses specifically on the new *Nancy Drew Files* romance series and the *Sweet Valley University* series. By glamorizing heterosexual romance, reinforcing the ideology of femininity, and encouraging the need for male affirmation and support, these novels contribute a “preferred reading” that offers girl readers a gendered view of what life “ought to be” (54, 63). Pecora’s (2002) study, which focuses primarily on the ideological consequences of the publishing industry’s economic decisions, is successful in demonstrating the degree to which young adult romance novels are saturated with traditional narratives and gendered ideas about girls and women (75).

Linda K. Christian-Smith (1994) also examines teen romance fiction. Specifically, she examines young adult romance novels over three periods of time from 1942 to 1982. She uses Foucault's ideas about the relationship between power and sexuality to investigate the ways in which heterosexual romance and femininity are constructed in teen romance novels. Interrogating the networks of power that definitions of sexuality are based upon, Christian-Smith (1994) argues that teen romance novels link sexuality with power, control, and knowledge by privileging heterosexual romance as the only legitimate context for girls' sexualities (210, 217-218). Within this context, she also claims that girls' sexualities are non-genital, for genital practices are reserved solely for adults and boys (210). These powerful ideas about female adolescent sexuality as heterosexual, non-genital, and legitimate only in the context of romance have the potential to "reconcile young women to traditional places in the world" (223). Unlike Pecora's (2002) work, Christian-Smith's (1994) work does not just expose the patriarchal ideas about girls in teen romance novels, it also analyzes and challenges the multiple ways in which hierarchical power relations of all sorts are embedded within such ideas. In other words, Christian-Smith's (1994) study goes one step further than Pecora's (2002).

Like Christian-Smith (1994) and Pecora (2002), Julia J. Motes (1998) also discusses the roles that femininity, sexuality, and romance play in YAL. Motes (1998) completes a "micro-ethnography" (40) on the gendered messages in a variety of contemporary YAL books, paying particular attention to how female protagonists are represented in such novels (40). Motes (1998) ultimately aims to understand the gendered ways in which girls learn to become "girls" (39). While focusing on girls'

relationships to themselves, their relationships to other females, and their relationships to males, Motes (1998) argues that female protagonists' identities are shaped by their concern with their "feminine" appearances and body images, their need for male attention, and their negotiations of romantic and sexual relationships with boys (40, 41, 44, 46, 47). Such depictions of girls, she claims, homogenize girls' experiences and convey that all girls' happiness and success are dependent upon boyfriends, male chivalry, female incompetence, and heterosexual romance (49). Although insightful, Motes' (1998) investigation, like Pecora's (2002), lacks analysis of the relationship among elements such as power, identificatory practices, and gendered identities in YAL texts (Gonick, 2006: 3).

Angela McRobbie (2000), like Motes (1998), is also concerned with the construction of femininity. Her analysis does not examine YAL but instead looks at Britain's biggest-selling teen magazine, *Jackie* (67). Though significantly different forms of text, YAL and *Jackie* are also similar, for they both have an ideological function (115). For example, *Jackie* is "a system of messages, a signifying system and a bearer of a certain ideology, an ideology which deals with the construction of teenage femininity" (67). Femininity is of prime importance in *Jackie*, which promotes ideal beauty, fashion dos and don'ts, and conventional and heterosexual romance for girls (114). *Jackie*, like much YAL, reinforces a gendered, classed, and raced sameness, a universal experience of womanhood and girlhood (69). *Jackie* thus functions as an agent of social control because its authority is often accepted by its young girl readers (McRobbie, 2000: 96). Although McRobbie (2000) does not thoroughly interrogate the categories of heterosexuality and race as systems of oppression in her analysis of *Jackie*,

she does acknowledge the gendered and classed aspects of teenage femininity that are represented in the magazine. She also acknowledges that readers do not simply swallow *Jackie's* axioms without question; instead, they actively negotiate them (114).

Younger (2009, 2003) also discusses the social and cultural construction of femininity, as well as that of sexuality and romance and the role these three things play in popular YAL texts. Specifically, she is concerned with the intersection of sexuality and body image in YAL, especially the ways in which sexuality and body image are portrayed as crucial aspects of girl characters' development (45, 46). In addition, Younger (2003) emphasizes the extent to which girls' bodies are cultural sites of contestation, particularly insofar as they are the (active) sites upon which cultural and social ideas about sexuality and body image are negotiated (54).

Despite the fruitful connections that Younger (2009) makes between body image and sexuality in YAL, her analysis conveys an overly simplistic view of the ways in which girl characters engage with their bodies and sexualities. Girl characters in YAL are not merely passive surfaces upon which cultural ideas about women's bodies and sexualities are imposed, as Younger (2009) seems to imply. Rather, they are depicted in constant negotiation and engagement with culture and their bodies and sexualities; they simultaneously incorporate and resist cultural ideas. This complex cultural engagement is, unfortunately, missed by Younger (2009). It is also missed by Motes (1998), who reduces depictions of girls in series fiction YAL to one-dimensional surfaces upon which gendered ideas are imposed. Christian-Smith, on the other hand (1994), does not fall into this trap; she successfully accounts for the tensions surrounding girl characters' active consent to dominant ideas by means of her analysis of a variety of adolescent

romance novels (209). Likewise, Trites' (2000) analysis also accounts for the complex ways in which adolescents are depicted as negotiating, as opposed simply conforming to, dominant narratives in YAL novels.

Julie Cross (2010) focuses on femininity in YAL fiction as well. However, Cross' (2010) concern is not with sexuality and body image but rather with various gendered forms of humor and the ways in which they perpetuate patriarchal and "limiting models of femininity and masculinity" (133). For instance, humor in YAL often builds upon nineteenth century notions of ideal womanhood and traditional femininity (136). It serves to "soften the blow" (137) of patriarchal ideas about girls and women as submissive, self-sacrificing, and non-rebellious (137). Scatological and grotesque humor is also often used to point out the ways in which female characters' behavior is strange, threatening or unacceptable in society (138). For example, in *The Belfry Withes* (1999) series by Kate Saunders, two witches and their grotesque eating habits and horrible personal hygiene are the means by which societal norms are ultimately reinforced. Their comedic "abnormalities" are depicted as unusual and not socially acceptable. Similarly, self-deprecating humor, another related form of humor, plays on societal beliefs about the "funny" incapacities of young women, who are often portrayed as amusingly incompetent (140). Girls' dissatisfactions and inabilities are depicted as normal and inevitable by means of humor in such cases (149). Another form of gendered humor that Cross (2010) discusses is humor that promotes "models" of femininity (143). For example, some female characters are portrayed as admirably "different" from "normal" girls by means of their "masculine" attributes, including: self-possession, resourcefulness, and being strong and tough (144). Texts that utilize this

type of humor offer girl characters alternatives to more traditional “feminine” subjectivities (147). Yet as Cross (2010) argues, these alternative subject positions tend to reinforce traditional binary oppositions and revert back to traditional patriarchal values (147, 149). In fact, all of these forms of humor build upon long-established, patriarchal views about girls and women (164). In Cross’ (2010) words: “young girls’ fiction either features simplistic, role-reversal humor of ‘tomboy’ girls who are marked out as different by dint of their ‘masculine’ traits, or fiction which, despite any surface ‘feminist’ comments or behavior, and/or the appropriation of ‘masculine’ forms of humor, eventually reveals entrenched patriarchal values” (164). Like Younger (2009), Cross’ (2010) offers an overly simplistic view of humor as either a positive or negative aspect of YAL. Nevertheless, her discussion points out the ways in which humor functions to reinforce gendered ideas about girls.

Girls and Girlhoods

Many feminist scholars also discuss gender and sexuality without focusing specifically on YAL. Their work is often concerned with interrogating and exploring contemporary girl cultures in the West. According to Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick, and Anita Harris (2005), who interrogate new and constantly changing meanings of contemporary girlhoods, academic and popular interest in contemporary girl cultures has increased in recent years as a result of rapid global change and new demands and opportunities for girls (1). Rapidly changing social and cultural systems have not only brought about a social and cultural fascination with girls, they have also provoked a degree of uncertainty, tension, fear, and anxiety about girls and their changing social roles (Gonick, 2006: 4-5). Given these complex and unstable realities, there are multiple

ways in which contemporary girlhoods can be defined and understood. Indeed, there is no “essential (or idealized) girlhood that exists outside the everyday dynamics of peer cultures, waiting to be ‘recaptured’ through girls’ empowerment” (Currie & Kelly, 2006: 169). In other words, new forms of girls’ empowerment that have developed and captured the interest of mainstream and academic audiences do not signify the emergence of a unitary and universalized notion of girlhood but rather a plethora of new meanings (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 1, 3).

McRobbie (2009) is particularly interested in some of the new meanings associated with contemporary girlhoods. For example, she elaborates on the new sexual contract to which many middle-class girls currently abide. This contract is directly linked to the popular discourse of post-feminism, which is concerned with a new kind of female empowerment whereby broadly defined notions of feminism are simultaneously drawn on and dismissed (Byers, 2005: 192). That is, McRobbie’s (2009) post-feminism responds to feminism by paradoxically disregarding any contemporary need for it (11).

Post-feminism can be considered both a cultural landscape and a “double movement” (26) whereby second wave feminist gains in the 1970’s and 1980’s are disarticulated and displaced by a new kind of female empowerment (McRobbie, 2009: 1, 26). This new kind of empowerment is also directly linked to the political ideology of neo-liberalism because it emphasizes girls’ individualism, their social obligations as citizens, and their equal rights with men. Indeed, teenage girls are thought to be able to make personal choices (freely) that will (self) determine the paths their lives will take. At the same time, they are expected to assert themselves as sexual and feminine subjects (McRobbie, 2009: 16). All girls are imagined as having equal rights to, for example,

education, labour force participation, and property ownership (Lazar, 2005: 17).

Although McRobbie's (2009) extensive study sheds new light the current political, social, and cultural landscapes through which many girls shape their lives and identities, it tends to essentialize girls as a white and middle-class group.

Similarly, Marnina Gonick (2006) discusses the contemporary neo-liberal girl subject and her participation in the popular social discourses of "Girl Power" and "Reviving Ophelia," both of which reflect "the uncertainties, tensions, fears, and anxieties elicited by the rapid social, economic, and political changes taking place due to neo-liberal policies" (4, 5). Although these discourses convey contradictory messages about girls as unbound and dynamic yet voiceless and fragile, they paradoxically forge the neo-liberal girl's subjectivity, for they are negotiated by girls as a means to construct a sense of self (2). Elsewhere, Gonick (2004) discusses how contemporary girlhood is currently understood in the West. She claims that a perceived crisis about girlhood has entered public consciousness (395). This is particularly evident in popular representations of "mean girls" (395). For example, best-selling books about the social "problem" of "mean" girls present girls' lives as ethnographic curiosities and treat girls themselves as individually responsible for their meanness and representing them as inherently lacking or wrong in some way (Gonick, 2004: 396, 397). Gonick's (2006, 2004) work, unlike McRobbie's (2009) thoroughly interrogates the intersecting oppressions that dominant discourses and ideas about girlhood construct, promote, and normalize today.

Similar to Gonick (2004), Currie and Kelly (2006) are concerned with the ways in which many academic and popular discourses have removed adolescence from social

and cultural contexts and defined girls' interpersonal aggression as uniquely female (155, 167). They conducted interviews with twenty-nine girls from various ethnic, racial and class backgrounds between the ages of eleven and sixteen to investigate the behavior of "meanness" that governs same-sex groups of girls (156, 160). In doing so, they aim to connect girls' agency to their subjectivities (155). They argue that girls' "meanness" "results from a failure of our culture to allow hierarchy to be explicitly celebrated; it provides a way for girls to covertly express and experience the feelings of personal power and invulnerability that make popularity so prized" (158). In this sense, girls' so-called meanness is a form of agency and an exercise of power insofar as it is used by those lacking economic or political power in the school setting to create status in groups (158).

Girls "do power" (169) in the discursive economy of peer cultures in order to negotiate the contradictory messages that they receive from the heterosexist misogynist currency that governs our culture (158). Examining these status systems thus exposes the gendered nature of power that embeds youth culture (155). Curry and Kelly (2006) hope to create a "sociology of girls' agency by locating relational aggression within the gendered economy of a heteronormative culture based on hierarchy and competition" (168). In other words, girl and youth cultures are spheres of both agency and a gendered heterosexist hierarchy (170). Both Curry and Kelly's (2006) and Gonick's (2004) studies of "meanness" in girls insightfully highlight the role that socially and culturally constructed forces play in the shaping of new meanings about girls and girlhoods.

Christine Griffin (2004), too, discusses contemporary girlhood in the West, but with a focus on the ways in which it is constituted and represented according to

“normal” femininity and sexuality, as well as a raced, classed, and gendered tension between “good girls” and “bad girls” (29, 30). In particular, she argues that dominant Western constructions of girlhoods draw from a variety of competing discourses to position “non-Western” and Third World young women as “traditional,” “backward,” “primitive,” and unenlightened in comparison to the more “enlightened” and “modern” Western girls (32). Like McRobbie (2009) and Gonick (2006), Griffin (2004) also examines the discourse of “girl power,” claiming that popular representations of girl power are highly racialized, a point which she claims is often missed by many anglo-centric feminist discussions of girlhood (33, 34). Finally, Griffin (2004) discusses the role that discourses of consumption play in the construction of contemporary notions of girlhoods (35). On the one hand, girls are positioned as consuming subjects and as ideal consumers. On the other hand, they are positioned as objects of male heterosexual consumption and desire (35).

Griffin (2004) contends that consumption practices play different roles in different girls’ lives. For instance, consumption varies for girls depending on their financial positions and “the availability (or lack) of subject positions in contemporary discourses around consumption” (34-35). Griffin (2004) concludes that contemporary girlhood in the West “appears to be an impossible project, caught between competing forces, in a permanent state of dissatisfaction or desire, surrounded by idealized representations of itself, and simultaneously invisible” (42). Griffin’s (2004) study, like Gonick’s (2006), is very useful in highlighting many of the dominant discourses that pervade the lives of young people and that play a role in the gendered, raced, and classed construction and representation of contemporary girlhoods.

Meda Chesney-Lind and Katherine Irwin (2006) discuss popular representations of contemporary Western girlhoods. They argue that white middle-class girls in particular are constructed as “bad” and “mean,” despite that there are no real increases in youth violence among them (53). These constructions imply that there is an intensified system of social control of girls, for girls are watched and scrutinized according to ideal womanhood (53, 54). “Mean” girls are considered “problems” because they stray from ideas about how girls ought to behave and present themselves. This social control of girls has serious consequences for girls of colour, who are less able to slip out of the purview of this social control than are white girls (54). Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2006) successfully interrogate the making of gendered, raced, and classed representations of “mean” girls.

Catherine Driscoll (2002) is also concerned with contemporary girlhoods. However, Driscoll (2002) takes a unique approach. She uses Foucault’s notion of genealogy to examine “how knowledge about girls has shaped what it means to be a girl” (4). Driscoll’s (2002) genealogical approach to girlhoods pays close attention to the popular social discourses and institutions that constitute feminine adolescence (4). These includes discourses in the areas of delinquency, maturity, female puberty, daughterhood and motherhood, employment, sexual identity, feminism, education, healthy body and beauty, consumption, and, of course, discourses of resistance and rebellion. Driscoll (2002) also provides a brief history of a variety of nineteenth and twentieth-century constructions and representations of girls.

Driscoll’s (2002) genealogy is especially concerned with the historical category of “feminine adolescence” (3). Feminine adolescence, Driscoll (2002) claims, is an idea

that arose in the twentieth century and that created new meanings for girlhood (3). It also emerged as a way in which the assemblage of culturally specific transitions that girls undergo could be understood, positioned, and disciplined (58, 59). Girlhood, she claims, has been produced as a universal category (15). Girls are caught in a space somewhere between childhood and womanhood; they are treated and judged like women by adults and social institutions, despite that they are not (29, 54). Many girls also experience “a difficult and indispensable progression to maturity, majority, or agency” (47), as well as a modernist and gendered way of being in and knowing the world (47). Girlhood is thus a space in which identity-formation and social placement are monitored (53); and “a process of defining, if never achieving, subjectivity” (57). Feminine adolescence is a category within which we can understand the production of the sexed and gendered subjectivities of girls (306).

Driscoll’s (2002) exploration of how girls are articulated in specific sites and specific cultural and historical moments allows her to both question how girls become women and consider those discourses that name and constitute girls and girlhoods (10, 304). By questioning the position from which girls are understood as well as demystifying the production of feminine adolescence, Driscoll (2002) is deconstructing and challenging naturalized and normalized ideas about girlhoods and girls (10, 304).

Similarly, Aapola *et al.* (2005) investigate culturally and historically grounded and changing meanings of contemporary girlhoods, paying particular attention to the intersection of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and ability (1). The authors also explore the connections between discourse and identity through an examination of girls’ relationships to “Girl Power” and “Reviving Ophelia”, as well as

educational discourses, employment, and the economy; discourses of the family, social relationships and friendships; discourses of sexual and embodied subjectivities, of citizenship and girls' relationship to politics; and, finally, discourses of feminism (11-15). While discussing these themes, the authors maintain that various kinds of new material conditions, new possibilities, and new constraints have opened up for girls today, positioning them in between two competing narratives: one of opportunity and choice and the other of risk and crisis (217). That is, girls are expected to take responsibility for and manage their lives and lifestyles while simultaneously making "high-stakes choices with less structural support than ever before" (218).

Valerie Hey (1997), although also concerned with new meanings of girlhoods, is particularly interested in feminine friendship groups (22). Her postmodern study examines girls' friendships within the context of various city schools in London, England (23, 31). Specifically, she examines girls' notes, talk, diaries, and interviews and investigates how girls' friendships are variously devised, deployed, experienced, and evaluated, especially in relation to individual girls' subjectivities (29). That is, she looks at the ways in which girls' subjectivities are produced in the privacy of their interpersonal lives (29). Indeed, "it is between and amongst girls as friends that identities are variously practiced, appropriated, resisted and negotiated" (30). In particular, she focuses on the ways in which particular subject positions (especially "feminine" ones) are embodied by girls in friendship groups—that is, she is interested in the ways in which girls in friendship groups make themselves into particular subject positions (23). Girls are "subjected" to the social world by means of discourse and social practices, which they negotiate within their friendships groups (27, 33).

However, Hey (1997) firmly admits that different girls are impacted differently by cultural hegemony and the powerful taken-for-granted discourses that it produces and reproduces (26). For instance, some girls' subjectivities may be constituted not just according to gender, but also according to specifically classed or raced forms of, for example, "niceness" (47). Girls construct and negotiate their schoolgirl feminine selves and friendships (what she calls "feminine social practice" (63)) within the context of complex overlapping forms of oppression and public forms of social power and regulation (29). In this way, girls' friendships and subjectivities are processual, dynamic, and contradictory (35). Girls take up femininity—and its gendered, raced, and classed dimensions—and negotiate and position themselves accordingly. Hey (1997) is clearly interested in the extent to which girls' friendships are "invested in the production of certain forms of power and subjectivity" (23). In other words, she emphasizes a connection between individual girls and groups of girls, forms of power (especially gendered forms), and everyday social contexts (24).

Both Hey's (1997) and Aapola *et al.*'s (2005) poststructuralist investigations into the contemporary lives of girls provide insightful information about the ways in which girlhood is constructed, by means of discourse, according to intersecting oppressions. These are not overly simplistic accounts of the relationship between discourse, power, and identity, but rather account for the complex ways in which girls are constructed and construct themselves according to contradictory and gendered, raced, and classed subject positions.

Youth Cultures

Griffin (1993), who is influenced by both feminist post-structuralism and sociology, examines a variety of popular discourses around youth and adolescence, paying particular attention to how these have been constructed and reproduced by academic research. She claims that academic research, especially psychological and sociological research, has contributed to the construction and reproduction of hegemonic and commonsensical ideas about young people (2).

Despite that youth research neither simply reflects nor misrepresents young people's lives, it does play an ideological role insofar as it constructs the very categories of "youth" and "adolescence" (2). For example, youth are often investigated in academia "as both the source and the victims of a series of 'social problems'" (3). They are treated as the "key indicator of the state of the nation itself" (9)—that is, they are assumed to be the key to the nation's future (10). Furthermore, the treatment and management of youth is expected to solve the nation's social problems, like drug abuse and teenage pregnancy, for example (10). These ideas are often justified and reinforced by academic and "mainstream" literature's perspective on youth and adolescence (3).

The construction and reproduction of hegemonic ideas about youth has resulted in naturalized distinctions between "normal" and "deviant" forms of adolescent behavior (6). These ideas have also been influenced by social and cultural constructions of class, race, gender, and age relations, as well as biological determinism. Indeed, youth and adolescence are often defined as a biologically determined period of puberty, generalized physiological changes and hormonal surges, reproductive capacity (for girls especially), and "normal" genital heterosexuality (12, 20).

Similarly, Hey (1997) claims that the theory that underpins “youth culture” is often a universal and highly gendered account of girls’ behaviors, identities, and lives (6). It endeavors “to insert girls into cultural accounts [and] thus leaves the problem of the gendered nature of culture unproblematized and masculinist presumptions untouched” (6). Likewise, as Gonick (2004) has discussed, girls are viewed in public consciousness as inherently and naturally pathological and in need of psychological or medical attention. Ahistorical and universal constructions of girlhoods as either “normal” or “deviant” would also have us believe that youth is a stable and unitary category that is not dependent on, for example, material conditions (6, 21). Of course, young people may refuse to take up existing subject positions or to fit themselves into existing categories, “creating their own negotiations of increasingly oppressive conditions” (26).

Mary Louise Adams (1997) also investigates the construction of normality in youth cultures but specifically in post war English Canada (3). Through an exploration of the dominant discourses of sexuality and youth during this time period, Adams (1997) interrogates the production and reproduction of heterosexual norms and the making of “proper” heterosexual teenagers (3). In her words: “I am concerned with the processes through which particular forms of heterosexuality were constructed as normal, and therefore socially desirable, in the postwar period in English Canada” (4). What counts as “normal” (and, by implication, what counts as “abnormal” and “deviant”) Adams (1997) argues, is a discursively organized social category that is articulated by and to a variety of intuitions and practices (84). In this sense, Adams (1997) is concerned with

the relationship between youth and the (naturalized) dominant sexual discourses by which young people are constituted (4, 10).

Indeed, it is by means of socially constructed discourses, Adams (1997) argues, that young people are both encouraged to meet and desire normative heterosexual standards and construct their identities and lives (13). For example, there is still a sexual double standard for teenagers: they are expected to learn about sex as a natural urge, yet are required to ignore and control that very urge (104). Teenagers also learn that (hetero)sexuality is dangerous insofar as it is considered destabilizing and morally charged (165). Along these lines, dominant discourses also function as a kind of moral regulation; they not only encourage individuals to self-regulate (according to the social norms they promote and construct), but they also limit the available forms of expression by homogenizing and ultimately masking difference (13, 15). As Adams (1997) herself states: “it is through this kind of restriction of possibility in people’s lives that the process of normalization goes to work, homogenizing the social fabric, erasing differences among individuals, and encouraging conformity” (169). However, Adam’s (1997) study of postwar youth and the hegemonic dominant discourses of normality that infused the postwar period in Canada (and that still infuse youth cultures today) seems to leave gender, let alone race, class, sexuality and other social barriers, out of the equation. Nonetheless, it does successfully highlight the complex ways in which discourses about adolescence and sexuality are normalized and used to control sexual expressions and justify the regulation of young people (82).

Driscoll (2002) distinguishes between girl cultures and youth cultures, stating that, for example, discourses of girlhood are specific to girl cultures, as opposed to youth

cultures (267). In other words, girl cultures are “specific fields of cultural production directed to, produced by, or perceived as particular to girls” (303). Girlhood is a site through which girls are produced and articulated and whereby girls produce and articulate themselves (305). New forms of cultural production, the idea of mass marketing, and a current cultural and social fascination with girls has also influenced the emergence of highly public and culturally specific girl culture(s) (267). Girl cultures are not, however, by any means coherent or homogenous. They are made up of a variety of artifacts, behaviors, values, roles, and meanings (Driscoll, 2002: 304). Girl cultures have therefore emerged as a particular part of youth culture. Although intertwined, these two subcultures are thus also distinct.

Like Driscoll (2002), McRobbie and Jenny Garber (2000) also claim that girl cultures are separate from youth culture(s), for they involve “the more closed, suspicious world of girls” (4). While providing some historical context for girl culture(s) and examining three images of girls: the motor-bike girl, the mod girl, and the hippy girl, McRobbie and Garber (2000) emphasize that girl cultures play a significant and separate role in youth cultural groupings (12). Girl cultures, they claim, “are not just marginal to the postwar youth cultures but [are] located structurally in an altogether different position” (14).

Although there are certainly different types and kinds of girl cultures, many girl cultures remain marginal to male-focused youth subcultures, or at least how these have been previously marked out by many (male) sociologists (14, 24). This is perhaps because the term “subculture” has strong masculine associations (14). Girls in these subcultures are present, McRobbie and Garber (2000) claim, but remain invisible

because of the gendered ways in which they seen by many sociologists (15). McRobbie and Garber (2000) claim that in the mid nineteen seventies girls and femininity became more acceptable within youth subcultures, and many girls began to organize their social lives in opposition to male sub-cultural life (18). For example, girls used clothing, different hairstyles, make-up, music, and magazines as a means by which they could participate in leisure industries and the new public sphere (16).

It is important to point out that girls who define themselves within such subcultures are active agents and subjects (24). Indeed, “they are making statements about themselves as consumers” (24) and negotiating a site of active feminine identity (24). While McRobbie’s and Garber’s (2000) work is one of the first to examine the idea of gender in youth cultures and thus provides insightful information about the separate and important category of girl cultures, it perhaps universalize girl cultures as only belonging to those girls who are white and heterosexual.

Girls’ Embodiment

Contemporary Western girlhoods are also discussed in light of girls’ embodiment and the relationship between their lives, bodies, and selves. This relationship is articulated by Laura Fingerson (2006), who states that girls’ lives and selves are shaped by their experiences with their bodies (3). Similarly, Driscoll (2002) states that popular discourses are not just shared across specific cultural locations, they are also extended into girls’ lives and into their experiences of the self (235). In other words, cultural narratives are embodied by girls. The connection between girls’ lives, bodies, and selves is discussed by scholars in relation to a variety of intersecting themes; however, only

those that are relevant to this thesis project will be discussed here. These include: gender difference, sexuality, puberty, and social and cultural resistance.

Gender difference is a popular focal point for those interested in contemporary girlhood and girls' experiences of embodiment. Liz Frost (2001) and Aapola *et al.* (2005), for example, discuss the gendered social and cultural construction of femininity, the ways in which femininity is inscribed onto girls' bodies, as well as the ways in which they act it out and "do" it (Frost, 2001: 37, 75; Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 134). They also discuss the idealized and normalized female body—that is, the white heterosexual and sexually attractive "feminine" body—and the ways in which ideas about this ideal body are imposed upon girls' lives, bodies, and selves (Frost, 2001: 53, 75-76; Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 134, 136, 137-138). Frost (2001), who takes a socioeconomic and Marxist approach to the study of girls' bodies, also insists that gendered norms and ideals of femininity are a direct result of patriarchal consumer capitalism (37, 38). Among other things, she is concerned with the capitalist rules that determine what a young woman's body can be. In her book, *Young Women and the Body: A Feminist Sociology* (2001), she aims to uncover the negative effects that consumerism has on young women (83). Ironically, despite her discussions on consumerism and capitalist culture, Frost (2001) does not elaborate about the ways in which femininity and beauty ideals are based on middle-class norms.

Like Frost (2001), Emilie Zaslow (2009) discusses the ways in which femininity is rooted in patriarchal attitudes, beliefs, and values. Specifically, she focuses on how personal fashion style is gendered and used to both perform and disguise the self (113). In addition to gender, she also addresses the ways in which the clothed body is a marker

of class and race, in addition to gender (115). She concludes by stating that style play “is not only the enactment of individual taste, but also a mechanism through which social difference, power, and economic inequalities are sustained” (115). In the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, fashion is certainly indicative of Alice’s individual identity, as well as her social and economic status.

Similar to Zaslow (2009), Aapola *et al.* (2005) discuss ways in which girls construct their embodied subjectivities according to the contradictory discourses of contemporary girlhoods (132). Without focusing particularly on style play as Zaslow (2009) does, Aapola *et al.* (2005) highlight some of the complicated ways in which girls experience their bodies and their identities. For example, they state that girls learn to relate to their bodies as aesthetic objects of pleasure for others (136). Consequently, girls may objectify their bodies, and even the bodies of other girls (Aapola *et al.* 2005: 137). Unfortunately, despite girls’ efforts to normalize their bodies, as Aapola *et al.* (2005) contend, girls’ bodies “can never be quite right, and can always be improved” (137). Indeed, femininity involves a *fantasy* image, one which often contrasts with the reality of girls’ bodies (Frost, 2001: 48).

Sexuality, like gender, is also discussed in light of girls’ embodiment. Aapola *et al.* (2005) emphasize the extent to which dominant social discourses of heterosexuality influence girls’ sexual maturity (147). They also examine how Victorian ideas about female sexuality as passive, heterosexual, and non-genital shape girls’ lives, bodies, and selves (143). Similarly, Deborah L. Tolman (2003) explores girls’ resistance to Victorian ideas about female sexuality (250). She claims that girls’ bodies often experience “voices” of desire. Girls, that is, often voice their embodied sexual desires,

despite messages they receive about passive female sexuality (100, 118). Put differently, girls actively express, experience, and describe powerful sexual desire and therefore interrupt the patriarchal culture in which they are situated. Although girls' experiences with sexual desire vary depending on the different social contexts in which they live, and despite that Western cultures discursively imagine girls without sexual desire, Tolman (1994) insists "that sexual desire is something that girls know" (119). However, as Currie and Kelly (2006) point out, girls' sexual desire is often negatively sanctioned (169). That is, while girls are encouraged to express sexual desire (albeit in very particular, safe ways), they are also discouraged from expressing sexual agency (169). This often occurs, Curry and Kelly (2006) claim, by means of the double standards of idealized femininity and its regulation and surveillance of girls' dress and bodily comportment (169). For example, girls are expected to be pretty, but not narcissistic; attractive to boys, but not slutty; popular but not snobby; and independent but not loners (169). The contradictions of idealized femininity thus have the potential to contribute to girls' experiences with their sexualities (169). Tolman (1994) and Currie and Kelly (2006) effectively articulate the degree to which girls' sexual desires are complex—indeed, they are experienced in relation to conflicting social and cultural forces and narratives.

The final theme discussed by scholars interested in contemporary girlhoods and embodiment is that of social and cultural resistance. According to Fingerson (2006), who conducted research with adolescent high school girls, girls use their menstruating bodies as sources of talk, power, empowerment, resistance, and agency (155). She claims that menstruation is a way in which girls can negotiate power and agency through

both their individual bodies and their social interactions with others. For example, their collective talk about menstruation is a source of empowerment that challenges the idea that menstruation is a taboo subject. Aapola *et al.* (2005) take this one step further by insisting that girls' embodiment is an ongoing and complex relationship between object and subject. Although current dominant social discourses of contemporary girlhoods often portray girls as either "good" or "bad," Aapola *et al.* (2005) claim that it is possible for them to balance these definitions and ultimately move beyond them (151, 154).

Despite their different focuses, these scholars all demonstrate that girls live and experience gender, sexuality, and resistance through their bodies. All of these discussions also focus on the ways in which adolescent girls learn and negotiate disciplinary regimes and feminine gender roles by means of their bodies, as evidenced by the extent to which they prepare their bodies to be "feminine" with all the trappings of socially constructed womanhood (Frost, 2001: 103). They also imply that girls do not simply conform or abide to gendered, racist, and classist roles and ideals but also resist them, often simultaneously.

Femininity

In addition to utilizing theories and ideas about girls' bodies and embodiment, this thesis project also draws from a variety of contemporary feminist theorists and their ideas about femininity. Susan Bordo (2003), for example, is concerned with the complex ways in which women engage with femininity (20). She examines this complexity in relation to popular culture and its perpetuation of sexist images and ideologies. In particular, Bordo (2003) draws on and critiques Foucault, especially his notion of power

as a system of regulatory practices and a form of social control, to examine the discourses and ideologies of femininity and the ways in which they mark women's bodies in contemporary Western societies. According to Bordo (2003), the current construction of femininity is contradictory and creates a double bind for many women because it asks them to maintain their femininity—that is, their so-called allure and warmth—as well as certain “masculine” values, such as toughness and coolness (173). Further, Bordo (2003) claims that the cultural construction of femininity aims to regulate and control women's bodies. Although Bordo's (2003) theories about femininity tend to essentialize women, for they assume all women experience socially and culturally constructed femininity in the same way, they insightfully deconstruct the ways in which ideas about femininity circulate as “natural” and “normal.”

Like Bordo (2003), Wendell (1996) is also interested in the construction and treatment of bodies in Western society and culture. She claims that bodies (both women's and men's) are experienced based on cultural ideals and a sense of what is “normal” in society (86). Aligning with Foucault, Wendell (1996) distinguishes between standards of physical normality and ideals of health, appearance, and performance (89). She argues that “disciplinary practices of physical normality” (88) are disciplinary practices that individuals participate in so that they can meet *ideal* standards of appearance, gesture, movement, health, and performance (87, 88). Individuals control, objectify, and manipulate their bodies according to culturally and socially enforced *ideal* standards of normality. This occurs as a result of Western societies and cultures' current exploitation, alienation, objectification, and idealization of bodies (85). In an attempt to pursue cultural ideals, many individuals strive to at the very least meet standards of

normality. Individuals internalize these disciplinary practices, ultimately becoming internalized disciplinarians who are barred from embodied consciousness and subjectivity (109). Those who do not meet the standards of normality are faced with internal and external shame and self-hatred. Wendell (1996) uses the terms “rejected” body and “negative” body to describe those bodies that do not or cannot meet standards of normality, or that do not or cannot meet cultural ideals (85).

Also like Bordo (2003), Wendell (1996) discusses the discourses and ideologies of femininity. She states that disciplinary practices of normality correspond with cultural and social constructions of femininity (88). Specifically, she states that the gendered norms and ideals of femininity and normality privilege ability and able-bodiedness, in addition to appearance and “health.” While standards of normality are behavioral practices that individuals participate in to meet cultural ideals, ideals of femininity are a particular set of cultural ideals that drive individuals to meet standards of normality. Ideals of femininity are difficult to meet, Wendell (1996) admits, because they circulate a myth that women’s bodies can be controlled and that feminine ideals are realistic and possible. The essence of this myth is the belief that we are individually responsible for caring for and tending to our bodies; that we can avoid disability, illness, and death; and that it is possible to make our bodies into the bodies we want (93, 94).

Although women have some control over our bodies, Wendell (1996) claims that this myth, paradoxically, leads us to further strive to meet body ideals. Indeed, it suggests that if we try hard enough, we can meet ideals of femininity (Wendell, 1996: 91). Though she does not account for the diverse ways in which different groups of women may encounter and experience cultural ideals and standards of femininity and

physical normality (indeed, she seems to assume a unitary category of women), she does interrogate intersections between gender and ability.

Bartky (2008) also discusses the complicated ways in which many women experience the relationship between their bodies and culture. More specifically, she, like Wendell (1996) and Bordo (2003), uses Foucault to describe the ways in which women's bodies are often subject to and experience patriarchal control. Women are constantly watched, scrutinized, and judged—albeit in different ways—according to socially constructed notions of ideal beauty and femininity (Bartky, 2008: 24). This watching ensures women's bodily self-policing and self-surveillance and bombards them with a continuous battle to attain these ideals (Bartky, 2008: 26). Further, women are watched and surveyed according to normative femininity, which, Bartky (2008) claims, requires them to perfectly ornament the surfaces of their bodies and restrict their general bodily comportment (22-23).

Yet, ironically, women who use cosmetics and disciplinary practices to transform themselves into the “proper” feminine body are often given “little respect and rarely any social power” (Bartky, 2008: 24). A very particular degree of femininity is thus required of many women: not too much, yet also not too little. Although Bartky's (2008) insightful theories about the ways in which women's bodies experience patriarchal power and normative and ideal femininity are highly valuable to the thesis project, they do not account for the various ways in which differently gendered, sexed, raced, classed, aged, and able-bodied women might engage with the disciplinary practices of femininity.

Deliofsky (2010) also discusses the ways in which femininity is socially and culturally constructed and enforced. Unlike Bartky (2008), however, she does not assume a unitary category of women, for she accounts for the different ways in which femininity is constructed according to intersecting oppressions. For instance, she claims that femininity is constructed according to the racialization of gender, as well as to whiteness, patriarchy, capitalism, and heteronormativity (11). Also using Foucault, Deliofsky (2010) sets out to explore the connections among elements such as class, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and power/privilege in the marking and mapping of a normative “white” femininity (3). She argues that normative “white” femininity is a historically, politically, socially, and culturally situated system that is made up of a set of expectations, performances, practices, and rules that are often embedded in and perpetuated by structures and relations of power, privilege, and domination (11, 5). Being “white,” for example, involves hidden heteronormative expectations, material and economic resources and, in women’s cases, patriarchal ideas about femininity and beauty (Deliofsky, 2010: 9, 13). The structures of power that perpetuate and construct normative “white” femininity, Deliofsky (2010) argues, are organized through the socio-economic order, the state, social institutions, organizations, and governments, as well as through discursive practices and real historical actors (10, 11). Being “white,” she insists, also impacts how one understands history, culture, and the self (8). At the same time, normative “white” femininity is often met with resistance and the desire to transgress its racial, ethnic, and/or sexual boundaries (Deliofsky, 2010: 10).

Deliofsky’s (2010) thorough discussion reveals the ways in which femininity functions as a powerful and pervasive system that is raced, classed, gendered, and

heteronormative. Although her study focuses on the ways in which white European women perpetuate normative “white” femininity, she does not assume that the ideology and discourses of femininity impact and affect all women in the same way. Indeed, her discussion implies that normative “white” femininity is experienced and resisted differently based on one’s privilege (or lack thereof). She also accounts for the different ways in which femininity is constructed according to intersecting oppressions.

Hey (1997) also discusses discourses of femininity. She claims that femininity is not homogenous, for there are different forms of femininity (72). Femininity is mediated and distributed differently based on, for example, barriers of gender, race, and class (13). Further, femininity offers various feminine subject positions that we take up and put down at different times and within different contexts. Yet this is not done out of our own choosing, Hey (1997) argues, because we negotiate these subject positions within and through the prevailing power relations that we are differently situated within (118). In this sense, our negotiations of femininity—and its raced, classed, and patriarchal dimensions—often end up perpetuating our own subordination. Hey’s (1997) view of femininity, like Deliovsky’s (2010), thus sees it as a complex and powerful discourse that is not only differently constructed but also differently produced, negotiated, and resisted by women and girls.

Embodiment

The concept of embodiment is concerned with the complex and often contradictory experiences of both bodies and identities. For example, Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price (1999) discuss the various ways in which women engage with culture and their bodies. Specifically, they use postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives to emphasize that

women's embodiment is a differential, fluid, and open construct and not fixed or natural (3). They claim that the body cannot be conceived of as a single and stable entity because there is no universal body and "there is never direct, unmediated access to some "pure" corporeal state" (Shildrick, 1997: 14). They claim instead that the human body is a fabrication that merely mimics material fixity and that there are only multiple bodies that are always in process (Shildrick and Price, 1999: 3, Shildrick, 1997: 13). Shildrick and Price (1999) also insist that the body is mediated and constructed by the social contexts within which it exists (7). That is, an individual is constituted by and constitutes her/his body and self through available discourses and ideologies. This is not to say, according to Shildrick and Price (1999), that all women's bodies are constructed and constituted the same way—indeed, notions of difference based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and nation influence the ways in which bodies are discursively constructed and constituted. Shildrick and Price (1999) account for the complex ways in which many women may experience the relationship between culture, selfhood, and their bodies.

Judith Butler (1990, 1993), like Shildrick and Price (1999), does not view embodiment as a unitary or natural process; rather, she views it as always mediated by various social and cultural factors. While thoroughly examining the ways in which the body's materiality is discursively constituted and culturally constructed, she argues that the regulatory norms of both gender and "sex" work together to constitute the materiality of bodies and to materialize sex (Butler, 1993: 2). "Sex" for Butler (1993) is a form of sexual difference that is culturally constructed according to hegemonic heterosexuality. Similarly, gender involves an ongoing process of performing or "doing" one's gender

(Butler, 1990: 185). The regulatory norms of gender also work in accordance with the heterosexual imperative, which is ultimately a matrix of power that conditions, enables, and limits the affirmation of materiality (Carter, 2009: 233). In other words, “sex” and the performance of gender shape bodies via regulatory norms and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1996: 134). Thus, for Butler (1993), the body’s materiality is culturally constructed and cannot be “experienced” outside of this cultural construction. Embodiment for Butler (1993) is possible, as it is for Shildrick and Price (1999), but only within and through cultural and social discourses and ideologies.

In contrast, Thomas J. Csordas (1994:12) contends that the body is a source of culture and language, as opposed to a surface upon which cultural meanings are inscribed. The body, he claims, can be understood as the existential ground of culture and self, for it is involved in an existential experience, an immediacy and sensory presence and engagement that can be captured using the term being-in-the-world (Csordas, 1994: 6, 10). Csordas (1994), however, neglects to acknowledge that one’s being-in-the-world may differ based on different social factors, such as gender, race, class, age, and ability. Indeed, he homogenizes and universalizes all existential body experiences. Nonetheless, his views on embodiment illustrate the ways in which bodies are both experienced and implicated in discourse and culture, in addition to being markers of identity.

Audre Lorde’s (1987) does not view embodiment as an experience affected by discourse and language; instead, she views it as an experience emanating solely from the sexual body. Lorde (1987) uses her own contextual situation and experience to speak about women’s sexual embodiment. Indeed, she states that the erotic is a recourse for

power for women (53). The erotic is also, according to Lorde (1987), a representation of true feeling and knowledge (54, 56). Unfortunately, the erotic is vilified, abused, devalued, and treated as suspect in Western societies (53). It also often goes unrecognized, unexpressed, and suppressed by women (54). By giving into the fear of feeling, women deny the erotic (54). But Lorde (1987) claims that when women embrace their “true” feelings and erotic sensations, they will feel a sense of satisfaction and completion (54-55). Further, they will no longer be docile, obedient, or externally defined (57-58). They will also connect with other women, creating a life-force of women, of their “creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (55). Erotic knowledge and true feeling thus empower women; they become the lens through which women scrutinize their lives and existences (56). Because the erotic arises from bodily sensations and feelings, experiencing the erotic as a resource of power and knowledge is also an experience of embodiment. Although Lorde (1987) universalizes the erotic and women’s experiences with it, her view of embodiment arises from a unique social positioning. As a lesbian woman of colour, Lorde (1987) successfully accounts for the degree to which bodies and identities are interconnected and play a role in many women’s lives.

Similarly, Claire Carter (2009), who examines ageing bodies and Western culture’s preoccupation with youth, takes into account the extent to which women’s (ageing) bodies relate to their identities (230). For example, socially unacceptable bodies, particularly ageing bodies, are not considered desirable, and thus their embodiment is complex; it is actively negotiated based on conflicting and contradictory socio-cultural

narratives and forces (235, 237). In this sense, Carter (2009), unlike Lorde (1987), accounts for the complex experiences of (ageing) bodies in youth-obsessed Western cultures and the ways in which they vary based on *different* social factors, barriers, and identities (237). The body is a cornerstone of selfhood and a project of self-identity insofar as we work on it, develop it, and refine it based on personal leisure and pleasure and ideas, discourses, and subject positions (230).

Like Carter (2009), Kathy Davis (1997) and Chris Shilling (2003) also discuss how the relationship between bodies and identities is a means of embodiment. For instance, Davis (1997), who is primarily concerned with the ways in which individuals' material bodies need to be further accounted for in academia, states that "the body is the vehicle par excellence for the modern individual to achieve a glamorous life-style" (2, 15). In this way, the body is taken up as a modernist and humanist certainty, as "secure ground for claims of morality, knowledge or truth" (Davis, 1997: 4).

At the same time, postmodern, poststructuralist, and social constructivist critiques of the body have revealed the untenable nature of a so-called "natural" body (Davis, 1997: 3-4). Thus although the body is seemingly fixed and bounded in the construction of a reliable sense of self, becoming a signifier of who one "is," it is also always fluid and in process (Davies, 1990-1999: 30, 43, Shilling, 2003: 2). In this way, the body has become a postmodern "blank screen" that is always "open to being constructed and reconstructed by external texts or discourses" (Shilling, 2003: 35). Individuals use "body projects" (Shilling, 2003: 4) and "self-care regimes" (Shilling, 2003: 5) to construct and signify their seemingly stable and unitary identities and individualities. However, although varying degrees of control over bodies is currently

possible, as Wendell (1996) has discussed, it is almost impossible to know where one body begins and another one ends (Shilling, 2003: 34). This is because narrowing gaps between technology and bodies exist and thus our knowledge about what bodies are and how we should control them has been thrown into doubt (Shilling, 2003: 3). For example, scientific developments in biological reproduction, genetic engineering, plastic surgery, and sports science, in addition to diet, exercise, and imaging, have contributed to the options around our practices of embodiment (well, those who have access to information about such developments). They have also influenced our potential to try and control our bodies, at least those who have the resources and means to do so (3). In Shilling's (2003) words, this has "stimulated among individuals a heightened degree of reflexivity about what the body is, and an uncertainty about how it should be controlled" (3). The body for both Shilling (2003) and Davis (1997) is thus an uncertain and embodied process of identity construction.

Embodied Resistance

Many theorists who discuss or are concerned with embodiment also discuss cultural and social resistance. For Bordo (2003), for example, resistance is grounded in "real" experiences, an idea that some theoretical analyses dispute. Bordo (2003) claims that resistance to disciplinary processes and cultural images and ideologies is not merely an abstract and un-situated linguistic process that happens in or to a text, it is also a social and historical process—a real event that occurs (292). Because resistance is contextual, historical, and social, it thus cannot be determined solely from cultural analysis and deconstruction, which abstracts it from actual social practice (Bordo, 2003: 292). Therefore, the actuality and effectiveness of resistance must also be sought out by

examining different historical and social situations (Bordo, 2003: 295). Bordo (2003) insists that resistance and subversion of powerful cultural and social forces are grounded in real lives, experiences, and bodies (167). She claims that despite the ideology of femininity's pervasive power, women are able to respond subversively to it, no matter how oppressive (each of) their circumstances (295).

As embodied as well as socially and historically situated beings, women have the ability to resist (albeit in different ways) femininity's cultural normalization by beginning to see differently and by "exploring what culture continually presents to them as their individual choices [...] as instead culturally situated and culturally shared" (300). Bordo (2003) also states that women who do conform to beauty ideals and norms are not cultural dupes, for they recognize that their success and happiness is often dependent upon their conformity (20). Bordo (2003) sympathizes with women; she sees that they are often concerned with a longing to be desired, loved, and successful (20). Although Bordo (2003) assumes a unitary category of privileged women who, presumably, have access to discourses of femininity, and despite that she homogenizes their experiences with embodied resistance, her discussion nonetheless exemplifies the complex ways in which women engage with and resist culture and their bodies.

Like Bordo (2003), Butler (1993), too, discusses resistance, but in a different context and with different conclusions. Butler (1993) accounts for the possibility of agency while appropriating regulatory social practices and norms (12). For her, resistance invokes the very norms it aims to resist. She insists that subjects who resist regulatory norms are themselves enabled by those very norms (15). In other words, resistance to regulatory norms and matrices of power is rooted within those very norms

it seeks to resist. By rejecting social and cultural norms, bodies mobilize themselves by those very norms. However, abject bodies—bodies which do not meet regulatory norms—fail to count as bodies that matter in our culture and are often unable to meet the requirements of subjectification (15-16). Consequently, they are unable to reach and therefore resist social and cultural norms. Like embodiment, resistance for Butler (1993) occurs in accordance with culture and language. Although Butler's (1993) focus is not specifically on the ways in which resistance is embodied by particular individuals, her theoretical discussion reveals the relationship between culture, identity, agency, and resistance.

Unlike Butler (1993), Trinh T Minha-ha (1999) focuses on the ways in which embodied resistance is lived and experienced. In "The Body in Theory" she inquires as to whether or not knowledge can be conveyed without the exercise of power. Although she believes that power relations are always embedded in the social nexus and thus cannot be easily abolished, she also contends that "in-between grounds always exist, and cracks and interstices are like gaps of fresh air that keep on being suppressed because they tend to render more visible the failures operating in every system" (262).

Resistance can thus creep into power relations where gaps and cracks exist, threatening and challenging power by exposing the means of its workings (263). Minha-ha's (1999) view of embodiment is interrelated with her idea about resistance, for resistance is not merely a strategy but also an embodied way of experiencing the world that enables "difference" to be at least partially rendered visible. Like Bordo (2003), Minha-ha (1999) is concerned with the ways in which resistance is experienced and enacted by individuals in real historical and social moments.

Analyses of Power/Privilege

Many scholars have contested the privileging of white middle-class women in popular culture and feminist theory. hooks (1997), for example, does so through an examination of the intersection between race and gender in popular culture. She states that there is a racialized fascination with black women's bodies in North American popular culture (14). Black women's bodies are culturally constructed against white women's bodies as more sexually available, accessible, and expendable—as the anti-aesthetic and mockery of the notion of beauty (116-123). She also claims that black female bodies are associated with deviance, nineteenth century racism and colonialism, and sexual savagery and primitivism (116, 120). Further, black women's bodies are represented as primitive sexual commodities to be voyeuristically consumed and exploited, especially by white men (hooks, 1997: 119).

Brown (1997) and Bannerji (2009), like hooks (1997), also speak about the ways in which racism manifests in contemporary Western societies and cultures. Brown (1997) historically and politically situates the racist and gendered ways of thinking that occur in the West (273). She is also concerned with the ways in which white middle-class heterosexual women's experiences are normalized and renormalized as the only possible experiences for women (276). She states that gender difference “reifies the notion that all women have the same gender and requires that most women's voices be silenced and some privileged voices be given centre stage” (277).

Likewise, Bannerji (2009) discusses the racist and classist ideologies and assumptions that have emerged in the construction of social and political discourses in Canada (29). Accordingly, she claims that “common-sense” (Jiwani, 2006: 31) notions

about “normal” ways of seeing, being, thinking, and knowing characterize racism in Canada today (30). Bannerji (2009), like Brown (1997), also states that middle-class white women are complicit in racial domination in Canada (33). These ideas highlight how discourses of privilege and exclusion function in relation to the construction of particular social ideas, norms, and discourses.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

While Chapter 1 concerns itself with the many definitions, concepts, and areas of scholarly inquiry that impact current understandings of the genre of Young Adult Literature (YAL), especially with respect to the representation of girlhoods, this chapter presents the conceptual-theoretical framework that guides this thesis project. This theoretical framework consists of feminist post-structuralism and embodied postmodernism, two approaches that concern themselves with the ways in which the dominant social discourses and the cultural ideology of normative “white” femininity are embodied by the protagonist in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy. This chapter also introduces a cultural studies perspective from which to further contextualize the *Alice, I Think* trilogy as a series of contemporary cultural texts about girls and girlhoods.

The feminist poststructuralist approaches of Bronwyn Davies (1990-1999) and Chris Weedon (1997) shape this thesis project, particularly their ideas about discourse, power, and the possibility of resistance, as well as subjectivity, agency, and embodiment (Weedon, 1997: 24). Although subject to change and in a constant state of flux, these concepts allow the content of the three books in this series to be deconstructed and explored, especially in light of how Alice negotiates and embodies her identity by means of discourse.

Discourse, Power, & Resistance

Feminist poststructuralist ideas about discourse are often informed by the work of Michele Foucault. According to Robert Dale Parker (2008), Foucault understands discourse in relation to the connection between knowledge and power (227). Foucault claims that knowledge is not transparent, unmediated, raw truth; rather, he insists that it

is mediated and constructed by social and historical forces that are outside of a person (Parker, 2008: 227). Discourses, then, do not only describe knowledge, they also produce and construct knowledge. Likewise, Stuart Hall (1997) contends that cultural meaning is produced and constructed as opposed to just found and reflected through discourse and power (5). Accordingly, discourse has the potential to regulate and control social conduct and life (Hall, 1997: 6). It also has the ability to delineate the ways in which certain things are represented (Hall, 1997: 6). In this sense, discourse can have powerful and oppressive ideological implications (Hall, 1997:50).

Knowledge is also made up of, according to Foucault, certain historically-specific cultural expectations that are often internalized by individuals, and which, consequently, become “common-sense” notions of “truth” (Jiwani, 2006: 31). As Parker (2008) states, a discourse is “a common pattern of culturally internalized expectation rather than the supposedly pure or essential truth that people traditionally mean by the term knowledge” (227). Despite that common-sense knowledge attempts to guarantee “truth” about what seems to be an already fixed reality, “truth” is actually only one version of meaning (Weedon, 1997: 75). Indeed, as Lazar (2005) states, common-sense knowledge mystifies and obscures the power differentials that are work in discourse, making knowledge seem “truthful” and fixed (7).

The most powerful discourses are those that have a firm institutional basis, whereby they govern “the organization and practices of social institutions” (Weedon, 1997: 105). These hegemonic discourses are defined as self-evident “truths” by social, cultural, economic, and political elites in the West (Henry & Tator, 2002: 25). They also represent and function on behalf of the dominant social group in the West—that is, those

who are white, often male, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, and Anglophone (Weedon, 1997: 40). Although not all discourses yield social power and authority, dominant ones do. Dominant discourses can be considered, in light of feminist post-structuralism at least, dominant sets of ideas, values, norms, attitudes, and behavioural practices that construct and describe “common-sense” or taken-for-granted knowledge about particular topics (Henry & Tator, 2002: 26, 72).

As Hall (1997) notes, common sense “truth” is often constructed according to “what is ‘normal’, who belongs—and therefore, who is excluded” (10). Dominant discourses, as previously implied, also send complex ideological messages that are embedded within hierarchical power relations. According to Lazar (2005), these ideological messages “are representations of practices formed from a particular perspective in the interest of maintaining unequal power relations” (6-7). That is, ideologies, like discourses, are cultural ideas that favour and privilege the dominant social group in the West.

However, discourses are never definitive and thus resistance is always possible (Weedon, 1997: 107, 111). Indeed, dominant discourses are dependent upon their ability to hide their own mechanisms, which they cannot always do (Weedon, 1997: 117). In addition, a discourse’s very organization “will imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal” (Weedon, 1997: 106). Resistant or reverse discourses, as Weedon (1997) calls them, or, alternate or alternative discourses, as Davies (1990-1999) calls them, challenge the meaning and power of a dominant discourse, creating discursive spaces of subversion and resistance (Weedon, 1997: 107). The individual who resists dominant discourses and the subject positions it offers begins the production of new and

alternate forms of knowledge and discursive positions (Weedon, 1997: 107-108, 119).

Yet it is important to note that even when we resist dominant meanings, creating alternate ones, we are still, by implication, invoking the dominant ones that we hope to resist. Our simultaneous compliance and resistance to dominant discourses and subject positions is a process referred to as subjectivity, one which Alice experiences throughout the *Alice, I Think* trilogy (Weedon, 1997: 83).

Subjectivity

Subjectivity, according to Weedon (1997), refers to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings of an individual, as well as her sense of herself and the ways in which she understands herself in relation to the world around her (32).

Dominant discourses offer a range of modes of subjectivity, which are commonly referred to by feminist poststructuralists as subject positions. These positions, according to Davies (1990-1999), are “discursively and interactively constituted and so are open to shifts and changes as the discourse shifts or as one’s positioning within or in relation to that discourse shifts” (71). Discourses are thus activated through the agency of the individual, which is discussed in the following section.

Many feminist poststructuralists also believe that our contradictory sense-of-selves, our subjectivities, are not innate; rather, they are constructed through language and discourse, or, “language in the form of conflicting discourses” (Weedon, 1997: 31, 21). We are constituted through discourse and discursive processes and we become speaking subjects who only *appear* to be separate and independent from discourse and discursive processes (Davies, 1990-1999: 15). We are subjected to and by particular discourses and enabled to act accordingly (Weedon, 1997: 34). We are not, however,

just subjected to and by discourse; we are also subject to and by the subject positions that discourses offer. As Weedon (1997) states: “to speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become *subjected* to the power and regulation of the discourse” (Weedon, 1997: 116, author’s emphasis). We are thus both the sites and subjects of the discursive struggle for our identities (Weedon, 1997: 93). We actively interpret the world and are ourselves governed by those subject positions (Weedon, 1997: 93). For example, in *Alice, I Think* trilogy Alice is portrayed as a girl who is trying to negotiate the subject positions and discourses that are available to her.

Furthermore, the subject positions that we mobilize vary based on our interests and our social locations, as well as the historically informed moments within which we are situated and produced (Weedon, 1997: 111). In Weedon’s (1997) words: “language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual’s subjectivity in ways which are socially specific” (21). We also “take up and put down” different subject positions at different times, all the while engaging in the ongoing process of our fluid subjectivity. Some individuals, however, have more privileged access to powerful discourses and the ways of speaking, moving, and interacting that they promote (Davies, 1990-1999: 19). For instance, if we are white heterosexual men we have full access to the institutional discourses of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. But if we are working-class women of colour, we are excluded and marginalized from such discourses, for we are not recognized as having the subject status that white heterosexual men have. Yet this is not to say that working-class women of colour are powerless surfaces upon which dominant discourses are imposed. Indeed, although oppressed by

such discourses, they nonetheless actively construct their subjectivities with various degrees of agency.

Feminist poststructuralist understandings of subjectivity also attempt to undo and resist classic liberal humanism and its masculinist understanding of the subject. In the humanist view, the subject is monolithic, unified, fixed, rational, and coherent (Davies, 1990-1999: 47, 32). Feminist post-structuralism aims to interrogate and contest the so-called essential fixity of human nature (Weedon, 1997: 80). The unitary self, according to Davies (1990-1999) is a fiction established through discourse and images as real (30). It is an idea that has been constructed as “natural” and “normal” by humanist discourse and, consequently, is taken up by individuals as true, often to guarantee the authenticity of the self and fixed meanings and guarantees. In this sense, humanist thought celebrates linear thinking and excludes everything that does not fit with the dominant concept of the unitary and rational person. This thinking ultimately serves as a justification for existing systems of power and privilege (Davies, 1990-1999: 58). The transition from humanist notions of the self to poststructuralist ones can be characterized by a move from the self as noun—that is, as stable and fixed—to the self as verb—that is, as always in process (Davies, 1990-1999: 137).

Agency

Many feminist poststructuralists understand agency in relation to humanist discourse. Davies (1990-1999) claims that our agency does not consist of a series of purely individual and continuous acts, as classic humanism might have us believe (56). Agency is not based on “free” “choice,” an idea that humanist discourse reinforces. Rather, agency is merely experienced as choice (Davies, 1990-1999: 31). We come to

see our “choices” as arising from a fundamental essential core or, “as indicators of who we really are” (Davies, 1990-1999: 44). Because the *Alice, I Think* trilogy is about a young woman who is trying to construct her subjectivity, a feminist poststructuralist understanding of agency is useful in thinking about how and through what “choices” this construction occurs.

Although we often understand our “choices” as springing from and confirming our identities, they are only made meaningful through the discursive practices through which we shape our beings and through which our beings are shaped (Davies, 1990-1999: 31). In Davies’ (1990-1999) words: “such acts do not spring from an essential prediscursive self but rather are constituted in humanist discourses through which subjects (mis)take themselves to be “choosing,” “positioning,” etc.” (133).

Agency, following feminist post-structuralism, involves a negotiation with discourse and the various subject positions discourses offer. Indeed, agency does not involve freedom from the discursive construction of the self but instead an awareness and recognition of those discourses through which one is constituted. Davies (1990-1999) claims that as agentic subjects, we move within and between discourses, modifying, refusing, and going beyond hegemonic ideas (60). Our agency, like our subjectivity, is spoken into existence as a fragmented and discontinuous—but nonetheless possible—process. It, too, is always positioned in relation to particular discourses, including classic humanist ones (Davies, 1990-1999: 61).

Embodiment

Feminist poststructuralists view individuals not just as agentic subjects, but also as embodied subjects who are constituted by and actively constitute themselves

according to discourse (Weedon, 1997: 40). Whether we are resisting dominant discourses and subject positions or conforming to them, or both, we are speaking from our own embodied knowledges, contradictory as they may be (Davies, 1990-1999: 41). That is, the discursive practices that we use to construct and articulate our subjectivities are not borrowed for this process but rather taken on *as our own* (Davies, 1990-1999: 44). In Davies' (1990-1999) words: we come "to live, to experience, to know, and to desire *as one's own*, to take pleasure in the world, as it is made knowable through available [discursive] practices [...] the patterns of power and powerlessness and one's positioning within them" (22, author's emphasis). We thus "become" not just through our minds but also through our bodies, for our sense of ourselves are inscribed on both our bodies and our minds (Davies, 1990-1999: 54, 78). We begin to physically belong in the world in certain ways and see it accordingly (Davies, 1990-1999: 44). We speak ourselves into existence not just socially, but also psychically and physically (Davies, 1990-1999: 85).

This brief discussion of feminist post-structuralism—at least how it is understood by Davies (1990-1999) and Weedon (1997)—has highlighted key feminist poststructuralist concepts that are relevant to the thesis project. In light of the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, feminist post-structuralism is a productive and effective means by which the relationships between identity, discourse, and power can be explored, for it is able to explore the extent to which the portrayal of Alice's seemingly fixed and stable sense of self is actually in constant negotiation. Indeed, Alice continually negotiates various dominant discourses and ideologies, especially that of normative "white" femininity.

Embodied Postmodernism

In addition to employing a feminist poststructuralist framework, the thesis project also employs the theoretical lens of embodied postmodernism. Postmodernism is a cultural movement which has built itself in contrast to modernism. It has rejected modernism's fixed and coherent system of belief; its elitist authority; its ideals of reason, clarity, truth, and progress; its nostalgia for an earlier age; and its preoccupation with the humanist subject. Instead, it embraces fragmentation; "fractured" art forms; the shifting nature of subjectivity; and ideals of plurality, difference, and opposition (Barry, 2002: 83-86). A postmodern lens is thus able to account for multiplicity of meanings and the often fragmented nature of knowledge. In addition, a postmodern lens can also account for the proliferation of contradictory images and ideologies that individuals both internalize and resist.

A postmodern perspective also has the potential to reject essentialism and universality and embrace the experience of "Otherness" and "difference," especially as they pertain to the ongoing construction of identity (hooks, 2006: 456). However, as Bordo (2003) argues, using a postmodern perspective may make it difficult to develop insight and perspective out of marginalized experiences (281). This is because, according to hooks (2006), postmodernism is written about and from a white male perspective, which, consequently, re-inscribes modernist master narratives of authority and privileges some voices over others (459). In this sense, postmodernist discourses simultaneously reject and employ modernist notions (Trites, 2000: 18). Although seemingly inclusive of a multiplicity of "different" identities, postmodernism may

exclude those very differences, replacing them with white male supremacy (hooks, 2006: 445).

As an alternative, Bordo (2003) suggests using what she calls an embodied postmodernism—that is, a theoretical framework that embraces the notion of postmodern multiplicity but that also constantly acknowledges embodied experiences and the ways in which individuals are differently impacted by various forms of “difference” (Bordo, 2003: 40). In this way, embodied postmodernism “critique[s] essentialism while emphasizing the significance of the ‘authority of experience’” (hooks, 2006: 458). That is, embodied postmodernism does not universalize or exclude differences but rather emphasizes the importance of them. Within the context of the thesis, embodied postmodernism is a useful way to explore the often postmodern ways in which normative “white” femininity is discursively constructed as well as embodied by the depicted protagonist.

Cultural Studies

The feminist poststructuralist and embodied postmodernist perspectives that I utilize are also informed by contemporary ideas from cultural studies. Cultural studies is a large area of study, spanning a wide range of geographical locations (Moody, 2006; Storey, 2001; Hall, 1997; Hermes, 2005; Kellner, 2003; Hallows, 2002; and Gedalof *et al.*, 2005). However, it is difficult to define cultural studies not only because it is a discipline that originates from different geographical locations, but also because its parameters are always shifting and evolving. Nonetheless, there is much academic work pertaining to this “ever-expanding” (Moody, 2006: 172) and always-changing discipline. For example, contemporary cultural studies is commonly described as an

interdisciplinary site of both ideological struggle and cultural analysis, wherein meaning-making and representation are engaged with and analyzed (Storey, 1996: 4). In other words, cultural studies is a discipline that cannot be considered a fixed category but rather an ongoing exploration of different cultural forms, as well as a place where conflicts between dominant and subordinate social groups are played out and continually constructed and reconstructed (Hallows, 2000: 30, 27). Cultural studies, that is, is a dynamic process, as opposed to a finished and static product or accomplishment (Gedalof *et al.*, 2005: 2).

Hallows (2000), who focuses on feminist cultural analyses, gendered cultural forms, and the construction of femininity and feminine identities, argues that cultural studies is specifically about the dynamic relationship between cultural texts and practices. Cultural studies is concerned with popular culture, particularly with how it has been defined and conceptualized (Hallows, 2000: 25-26). As Gedalof, Boulter, Faflak, and McFarlane's (2005) claim, cultural studies consists of an "examination of how culture is made, by whom it is made, and how it is practiced" (9). It is an ongoing study of how texts generate meaning, what kinds of meaning they generate, and the role that both texts and meanings play in the mediation of social life (Moody, 2006: 172, 175).

In addition, cultural studies takes into account the polysemic nature of text—that is, a text's ability to generate multiple meanings (Parker, 2008: 24). Although a text may have a "preferred reading," not all readers or even the same reader will interpret or decode this in the same way (24). Indeed, texts are open to contradictory readings and often convey ambiguous cultural messages (Moody, 2006: 175). Cultural studies is also concerned with how individuals use different cultural forms to speak back to and resist

dominant ideologies and the broader cultural hegemony (Parker, 2008: 232). In addition, it pays attention to how cultural texts both comply with and resist dominant ideologies (Parker, 2008: 234).

In addition to examining different cultural forms and practices, cultural studies also takes into account the complex social, cultural, political, and historical nature of cultural texts. As previously discussed, Saukko (2003) argues that texts “emerge from, and play a role in, the changing historical, political, and social context” (99). Historically, socially, and politically situating cultural texts enables the examination of the relationship between culture and social power. It also enables a view of texts as “site[s] of contestation over meaning, where different groups compete to set forth their understandings of the state of affairs of the affairs in the world” (Saukko, 2003: 100) and make the world mean in particular ways (Saukko, 2003: 101). For example, Stuart Hall (1997), a cultural studies scholar, focuses on the function of power in meaning-making and representation in the West, arguing that racism in particular “is a powerful force in the shaping of culture” (Gedalof *et al.*, 2005: 8, 9).

Cultural studies is a social and political project, especially insofar as it seeks social and political change by means of its focus on the complex relationship between cultural industries, cultural institutions, and cultural forms and practices that are bound up “with, and within, relations of power” (Hollows, 2000: 25). In Nickianne Moody’s (2006) words, cultural studies “constitutes a space of exchange between dominant and subordinate cultures and provides a valuable area of study for those who hope to understand social change” (172). Put differently, cultural studies has the potential to

challenge dominant discourses and their subsequent exclusion of social “difference” and “Otherness.”

Many cultural studies scholarship also maintains a concern with postmodern culture. Saukko (2003), for instance, discusses postmodern texts, which are texts that have emerged as a part of the postmodern movement, as well as postmodern readings of cultural texts. She claims that postmodern texts often make ironic and critical statements about other cultural texts, which ultimately points out the mediated nature of reality (100). She also claims that postmodern texts are “characterized by a ‘floating signifier’, which no longer refers to a signified but to other signifiers, such as media texts” (105). Postmodern texts also have an “analytical reflexivity” (109) whereby both their content and their form self-reflexively challenge and evoke other texts (110). Although self-reflexive, postmodern texts also often have contradictory agendas. For example, there are various twists, tweaks, and blurrings that do not neatly fall into dichotomies and plots within postmodern cultural texts (Saukko, 2003: 104, 108).

Postmodern readings of texts are able to account for on both the content and the form of the text under examination (Saukko, 2003: 110). They flesh out the social contradictions and contestations that are embedded within texts, in addition to revealing the critically self-reflexive nature of postmodern texts (Saukko, 2003: 100). But they do so by always remaining socially, politically, and historically located and circumscribed, bearing in mind that one’s reading of text arises from her social, political, and historical location and that the text itself is socially, politically, and socially situated.

Within the context of the thesis, a postmodern reading of text will enable me to examine of the ways in which the *Alice, I Think* texts are products of a postmodern

world. In other words, such a reading enables me to call attention to the ways in which the form and content of these texts may be “postmodern,” insofar as they contain multiple contradictory social, political, historical, and cultural messages and ideas. Finally, a postmodern reading permits me to view the *Alice, I Think* trilogy as a part of, as opposed to simply reflective of, a range of cultural histories and expressions (Parker, 2008: 234).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This thesis project utilizes feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and is informed by Foucault's ideas about discourses as dominant sets of taken-for-granted knowledge about particular topics as well as common-sense values, norms, attitudes, and behavioural practices that are defined as "truth" by economic, political, and social elites (Parker, 2008: 227, Henry & Tator, 2002: 25, 72). Dominant discourses have powerful and oppressive ideological implications. As Jeffries (2007) states, "all discourse is ideologically saturated" (8). The methodological approaches of Michelle M. Lazar (2005), Frances Henry and Carolyn Tator (2002), and Jiwani (2006) are also used for this thesis project, as will be illustrated in the discussion to follow.

CDA has become increasingly popular in social scientific (Henry & Tator, 2005), communication and cultural studies research (Lazar, 2005; Jiwani, 2006). As Wendy Glenn (2008) states, CDA allows for the incorporation of cultural as well as social and political theories in its analysis of text (35). Following these scholars, CDA is, very broadly, a means by which I can examine and interrogate the dominant social discourses present in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy and reveal the workings of power that sustain oppressive social structures and relations within the texts (Lazar, 2005: 5, 6).

Unfortunately, I have found that very few studies use CDA to examine YAL. Those studies that do, however, do not do so from a feminist perspective, and often leave social oppressions related to gender un-problematized. For example, although Glenn (2008) uses CDA to critique the degree to which some YAL series' privilege whiteness and "conspicuous consumption"—that is, wealth and entitlement—she leaves gender completely out of the equation and assumes that class is the only social barrier

that characters in series fiction YAL face. For example, although she contends that girl characters in *The Insiders* (2004) by J. Minter are valued only for their “beauty and eroticism” (38), she does not bother to theorize about why this might be so. Glenn’s (2008) use of CDA therefore neglects to theorize about gender relations as an equally important and interrelated set of social barriers to those of class. In this sense, Glenn (2008) might “invoke[e] the very difference [she] [seeks] to deny” (Bryson, 2003, as qtd. by: 15).

CDA does have the potential to deconstruct those discourses and discursive strategies that are used to justify social the social order (Lazar, 2005: 5). As Henry and Tator (2002) state, CDA “provides a tool for deconstructing the ideologies of the mass media and other elite groups, and for identifying and defining social, economic, and historical power relations between dominant and subordinate groups” (72). Both Henry and Tator (2002) and Lazar (2005) use CDA to employ poststructuralist understandings of discourse, language, and power while simultaneously paying particular attention to both cultural production and social relations (Lazar, 2005: 11). CDA fosters a critique of the power-entrenched values, norms, and behavioral practices associated with discourse, as well as the taken-for-granted nature of ideological messages that are embedded in texts (Henry & Tator, 2002: 72).

Lazar (2005) uses feminist CDA, as opposed to “regular” CDA, which adopts a critical view of gender relations, among other forms of intersecting social oppressions, inequalities, and injustices (Lazar, 2005: 2, 3). Keeping gender in mind as a key form of social oppression, feminist CDA seeks to understand how social power, dominance, and inequality are produced and reproduced, as well as negotiated and contested (Lazar,

2005: 11). Feminist CDA is, in other words, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology that are embedded within discourse and text (Lazar, 2005: 5). Feminist CDA, following Lazar (2005), also accounts for the extent to which discourse sustains and creates a (patriarchal) gendered social order (5).

Jiwani's (2006) work on gendered, racist, and classist violence in Canada and the ways in which it gets erased, trivialized, and contained within categories is, like Lazar's (2005), is an excellent example of feminist CDA (xii). Her work specifically examines the ways in which dominant discourses are used to maintain and perpetuate hierarchies of power, white dominance, and the symbolic and inferential forms of violence that white dominance employs (31, 37, 44). She aims to demystify common-sense and hegemonic notions that deny, justify, and legitimize inequality, structures of domination, and the routinized violence of racism, sexism, and classism that promote and encourage cultural and economic privileging of particular groups over others—what she calls symbolic or inferential violence (xviii, xvii). She does this by thoroughly interrogating and deconstructing powerful cultural messages, discourses of power, and the discursive strategies that are used to maintain them, as I hope to do in this project (xix, xiii, 31). Although she focuses specifically on the news media—as opposed to YAL—she nonetheless uses feminist CDA to critically analyze dominant discourses and pay attention to a) the extent to which cultural representations and messages are socially mediated and constructed through discourse; b) the degree to which oppressive ideas (like whiteness, for example) are naturalized, normalized, and routinized (through discourse); c) the ways in which the powerful field of whiteness is a discursive strategy of domination; and d) the historically and socially situated nature of cultural

representations and messages (32). Such an analysis, she claims, facilitates possible sites of intervention and makes room for subjugated knowledges (60). Unlike Lazar (2005), Jiwani examines not just gender but also other social categories including race, ethnicity, class, nation, language and the ways in which they are constructed through discourse as a means of perpetuating hierarchies of power.

In terms of this thesis project, feminist CDA enables critical analysis, from a feminist perspective, of the dominant social discourses of contemporary girlhoods that permeate and are discursively constituted in the *Alice, I Think* novels (Lazar, 2005: 5). It calls attention to these discourses through its incorporation of social, political, and cultural theories into the analysis of the texts (Glenn, 2008: 35). Doing so enables a better understanding of the ways in which the protagonist embodies the dominant social discourse and cultural ideology of normative “white” femininity. Feminist CDA also facilitates an investigation of the ideological messages and attitudes that are circulated and reinforced in and through discourse as natural and commonsensical in the novels (Lazar, 2005: 7). Finally, it encourages the deconstruction of power and dominance as they are discursively produced and resisted within the world of the novels (Lazar, 2005: 10). Because it calls attention to and creates alternate discourses and “ways of interpreting, understanding, and interacting with the world” (Henry & Tator, 2002: 73), feminist CDA is a political and praxis-oriented form of research that is itself a form of “analytical resistance” (Lazar, 2005, as qtd. by Van Dijk 1991: 5-6).

Although CDA is able to reveal and interrogate the often oppressive ideas that are embedded in text, it has been critiqued for what it does not do. For instance, Sheila Jeffries (2007) states that many have attacked CDA for its methodological and

theoretical flaws (4). CDA is often accused of neglecting the “contextual conditions” (8) within which texts are embedded (8). For example, CDA may view texts as pre-existing linguistic materials and thus may fail to acknowledge the discursive practices by which texts generate meanings (7). CDA may also idealize ideology insofar as its users want to believe that all discourse is ideological and that CDA can magically reveal those ideologies that would otherwise be hidden (8). CDA’s users often fail to realize that “there may be an infinite range of ideologies, some of which we may not want to evaluate on these lines at all” (8).

CDA also often fails to be “context-sensitive”—that is, it often fails to historically and culturally situate the texts under examination, despite that it may aim to do so (Saukko, 2003: 135, 136, 139). It may also end up reaffirming binaries without offering any social alternatives (Saukko, 2003: 147). In order to address CDA’s limitations, it is crucial to contextualize texts by situating them as historically, socially, politically, and culturally grounded pieces of popular culture that not only reflect but also construct particular meanings. To avoid reaffirming binaries, it is also important to highlight the complex and contradictory nature of the dualistic positions in question. This reveals “the fussier side of the cultural and social world, which does not fall so neatly into dichotomies and plots, but where there are twists, tweaks and blurring that may reflect and change meaning and history in quite consequential ways” (Saukko, 2003: 105).

It is also essential that CDA suggest social alternatives to the binary oppositions and common-sense ideas that are embedded in texts. For example, the thesis project does so by taking a political and emancipatory stance by means of its primary method,

feminist CDA. Feminist CDA takes seriously issues of social inequality and injustice, especially those related to gender, and is motivated by a desire to change and demystify unequal and unjust social conditions through a critique of discourse (Lazar, 2005: 2-3, 5).

Despite its “inevitable circularity” (Jeffries, 2007: 10), however, CDA remains a useful method for investigating relationships between power, ideology, and discourse. Using feminist CDA enables this thesis project to examine and analyze the *Alice, I Think* texts in light of the theoretical approaches outlined. In other words, my methodological and theoretical approaches enable the thesis project to convey its central concerns, namely the ways in which and the means by which the protagonist is depicted as embodying and engaging with the dominant social discourse and ideology of normative “white” femininity. Moreover, these two methods foster the demystification and interrogation of oppressive ideas that are constructed and depicted as “natural” and “normal” in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy by and through discourse. This thesis project thus uses feminist CDA to identify and analyze three dominant social discourses in the texts, as well as discourses that are secondary to them. The dominant discourses include: dependence, post-feminism, and normative “white” femininity.

I have taken other steps to follow through with my analysis of discourse in this thesis. The first step in this thesis involved reading each book twice, the first time to grasp a general understanding of the content, and the second time to pinpoint prevailing themes. The second step involved using these themes to identify intersecting dominant social discourses that are prevalent in all three of the novels. The third step involved working from the texts to thoroughly explore and deconstruct each passage and the ways in which Alice embodies and negotiates specific discourses. A Microsoft Word

document was created and the analysis emerged through a process of editing.

Throughout the writing process, I aimed to follow through with the central argument of the thesis: that Alice negotiates dominant social discourses as a means by which she can construct a sense of self and establish her position within the discourse of normative white femininity. Although her negotiation is often subversive—for she resists many of the subject positions available to her—it also serves to reinforce commonsensical ideas about girls and girlhoods.

Chapter 4: Book Summaries

Book One: *Alice, I Think* (2000)

Like the other two novels, *Alice, I Think* (2000) uses a journal-format and first-person narrative style to depict its protagonist's "maladjusted" (11) life and developing sense of self. Through journaling, fifteen year-old Alice discusses her to day-to-day life in small town Smithers, British Columbia. Her diary entries enable readers to get a sense of what she thinks, how she feels, and who she is. The novel begins when Alice starts attending the "regular" (26) high school, an alternative school, as well as the Teens in Transition (Not Trouble) Club, where she sees Bob, her guidance counselor, weekly.

Alice's journal entries describe feelings of frustration and unhappiness with her life, especially because she does not fit in with her high school peers and is uncomfortable in social settings. She describes herself as a feminist, nonconformist, and "misfit" (39) because she has been home-schooled in the past; teased and bullied by peers; forced to attend counseling sessions by her parents with Bob; and lives with her hippie mom, deadbeat and unemployed dad, and well-rounded younger brother. She also lacks peer interaction, interest in boys, (heterosexual) romance, and other "feminine" conventions. Alice's feelings of worry and doubt provoke her to create a list of "life goals," which she revises and attempts to complete throughout the novel and which ultimately guide the plot of the book. These goals include: finding an innovative career path, getting a part-time job, increasing her contact with people outside of her immediate family, learning to drive a car, increasing her boy-girl interaction, publishing a paper comparing peer groups to chickens, reading the entire *Lord of the Rings* series, developing a new look, going back to school, and becoming a feminist (12-14, 15, 97).

Throughout the novel, Alice accomplishes many of her life goals. For example, she goes back to school, “get[s] behind” (95) feminism, and finds an innovative career path as a cultural critic, which she experiments with in online chat-rooms and while reading *Spin* magazine (22). Alice also develops a new and unique look for herself with thrift-store outfits, a new (and slightly uneven) hair-do, and dramatic make-up styles. She also increases her interactions with people outside of her immediate family. For example, Alice meets her friend George while horseback riding on a family outing and the two connect immediately. However, Alice is also badly beaten by a long-time enemy, Linda, and her followers. Alice does not describe how she feels about being beaten up by Linda, for she keeps a detached and aloof demeanor in her journal throughout all three novels.

While getting her haircut in Prince George, Alice checks another item off her life goals list. She meets a young man named Aubrey. Although the relationship does not last, Alice is determined to meet another boy, which she does by the end of the novel. Daniel, or Goose as he is nicknamed in the book, is also an oddball. The pair meet at a running track outside of a fish show in which Alice’s brother, McGregor, is competing. Alice is attracted to like-minded Goose, finding herself sexually desiring him, so much so that she asks him if he would be interested in finding a private room nearby (a storage closet in the high school where the fish show is taking place) so that she can “go to the womanhood tent [...] for some sex” (230). Although Diane interrupts the pair mid-kiss (and thus they do not get to sexual intercourse), Alice is relieved that she can now at least partially strike yet another goal off her life goals list. However, as the book comes to a close, Alice reminds us that she is not just concerned about boy-girl interaction, she

also “want[s] to be an independent woman” (241). On this note, she leaves us wondering a) what will happen with Goose, who she claims has long-term relationship potential; b) what will happen with her new friend, George; and c) what will happen with her career as a cultural critic.

Book Two: *Miss Smithers* (2004)

While *Alice, I Think* (2000) ends in October, *Miss Smithers* (2004) begins in January. In the first journal entry in *Miss Smithers*, Alice announces that she will be a candidate in the annual Miss Smithers pageant, an event that guides the plot of this book. A family friend, Finn, who is a member of the Smithers Rod & Gun Club, has asked Alice to participate in the contest on behalf of the club (different local businesses and services sponsor each contestant). At first, Alice is unsure she wants to participate, especially given that her mother is furious about the idea and has taught Alice that beauty pageants are unhealthy for young women because they promote patriarchal beauty ideals. But despite her mother’s concern, Alice decides to participate in the competition, insisting that she does not suffer from “media images of female perfection” (Juby,2000:94).

In addition to devoting time to the Miss Smithers pageant, Alice also decides to take her career goals in a new direction by becoming a journalist. Her journalism career kicks off with her ’zine writing, wherein she uses the pseudonym “P.J. Hervey,” an allusion to singer/songwriter P.J. Harvey. Alice writes ’zine pieces about the events that are occurring in her life, often with an ironic and funny twist. For example, in a piece called “It’s Not Who Does it First,” Alice explains that there is a competition among “teenage people” (47) to be the first one of their friends to have sexual intercourse. Alice

insists that this is trivial and stupid and not always as easy as one might think. Yet within her own life, Alice is determined to have sex with Goose, claiming that she does not want to be the last of her friends to have sex (George, for instance, has had sexual intercourse). This 'zine piece is a humorous justification and explanation for Alice's lack of sexual intercourse with Goose. It is also a means by which she can creatively express her opinions and her feelings about the events occurring in her life. Alice also writes 'zine pieces about her thoughts on the Miss Smithers pageant and its contestants. Specifically, she rates the fourteen other girls in the pageant on a scale from one to five for beauty, talent, congeniality, and fashion sense.

Unfortunately, Alice's 'zine is accidentally distributed to the entire "regular" high school. When Goose, who is now her boyfriend, comes to visit Alice and stays with her family for a weekend, he types-up many of her 'zine articles and accidentally places them in the eager hands of another pageant member's mother when trying to make copies at the library. At first, the 'zine copies lead to much controversy at the regular high school, especially with the other pageant members. However, with time, many of the candidates accept and even enjoy Alice's scoring of them in her 'zine.

Alice also takes up a few other extracurricular activities. In addition to her 'zine writing, she joins a martial arts club and joins the Young Christian Association at school, which encourages chastity and virginal youth (161). Since Alice is curious about heterosexual activity and whether or not she do it, she is immediately attracted to the group's goals. However, her attraction does not last long, for she discovers that maintaining a "pure" Christian identity is hard work and not for her.

In terms of her personal life, Alice tells us that George is “too self-involved” (46) and unable to commit to phone calls and regular hang-outs. As a result, their friendship seems to fizzle out a little as *Miss Smithers* goes on. Alice also makes a new friend. Karen Field, the most popular and coolest girl in school, befriends Alice after she reads and is struck by Alice’s accidentally distributed ’zine.

Book Three: *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last* (2005)

In the final book of the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, Alice is a sixteen year-old turning seventeen year-old who is about to go into her last year of high school. The book begins in the summer, June to be precise. Alice excitedly explains that she has again changed her career path; she has become a screenwriter and has just started her first screenplay, *Of Moose and Men*, a reference to John Steinbeck’s book, *Of Mice and Men*. *Of Moose and Men*, however, does not just make reference to a prized piece of the English literary canon, it is also based on the events that are occurring in Alice’s life. For example, in *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last*’s opening journal entry, Alice explains that Goose will be leaving Smithers for a whole year to live in Scotland with his family. The day he leaves both he and Alice take an excursion in Alice’s parents’ hatchback. After accidentally driving into a ditch, the two begin kissing and Alice hopes to finally “consummate [their] love” (8). However, this is halted when a giant and unhappy moose appears beside them. Although Alice is willing to continue with sexual intercourse, Goose is afraid and so they both decide to return home, where Alice says farewell to Goose. Similarly, In Act I, Scene I of *Of Moose and Men*, a girl (character) says goodbye to a boy (character) in a car, but not without first being interrupted by a giant moose. However, this scene is much more majestic than the one that occurred in Alice’s

life, for the boy is overcome with emotion as he sheds tears for the girl (which does not happen when Goose says farewell). The girl character and the boy character are also in a hybrid sport utility vehicle, as opposed to a hatchback, and in the middle of the wilderness, as opposed to a ditch. In this way, Alice's screenplay, like her 'zine, is a way in which she can creatively and imaginatively express both the events going on in her life and how she (directly or indirectly) feels about them. New additions to the screenplay are made throughout the novel each time an event occurs in Alice's life. The screenplay is thus complementary to the plot of the novel.

In addition to writing a screenplay and mourning the loss of Goose, Alice also discovers that her mother has been sentenced to two months in jail for assaulting a man during the environmental protest that took place in the previous novel. Because her mother will no longer be working and financially supporting the family, and because her father, John, cannot find work due to what seems to be a lack of motivation, depression, and cluelessness, Alice is required to find work to help out the family. Although she does not want to work, she does find employment as a hiking guide/counsellor for Evan, who runs a hiking camp for children called the Bulkley Valley Junior Backpackers' Club. Alice also works for Betty Lou, her father's band's lead singer, at her new yarn store.

In addition to trying out a few different jobs, Alice also briefly dates a few different young men, although she wonders if she is cheating on Goose in the process. She meets the first bachelor, Vince, at the *Number Four* restaurant, where he works as a cook. The two go out on a few dates but when Vince, who is twenty-two, finds out that Alice is sixteen-turning-seventeen, he breaks off the relationship, leaving Alice confused

and sad (or seemingly so). Alice meets bachelor number two through work. Evan, like Vince, is also older than Alice. He is charming and very attractive. Alice believes that Evan is only demonstrating romantic interest in her for sexual reasons. This turns out to be the case when she attends a party with him and he lures her into his bedroom to have sexual intercourse. Luckily, when Alice realizes she does not want to lose her virginity to Evan, she is able to escape.

Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last seems to be primarily about Alice's trials and tribulations with young men, including Evan and Vince, and even Goose. At the end of the novel, however, Alice is a single and happy working-young woman who no longer needs any more therapy sessions with Bob (258).

Chapter 5: Embodiment and Femininity in the *Alice, I Think* Trilogy

The following pages employ the methods of CDA to analyze a variety of interrelated social discourses that permeate the *Alice, I Think* trilogy from a feminist-poststructuralist and embodied postmodernist perspective. The discourses identified in these texts include: those of adolescent/young adult adulthood development, those of post-feminism, and those of normative “white” femininity. Although discourses of normative “white” femininity are the primary focus of the thesis, the two other, interconnected, discourses play significant roles in the trilogy.

This chapter is divided into three sections based on the three sets of interconnected discourses under examination. Intertwined throughout each section is a discussion of the roles that counter discourses and notions of power/privilege play in the novels. In all, this analysis reveals the oppressive, common-sense ideas that are reinforced and normalized through discourse in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, as well as the ways in which Alice is depicted as embodying and negotiating those discourses.

Discourses of Adolescent/Young Adult Development

Discourses of development are concerned with and construct ideas about the ways in which adolescents develop—whether in terms of psychological states-of-mind (clinical discourses), education (educational discourses), the family (discourses of dependence and the family), or puberty (discourses of puberty and maturity) (Griffin, 1993). Borrowing from the specific terms used by Griffin (1993), the following analysis identifies and explores ideas about adolescent/young adult development and how they are negotiated and embodied by Alice’s character in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy.

Intertwined with the dominant discourse of development are counter discourses/discourses, which offer resistance to power and privilege.

Within the context of the trilogy, Alice is an “adolescent in formation” (Younger, 2009: xi) insofar as she develops and matures from a fifteen year-old girl to an almost seventeen year-old girl throughout the course of the novels. In the first book, Alice develops and matures by means of her list of life goals. At the beginning of the novel, Alice claims that she does not know what she wants to do with her life. This is a problem because both her parents and Bob expect her to know this (16). They are worried that she is “not growing enough, or in the right areas” (13) and that her “life could use some direction” (13). To resolve this problem, Alice decides to create a list of life goals, insisting that she “will be a success in [her] own life” (200) if she does so.

Alice is portrayed as a young woman who is in the midst of growing up, especially insofar as she is in the process of “becoming the person [she] want[s] to be” (Juby, 2000: 61). In the second and third books Alice is still portrayed as being concerned with her growth and development. In particular, she is concerned with establishing a “unique” identity—one that is unconventional and untraditional (Juby, 2004: 23). For example, in *Miss Smithers* she claims that she will “establish [her] individuality through [her] unique behavior and talent” (Juby, 2004: 36). Similarly, Alice uses “personal expression” in *Alice Macleod: Realist at Last* to show that “[she’s] unique; an individual” (Juby, 2005: 205). In other words, Alice is concerned with being unlike others and in opposition to conformity.

Alice’s concern with forming a unique identity and figuring out her life’s direction is consistent throughout all three of the novels. Yet in the final book Alice tells

us that she no longer “need[s] any more [therapy] sessions with Bob or Ms. Deitrich” (258). This implies that her identity project has been completed and fulfilled—that she has “found” herself. In this sense, the *Alice, I Think* trilogy can be considered a *Bildungsroman*, which is German for a coming-of-age story about a protagonist’s growth from childhood into adulthood. Indeed, Alice is depicted as reaching adulthood insofar as she develops from a confused adolescent into an autonomous and self-determined young woman (Trites, 2000: 18). Because this kind of ending embraces conclusions and a “happily-ever-after” resolution, it enables the novels to conclude on an affirmative note and embrace the romantic modernist narrative (Trites, 2000: 14, 18). Alice’s depicted development, however, is also informed by the following interrelated discourses of development.

Clinical Discourses

According to Griffin (1993), clinical discourses construct various categories of what she calls “troubled youth” (178). Griffin (1993) argues that “troubled youth” are constructed as the source of particular “problems” by welfare agencies, health care professionals, and their immediate families (178). They are thought to have an array of “emotional and social issues” (Juby, 2000: 119) and, consequently, are treated under psychological, clinical, and psychiatric regimes (178). In other words, they are viewed by health care organizations as abnormal because of their psychological states-of-mind. However, some groups of youth are deemed more “at risk” of becoming deviant than others (178). Working-class or poor girls of colour, for example, are especially deemed “at risk” by welfare agencies and health care professionals, given that they are triply

marginalized by way of their gender, race, and class. Clinical discourses are especially relied upon to “diagnose” and “treat” the “disturbed” adolescent (178).

In the case of the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, adolescent girls of the English-speaking white middle-class, namely Alice, are seen as “at risk” of becoming deviant and thus in need of “treatment” (178). We know that Alice is Caucasian because she is pictured as such on each of the book covers. She also speaks about race from a normative white position (Jiwani, 2009: 32). For example, she is depicted as the all-knowing “white-eye” (Jiwani, 2009: 32) who is outside the frame and looking down on and positioning “race relations” (Juby, 2000: 73) in *Smithers* that she claims need “help.” Further, although her family struggles with money, she actively and continuously disassociates herself and her image from working-class life and values by, for example, insisting that she does not “want to look like a poster child for the working classes” in *Miss Smithers* (Juby, 2004: 17). Although Alice’s family does not have much money, Alice is concerned with belonging to the middle-class, as opposed to the working-class. *Alice, I Think* embraces and promotes middle-class values, therefore appealing to dominant the social group.

Yet despite her relatively privileged life as a white middle-class girl, Alice is nonetheless considered a “troubled youth” throughout the series. In the first novel, for example, Alice is continually watched and scrutinized by her parents according to what is “healthy” for teenage girls. Alice tells us that her parents “think I have some unhealthy role model adoption-negative hero worship issues going on” (Juby, 2000: 198) because she takes to her bed out of sadness after her “not normal” (Juby, 2000: 19) cousin Frank runs away with Linda, the girl who bullies Alice.

Consequently, Alice's parents insist that Alice attend counseling at the local Teens in Transition (Not Trouble) Club so that Alice can "help offset any problems related to [her] lack of peer interaction" (Juby, 2000: 11). Alice's mother even attends a conference on "dealing with difficult teens" (Juby, 2000: 23)—perhaps as a means to better "cope" and explain her adolescent daughter's "behavior" (Griffin, 1993: 180). Alice's parents believe that Alice is unable to care for herself in *Miss Smithers* so much so that they ask eleven-year old MacGregor to take care of "things" (Juby, 2004: 188) when Diane leaves to take part in her environmental protest. Even Alice admits that MacGregor has "a stabilizing influence on [her]" (Juby, 2000: 51).

Alice both resists and takes up the clinical ideas about "troubled youth" that her parents promote. In *Alice, I Think*, for example, she claims that she does not have "unhealthy role model adoption negative hero worship issues" (Juby, 2000: 198) when it comes to Frank, despite what her parents believe. She also claims that such "unhealthy" "episodes" are not caused by anything "wrong" with her but rather are "a direct reaction to some unbearable behavior of [her mother's]" (170). She also rejects her mother's "Co-dependent baggage" (Juby, 2000: 87), claiming that she is "Co-dependent no more" (87). Alice use of the psychological term Co-dependent indicates that these novels are aware of the degree to which clinical language permeates girls' talk and lives. It also indicates that Alice constructs her sense of self in relation to, or, more precisely, in opposition to, her understanding of her mother's sense of self. However, in *Miss Smithers*, Alice admits—again drawing from clinical discourses—that she always feels "more or less hysterical" (Juby, 2004: 15). She also explains that George, like MacGregor, has "a calming influence" (15) on her.

Similarly, in *Alice Macleod, Realist At Last*, Alice draws on clinical discourses to judge her family's good friend, Finn and his boyfriend, Delvin. She states that Delvin is "nice and healthy" (Juby, 2005: 12) because he is optimistic, fit, and practices activities that require flexibility and coordination. Finn, on the other hand, drinks, is always in new and "unhealthy" (12) relationships, and is cynical and bitchy. In this sense, Alice negotiates clinical ideas about what it means to be "healthy" and "normal" not just as a means to construct herself, but also to understand and organize others. By both resisting and drawing from such clinical ideas, Alice learns about herself and her place in the world. These novels clearly demonstrate the extent to which clinical discourses invade and prescribe many girls' lives.

Educational Discourses

Like clinical discourses, educational discourses are concerned with "troubled youth" for they emphasize "the need to educate and control such 'deviant youth' out of their 'problem behaviors'" (Griffin, 1993: 184). Educational discourses view groups of young people (some more than others) as deficient and in need of discipline by means of educational initiatives, such as schooling (186). Educational discourses imply that young people lack knowledge and hold "inappropriate" attitudes about, for example, contraception, sexuality, and parenthood (186). Along these lines, educational discourses encourage rational thinking and decision-making in order to eventually construct a unitary and rational youth who makes unitary and rational choices (186). Educational discourses are informed by, following Aapola *et al.* (2005), current economic conditions, such as the global expansion or contraction of industries, including: communications, services, and technology (57). Indeed, these things have re-shaped the labour market and

education (57). Along these lines, youth are expected to participate in education in order to transition into adulthood and enter this new economy (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 78).

Educational discourses are gender-specific. For girls, they emphasize female individualism, which according to McRobbie (2009), is a particular form of female success whereby all teenage girls are thought to be free to compete in education and work as privileged subjects (16). They also position all girls as “feisty, ambitious, motivated and independent” (Aapola *et al.*, 2005:26). In order to create and be responsible for the lives they want to live, teenage girls are taught to self-monitor and self-discipline their lives, with, for example, education (McRobbie, 2009: 19). In this way, educational discourses stress personal choice and self-improvement, as opposed to collective values and shared responsibilities (Brodie, 2009: 102). Unfortunately, these discourses tend to homogenize differences between different groups of girls, creating one-dimensional ideas about female “success,” “improvement,” and “choice.”

Within the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, Alice’s education is a crucial means by which she is trained and disciplined. For example, Alice is encouraged by her parents and Bob to attend school and figure out her “goals for [her] life” (13). Although this encouragement may have something to do with “new demands on families to provide for children in their adult years” (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 61) as well as new educational freedoms and opportunities, it also speaks about the degree to which Alice is depicted as experiencing gendered (and raced and classed) educational norms (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 74). Alice, like other teenage girls, is expected to know what she wants to do with her life, perhaps to ease her parents’ and Bob’s anxieties about her future.

Alice's education and training are further emphasized by means of her characterization as a "troubled youth" in school. For example, Alice is deemed unfit for the "regular" (Juby, 2000: 26) high school by school officials due to her "emotional and social issues" (119). The alternative school is depicted as an institution where "problem" children who are "are too far gone" (119) in regards to their "issues" are sent. Alice's attendance at the alternative school is not a problem for her, however, for she admits in the third novel that she "need[s] the discipline" (Juby, 2005: 123). Nonetheless, she still desires to attend the "normal" school, stating in *Alice, I Think* that her "goal is to go back to regular school" (Juby, 2000: 26). At the same time, Alice also claims that she is "not exactly regular school material or anything" (Juby, 2004: 31) and she is "only willing to conform so far" (Juby, 2005: 47). In addition, Alice explains in the first novel that it is unfair of her parents to expect her to know what she wants to be when she grows up, especially because she is only "the tender age of fifteen" (Juby, 2000: 16). Yet despite her unwillingness to subscribe to educational and disciplinary regimes, as well as dominant ideas about female "success," "improvement," and "choice," Alice nonetheless remains concerned with and even motivated by what is "normal" for girls in terms of, in this case, education and how she can "be a success in [her] own life" (200).

It is clear that Alice both resists and conforms to gendered ideas about female "success," "improvement," and "choice." Indeed, the completion of her list of life goals indicates that she learns and internalizes dominant narratives about the ways in which she can self-improve and become a "successful" (read "normal") teenage girl, in this case by means of education. As Trites (2000) claims, YAL characters, in this case Alice, use their power and privilege to interact with the powerful institutions that shape them

and that are vital to their growth (23, 33). The *Alice, I Think* trilogy brings to light the ways in which Alice struggles with and is rewarded by education and the role it plays in her life. By the end of the first novel, for example, Alice reinforces that her life is gaining “some direction” (Juby, 2000: 13) after all. She claims: “us career girls have so many hard decisions to make. Bob is going to be so proud” (242). This passage indicates that Alice is pleased with and motivated by her dedication to develop herself in the “right areas” (Juby, 2000: 13). As an attendant of the “regular” school, she is on the way to prominent career. Her excitement about this prospect is evident in that she cannot wait to boast to Bob about her newfound status as an “independent woman” (Juby, 2000: 241)—especially because she knows he will approve. Although the trilogy may make these struggles “a purely personal matter, obscuring the actual social and material constraints faced by different groups of women” (Lazar, 2005: 18), it nevertheless highlights the ways in which education can be both empowering and oppressive by those girls (textual or real) who embody it.

Discourses of Dependence and Family

Like educational discourses, discourses of dependence and the family are “crucial to constructions of adolescence” (Griffin, 1993: 188). Indeed, they construct adolescence as a transition point between the dependency of childhood and the “economic, social, and psychological independence which is associated with adult status” (Griffin, 1993: 188). According to Griffin (1993), this transition stage positions adolescents in relation to their parents (188). Girls, however, are often seen as not capable of this stage of independence, unlike boys, because they are still thought to be dependent upon and in need of the protection of boys and men (188). Although girls are

considered more sexually free and independent now than ever before (which is further discussed in the following two sections), they are still, according to Aapola *et al.* (2005), under the purview of patriarchal, heterosexist, racist, and classist notions of femininity and sexuality (149).

Notions of dependence and the tensions that exist within families about young people's rights, responsibilities, freedoms, and obligations are thus deeply gendered, for they reinforce patriarchal control over girls (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 86). Discourses of dependence also construct *all* girls as dutiful daughters who ought to become autonomous young women (86). In this way, discourses of dependence emphasize a linear (and patriarchal) progression from dependence to independence (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 149). Accordingly, this is a constant negotiation that involves not just the input of family members but also prevailing ideas about social rights and obligations (86).

Yet as Aapola *et al.* (2005) point out, discourses of dependence and the family are not just informed by the traditional family structure, for the realm of the family has recently undergone many changes, some of which are a result of women's redefined positions in society and new economic conditions (79). More women have jobs outside the home, as "their economic independence has increased with their growing engagement in the paid labour force" (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 81). Other changes that families have undergone include: higher divorce rates—that is, in comparison to the first part of the twentieth century; more alternatives to the heterosexual nuclear family; more altered relations between family members; and families with fewer children than before (79-80).

In addition, Aapola *et al.* (2005) explain that conceptions about parenting have become more liberal and child-centred (80). Parents are also required more now than ever before to negotiate and fulfill the demands and responsibilities of the state in regards to their children's upbringing (80). In Aapola *et al.*'s (2005) words, "families have a crucial role in translating society's demands for their children" (80). Although these changes are not necessarily visible or outwardly apparent, they have material effects in terms of how youth experience the transition from childhood to adulthood. More importantly, these underlying changes impact the ways in which this transition is represented and constructed, especially within the context of discourses of dependence and the family.

Discourses of dependence and the family appear throughout the *Alice, I Think* novels. For example, Alice's family is portrayed as being made-up of a wide variety of unconventional characters that defy gender and sexuality norms. These include: an unemployed father, a feminist and environmental activist mother, a male family friend who is homosexual (Finn), a girl friend who identifies as a lesbian (George), and an anti-social female cousin (Frank) who, according to Alice, looks like a boy and has drug problem.

Diane, Alice's mother, defies gender norms insofar as she identifies as feminist and is concerned with the negative ways in which women are treated. For instance, in *Miss Smithers* she teaches her daughter "about the exploitation of women" (Juby, 2004: 20) by means of "feminist books" (94) and reinforces the importance of independence and nonconformity in Alice's life (Juby, 2000: 39). Diane is therefore concerned not with reproducing patriarchal attitudes but rather with resisting and even challenging

them (and encouraging her daughter to do the same). At the same time, she is responsible for all the cooking, cleaning, and other household responsibilities. She provides for the family's emotional needs and, unlike Alice's father, John, she is the sole breadwinner. Alice tells us: "my mother made all the money in our family" (Juby, 2005: 22).

Despite a gig here and there with his band, *The Hoar Hounds*, John "hasn't ever had a regular job" (Juby, 2005: 23) and "is not exactly a go-getter" (Juby, 2005:24). He also rarely contributes to the family candle-making business. As Alice says in the third novel, "helping mom run the candle-making operation hardly counts because he delegated most of the work to our one employee, Betty Lou" (Juby, 2005: 23). Alice's father is clearly a non-traditional male character insofar as he does not provide for the family financially. He does, however, participate in domestic labour activities when Diane is away at the environmental protest by cooking, scheduling, and coordinating the family's appointments and events. Regardless, his wife, Diane, is the sole breadwinner and plays the additionally unconventional role of social activist.

Alice's parents are also non-traditional in other ways. For example, they endorse the new and more liberal parenting style to which Aapola *et al.* (2005) refer. That is, they encourage "a less hierarchical relationship" (Juby, 2000: 21) between themselves and their two children. Despite that they monitor their daughter according to clinical ideas about "troubled youth," they also provide Alice with a certain degree of flexibility in her life. For example, when Alice goes to meet Evan in *Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last*, she tells her father where she is going and he responds with little concern. "I'm going out for a while" (Juby, 2005: 232), she says, and his response is a mere "Okay!"

(232). Alice conveys unhappiness with his response: “and that was it. No ‘when will you be home?’ No ‘who are you going to see?’” (232). This kind of response (or lack thereof) is obviously not what Alice expects, or wants. Although her parents monitor her life, they also provide flexibility in allowing her to make her own decisions and create her own timetable. Alice’s family draws from discourses of the family insofar as they are represented as non-traditional and constructed against the nuclear and patriarchal family ideal.

It should be noted, however, that Alice’s parents do not stray too far from tradition, for despite the unconventional features of their family, Diane, like so many women, continues to “bear the brunt of domestic responsibilities” (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 91) and the white heterosexual family also remains the “normal” family form (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 94) in these novels. The novel’s portrayal of Alice is therefore both challenges and reinforces the rigid patriarchal family of the past (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 83).

Alice’s family is central to her development as an adolescent, for they are portrayed as the key means by which she negotiates discourses of dependence (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 91). For example, she is depicted as rebellious from her family and other people (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 91). She wants to “find out for [her]self” (Juby, 2004: 21) what life is all about and describes herself as a “strong-minded” (Juby, 2005: 25), “fierce,” and “proud” (Juby, 2004: 154) girl, a girl of “independence and nonconformity” (Juby, 2000: 39). She attributes these qualities to her “warlike Scottish heritage” (Juby, 2004: 251). In this instance, Alice is aligning with a prominently white and Anglophone history perhaps as a means by which she can identify with and feel a sense of power and privilege. Alice resists traditional ideas about girls as dependent

solely on others while at the same time abiding to developmental ideas about adolescence as a time of rebellion from families and adult authorities (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 92). In other words, she is depicted as transitioning from childhood to adulthood by maintaining rebellion from—as opposed to dependence on—her parents. As a means to both resist and take up ideas about dependence and the family, Alice’s character also negotiates and utilizes her privilege and power as a white middle class girl.

Despite her rebellion, however, Alice is aware that she is required to abide to the dutiful daughter role. When she attends a counselling session with Bob’s temporary replacement, Ms. Deitrich, in *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last*, she is at first horrified that Ms. Deitrich thinks she ought to help out her family more by way of cleaning, cooking, and contributing to the finances (Juby, 2005: 122). Soon thereafter, however, she realizes that “it’s time to step up to the plate at home” (122). Alice is therefore both a rebellious adolescent and a dutiful daughter insofar as she tries to “figure out what it means to be a good girl” (Juby, 2004: 5). In this way, Alice negotiates discourses of dependence and the family, sometimes conforming to them, other times resisting them, but always subject to the ideas they construct and reinforce. Alice uses her power and privilege as a white and middle-class teenage girl to resist and conform to dominant patriarchal discourses of female dependence—despite that her privileged positioning reinforces some the patriarchal ideas about girls she aims to resist.

Discourses of Puberty and Maturity

Dominant discourses of puberty and maturity construct puberty as a universal state of development. Within this context, puberty is constructed according to masculinist and Enlightenment models that link the physical and sexual changes of

puberty with the emergence of a rational male subject (Driscoll, 2002: 81). In this model, the physical changes of puberty are thought to consist of hormonal flows and bodily reshaping while the sexual changes are thought to consist of the formation of genital organs and sexual desires (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 143, Driscoll, 2002: 85). However, while boys' sexual changes are often welcomed and even valued, girls' are believed to be morally questionable, uncontrollable, and in need of channelling into "proper" (hetero)sexual practices (Driscoll, 2002: 84, Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 143).

Driscoll (2002) nicely summarizes the gendered ways in which dominant discourses of puberty construct girls and boys differently. Such discourses, she claims, consist of "an understanding of male/female puberty as respectively visible/invisible; an attribution of greater difficulty, mystery, and importance to feminine puberty; and the articulation of puberty as physical development with irreducible social implications that are more pervasive for girls than for boys" (85). Accordingly, representations of girls' puberty are embedded in ideas about discipline, education, and self-production, advising girls about and helping adults cope with the "dramatic reconstitution of girls in puberty" (Driscoll, 2002: 79). Puberty is also thought to move girls toward becoming "real" "women" and "fully" "female"—physically, sexually, and emotionally (Driscoll, 2002: 81, 87).

This universalized and gendered period is also considered, within the context of dominant discourses of puberty and maturity, a life stage wherein a "normatively inscribed mature physical, sexual and emotional identity" is established (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 147). In other words, the physical and sexual changes that are thought to come along with puberty are considered the means by which the mature subject is constituted

(Driscoll, 2002: 80). In such a model, this life stage is understood as a linear sequence, much like the developmental transition from dependent child to autonomous adult (Driscoll, 2002: 83).

Female puberty is not just dominated by Enlightenment models about the subject, it is also dominated by medical and clinical models. Medical experts, according to Aapola *et al.* (2005), promote a hygiene-based discourse of reproduction, requiring mothers to teach their pubescent daughters about the basic facts of reproduction, particularly the hygienic management of menstruation (143). Ideas about girls' bodily development are embedded with resonances of motherhood and the "importance" of reproductive capacities (Driscoll, 2002: 84). These resonances are naturalized as "facts of life" (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 143) by doctors and dominant discourses of puberty and maturity. Dominant ideas about girls' puberty and maturity are also influenced by the medical realm's control over and the definition of girls' bodies (45). As Aapola *et al.* (2005) state, the medicalization of women's bodies defines them as medical problems that need treatment. Frost (2001) also claims that when girls hit puberty, they are introduced to the medicalization of their bodies (73). The medical realm presents girls' bodies and lives as ethnographic curiosities and treats them as individually responsible and inherently lacking or wrong (often psychologically) in some way (Gonick, 2004: 396, 397).

Discourses of puberty and maturity appear in the trilogy in terms of Alice's negotiation of her sense of self. Alice is depicted as experiencing particular physical and bodily changes, all of which impact her identity and development from a child into a young woman. For example, in the third book, *Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last*, Alice

tells us: “before I turned sixteen, half the time I forgot that I even had a physical body. I was all head. Then I turned sixteen and somebody shut off my head and now I’m all body. How weird is that?” (Juby, 2005: 238). Not only does this passage imply that Alice’s “real” self—her adult self—has emerged and consists only of her body and not at all of her mind, it also states that Alice has been previously unaware her body. That is, this passage suggests that Alice has gone through puberty without even knowing or being aware of it. Alice has no role in her own bodily changes—changes that are apparently so universal and natural that they need no explanation.

If Alice was not aware of her body before, however, she is now. She has become more in tune with the appearance of other bodies, stating at a party that “all I was aware of was their bodies” (Juby, 2005: 238). She has also become more aware of her own embodied feelings. For example, she feels “sick” (217) when looked at like an inanimate object by Evan and “powerful” (237) when walking by Trent, the manager at *The Number Four* who would not hire her. Feeling “powerful” and “sick” are both portrayed as being driven from Alice’s body and her reaction to a particular event or feeling.

Along with her bodily awareness comes an awareness of its “need [for] discipline” (Juby, 2005: 123). In order to discipline her body, Alice pursues martial arts (in addition to education), explaining that “body fat” (Juby, 2004: 220), “health” (221), “personal discipline, controlling oneself, and working hard” (221) are serious issues for her as a martial artist. In this way, Alice participates in the “fantasy that control over her body is both necessary and possible” (Driscoll, 2002: 94).

Alice’s erroneous attempt to control and discipline her body also occurs in the first novel. For example, at the end of the *Alice, I Think* book, she is asked to join a

drumming workshop. She does so reluctantly, feeling uncomfortable to say no to her mother's "counterculture" (Juby, 2000: 215) friends, who have invited her. But Alice begins to get into the drumming music: her "hands were flowing to the rhythm almost against [her] will" (217) and she became "powerless over the beat" (217). However, when the workshop is over Alice feels a "sickening shame" (217) at her "lack of personal integrity and strength, [her] overwhelming weakness" (217). This may be a result of dualistic Enlightenment and masculinist ideas about the female body as unruly and inferior to the mind. Indeed, Alice listens to her rational mind without giving into her "weak" and "feminine" bodily feelings, which her mind views as "sick" (217) and in need of disciplinary action (by, for example, martial arts). These passages depict Alice as not only unaware of her body, but also uninterested in and disgusted by it, calling its "unruly" desire to flow to rhythm and music a shameful and sickening act. Alice is clearly negotiating social ideas about puberty as a time of universalized bodily changes whereby girls learn that their minds are superior to their sexed bodies, which ultimately need to be disciplined and controlled.

Alice, however, also resists dominant social ideas about puberty and maturity. For example, although the idea of becoming a wife and mother is brought up repeatedly throughout the novels, Alice remains uninterested in these roles. In *Alice, I Think*, for instance, Alice worries about Aubrey coming to stay for the weekend with her family. She fears that he will "slow down [her] Life Goals progress. Unless I add wife and mother to the list" (Juby, 2000: 81). Alice goes on to say that she is "not ready for any of the rites of womanhood" (82) and "doesn't buy into that bubbly, happy-girl stuff" (Juby, 2004: 9). The topic comes up again later in the book when her mother, Diane, assumes

that Alice will have children at some point in her life. She says to Alice: “parents support their children, regardless of their feelings. You will understand *when* you have kids” (259, my emphasis). Alice (and her mother) are aware that women are expected to marry and bear (and raise!) children. Alice goes against popular notions of womanhood and femininity by desiring other things, like, for example, male-dominated and identified martial arts and screenwriting. In this way, Alice resists ideas about puberty and maturity as a time when traditional womanhood and women’s roles are emphasized and encouraged.

Alice both resists and conforms to the ideas that are circulated by discourses of puberty and maturity, for she defines and shapes her identity as masculine (as opposed to feminine) and remains concerned with untraditional roles for women. At the same time, she feels sickened by her body and learns the importance of self-regulation and self-discipline. Alice’s negotiation ironically invokes the very patriarchal and gendered ideas about girls and women that she seeks to challenge, for she remains locked in gendered social order that constructs masculinity as superior to femininity and the mind as superior to the body. Clearly, Alice takes up these dominant ideas “as [her] own” (Davies, 1990-1999: 22) in order to constitute her unique sense of self (Driscoll, 2002: 93).

Discourses of Post-feminism

Following McRobbie (2009), I will now explore post-feminist discourses in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy. Under the rubric of post-feminist discourses, a variety of distinct yet intersecting discourses are examined, including discourses of (hetero)sexuality, neo-

liberalism, and femininity. Counter discourses and discourses of resistance to post-feminist discourses are also examined, as are notions of power and privilege.

According to McRobbie (2009), post-feminism is a kind of cultural landscape that is marked by an anti-feminist sentiment (1). Although post-feminism can be, very generally, considered a backlash to Second Wave feminist gains of the 1970's and 1980's, it cannot be defined solely as such, for it is much more complex (McRobbie, 2009: 1). Indeed, it draws on a vocabulary of words including "girl power" (Byers, 2005: 191), "empowerment", and "choice" (McRobbie, 2009: 1), all the while converting these elements into much more individualistic, as opposed to collective, terms. It also embraces a "me" feminism as opposed to a collective "we" feminism (Lazar, 2005: 18). These "me" elements are then "deployed in this new [post-feminist] guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism" (McRobbie, 2009:1).

In other words, feminism is incorporated through post-feminist discourse by a range of institutions, such as law, education, medicine, employment, and popular culture only to be dismissed as out of date and no longer needed (McRobbie, 2009: 14). McRobbie (2009) implies that this "new" feminism has arisen and caught on because of a) a nostalgic longing for a conservative white past; b) feelings of anxiety and fear about women's and girls' new social roles, which have come about as a result of new opportunities and rapidly changing social and cultural systems; c) feelings of anxiety and fear about forms of "difference" based on gender, race, ethnicity, class, ability, sexuality, and so on; d) a desire to use different groups of women and girls as scapegoats—as individuals that we can blame and dismiss in an attempt to avoid looking

at patriarchal social structures, intuitions, discourses, and norms; and e) many white men's desire for their "rightful place as a man in the world" (39).

Post-feminism's responses to and subsequent undoing of feminism, according to McRobbie (2009), is also inextricably connected with the category of young women, fractured and unstable as that category may be (11). Teenage girls negotiate post-feminist discourse—and its language of empowerment and choice—to imagine themselves as social and sexual subjects (Byers, 2005: 192). For example, Alice shapes her life and identity by means of popular ideas about feminism. As I have previously stated, she refers to herself as a feminist and participates in unconventional activities for girls, including screenwriting and martial arts. She also thinks of herself as an independent young woman who is free to choose her own career path (as a cultural critic, 'zine witer, and screenwriter), dress as she pleases, and outwardly express her sexual desire. Alice actively participates in popular culture as a producer, consumer, and feminist subject (Byers, 2005: 192). She draws on discourses of post-feminism to negotiate her developing identity (Aapola *et al.*, 2009: 21).

Alice also takes up popular notions of "girl power" and post-feminist empowerment. In *Alice, I Think*, for example, she identifies with feminism and as a feminist in order to negotiate a form of feminist empowerment. In her very first diary entry, she aligns with feminism, claiming that from the age of four she "could belt out show tunes and feminist anthems like 'I am A Woman'" (Juby, 2000: 1). She also insists that she is not a "paragon of normalcy" (11), particularly because she has lacked interest in boys and peer interaction, and has been home-schooled, which "hasn't exactly set [her] on the road to being voted most popular" (5, 11). In this entry she also calls herself

a maladjusted “pessimistic, bitter misfit” (39) and an “object of ridicule” who can “get behind” (95) feminism. In this way, Alice embodies the notion of “girl power” because she sees her difference from others is a source of feminist empowerment. She uses feminism as a means of resisting “normality” (Hey, 1997: 115).

In the last book, however, Alice is dismissive of feminism, claiming that it is “unrealistic” (Juby, 2005: 73) and “too potent” (118). Instead of identifying with feminism, here Alice is critical of it. While she is portrayed as at times identifying with feminism, she is also depicted as remaining indifferent to it. This suggests that Alice is negotiating conflicting ideas about feminism as both a positive force that encourages her to take pride in her “fierce” and “proud” (Juby, 2004: 154) individuality, as well as a negative force that envisions feminism as an out-of-date movement. Alice is clearly engaging with post-feminist discourses, which replaces out-of-date Second and Third Wave feminism with a new kind of female empowerment, one that encourages individuality among girls and the importance of their roles as sexual and feminine subjects, which are further discussed in the following sections.

Discourses of (Hetero)sexuality

According to McRobbie (2009) “a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure” (18) currently exists for young women. Discourses of post-feminism stress a new sexual contract that not only encourages teenage girls to meet and participate in commercialized and patriarchal notions of traditional femininity, it also requires their active negotiation of heterosexuality and their maintenance of their sexual desirability (McRobbie, 2009: 67). This new regime also promotes a desire for heterosexual male attention, fantasies of

heterosexual romance and marriage, and notions of active female heterosexuality, as opposed to traditional ideas about passive female heterosexuality (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 30; McRobbie, 2009: 21, 67). In this way, the new sexual contract encourages teenage girls to reclaim their “lost” femininity, enjoy traditional feminine pleasures, and recover their supposedly suppressed sexualities (McRobbie, 2009: 21).

Despite its emphasis on active female sexuality, this new sexual contract invokes and reinforces the very patriarchal ideas about female sexuality that it pits itself against. Many scholars claim that these patriarchal ideas have been passed down from the Victorian era, which essentialized girls’ sexualities and viewed them as passive and passionless, as well as responsive, restrained, and the sources and sites of pleasure for male consumption (Frost, 2001: 110, Christian-Smith, 1994: 222). Within this context, girls’ desires for the opposite sex are seen and constructed as natural, healthy, and the “proper” form of female sexuality (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 147, Christian-Smith, 1994: 222). “Bad” sexuality is considered “at risk” behavior; it involves being sexually active, as opposed to passive (Frost, 2001: 122). As Younger (2009) states, girls’ sexual desires are “often viewed as a primitive, taboo drive[s] that must be regulated” (2).

Delivosky (2010) refers to as compulsory “white” heterosexuality, which is a powerful political institution that is socially and culturally imposed, organized, and scripted according to a hegemonic, capitalist, patriarchal, and “white” framework (55, 56). Girls’ sexualities are represented according to compulsory “white” heterosexuality because it is understood as the only, the natural, and the normal context for girls’ sexual expression. Being “white” and heterosexual, for example, are the standards by which all girls are measured, judged, and monitored.

Although traditional and patriarchal ideas circulate about girls as passive sex objects, girls are, paradoxically, also considered desiring sexual subjects who make their own choices (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 134). In other words, although traditional discourses of female chastity and sexual vulnerability are still very powerful, they are now met with new and conflicting post-feminist discourses on young women's sexualities (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 133). Girls are treated as sex objects who, although active and desiring subjects, remain the source of male pleasure and consumption. In this way, their so-called "active" (hetero)sexual desires exist within and are shaped by the patriarchal structures of power that they are seen as challenging.

Girls' sexualities are also often defined in terms of deviance—deviance from, for example, the heterosexual norms and patriarchal ideas about female chastity and sexual passivity (Trites, 2000: 87). Cultural texts, including YAL, define teenage girls' sexuality in terms of deviancy, implying that girls ought to feel guilty if they stray from the "white" heterosexual standard and experience any kind of sexual desire (88). The discourse of sexual deviancy, according to Griffin (1993), also constructs girls as the "promiscuous" and "passive victims of unscrupulous men *and* as actively 'deviant' in heterosexual terms" (141, author's emphasis). These women are watched and governed with patriarchal control and constructed as "deviants" that need to be "dealt with, punished or 'helped'" (171, 144). Some girls, however, are constructed as more "deviant" than others. For example, those girls who are privileged in terms of (hetero)sexuality, race, and class will potentially be considered less "at risk" (at least in terms of deviancy) than those girls who are not.

Discourses of (hetero)sexuality appear frequently in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy. For instance, Alice is always portrayed with reference to compulsory “white” heterosexuality. In the first novel she meets a young man, Goose, with whom she experiments sexually (Juby, 2000: 235). She encourages Goose to come with her to a “little cloakroom” (232) in the high school and insists that it is “time for some sex” (230). Since Goose is not “exactly taking the bull by the horns” (234), Alice decides to take matters into her own hands by grabbing his and putting “it under [her] vest” (234). However, although she initiates the sexual encounter with Goose, she also questions whether or not her actions are complete “lunacy” (232), perhaps because she is aware of social ideas about female sexuality as “deviant” and “promiscuous” and fears being called, for example, a slut.

Indeed, after her sexual encounter with Goose, she feels “sickened” (238) by what happened. Similarly, when she is pushed to have sexual intercourse against her will in the third novel by charming Evan, she thinks she should “let [it] happen” (Juby, 2005: 241) and “just get it over with” (241). Although she finally gets the courage to say no to Evan’s advances, she also believes that a wrinkle that has developed on her face is a form of punishment for her “wanton sexual behavior” (243). Alice is depicted as asserting sexual freedom, but not without feeling the pressure from social ideas about girls as sexual, but not “too” sexual. She is aware that she is constantly measured, judged, and monitored by “white” heterosexual standards and thus is careful about how much or how little (hetero)sexual desire she expresses, for she does not want cross into “at risk” behavior, such as (hetero)sexual deviancy and promiscuity.

Alice also negotiates (hetero)sexual norms while she is dating Vince in *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last*. For example, she wonders if her desire to go on a date with Vince makes her a slut. She asks: “how can I be a slut when I’m still a virgin? I’m still very confused” (Juby, 2005: 67). Alice is clearly aware of social ideas about female sexual desire as promiscuous and wants to make sure she does not cross from “appropriate” sexual behavior to “inappropriate” sexual behavior. Contradictory and gendered messages about girls’ sexual desires are therefore negotiated by Alice in the trilogy. Alice actively participates in, consents to, and receives pleasure from heterosexual male attention and heterosexual activity, in addition to remaining concerned with patriarchal ideas about “proper” female sexuality. In this way, Alice embodies the tension between female sexuality as passive, responsive, and restrained and female sexuality as active, initiating, and unrestrained.

Alice’s depicted embodiment of such tensions also reveals the degree to which compulsory “white” heterosexuality is represented as the legitimate and “normal” form of sexuality in the trilogy. For example, in the first novel Alice claims that she feels “nice, positive things” (92) when holding hands with a boy. She also insists that she “will be a success in [her] own life” by taking part in a “more extensive boy-girl interaction” (200). Likewise, in *Miss Smithers* Alice is determined to have sexual intercourse: “but soon [George] won’t have anything on me. I’ll have sex *and* I’ll be a [Miss Smithers] Candidate” (46, author’s emphasis), she claims. This passage indicates that Alice is determined to become both a Miss Smithers candidate and, more importantly, a non-virgin. She considers her “march toward [hetero]sexual experience” (46) the key means by which she can one-up George and become a successful and

“normal” teenage girl. Furthermore, Alice’s ongoing concern with (hetero)sexual intercourse and activities throughout all three novels reveals the degree to which heterosexuality is compulsory for Alice in order for her to “succeed.” Although queer characters are represented in these books (Quinn and George, for example), and thus a (limited) space is opened up for resistance, heterosexuality remains the only option for Alice, who ultimately offers readers a safe version of normative girlhood.

Discourses of Neoliberalism

Discourses of post-feminism are also connected to the political ideology of neo-liberalism. According to Janine Brodie (2009), neo-liberalism is a philosophy of Western governance that is concerned with “the ways in which citizens understand themselves, articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences” (95). Neo-liberalism also “reconstitutes the [post-war] welfare state and relations with its citizens” (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 36). That is, the post-war welfare state has been reconstituted within this new neo-liberal form of governance as a social world wherein individuals are fully responsible for their selves and social citizenship is emphasized (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 36). Under neo-liberalism, each individual is solely responsible for making her life meaningful and self-monitoring according to social citizenship norms and gendered (and raced and classed) ideas about the “good citizen” (Brodie, 2009: 99). Those women (and men) who do benefit from this new political and social order are usually white and upper-class, often deeming their prosperity as “a measure of the individual” (Brodie, 2009: 104).

Brodie (2009) asserts that neo-liberalism is also governed by one central paradox: on the one hand, its measures of social exclusion have become increasingly

gendered. On the other hand, it has completely erased the goal of gender equality from public discourse and the formation of public policy (98). This is certainly the case in regards to post-feminist discourses, which would have us believe that equality has been achieved and therefore feminism is no longer needed. As Lazar (2005) points out, post-feminist discourses promote girls' equal rights to, for example, education, labour force participation, property ownership, and abortion and fertility (17). Yet, paradoxically, girls (some more than others) continue to be exploited and objectified by racist, heterosexist, and classist patriarchal culture and society. In this way, gender inequality is intensified because it is dismissed by neo-liberalism and post-feminism as irrelevant and no longer an issue (Brodie, 2009: 104). As McRobbie (2009) puts it, post-feminism "plays with" current debates about women as sexually exploited while, at the same time, enacting sexism (16).

Within the context of post-feminist discourses, neo-liberalism also emphasizes girls' individualism, their social obligations as citizens, and their equal rights with men. Indeed, teenage girls are thought to be able to freely make personal choices that will (self) determine the paths their lives will take. At the same time, they are expected to assert themselves as sexual and feminine subjects (McRobbie, 2009: 16).

Alice is depicted as engaging with discourses of neo-liberalism throughout the trilogy. First, she is portrayed as making "free" choices and having total responsibility over her life and self. Indeed, she creates a life goals list, which will help her become "the person [she] want[s] to be" (Juby, 2000: 61). Similarly, in *Miss Smithers*, Alice is determined to pursue a career as a journalist and 'zine writer, as if working toward a designated career path will insure that she has a "successful" life. In *Alice MacLeod*,

Realist At Last, Alice is portrayed a “working woman” (Juby, 2005: 229) who, although still “deeply misunderstood” (206), is more concerned than ever with “some much-needed acceptance” (190). In all three of these novels, Alice is individually responsible for making her life meaningful. She is also depicted as having total responsibility over her life and self, making personal choices and decisions that work to guarantee her a life of success and reinforce that she is indeed a “good citizen.”

Second, Alice is depicted as no longer needing feminism because she has already been granted equality and sexual pleasure. Although in the first novel she identifies as a “maladjusted” (Juby, 2000: 11) “pessimistic, bitter misfit” (39) who can “get behind” (95) feminism, by the second and third novels she is depicted as no longer needing feminism. For example, as discussed above, she is portrayed as having freedom to be a desiring subject, one that, albeit, struggles with patriarchal and heteronormative ideas about female sexuality. In addition, she is also portrayed as having equal opportunities with young men, which implies that gender-inequality has been eliminated for her and girls like her. Alice is also depicted as having access to education in the first novel. She can also easily work and drive and read and enjoy male-identified and male-centred books, such as *Lord of the Rings*. In the second novel, she takes up martial arts, a male-dominated physical regimen, finally figuring out that she is “good at something” (Juby, 2000: 160). Similarly, in the third book, Alice takes pleasure in believing she is the male breadwinner of her family. She tells us that she is “sort of like one of those men in the 1950s who went to work every day to support his family and was happy to do it” (Juby, 2005: 230). She works two jobs, one as a hiking guide and the other as a helper at Betty Lou’s yarn store. Unlike her deadbeat father, John, who “is like one of those

flighty 1950s females who is disobedient and ungrateful and has no idea that it's her part of the social contract to cook the meals and clean the house" (230), Alice is capable of taking on the breadwinner role. Aligning with the 1950's man enables Alice to construct herself as a doer and provider who has achieved gender equality and does not suffer from a patriarchal past. Indeed, she has adopted a powerful role that women during the 1950's lacked (or seemingly so). Alice is empowered by a "me" feminism that embraces active female sexuality and gender equality. Although she participates in collective values and shared responsibilities for the sake of her family, her priority is to be an "independent woman" (Juby, 2000: 241) and a "career girl" (241) who remains rebellious from her family.

Gender equality is not the only form of equality emphasized in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy. For example, in the first book Alice stresses the importance of equal opportunities for those who are marginalized in Canada as a result of their race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. She claims: "I want to do my part for race relations in this town" (Juby, 2000: 73). Apparently, this involves having an "authentically" (71) "Native" (71) friend, a co-worker who wears a "Muslim veil-type thing" (70), and a family friend who is a homosexual male hair stylist (51). Not only are these characters stereotypically depicted, they are also denied substantial voices and central roles in the novel. Certainly, this is reflective of contemporary Canadian society and culture, in which oppressed peoples are denied autonomy and access to social resources (Collins, 2000: 320). Similarly, in the third book, Alice briefly dates Vince, a "very poor" (Juby, 2005: 87), "disadvantaged financially", and "brown" (140) young man who she feels "bad for" (87). Alice is clearly the all-knowing "white-eye" (Jiwani, 2009: 32) who

speaks about race (and class) from a normative white standard. As a girl who is white and “middle class” (87) (well, “minus the money” (87), that is), Alice has the ability to determine “what is “normal,” who belongs—and therefore, who is excluded” (Hall, 1997: 10). Likewise, when Alice realizes that George is a lesbian, she is open-minded to it, claiming that “sexuality is a continuum” (Juby, 2005: 185). Yet Alice is also uncomfortable with George’s lesbianism. For example, she worries about whether or not George “ever [had] feelings for [her]” (185). Although socially acceptable, homosexuality is not “normal;” rather, it provokes doubt, reluctance, and hesitation.

The neo-liberal discourses embedded in *Alice, I Think* subtly convey that all girls and women, regardless of race, class or ethnicity, have the same access to various institutions and therefore the same number of opportunities as men and boys. Although these novels allude to the degree to which sexism and racism persist in Canada, they do not question the role that these social attributes currently play in our society and culture as well as in girls’ lives and the formation of their identities.

Discourses of Femininity

Deliovsky (2010) contends that femininity is a socially and culturally constructed and enforced system that emphasizes “idealized ‘white’ feminine beauty” (Deliovsky, 2010: 101) as well as self-surveillance, self-management, self-presentation, feminine grooming, excessive feminine adornment, heterosexual male attention, fantasies of heterosexual marriage and romance, hyper-sexualized and commercialized sexuality, and the performance and regulation of (feminine) behaviors (Deliovsky, 2010: 106, 108; McRobbie, 2009: 18, 21, 67). Under the regime of femininity, all girls are expected to engage with “specified practices which are understood as both progressive but also

“consummately and reassuringly feminine” (McRobbie, 2009: 57, 16, 61). They are also required to assert themselves as (hetero)sexual and feminine subjects not only in leisure and in everyday life, but also within the workplace and governmental domains. In addition, girls are expected to engage with emerging neo-liberalized and social and economic arrangements, as well as the new sexual contract (McRobbie, 2009: 57).

This system of femininity is a crucial aspect of post-feminism, which although seemingly progressive and empowering for girls, is actually deeply conservative and promotes “a highly conservative mode of feminine empowerment” (McRobbie, 2009: 27). Discourses of femininity are a means by which such notions of female empowerment are encouraged and promoted. As previously discussed, post-feminism envisions feminism as out of date and no longer needed because it is thought to rob girls of the feminine pleasures and practices that they once were able to enjoy, such as gossip, fantasies of marriage and romance, and beauty regimes (McRobbie, 2009: 21). In McRobbie’s (2009) words: “post-feminism “re-instate[s] the spectacle of excessive femininity” (66) and “endorse[es] this public femininity which appears to undermine, or at least unsettle this new power accruing to women” (66).

Emphasizing femininity enables those who use post-feminist discourses to celebrate traditional feminine pleasures and practices and reclaim girls’ lost femininity, all-the-while abandoning a critique of the ways in which femininity is socially and culturally constructed according to patriarchal, racist, classist, and heterosexist ideals (McRobbie, 2009: 57). As McRobbie (2009) states, post-feminist masquerade is “a mode of feminine inscription” (McRobbie, 2009: 64) and a “feminine totality” (66) that hides not only its patriarchal power and authority but also a deep social anxiety about

girls' "Otherness" (70). Post-feminism and indeed femininity therefore masquerade as progressive and empowering but are, in fact, dependent upon and work to promote the patriarchal structures of power that they are based upon. No matter how appropriately "feminine" girls become, they remain objects to be further manipulated, fetishized, contained, and monitored by a system that constantly signifies their "limitations," their own "fearful lack[s]" (McRobbie, 2009: 106), their threats as unruly leaky bodies—as girls (McRobbie, 2009: 67). In this way, femininity is used to bring girls' sexual difference "to order" (McRobbie, 2009: 107).

Alice negotiates post-feminist notions of femininity throughout the trilogy, despite that she does not align herself with femininity or contemporary girlhood—in fact, she completely disassociates from these things. For example, she is described as "not most girls" (Juby, 2004: 5) and not "traditionally pretty" (Juby, 2005: 67). Furthermore, she explains that she is "not even sure if [she's] a girl" (Juby, 2000: 64), or at least doubts "very much that [she's] a good girl" (Juby, 2004: 6). She also claims that she is opposed to "conformity, power, [and] popularity" (Juby, 2004: 78). As previously discussed, Alice also tells us that she is not "ready for any of the rights of womanhood" (Juby, 2000: 82), including social expectations placed on women to become wives and mothers, at least not in the beginning of the first novel, and does not think that she suffers from the influence of "media images of female perfection" (Juby, 2000: 94). Alice also disassociates herself from femininity by actively dismissing stereotypically "feminine" characteristics, specifically being excessively emotional and sensitive, in either herself or other girls. For example, in *Alice, I Think*, Alice expresses annoyance

with “overly sensitive girls” (Juby, 2000:109) on countless occasions, despite that she also describes herself as “so sensitive” (137).

Similarly, when Alice meets Goose in *Alice, I Think*, she explains that she is “overwhelmed by sappiness and irritation” yet has “enough problems without adding squishiness to the equation” (Juby, 2000: 229). She also hates “the sappy way [she] get[s] around him” (Juby, 2004: 11). Alice is also sickened by public displays of affection, saying that “any more loving displays could have been the end of me” (Juby, 2005: 257). Finally, she explains that she “doesn’t buy into that bubbly, happy-girl stuff” (Juby, 2004: 9). Alice is depicted as dismissing characteristics that are associated with emotionality and sensitivity. Within humanistic and Enlightenment models, such traits are associated with the body and considered “feminine” and therefore somehow inferior to “masculine” qualities associated with mind, including rationality and assertiveness. Alice dismisses such “feminine” traits as a way in which she can align herself with masculinity and “you know, [be] detached” (Juby, 2004: 19). Alice may also do so in order to demonstrate that she can compete and participate in the neo-liberal world like a man.

Although Alice does not identify as a girl or align herself with femininity, she is nonetheless depicted as engaging in “feminine” activities, including beauty, fashion, magazines, and body culture, as a means by which she can discipline herself. She also engages in such activities as a way to construct a feminine identity for herself (McRobbie, 2009: 61). For example, in all three of the novels she is concerned with “begin[ing] to fit in” (Juby, 2004: 5), looking “presentable enough” (5), and trying to “figure out what it means to be a good girl” (5). She also wants to “blossom into [a]

pretty person” (Juby, 2005: 67). Furthermore, she turns to the latest issue of *Cosmopolitan* for advice (Juby, 2000: 86), plays around with make-up (Juby, 2000: 118), and develops a new and unique look for herself by way new clothes and a new hair cut (Juby, 2000: 17).

Alice also negotiates a “feminine” appearance and identity when Karen offers to give her a make-over for a high-school party in *Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last*. Alice is excited for the “transformation” (Juby, 2005: 210) and curious about what it will feel like to be “well-dressed” (208) as well as “detached, superior, but also approachable” (210). Yet when Alice arrives at the party in her make-over outfit, she feels like she “disappeared and just left [her] body behind for people to look at” (212). She describes feeling like “an inanimate object” (217), like someone else, “someone who wore tight clothes, someone who wanted to be sure that everyone knew she was a girl” (212). Alice later admits that the clothes she wore that night “didn’t even reflect [her] true personality” (232).

Yet despite her feelings of discomfort and doubt, Alice wears the outfit again to meet Evan at a restaurant, and this time feeling “powerful” (237). Alice is depicted as being aware of the power comes with a more “feminine” appearance, particularly insofar as she feels noticed by men. However, she is also depicted as feeling uncomfortable with and disconnected from such a “feminine” appearance, for she sees that femininity is based on the patriarchal objectification of women. Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate that Alice is concerned with creating a reassuringly feminine self, despite that she is portrayed as disconnected from traditional femininity. Feminine pleasures and practices enable Alice’s character to create a more “spectacularly feminine” (McRobbie,

2009; 60)—and by implication a more socially acceptable—appearance and identity. Feminine pleasures and practices are also a means by which she can bring her sexual difference—her “Otherness” as a girl—“to order” (McRobbie, 2009: 107). Indeed, she does not want to go “over the edge into total freakdom” (Juby, 2004: 15) or give up those “feminine” pleasures and practices that enable her to at least partially fit in with the dominant social group. Post-feminist notions of femininity clearly enable Alice to stay “firmly on course” (Juby, 2004: 8) and become “a success in [her] own life” (Juby, 2000: 200).

Alice’s embodied engagement with this gendered, raced, and classed femininity and its post-feminist masquerade thus reveals that the *Alice, I Think* trilogy is embedded with oppressive and hegemonic ideas about girls. Further, although the trilogy alludes to the degree to which sexism and racism persist in Canada, it does not explicitly challenge the role that multiple forms of social inequality currently play in our society and culture as well as in girls’ lives and the formation of their identities.

Discourses of Normative “White” Femininity

The following discussion utilizes Deliovsky’s (2010) ideas about femininity as a cultural and social system that centres around whiteness, heterosexual expectations, material and economic conditions, and patriarchal ideas about beauty and romance to examine how Alice is depicted as engaging with and embodying discourses related to normative “white” femininity (9, 13). Normative “white” femininity, according to Deliovsky (2010), involves “doing” femininity and negotiating “heterosexist, Eurocentric gender ideology” (Collins, 2000: 165) and “white capitalist patriarchy” (Deliovsky, 2010: 119). It also involves the negotiation of several discourses of

femininity and the social regulation and control of girls. This section will examine the discourses of normative “white” femininity that appear in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, including: discourses of consumption, those of heterosexuality, of romance, and those of ideal beauty. Discourses of resistance are also examined in this section, as will notions of power and privilege.

Alice is constituted by and constitutes herself according to its conflicting and contradictory socio-cultural narratives of normative “white” femininity. In other words, she is subjected by and constructs herself according to the system of normative “white” femininity. Her embodiment of normative “white” femininity is evident insofar as she is portrayed as being concerned with what is “normal” so that she can “fit in” with her peers and the dominant culture. In *Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last*, for example, Alice expresses her concern with normality while she is waiting outside the *Number Four* restaurant, lecturing herself about whether or not she should go inside to talk to Evan: “normal girls do not behave this way” (Juby, 2005: 234), she claims. She also wonders about whether her actions are normal or not in *Alice, I Think* when she claims that “it probably isn’t normal to think that having coffee with a boy is automatically going to turn into a murderous spree” (Juby, 2000: 64). Instead of listening to her fear about meeting Aubrey for coffee, Alice instead questions whether or not this fear is “normal.” Alice is clearly concerned with what is “normal” and if her actions and feelings fit into categories of “appropriate” boy/girl etiquette. Alice’s depicted concern with normalcy is intertwined with and arises from ideas about normative “white” femininity and what it takes to be “acceptably feminine” (Hey, 1997: 106). For example, she is described as

“one big cry for help” (Juby, 2004: 217) in *Miss Smithers* who “need[s] saving so badly” (217) by, presumably, one of her male suitors.

Such descriptions carry deeply entrenched patriarchal undertones whereby male heroes are thought to “save” female heroines from the inner turmoil they cannot face on their own (as women and girls). Alice is also concerned with “figure[ing] out what it means to be a good girl” (Juby, 2004:5). Indeed, in Act III, Scene II of her screenplay in *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last*, Alice describes the lead character, who is hauntingly similar to Alice, as a “sexy”, “beautiful”, “attractive”, “very feminine”, and “worldly” girl (Juby, 2005: 221). Being a “good girl” is therefore linked not only with femininity but also with heteronormative romantic fantasies and, indeed, Alice’s privileged access to such fantasies as a white middle-class girl. Despite that Alice does not “want to be sent to the womanhood tent” (Juby, 2000: 83) in the first novel, and although she resists the “bubbly, happy-girl stuff” (Juby, 2004: 9) that is associated with normative “white” femininity, she nonetheless wants to know what it would feel like to be a “normal” and “feminine” girl.

Discourses of Consumption

According to Griffin (1993), consumption of various goods and services is often considered ‘normal’ for young people in mainstream literature (139). Discourses of consumption draw on notions of “lifestyle,” “choice,” and “freedom” to suggest that the transition from childhood to adulthood involves learning to make appropriate lifestyle choices and negotiate consumer capitalism (139). Girls in particular are considered avid consumers of advertisements, magazines, the media, and various types of products and services (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 135).

In fact, ideas about consumption are often gendered as feminine. As Hollows (2000) points out, consumption is defined “as negative and is identified with women and/or as ‘feminine’” (113). In other words, while production is commonly associated with men and considered a masculine activity, consumption is commonly considered destructive, wasteful, extravagant, trivial, and insatiable—all things associated with femininity (114). Along these lines, girls are considered the passive recipients of consumer culture who merely take on and take in culture and do not produce or create it (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 21). Yet as Bordo (2003) points out, women who do take on and take in commercial culture are not cultural dupes, for they recognize that their happiness and social success is often based on their conformity to it (20).

Ideas about girls’ consumption are also influenced by post-feminist notions of “girl power” and girls’ empowerment. For example, girls’ empowerment is commodified insofar as it is seen as arising out of girls’ purchasing of goods and services and their consumption of media images and advertising (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 200). In this regard, consumption becomes an important element of identity construction and self-expression (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 179). Yet although consumption may very well be empowering, it is often gendered and patriarchally entrenched and produced and thus only seemingly celebratory of girls. In addition, girls’ commodified empowerment is directed toward middle-class girls who have the financial means and resources to participate in consumer culture. Working-class girls are, unfortunately, excluded from the world of “female” consumer culture.

Alice’s depicted engagement with the discourse of consumption is complex, for she simultaneously resists and conforms to its contradictory ideas. First of all, she is

characterized against consumer culture and ideas about girls' consumption. Not only does she want to become a "cultural critic" (Juby, 2000: 22), she also has "an alternative value system" (18) and is "only willing to conform so far" (Juby, 2005: 47). However, despite that she has "a natural tendency for critical thinking" (Juby, 2000: 21) and is described as "counter culture" (Juby, 2000: 215), she nonetheless takes up consumer culture, particularly by means of fashion.

Alice is depicted as using fashion and style as a means by which she can establish an "individual identity" (Juby, 2000: 17). In *Alice, I Think*, for example, Alice goes shopping in Prince George with her mother. However, Alice is not interested in shopping at the mall because she is "in theory [...] against" (Juby, 2000: 53) it. Rather, she is interested in shopping at the *New In View* thrift store, where she finds many "new cool clothes" (31), including: a whole macramé outfit-vest, bell bottoms, a hat, a purse, a pair of red and blue checkered four-way stretch pants, an orange tank top from the kids' bin, and some nursing shoes (28). Not only is Alice re-using old clothing items and thus contributing to environmental sustainability, she is also participating in consumer culture in a unique way, specifically the "riot grrrl" culture of the late 1990's, during which the *Alice, I Think* novel was most likely written. As a used-clothing consumer and cultural critic, Alice is not just consuming culture (mainstream or not), she is also producing it.

Similarly, in *Miss Smithers*, Alice is portrayed as consuming as a means by which she can assert and articulate her "individual identity" (Juby, 2000: 17). For example, she is given a budget of four hundred dollars to buy an outfit for the Miss Smithers pageant. Instead of heading to a mall, she heads to *Rotten Ryders*, the local biker shop, and buys a pair of leather pants. These pants apparently reveal "the kind of

candidate [she] plan[s] to be” (Juby, 2004: 39). She explains: “it’s amazing what leather pants can do for a person’s confidence and individuality” (43). Alice seems to be using her leather pants to align herself against anything “girlish” (Juby, 2000: 52). Alice’s consumption at a local and alternative store, as opposed to a commercialized and mainstream one, enables her to construct a unique pageant identity. On one hand, Alice is identifying with mainstream/popular culture merely by consuming. On another hand, she is articulating her identity as “Other” from and resistant to it (Juby, 2000: 39, Zaslow, 2009: 114). In this sense, Alice’s consumption does not necessarily arise from her “purchasing power” but rather from her ability to resist such power. In addition, she is not a passive recipient of consumer culture, but rather an active negotiator of it (though she nonetheless needs the financial means to do this).

Alice is also depicted as negotiating consumption in other ways. For example, she decides to participate in the Miss Smithers competition, which is itself a mainstream activity that promotes commercialized ideas about feminine beauty. However, she is very aware of her choice to participate in the pageant, saying: “I’m innately drawn to unusual subcultures, despite my ability to participate in very mainstream activities” (Juby, 2004: 14). Alice is also aware that participating in a beauty pageant involves a certain degree of gender performativity. She explains that “being a Miss, like any other *performance-oriented* activity, is an art into which one must plunge oneself” (26, my emphasis). This passage indicates that Alice is aware that participating in a beauty pageant as a contestant is not a “natural” or “intuitive” activity but rather a socially and culturally negotiated one. Alice is perhaps compelled to engage with the regulatory practices of gender coherence in the Miss Smithers pageant as a way to constitute her

appropriately feminine and “normal” subjectivity (Butler, 1993: 34). Alice negotiates consumer culture, in this case by means of her participation in a beauty pageant, as a way to both “do” her feminine gender and establish her unique individuality. Yet she is not blinded by the gendered messages that prescribe the space within which she constructs her sense of self. Rather, she is depicted as willingly and actively engaging with such messages as a means by which she can both “fit in” and establish her identity. In this way, Alice establishes her “feminine” sense of self within the very discourses of consumption that she is depicted as resisting (Zaslow, 2009: 127). This indicates that Alice’s negotiation of discourses of consumption is a complex and contradictory negotiation, as opposed to a simplistic one, that enables her to establish an individual identity.

Discourses of (Hetero)sexuality

Although discourses of heterosexuality have been previously discussed under the rubric of post-feminism, they are further touched on in the following pages. Here, however, the context shifts from the post-feminism to normative “white” femininity. In other words, this section examines the ways in which normative “white” femininity, as opposed to post-feminism, play a role in Alice’s experiences with (hetero)sexuality in the novels (Deliovsky, 2010: 109).

As already discussed, heterosexuality is a precondition for normative “white” femininity. In Deliovsky’s (2010) words, “heterosexual normativity is first and foremost about [the] ‘white’ patriarchal production of a ‘white’ feminine ideal” (101). Girls’ sexualities, and, by implication, their bodies, are defined as heterosexual (Christian-Smith, 1994: 210). Heterosexuality is considered the only legitimate context for girls’

sexual and bodily expression in Western societies and cultures (222). Put differently, heterosexuality is a requirement of socially and culturally constructed femininity, for it comes to be seen as natural, necessary, and inevitable for young women. Like heterosexuality, whiteness is normalized “as a way of being and a structural location of advantage” (Deliovsky, 2010: 13). Together, both heterosexuality and whiteness help to construct and reinforce (hetero) normative “white” femininity, which subsequently becomes a standard by which girls are measured and the means by which they are regulated (13).

Despite that sexuality is treated openly and frankly in the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, perhaps as a means to articulate girls’ “missing discourse of sexual desire” (Aapola et al., 2005: 144), it is also loyal to a hetero-normative “white” feminine ideal. As previously discussed, Alice articulates her desire by means of post-feminist ideas about sexuality. She is depicted as sexually assertive and free to engage in sexual activity as an active sexual subject. Yet although the novels acknowledge the ways in which female sexuality is active as opposed to passive, they also remain concerned with Victorian ideas of “proper” female (hetero)sexuality.

For example, in *Miss Smithers* Alice’s character is “torn between attraction and anxiety” (Juby, 2004: 63) when it comes to Goose. She longs to have sex with him yet also explains that “the whole thing just seem[s] so invasive” (63) and scolds herself for “thinking unclean thoughts” (66). Alice is torn between feelings of sexual desire and feelings of worry, which are clearly influenced by patriarchal ideas about sexuality as taboo, unnatural, dirty, and morally questionable (Aapola et al., 2005:143). Later on, Alice also scolds herself for being “virginal and unsophisticated” (Juby, 2004: 107),

“how un-Miss Smithers” (107), she claims. Virginity—that is, abstaining from sexual intercourse and potentially ignoring one’s sexual desire and sexual thoughts—is clearly no better than having sexual intercourse and sexual thoughts. Virginity may not be taboo, but it is certainly not beauty-pageant worthy, according to Alice.

These examples not only demonstrate the degree to which Alice negotiates her own contradictory feelings about sexuality, they also exemplify the influence of Victorian and post-feminist ideas about female sexuality as an active yet taboo force that needs to be regulated. In other words, Alice’s sexuality is portrayed as an active force that needs to be regulated. Abiding to feminine sexual norms is crucial for Alice character’s success, in this case within a beauty pageant.

Patriarchal ideas about female sexuality are also reinforced in *Miss Smithers* when Alice puts on her new leather pants to show Goose. He says: “Oh my God. Your pants. [...] I *love* your pants. I love them too much” (Juby, 2004: 65, author’s emphasis). Upon hearing this, Alice changes “into clothes that Goose [can] handle” (65). In this instance, Goose feels sexual desire for Alice, which is triggered when he sees her in the leather pants. It is clearly the young man—and not Alice—who is considered the sexually active and desiring subject. Additionally, it is Alice—and not Goose—who is expected to work around and respond to Goose’s sexual desire, which implies that Alice—and again, not Goose—is responsible for Goose’s arousal. Gendered double standards of morality are clearly present here, whereby women, and not men, are responsible for men’s sexual behavior. Women are also clearly required to seek out men’s sexual approval, as Alice does in this instance.

In *Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last Alice*, Alice feels the inclination to surrender to Evan's sexual desire. For a moment, she decides to "let this happen" and "just get this over with" (Juby, 2005: 241). Although she refuses Evan's sexual advances, shaking her head and saying "I don't think so" (242) and "I'm leaving" (242), she later believes she is being punished for her "wanton sexual behavior" (243). In this way, Alice is depicted as taking up patriarchal ideas about female sexuality as always heterosexual, restrained, and responsive—despite that she may also resist such ideas.

It is clearly also important that Alice maintain heterosexual desire without engaging in "too much" heterosexual activity—well, that is, if she wants to be perceived as "healthy," "mature" and not "deviant" (Aapola *et al*, 2005:149). Indeed, in *Alice, I Think*, Alice insists that she "*will* be a success in her own life" (Juby, 2000: 200) by taking part in a "more extensive boy-girl interaction" (200). She claims that she will "attack" this "problem" with "sex" (200). Alice's "success" is clearly dependent upon her heterosexual activity. Although she is "unique" in other areas, her heterosexual activity is a means by which she is represented as a "normal" and "healthy" girl (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 148). Indeed, for Alice, growing up and (hetero)sexuality are inextricably linked (Younger, 2009: 83).

These examples reveal that Alice negotiates the difficulties that come along with being a girl who has sexual desires and who is subjected to the discourses of compulsory white heterosexuality and normative "white" femininity. As Griffin (2004) states, there is no obvious right way to be a girl (whether in novels or real life), for "the girl subject is constituted in an uneasy and shifting location between competing external demands and pressures, and the obligatory expression of internal desires" (40). In other words, Alice's

sexual desires are met with pressure from contradictory external demands. Although she actively explores her sexuality and sexual desire as an agentic post-feminist subject, she also negotiates discourses of compulsory white heterosexuality and its many rules about femininity as a means by which to position herself as “properly” female and feminine (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 147).

Discourses of Romance

Like heterosexuality, romance is considered the only legitimate context for girls’ sexual expression (Christian-Smith, 1994: 217-218). Heterosexual romantic relationships are seen as the appropriate relationship choice for young women (Younger, 2009: 11). Furthermore, heterosexual romance is thought to awaken girls’ sexualities (Christian-Smith, 1994: 211). It is also seen as providing young women with self-definition and self-fulfillment (75). In other words, heterosexual romance is considered the means by which girls become mature women. Girls are expected to secure their teenage futures either by means of sexual consummation or marriage, or “going steady” (Younger, 2009: 760) with the opposite sex.

In Driscoll’s (2002) words, girls’ development tends to be framed by heterosexual romance, around how girls who grow “up and fall in love, [are] made by love” (51). Romance remains “the only path to full happiness or maturity” (Driscoll, 2002: 77). In McRobbie’s (2000) words: “a happy ending means a happy couple” (86). In addition, romantic discourses teach young women “how to position themselves correctly inside the male/female dualism” (Davies, 1993: 145, 150). Young women are told that the “proper” thing to desire is unequivocally masculine young men “who [are] opposite and dominant in relation to [girls’] femininity” (153). Romantic discourses thus

emphasize a hierarchical male/female dualism whereby girls are marginal to boys and their sexual difference is established as natural (Davies, 1993: 158). This duality is often so taken-for-granted that it is never even mentioned (Davies, 1993: 154). It is naturalized as a part of the “orderly everyday world” (Davies, 1993: 155). Evidently, it is through romantic discourse that girls learn both the appropriate patterns of desire as well as the means by which they can be considered “successful” and “mature.”

Yet while girls are taught to enjoy and maintain interest in heterosexual romance, boys are taught to scoff and laugh at the idea of romance as a means by which they can emphasize their dominant masculinity (and superiority as the male sex). Boys are also taught to be sexually attracted to their girlfriends and aroused by other girls (McRobbie, 2000: 83). Contrastingly, girls are expected to remain emotionally vulnerable (indeed, romance is thought to establish feelings and emotions in girls) and concerned with domesticity and marriage (Christian-Smith, 1994: 209, 211). Heterosexual romance is therefore less about passion and love and more about maintaining male/female dualisms and female (and male) sexual norms.

Romantic discourses do not, however, treat all girls identically, despite that they seem to do so. For example, white middle-class girls fit well into the “appropriate” female/feminine body and thus are well on their way to becoming “successful” and “mature”—well, so long as they also maintain an interest in heterosexual romance. However, girls with disabilities, girls from lower-class backgrounds, girls of “different” ethnicities, nations, and colours, or girls who do not meet the standards of normative “white” femininity remain on the outside of conventional heterosexual romance. Although discourses of romance assume a universal category of girls, requiring that all

girls shape their femininity according to heterosexual romance, they also treat some girls as more in need of discipline and regulation than others (Christian-Smith, 1994: 207). This is not to say, however, that discourses of romance cannot be or are not resisted—indeed, as Davies (1993) claims, it is possible to move beyond and transgress dualistic depictions of masculinity and femininity by creating and imagining alternative ways of being positioned and disrupting the inevitability of the romantic storyline (169).

The *Alice, I Think* trilogy maintains a concern with popular socially and culturally constructed ideas about romance and femininity and uses such ideas to normalize Alice's developing sense of self. For example, *Miss Smithers* ends with a romantic encounter between Alice and Goose. After the Miss Smithers pageant, Alice sees Goose and feels like crying, explaining that "he had that way of smiling at me that made me feel like there was someone beautiful right behind me" (Juby, 2004: 273). Not only does this passage indicate that Alice does not herself feel "beautiful," it also reveals Alice is interested in romance, despite that she has also expressed that "love is so dumb" (272). The *Miss Smithers* ending also attempts to appease readers by insisting that Alice does "think about boys" (Juby, 2004: 216) and that her relationship with Goose "might be going somewhere" (241). Romance seems to prevail in *Miss Smithers* as a means by which it can provide a sense of closure to readers—in other words, the "happily-ever-after" that our culture embraces.

Ms. Deitrich also picks up on Alice's desire for romance in *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last*. In a therapy session, the two discuss Alice's relationship with Goose. Alice is confused about the relationship because before Goose moved to Scotland she

“told him it [would be] okay to see other girls” (Juby, 2005: 35), despite that she does not really want this. Ms. Deitrich responds:

Ah, you want to imagine that he is your only love and you are his only love forever. [...] Now we get to it. The great myth of our time. [...] It is the women who suffer the most from this notion. One true love. Only one. Isn't that what you seek? [...] Women look for this love to make them whole. They wait for love in order to start their lives (35).

Hesitantly, Alice responds with “well, yes” (35), despite that she also doesn't “know about that” (35). Although Ms. Deitrich is dismissive and critical of Alice's feelings and need for attention, she brings to light some of the romantic ideas with which Alice is grappling. Indeed, Alice also admits that she is “clearly in need of saving” (Juby, 2004: 210). Although this particular passage refers to Alice's brief experimentation with Christianity and her curiosity about Jesus Christ, as opposed to her relationship with Goose, it nonetheless indicates that Alice takes up discourses of romance and gendered ideas about male heroes (whether a religious figure or young men) and female heroines. Alice's character learns to see the constitutive and coercive force of the romantic discourses to which she has access and through which she constructs her “female” identity.

Alice's negotiation of conventional ideas about romance, however, is far from conventional. For example, she is not depicted as a passive or vulnerable girl but rather she is portrayed as a self-determined young woman whose self-worth is not dependent solely upon male attention and desire (Younger, 2009: 76). In *Alice, I Think*, for example, Alice cringes at the thought that she may become “one of those girls who

want[s] to know how to get and keep a guy, who want[s] to know what guys think looks good on them and take tests to find out if their personality makes them girlfriend material” (Juby, 2000: 222). Alice neither wants to be dependent on men, nor does she want to be solely concerned with men. Indeed, she emphasizes that she wants “to be an independent woman” (241) and a “career girl” (241) who “want[s] [her] profession to be separate from Goose-boy’s” (241). Similarly, in *Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last*, Alice conveys that the protagonist of her screenplay is a girl who wants to “find a job in which she can excel on her own terms and not be dependent on men” (Juby, 2005: 95). As I have previously discussed, Alice’s character also cannot stand the thought of “squishiness” (Juby, 2000: 235) and “sappiness” (229) in herself when it comes to Goose. She explains: “I don’t like the sappy way I get around him. I can’t stand the idea that I’m not captain of my own ship” (Juby, 2004: 11).

Also unconventional is Alice’s role in her relationship with Goose. In *Miss Smithers*, Alice is masculinized as the partner in control of the relationship whereas Goose is depicted as her “feminine” counterpart. For instance, when a librarian gets hold of Alice’s photocopied ’zine articles, Alice blames Goose, telling him that he “just can’t get anything right” and is “totally hopeless and useless at everything” (Juby, 2004: 73). She later admits that she was “awful to him” as a means to test “her power” (73). Alice is not depicted as the emotionally vulnerable and passive girl who desperately needs a man to love her. Further exemplifying this is her ongoing sexual desire and interest in sexual activity. She claims that, for example, she is sexually frustrated (Juby, 2004: 70) and wants “some sex” (Juby, 2000: 230).

Alice's interest in gaining (hetero) sexual experience and acting on her (hetero)sexual desire—activities that were once considered taboo for young women—clearly take centre stage in these novels. These activities may also be a way in which the trilogy can break from a conventional romantic ending in *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last*. Alice neither ends up with a boy, nor does she consummate her sexual desire with a partner. At the same time, she expresses her own sexual desire—one that is not solely about pleasing or responding to men's sexual desire. Alice is also portrayed as viewing romance as something she can enjoy, as simply another aspect of her existence, and “not the central space of her life” (Younger, 2009: 77). In this sense, the *Alice, I Think* books also challenge “the cultural ideal that ties female self-fulfillment to a male partner” (Younger, 2009: 75), for Alice imagines possibilities other than traditional romance and marriage (Younger, 2009: 101). Other examples of this include her ongoing interest in establishing a career that interests her and that she is good at. She also experiments with a variety of different hobbies, including martial arts, beauty pageants, screen writing, cultural criticism, and much more.

Despite Alice's unconventional characteristics, however, her character remains in line with heterosexuality and normative “white” femininity. For example, she is reliant on heterosexual romance and desire, as well as traditional feminine pleasures. Indulging in these things enables Alice to create a more “feminine” and “normal” appearance and identity, thereby reaffirming those categories of normality and femininity that the books may pit themselves against.

Discourses of Ideal Feminine Beauty

Ideal feminine beauty, like heterosexual romance, is a key aspect of normative “white” femininity. As a powerful patriarchal discourse and ideology that both reinforces and produces normative “white” femininity, discourses of ideal feminine beauty construct and promote a universalized, homogenized, and idealized idea of patriarchally-defined beauty, or, what Aapola *et al.* (2005) refer to as hegemonic notions of female beauty (2005: 134, Deliovsky, 2010: 101, 102). Ideal feminine beauty also involves a network of practices that control, monitor, regulate, organize, and optimize girls’ “feminine” activities (Deliovsky, 2010: 5). As both Bartky (2008) and Bordo (2003) discuss, girls’ bodies are subject to and experience patriarchal control in contemporary Western societies and cultures (Bartky, 2008: 21). Yet feminine beauty does not just encourage social surveillance and monitoring of girls’ bodies, it also encourages girls’ self-surveillance and self-monitoring. For example, girls may alter their body shapes, sizes, and appearances (Frost, 2001: 75-76). Aapola *et al.* (2005) refer to these alterations as “‘beauty projects’ that are required of young girls and women” (138).

Discourses of ideal feminine beauty are also embedded with underlying ideas about girls as innately defective and in need of discipline and regulation (though some girls more than others). For example, discourses of ideal feminine beauty positions girls as naturally and biologically inferior as a result of their inherently “lacking” female bodies. As a result of their so-called biological inferiority, girls are required to construct, manipulate, and train their bodies, appearances, and identities according to

contemporary Western regimes of beauty, diet, exercise, and appearance (Deliovsky, 2010: 102).

However, ideal feminine beauty does not just involve self-surveillance and self-monitoring in terms of aesthetics and appearance, it also involves self-surveillance and self-monitoring in terms of one's behavior. If girls do not engage with or deviate from ideal feminine beauty and its emphasis of the self-surveillance and self-management of both behavior and appearance, they are interpreted by others and often themselves "as a moral failure on their part *as women*" (Deliovsky, 2010: 106, author's emphasis). As Wendell (1996) argues, they may become "rejected" or "negative" bodies who are feared, ignored, and despised in Western society and culture (85).

Yet certain girls lose more than others, for some girls are incapable of meeting the unrealistic standards of the feminine beauty ideal. Indeed, feminine beauty ideals differentiate girls according to class and race, among other things, and are based on processes of exclusion and inclusion that privilege one social group over others. Discourses of ideal feminine beauty's privileged members are primarily white, middle-class, able-bodied, English-speaking, and heterosexual (Deliovsky, 2010: 10, 12).

Despite girls' efforts to normalize their bodies and meet the unrealistic standards of ideal feminine beauty, they "can never be quite right, and can always be improved (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 137). Indeed, ideal femininity and beauty involve a *fantasy* image, which may contrast with the "realities" of girls' bodies (Frost, 2001: 48). Consequently, girls may objectify their bodies, and even the bodies of other girls (Aapola *et al.* 2005: 137). They may even come to view their own bodies as deficient in comparison to the unrealistic standards of ideal feminine beauty (Deliovsky, 2010: 107).

Paradoxically, girls may also enjoy and feel empowered by the very beauty ideals that limit and oppress them (Davis, 1995: 55). But, as I have previously said, this does not mean that girls are cultural dupes or the passive surfaces upon which discourses of ideal beauty are imposed. Rather, they actively experience and negotiate tensions between the cultural and social ideas that view them as inferior and aesthetic objects of pleasure for others (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 136). Indeed, as both objects and subjects, girls have the ability to “experience their bodies as vehicles for enacting their desires or reaching out in the world” (Davis, 1995: 59).

Of course, girls can also resist and subvert prevailing beauty ideals, though they cannot and do not do so outside of or separate from those ideals (Davis, 1995: 56). In other words, girls cannot completely eradicate those ideals, for even their resistance invokes and makes reference to them. Whether resisting or conforming to dominant discourses of ideal feminine beauty, girls negotiate, experience, are subjected by, and construct themselves in relation to them. Ideal feminine beauty is thus a constant and embodied process of bodily becoming and identity construction (Coleman, 2009: 1).

Alice is depicted as engaging with discourses of ideal feminine beauty throughout the *Alice, I Think* trilogy. Her appearance is watched and scrutinized by adults and the patriarchal system of surveillance that produces and contributes to ideal “feminine” beauty. In *Alice, I Think*, for example, Alice is advised by a teacher, Ms. Swinke, to tone down her fashion statements (Juby, 2000: 133). Ms. Swinke attempts to give Alice “some personal advice” (133) and pinpoint “the problem” (133) with Alice. She states: “You know, Alice, I respect individuality and personal fashion statements as much as the next person, but yours, well...” (133). “The problem” (133), she claims, is

Alice's "clothes and certain behaviors" (133). Likewise, Finn, the MacLeod's family friend, critiques Alice's outfits in *Miss Smithers*. When he picks Alice up for a meeting at the Rod & Gun club about the Miss Smithers pageant, he takes one look at her and says: "What have you got on? [...] For God's sake, don't you have, like, a dress or something? You know something from the Gap. [...] Christ, I've got more feminine outfits than that" (Juby, 2004: 22, author's emphasis). Similarly, in *Alice MacLeod, Realist at Last*, Jeff, a trainer at the martial arts club who has a crush on her, "likes girls to be conventional" and suggests that Alice "try and at least look a bit more normal" (Juby, 2005: 124, author's emphasis). He also encourages her to find ways "to become more attractive" (Juby, 2004: 183) so that she can "look better and begin to fit in" (Juby, 2004: 182).

Although Alice seemingly resists these remarks, claiming that she is "not about to go changing for someone [she's] not attracted to" (182), her act of resistance is also an act of conformity. Indeed, she claims that if it were Shawn, her dojo instructor, who had asked her to change her style, she "might think about it" (182). Although Alice resists Jeff's attempts at patriarchal control over her appearance, she does so only because she is not romantically interested in him. Clearly, Alice's appearance—in this case, her outfits and fashion style—are constantly watched and critiqued by adults and authority figures, and Alice does not always see a problem with it.

Alice's make-up and hair are also a means by which she is watched and scrutinized. In *Miss Smithers*, Alice is told that "a haircut would probably be a very good idea" (Juby, 2004: 171) by one of the Miss Smithers pageant organizers. Apparently, her hair is "looking a little, ah, shaggy, I guess would be the word" (171). Even Alice admits

that “the situation on [her] head [is] unruly or even out of control” (170), though she decides not to have it cut and “just leave it” (171), perhaps as a way to resist patriarchal control of her appearance. However, Alice does decide to “beautify” her appearance for the *Miss Smithers* pageant. When Finn tells her she looks “like one of the boys down at the leather bar” (260), she decides to “add a bit more lipstick” (260). Likewise, in *Alice, I Think*, Alice goes to see a “makeup lady” (Juby, 2000: 135) at her “beautifying studio/salon” (135) to get a “professional model-style” (135) makeover. While there, the esthetician comments on the “inadequacies of [Alice’s] skin” (136), saying she looks “sick,” “sallow,” and “blotchy” (136). But Alice nonetheless enjoys being made-over, for it makes her “feel like a princess” (137). At the same time, Alice claims that her new make-up “[doesn’t] fit” (138) because she looks “like one of those freak child models” (138) who looks like a “thirty-six-year-old first grader” (138). It is evident that Alice negotiates both societal expectations regarding ideal feminine beauty as well as her own feelings about and resistance to them.

Alice’s negotiation of discourses of ideal feminine beauty is further highlighted when she is deemed not “hot” (Juby, 2005: 62) enough in *Alice MacLeod, Realist At Last*. Alice goes for an interview and a trial shift at the local *Number Four* restaurant, where she hopes to find work. However, she is turned down as “not a good fit” (62) because of her appearance. The owner of the restaurant explains to a manager, and Alice overhears: “there are the *aesthetics* of the thing to consider. We’re developing a look here. And she don’t have it, brother. We’re going to renovate soon. Do the modern Asian club look. Put in some uncomfortable chairs. A bar. Hot waitresses.” (62, author’s emphasis). Alice is “kind of [in] shock” (62) by this sexist dismissal of her appearance

and her potential to work well at *Number Four*, claiming afterward that she does not “know what to do with [her]self” (62).

Although she does not further discuss how she feels, her statement indicates that she is embarrassed and disheartened, and it is not difficult to understand why this might be so. Indeed, she has endured the brunt of male dominance; she has been rejected as a moral failure, a girl who does not measure up to the standards of ideal feminine beauty. But readers need not feel uncomfortable with Alice’s rejection for long, for just as soon as she is rejected, she is asked on a date by Vince, who is the cook at the *Number Four*. Alice’s gendered exclusion from the *Number Four* is potentially lost and forgotten in the midst of her romantic chat with Vince. Yet despite that the novel covers up Alice’s dismissal by hegemonic masculinity, it is nevertheless clear that she experiences social pressures of ideal feminine beauty and its exclusion of those girls that do not measure up to its standards (Aapola *et al.*, 2005: 137).

Interestingly, Alice uses the gendered standards that she is measured against to judge other girls. For example, when she meets her fellow Miss Smithers candidates for the first time in *Miss Smithers*, she judges them based on the femininity of their appearances. She claims that “Miss Main Street had on so much blue eye shadow and blue mascara, it was a wonder she could keep her eyes open. She’s an obvious sex-haver from way back” (Juby, 2004: 5). She also claims that Miss Bulkley Valley Fall Fair had on “a face full of pancake makeup” (50) and Miss Forest Products was “actually just hiding behind several layers of sheer makeup in natural colours” (50). Finally, she claims that Miss Evelyn Station Fish Hatchery had a “motionless mask of orange foundation and a cloud of hair product fumes” (51).

Although Alice's depicted watching of the other contestants may be a means by which she can resist feminine beauty practices and feel a degree of power and authority, it also exemplifies her own internalization of societal expectations about ideal feminine beauty. Indeed, her words warn us that "too much" makeup or feminine beauty practices can lead to us not being taken seriously, and, in this case, being seen as an eccentric.

Not surprisingly, however, Alice also resists feminine beauty regimes, potentially because she knows she does not meet their standards. In *Alice, I Think*, for instance, she claims that although she is excited about getting her hair cut in Prince George, "there is a limit to how excited [she] can get about something as shallow as a haircut" (Juby, 2000: 61). She then explains that the hair cut she wants to get is an "alternative" (61) one—one that presumably deviates from feminine beauty ideals. Likewise, later in the novel, after she is beaten up by Linda, Alice conveys how much she likes the look of her bruised face: "it was amazing how beat up my face looked with all the blood and stuff on it" (105). She also claims that her bruises "practically looked like a beauty mark" (107). Alice's idea of beauty is therefore tied not to femininity but rather to masculinity, for it values toughness as opposed to conventional "prettiness." Although the author's intention may be to challenge normative femininity here, she draws on patriarchal and dualistic ways of thinking about masculinity as opposite and superior to femininity to do so. Aligning with masculinity to challenge the pervasive power of normative femininity, however, ends up reaffirming it, for masculinity is rooted in patriarchal attitudes and beliefs.

Alice's simultaneous resistance and conformity to dominant discourses of ideal feminine beauty enable her to learn how she might create an appropriate "feminine

subjectivity” (Hey, 1997: 36) without necessarily sacrificing her “individual identity” (Juby, 2000: 17). In this way, discourses of ideal beauty are a means by which Alice both negotiates and constructs her unique yet “feminine” sense of self. We might even say that Alice embodies ideal beauty, for she takes it on as her own; she “feels her ‘femininity’” (Hey, 1997: 117). Although Alice’s character is white, heterosexual, and middle-class and thus at least partially meets the standards of ideal feminine beauty and normative “white” femininity, she is not considered (by both others as well as herself) conventionally attractive or beautiful and, consequently, does not fully fit in with feminine beauty norms. She also purposely and willingly constructs herself as “Other,” as “unique” (Juby, 2005: 205), from such norms. Evidently, Alice negotiates her exclusion from beauty norms and ideals, as well as her privileged position within them, by both resisting and conforming to their expectations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This project examines and critiques gendered and oppressive ideas about girls and the discourses that construct and reinforce them in a Canadian YAL trilogy. Having once been an adolescent, I am familiar with and interested in the complicated ideological messages conveyed to young people, especially by means of popular texts. I am also curious about the ways in which young people are represented in text as both resisting and conforming to such messages. The *Alice, I Think* trilogy is an excellent example of this negotiation because its protagonist negotiates conflicting cultural messages as a means to develop and construct a sense of self.

Throughout this thesis project, I explore the construction and defining of Alice's subjectivity by means of discourse in an attempt to demystify the normalized and naturalized messages about girls. The concept of embodiment is central to account for Alice's negotiation of discourse, for it enables an exploration of how Alice both takes on and resists socially and culturally constructed ideas—and the discourses that construct them—in her bodily demeanor and behaviors. Alice negotiates three interrelated sets of discourses, which include:

- a) discourses of normative “white” femininity, including those of ideal “feminine” beauty, romance, (hetero)sexuality, and consumption;
- b) discourses of post-feminism, including those of femininity, neo-liberalism, and (hetero)sexuality;
- c) and discourses of adolescent/young adult development, including those of puberty and maturity, dependence and the family, education, and clinical discourses.

I have chosen to use the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine Alice's negotiation and embodiment of these discourses because it enables me to look specifically at discourse and the role discourse plays not only in the depiction of Alice's life and the defining of her identity, but also in the construction of a gendered social order. Similarly, I have chosen to use feminist poststructuralist and postmodernist perspectives to account for the complicated ways in which individuals simultaneously resist and conform to discourse. Feminist post-structuralism disrupts dualistic ways of thinking and humanist understandings of the self and embraces the complex ways in which individuals construct and are constructed through language and discourse. Similarly, embodied postmodernism is able to account for the twists, tweaks, and blurrings within a text. Together, CDA, feminist post-structuralism, and embodied postmodernism have enabled me to examine the *Alice, I Think* trilogy and the complex ideas that are embedded within them. They also allow me to explore how Alice's character draws on discourse as a means by which she can shape her identity as unique yet also appropriately "feminine" and "normal."

Although the novels call attention to and acknowledge the oppressive and gendered ideas that these discourses construct and promote, and therefore question their inevitability, they do not challenge the ways in which they privilege some girls and exclude others. Indeed, despite that Alice is marginal in terms of her gender behaviour and appearance, as well as her identity as a "counter culture" (Juby, 2000: 215) "misfit" (Juby, 2000: 39), she remains relatively privileged as a middle-class Anglophone "white-eye" (Jiwani, 2009: 32) who does not stray too far from standards of normality and femininity. Although it is easy to understand why Alice might maintain concern

with whether or not she is “normal” and “feminine” enough—indeed, her social success and acceptance is dependent upon such things—her character nonetheless enables the *Alice, I Think* trilogy to remain within the boundaries of the “proper” fantasy for teenage girls. In this way, the *Alice, I Think* trilogy, although in some respects seemingly subversive, works to reinforce the very ideas to which it calls attention.

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