Voices from the margins: A critical ethnography of conflict in female friendship in a regional Australian school

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B.Ed. (Hons)

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Abstract

The way that interpersonal conflict is displayed and navigated is informed by broader discourses about the nature of gender roles, gender expectations, and understandings of what it means to be a girl in regional Australia. This research explores the role of conflict in everyday school interactions for the female students of one regional secondary school in the state of Victoria, Australia. For these female students, the nature of their interpersonal conflict was either widely discussed and scrutinised by teachers, adults and other students, or ignored and silenced by the same groups. For the young women of Rural Valley, their experience of conflict is intrinsically tied to the cultural spaces and places they occupy.

In this thesis, young women’s voices and experiences of conflict in a regional secondary school are considered through a critical perspective situated within critical theory. A critical ethnography has been conducted drawing upon the notion of horizontal violence to develop understandings of the nature of conflict as experienced by young women from regional Australia. In order to illuminate the lived experiences of conflict for young women, narrative portraiture is used as a representational method to deconstruct traditional views of ethnographic writing. In doing so, this research provides a counter-narrative to dominant discourses about how young women experience and manage conflict and how they navigate their relationships when conflict arises.

This research is significant because it challenges stereotypical notions of what conflict means to young girls in a regional secondary school context. The findings of this study highlight that young women use group-specific strategies to negotiate friendships and confront structural inequalities of a hegemonic education system. This research ultimately advocates for understandings of conflict that move away from deficit discourses to advance discussions concerned with the gendered nature of violence within Australian society.
Statement of Authorship and Originality

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and bibliography of the thesis.

Signed: Kimberly Pappaluca
Dated: 30/08/2018
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Dated: 30/08/2018
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This dissertation contains 83,375 words.
Dedication

To Leah, Charlie and Tilly, you make the world a better place.

To the girls of 8R, meeting you all changed my life. Thank you for sharing your stories.
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There is a list a mile long of people that have helped me travel this crazy process of doing a PhD. Firstly, to the students, teachers and parents of Rural Valley High School*1. You welcomed me into your school, and your classrooms, with open arms and made me feel incredibly welcome. Thank you all for trusting me with your stories.

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* Denotes the use of a pseudonym
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List of Acronyms

ABS              AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS
ACARA            AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING AUTHORITY
AHRC            AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
AIHW             AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE
DEECD          DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
FedUni           FEDERATION UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA
RVHS               RURAL VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL
SEIFA            SOCIOECONOMIC INDEXES FOR AREAS
WMW             WOMEN’S MARCH ON WASHINGTON
Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis bears witness to the extraordinary young women who welcomed me into their lives and their relationships without anything to go on except a piece of paper and a promise to ‘write a book about them’. This thesis has become a privilege afforded to me to offer the scholarly community an alternative lens through which to see the lived experience of these young women and the relationships that sustain and break them.

The introduction to this thesis offers a foundation for the reader to learn how this thesis came to be; the journey, which led me to become a researcher, and the mis/adventures that shaped this research. This research did not follow a linear path from start to finish. Rather, this research grew out of the nourishment that a generous tribe of women gave me through all aspects of fieldwork, analysis, and the journey I encountered towards becoming a reflexive scholar and person.

This chapter describes some of the important thinking that has gone into developing this thesis. In part, this first section will help alert the reader to key elements of this study, including how it evolved and why that evolution is important to understanding this research. The second part of this chapter is concerned with positioning myself as an active participant within my ethnographic research project, abandoning claims of neutrality and objectivity in favour of focusing on how my life experiences have informed the layered meanings throughout this thesis.

Beginnings

I struggle with beginnings … beginnings are difficult and there is the ever-present danger that procrastination will take over and that a beginning will never start. Poet David Whyte (2015) offers a view of beginnings as an opportunity to “clear away the crass, the irrelevant and the complicated to find the beautiful, often hidden lineaments of the essential and the necessary” (p. 23). The genesis of this research project starts with a story. This is a story that has occupied and guided my life for the past seven years. This story recounts a real-life event told to me by a fifteen-year-old girl in 2010. I was working with a group of ‘disengaged’ young people in a re-
engagement program targeted at keeping students connected with education. This program included several afterschool activities, including a ‘girls only’ workshop run every Wednesday afternoon. It was at this workshop that I met ‘Kate’ and a few of her friends. Over the course of six months, I got to know these girls a bit better and they began to open up to me, sharing stories of school and friends. Some of the stories they told were incredibly familiar (e.g. sleepovers and school yard romances), and some stories left me speechless. The particular story that set this research project in motion went like this:

Jacob and Dylan were mates. One day they had a falling out. Dylan told some friends about his issue with Jacob. The friends decided to get Jacob back. However, the friends enlisted a girl – Kate – to help them get Jacob. The next day the group of boys, and Kate, followed Jacob to the boys’ toilets and waited for him to come out. When Jacob came out someone pushed him onto Kate who claimed, “He felt me up!” Kate, with the encouragement of the boys, then began to punch and kick Jacob … “I knew he wasn’t going to hit me back ’cause I was a girl …” This went on until Jacob fell to the ground and did not get up. Kate went up to him while he was on the ground and stomped on his head smashing his face into the concrete footpath. Only after he was nearly unconscious did the beating stop. Jacob had a broken cheekbone, numerous cuts and bruises and untold psychological trauma. When Kate was asked to explain why she did this, she simply stated, “He felt me up and needed to be taught a lesson”.

The story Kate told about ‘Jacob’ (above) made me recoil in confusion; girls in my life did not behave like this; I did not behave like this. Why then were these girls appearing to boast about what they did to Jacob? My judgement that the girls actively used, and celebrated, violence in their daily lives was a puzzle that needed to be explored.

**Developing research questions**

The importance of Kate’s story was not obvious to me at the time. Rather, her story bothered me over a period of time and the more that I thought about it, the more questions it raised. I knew that Kate was involved in a re-engagement program because she was ‘disengaged’ from school, but
who had decided that she was disengaged? What does being disengaged from school even mean? I also knew that Kate was not the only girl in the group who had spoken about fighting, but I began to question if the other girls’ experiences were the same. Moreover, how could you measure their experience? What kinds of consequences are placed on these girls because of their actions? Are those consequences justified; and who makes those decisions? All of these questions fuelled my curiosity about what was happening in the lives of these young women that was leading them to engage in behaviour that seemed to me to be dangerous. My desire to understand was powerful. From it, I developed a research project that sought to understand the friendship-based experiences of young women and the role that conflict plays within their lives.

Initial attempts to craft a research question that encapsulated the above questions was challenging. To help work through this, I did some reading around the topic of ‘female-based-violence’, ‘conflict amongst young people’, and ‘violence within schools’. Research has been conducted in a variety of fields within the area including sociology, criminology and gender studies. These studies investigated several key topics such as the ‘moral panic’ of nasty girls (see, for example; Barron & Lacombe, 2005; DiNapoli, 2003; Gilbert, 2002; Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008), ‘ladette’ culture and modern girls (see, for example; Jackson, 2006; Jackson & Tinkler, 2007), and young female criminal offenders in Scotland (see, for example; Burman & Batchelor, 2009), South Africa (see; Bhana & Pillay, 2011), Australia (see; Field, 2003) and the United States (see; Letendre, 2007). What appeared to be missing from the literature though, was an understanding of the role that conflict plays in the lives of girls that live in regional Australia.

From this foundational reading, it became apparent that my study could contribute to addressing this gap in the literature. Kate and her friends lived in regional Victoria and attended school in that community, therefore, their understandings about how they experience and engage in conflict can contribute to broader discussions about violence and conflict. My initial research question was ‘What are young women’s experiences of conflict, and of ways to resolve conflict, within a regional context?’ This question enabled an exploration of the experiences of young women like
Kate. It also captured the role that place and community played within understandings of conflict and violence.

Over time, two research questions evolved to underpin this research project:

1. How do young women in regional locations negotiate their friendships when conflict arises?
2. How do dominant gendered practices impact on young women’s negotiation of conflict within their friendships?

These questions point towards the importance of place as integral to the development of this study. I now offer up an overview of the status of stories in critical research and then move on to defining the importance of place. This will be followed by a summary of the research methodology. Following the methodology overview, I reflect on the cultural, historical and situated events of my life that have impacted on me as a researcher and contributed to the construction of this research project. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief summary of the chapters to follow.

**Stories and the importance of place**

Stories are an intrinsic part of the world in which we live. Human history is framed and created through narratives that cross boundaries of culture, class, race, gender, religion and other facets of the human condition (Atkinson, 2015). Some people tend to make sense of their life and the lives of others through the construction of narratives and the possibility of making a connection with others that might reduce feelings of isolation and alienation (Richardson, 1990). Historically, women’s stories and voices have been missing from social narratives and spaces; female autonomy, knowledge and values have been positioned in relation to men. Simone de Beauvoir wrote in 1952, “man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him … she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential” (p. xviii). Feminist researchers over past decades have attempted to rectify the imbalance and exclusion of women’s voices from cultural and social
narratives by disrupting traditional ways of knowing to create rich new meanings (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2014). One method through which feminist research has disrupted traditional forms of knowledge-building has been by giving a legitimate space to women’s voices and lived experiences through the construction of creative research texts, written by women for women (Richardson, 1990). As this thesis is concerned with the lived experience of young women’s lives in regional locations, the personal narratives they construct about their experiences with their friends offer a unique opportunity to make visible those experiences and behaviours that would otherwise remain hidden from view, or be differently constructed by others who occupy positions of power and privilege.

Capturing and theorising the experiences of these young women is of particular interest in this thesis, as an important component in building understanding of their narratives around conflict and its role in their everyday lives. The notion of experience has been extensively analysed by feminist theorists (Butler, 1990; de Lauretis, 1984; Gatens, 1996; Scott, 1992). Anderson (2015) describes the notion of experience situated within a feminist epistemology as follows:

Feminist epistemology conceives of knowers as situated in particular relations to what is known and to other knowers. What is known, and the way that it is known, thereby reflects the situation or perspective of the knower. (Anderson, 2015, para. 3)

In this definition, attention is directed to situating knowledge in relation to others and to one’s self. From this perspective, a claim to know something about the world is embodied in sites of experience and interactions with other people in particular places (Anderson, 2015; Scott, 1992). For instance, children learn how to listen and tell stories from a very early age, and this process inscribes (in them) cultural meanings, values and particular ways of being (Atkinson, 2015; Richardson, 1990). Through her exploration of young children’s understanding of feminist stories, Davis (2003) notes that stories contain characters and plots that reinforce particular messages about social expectations. These include social order, gendered order and other subtle cultural messages about the roles men and women can or cannot occupy in society. Anderson (2015) asserts that these messages are also socially situated. Finding stories that challenge normative
assumptions about the social, cultural, and gendered order, offers opportunities to generate new stories about places and the people who inhabit them. The use of young women’s narratives about what it means to live in a regional community, attend school, forge friendships and navigate those relationships when conflict arises is, therefore, important to acknowledge and make visible.

**Place as pedagogical**

Making the stories of young women in regional communities visible is a way of directing focus onto the places in which those stories are constructed and recounted, and their impact understood. Australian scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have long considered the notion of place to be an important lens through which to construct knowledge about the world (Somerville, 2010). Ward, Reys, Davies, and Roots (2003) consider the association that Aboriginal peoples have to land and their “connection to country [as] being the very essence of their belief structure and subsequent social organisation” (p. 29), despite the ongoing impact that colonial dispossession, displacement and genocide at the hands of successive Australian Governments has had on their communities. This close connection to the land is reflected in contemporary Australian schooling through the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in the current Australian Curriculum, with specific reference to “the special connection to Country/Place … and … the unique belief systems that connect people physically and spiritually to Country/Place” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2017, n.p.). Somerville (2010) suggests that Aboriginal knowledge about the importance of place can have significant implications for all Australians and their understanding of, and relationship to, place.

As a non-Indigenous Australian, my understanding of who I am as an Australian is intrinsically tied to the land upon which I live and the stories I tell about my life. My lived experiences and memories are categorised around specific locations, for example, my step-father was a member of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Due to this, my memories of childhood centre around our family relocating to a range of regional and urban locations every couple of years. The stories that
I tell about my childhood and adult life are largely founded on where I was living at the time.

According to Gruenewald (2003a),

… places are profoundly pedagogical … places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places make us. As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped.

(p. 621, original emphasis)

Casey (1997) argues that the importance of place to a person’s sense of identity is something that human beings cannot escape. He states:

To be at all – to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and though them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced.

(Casey, 1997, p. ix)

According to scholars who study place (see, for example; Cloke, 2012; Gruenewald, 2003a), most “agree that an understanding of [place] is key to understanding the nature of our relationships with each other and the world” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 621). Similarly, Tedlock (2011) argues that adults do not live in different worlds from children (or adolescents) but rather, “we live differently in the same world, tasting other ways of life in cultural co-participation, solidarity, and friendship” (p. 332). In other words, I am not removed from the lives of the participants in this research, nor are they removed from mine. Rather, this research draws upon the methodological feature of narrative as a means of exploring the rich and diverse relationships that young people have with each other, their school, and community. Through narrative I also explore my own subjectivities as they relate to being a women, and a researcher, in places and spaces with which I am familiar and historically connected to. The incorporation of personal narratives from my life, my reflections, and my memories of fieldwork, are therefore, a key tool in exploring the co-dependence of place and personal relationships. A more in-depth discussion of how narrative has been used within this thesis is outlined in Chapter Three.
I now turn to a brief overview of the research methodology used in this research project to describe how these issues will be explored.

**Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory**

This research project is founded in my desire to understand the lived experiences of young women from regional locations. As the research questions concern the lives of young women and their experiences, the theoretical paradigms that are drawn upon engage with broader social and cultural constructs surrounding issues of gender inequality, gendered disadvantage and social exclusion. This research project is therefore, ideologically, theoretically, and politically framed within the context and understanding of critical social theory.

Critical theory first emerged as a methodological approach, in the 1920s and 1930s at the Frankfurt School of Social Research in Germany. This school connected a range of scholars who aligned with the philosophical and social works of eminent philosophers Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Max Weber (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). In order to try and make sense of the political and social climate of the early 20th Century, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse drew upon the work of Marx, and in particular, his ideology of capitalism, which asserts that within a capitalist society, the dominant classes exercise power over the working classes through sites of economic production (Stoddart, 2007). Marx’s ideology suggests that the working classes fail to recognise their own exploitation inherent in the economic structures of the day (Stoddart, 2007). The work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, therefore, took up some of Marx’s concepts and applied them to contemporary life (Budd, 2012), which helped raise the Frankfurt School to prominence in the field of social science research (Budd, 2012; Crotty, 1998; Giroux, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Stoddart, 2007). These scholars developed a reflexive and critical form of social inquiry which argued that social scientific knowledge played an important role in the creation of new sites of power, resistance and oppression for those groups not a part of the dominant class (Stoddart, 2007). While there was never a unified approach to cultural criticism represented by these scholars, they were all
committed to unveiling “the world of objective appearances and to expose the underlying social relationships they often reveal” (Giroux, 2001, p. 8). For the social theorists of the Frankfurt School, their work was focused on the goal of emancipation and it is this goal that continues to underpin contemporary understandings of critical theory (Carspecken, 1996; Gannon & Davies, 2014; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Lincoln and Denzin (2003) sum up what it means to be a critical theorist in the 21st Century, as they argue:

the critique and concern of the critical theorists has been an effort to design a pedagogy of resistance within communities of difference. The pedagogy of resistance, of taking back “voice,” of reclaiming narrative for one's own rather than adapting to the narratives of a dominant majority … [aims at] overturning oppression and achieving social justice through empowerment of the marginalised, the poor, the nameless, the voiceless. (pp. 625–626)

Lincoln and Denzin (2003) suggest that the concern of contemporary critical theorists is to work with, and from within, communities with people who have traditionally been marginalised, silenced and who have experienced forms of oppression. By working from within communities, critical theorists can contribute to opportunities for oppressed people to think differently about their lives and their communities and thus open up the possibility for changing their responses towards dominating groups and processes (Benhabib, Butler, Cornell, & Fraser, 1995; Gannon & Davies, 2014). For critical theorists, one of the main objectives of their research is to emancipate groups of people from the structures that oppress them. My research aligns with this value.

The research questions that form the basis of this project are female-focused and regionally situated. This research focus has been influenced by the social, cultural and political context in which I live and work. Firstly, according to the Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC] (2018), women in Australia continue to be discriminated against because of their sex and gender despite community perceptions that gender equality has been achieved. Secondly, the lives of women in Australia are not homogenous due to the size of the continent in which the population
lives. Women and girls who live within rural and regional communities often experience gender inequality in very different ways to their urban counterparts (Alston, 2016). These women face personal, social, cultural and economic circumstances that can compound their disadvantage because of their gender (Women’s Health Grampians [WHG], 2016). Some of the specific structural barriers that impact on the life chances of young women from rural and regional areas, relate to limited access to education, including tertiary studies and male-dominated apprenticeships, as well as access to childcare and health-services (WHG, 2016). Furthermore, patriarchal social structures have been recognised as appearing more inflexible in rural areas due to historical beliefs and practices about land ownership as pertaining to men only, and women are relegated to the role of wife and mother (Alston, 2016).

The combined impact of social, cultural and economic factors discussed above result in women and girls from regional and rural Australia having markedly different understandings of girlhood, womanhood and the gendered experience than their urban counterparts. Therefore, the exploration and documentation of their voices and experiences will contribute to more inclusive understandings of how young women make sense of, and live their lives within, a particular place and space. I now turn to the social and political changes that are challenging heteronormative discourses around how we listen to the experiences of women and girls.

To ‘Witness’ in times of change

The gendered inequality of women’s lives has recently come to public prominence through a series of high profile global marches and social media campaigns. Some of the more visible campaigns include, the 2017 March on Washington [WMW] (#marchonwashington)2, Time’s Up

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2 Women’s March on Washington (2017) was a worldwide protest that occurred on January 21, 2017, the day after Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States of America. Approximately five million people, across seven continents, marched in response to Donald Trump’s political stance on women, and migrants. The organisers stated that their goal was to “send a bold message to our new administration on their first day in office, and to the world that women's rights are human rights” (WMW, 2017). Further information can be found here: https://www.womensmarch.com/
campaign (#timesup)\(^3\), as well as the social media campaign, #\textsc{MeToo}\(^4\). These campaigns are aimed at giving voice to the experiences of women and drawing attention to the many facets that gender inequality takes within our society. One of the guiding principles that underpinned the 2017 WMW, was:

\begin{quote}
As mothers, sisters, daughters, and contributing members of this great nation, we seek to break barriers to access, inclusion, independence, and the full enjoyment of citizenship at home and around the world. We strive to be fully included in and contribute to all aspects of … life, economy, and culture. (WMW, 2017, n.p.)
\end{quote}

While the above statement is only one example of the principles that have guided the WMW, it is the global swell of voices collectively arguing for fundamental human rights that is of relevance to the framing of this research project. The overarching aim of WMW, and other women’s movements, is the capacity to achieve “transformative social change” and the “dismantling [of] systems of oppression … and [the] building [of] inclusive structures guided by self-determination, dignity and respect” (WMW, 2017, para. 1). While this research project alone cannot offer the kind of ‘transformative social change’ that the WMW aims for, it can nevertheless contribute to making visible systems of power and oppression that constrain and confine aspects of young women’s lives in regional Australia. One way in which this project ‘witnesses’ the lives of young women is through a research project underpinned by critical theory, critical ethnography, and the

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\(^3\) Time’s Up is a movement created in 2018, aimed at overcoming systemic gender-inequality and sexual harassment in the workplace. It was created by a group of female celebrities, and the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, in response to high levels of sexual misconduct allegations against female workers in various industries (Time’s Up, 2018). In response to this movement, a legal defence fund was established to support low income women seek justice for sexual assault and harassment in the workplace, with the ultimate goal of improving legislation that leads towards gender parity and equality (Time’s Up, 2018). Further information can be found here: \url{https://www.timesupnow.com/}
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\(^4\) The MeToo movement began as a grassroots campaign in 2006 (Me Too, 2018) as a way to help survivors of sexual assault and violence gain access to resources and build a community of advocates. This movement rose to prominence through Twitter using the hashtag #metoo, resulting in a global community of sexual assault survivors sharing their stories. Currently, the Me Too movement continues to advocate for policy changes, research, and supporting survivors through resource development and community-based action (Me Too, 2018). Further information can be found here: \url{https://metoomvmt.org/}
\end{flushright}
incorporation of narrative writing, all of which is geared towards working with, and for, the participants in this study. The specific method used to do this was based on critical ethnography.

**Critical ethnography**

Aspects of conventional ethnography, such as observational-based fieldwork, key informants, and embedded interviews were used in this research project. One main difference between conventional ethnographic studies and this research project as a critical ethnography is the “unapologetic political agenda of knowledge production for informants that equips them to gain ownership of the change process” (Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2006, p. 130). This project is designed and conducted with the intent of enhancing the lives of young women from a regional community. This thesis does not aim to produce a holistic portrait of an entire culture. Rather, the project illuminates those conditions that oppress a group of young women in one such community, and offers them the capacity to speak against the discourses which have long silenced them (Smyth et al., 2006).

Using critical ethnography as the methodology for this study aligns with the epistemological stance that underpins this research project and is further discussed as the theoretical perspective in Chapter Three. Pasco (2003) describes a critical orientation towards ethnography as encompassing three fundamental beliefs:

a) That knowledge is socially constructed and mediated through power relations;

b) That certain groups in society are privileged over others; and

c) Research should be used as a form of social and cultural criticism. (p. 26)

As has been shown throughout this introductory chapter, this research project is founded on the belief that knowledge is socially constructed through interactions with others, is situated in particular spaces and places; and is mediated through unequal power relations. This research acknowledges that the lives of women and girls have historically been silenced or marginalised by patriarchal notions of value and worth. Furthermore, the current political climate emphasises the right for women to ‘self-determine’ their lives and for people to bear ‘witness’ to the experiences
of all women. These understandings align with Pasco’s (2003) description above and enable this study to be described as ‘critical’. I now offer a brief overview of the particular elements that comprise this research project.

This critical ethnography focuses on the observation of one Year 8 class at a regional Victorian co-education secondary school over a period of nine weeks at the end of 2012. In total, 22 students and five teachers participated in both observations and interviews. The challenge for this project was not around the fieldwork or generation of data, but rather, how to represent the voluminous and diverse forms of data collected. Specifically, the challenge was to find a way to collate the participants’ narrative and my commentary into a coherent representation that was simultaneously sympathetic to academic discourse and true to the multitude of expressions, feelings and nuances of every conversation. The issue of representation, including how aspects of narrative research were conceptualised and used, will be further discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, along with a thorough, detailed account of how each stage of the research was conducted and why. For the purpose of this overview, it is important to acknowledge Laurel Richardson’s (1995) work on crystallization and how that work informed the representations used to shape and display the data. Throughout this thesis, a range of narrative portraits and observational vignettes have been crafted in a variety of styles to highlight ways in which conflict was observed to occur for one group of young women. Another key representation is the use of reflective portraits of the participant ‘Kim’ to highlight and acknowledge the researcher’s thoughts, feelings and actions at particular times within the fieldwork and analysis. This inclusion of ‘Kim’ is a deliberate strategy to ensure that issues of bias from within the researcher’s own life are included in the display of the data as a way to interpret, and support, the analysis and disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions that could be made about the participants and their lives (McLaren, 1997).
Who am I? Why should you listen to me?

McLaren (1997) suggests that ethnographers are unable to escape the life narratives that surround them, affect them and, therefore, the research they construct:

I wish to shed some light on the dilemma faced by the urban ethnographer who lives in the in-between spaces of the city, who cannot escape his or her memories and who in his or her creatively charged strolling, always already occupies the existential geography of his or her own desire and fear. (McLaren, 1997, pp. 144-145)

In other words, all researchers bring socio-historical identities and narratives to any research in which they participate. I cannot claim to be value free in this research project; every observation, every piece of data I generate is an interpretative act upon which I subject my memories, experiences and values. Consequently, who I am as a person and researcher, has relevance to this research project. The following story is my story: the story of my birth, my relationship with my parents, and the many struggles and triumphs that have shaped me into the person I am. I offer this not as an act of self-indulgence, but rather as a contribution to the cultural and historical understandings I bring as an ethnographer to this research project.

Childhood memories

I was a winter baby, born in 1985 to white, welfare-reliant, working-class parents. My father was a factory worker who drove a forklift for a company that manufactured industrial pumps. He was not an educated man having only completed schooling to Year 8. He learnt how to read, write, and do basic arithmetic. According to his way of telling it, once school no longer held any relevance for him he left and got a job at a factory. He stayed there for the remainder of his working life and only recently reached retirement age.

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5 In Australia, Year 8 is typically the last year for middle school. In the United States, eighth grade is usually the second or third year of middle school (junior high school).
My mother left school during ninth grade – having always stated that she “hated school and couldn’t wait to leave”. After finishing school, my mother proceeded to have numerous casual jobs, including stacking shelves and delivering pizzas until she became pregnant for the first time. At the time I was born, my mother was a stay-at-home parent. I was her fourth child in seven years. My mother had my older sister at age twenty, and my grandparents raised her. One of my older brothers, whom I have never met, was raised by his father. My other older brother is my only full biological sibling.

I do not remember my family as the stereotypical nuclear family in any way (which could be described as a mother, father, two children and a minivan). My parents divorced when I was three years old and I have few memories of that time except for some photographs. My mother became the primary caregiver (or single parent) and raised my brother and me on a single parent pension with minimal child support. My early relationship with my biological father was defined by my mother as I was not old enough to truly understand the circumstances around his leaving despite the tension I recall hovering between them. I never heard my mother say anything nice about my father, in fact, it felt like any opportunity to ‘bad-mouth’ him she took up with relish. I was constantly told by her that my father “never wanted you; but I did” or “he’s too busy to have anything to do with you” and I am sorry to say that I believed what she said. To this day, I have never asked my father about the truth of these statements; in all honesty, I am not sure how I would cope with the answer. I currently have no relationship with my biological father, something that causes me both pain and relief.

My memories of being young are sketchy at best, but a few stand out:

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• The time that my mother went into a milk bar and only had a $5 commemorative coin (for some sports star) and bartered with the owner for a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread so that we could have something to eat for dinner that night.

• Sitting in the kitchen with my doona\(^7\) wrapped around me and the oven door open because we had no money to pay for heating that week.

• Never having the right coloured netball skirt for school because my mother could not find the right colour, or size from the op\(^8\) shop, where all of my clothes were bought.

• My father coming to collect us for his scheduled visitation and my mother not allowing him in the house. He got angry and kicked over the rubbish bins. My mother called the police and we never got to have our visitation.

• Going with my mother to the Salvation Army\(^9\) just before Christmas one year and being told to wait in the waiting room. I waited as my mother went in to a side room and about five minutes later I heard her cry. Not long after that my mother and a lady returned with my mother holding a large black bag. I later learnt that that bag contained gifts for my brother and me.

These are only some of the memories that I have of this time in my childhood. While I never felt I was left wanting for anything, I do remember feeling as though I was missing something – as if I had missed a joke that everyone else was laughing at. I did not seem to have the same cultural and social capital of other students in my class; it felt like we were reading the same book, but I was always a chapter behind them. One example from school remains clearly in my mind: we did not have enough money for cling wrap to wrap my sandwiches for school so instead we used empty bread bags. One day a girl in my Year one class asked me loudly why I did not have cling wrap and I remember feeling sad when I told her we did not have enough money. She was upset for me

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\(^7\) An Australian word for duvet

\(^8\) Abbreviation for Opportunity Shop, otherwise known as a second-hand or ‘thrift’ shop where people buy donated goods

\(^9\) Australian charity that offers crisis support and help to people experiencing hardship
and I felt embarrassed that my poorness made her sad. Even now, there are times when my background can rear its ugly head and cause me to question the position that I find myself in.

My mother starting a relationship with my now stepfather when I was seven years old signified a new and important period in my life. While the courtship was rocky at times, they nevertheless began a relationship that introduced me to an unfamiliar world, one that I did not consider I would ever be a part of. My stepfather came from a traditional farming family – mother, father, and three sons. I thought his family was what a family ‘should’ look like, although with a few sisters to. My stepfather introduced me to vegetables that I had never eaten (pumpkin, squash, and broccoli), music that I had never heard (country music mostly, with some classical too), and the idea that education is to be valued, respected and enjoyed. He regaled me with stories of his days at boarding school – like the time he brought back fish and chips in a suitcase for all of the boys after wool classing down at the local tech school, or when he distracted the headmaster so one of the other boys could steal some biscuits from the jar on his desk. Everything was magical and his school seemed like a dream.

Through his presence and guidance, I strived to be the best that I could be. I wanted him to be proud of me and I wanted to make something of my life. As he had done for us, I wanted to be in a position to provide stability for my family, something that I had not always known myself.

A desire to improve my learning experience emerged as I commenced Year 10 at the local public high school in the Victorian Riverina area. I had become dissatisfied with school and wanted something ‘more’, though I could not define what that was. My stepfather encouraged me to apply for a scholarship to his old school, which I did. Two months later, I was offered a place there. I received a 75% reduction in fees, which enabled my mother to let me go to the school.

While the reality was not magical all the time (severe homesickness in the first six months dampened the experience, as did the lack of money in my bank account), I loved this world and the people and opportunities that were suddenly available to me. There were trips to the football, opportunities to see the Dalai Lama in person, and plenty of friends to borrow clothes from. This
private school world was new and shiny, yet felt very intimidating. Almost all the students had the
best of everything – uniforms, shoes, computers, and in Year 12 – cars! Their knowledge of the
world was more advanced than mine and their knowledge of the possibilities that awaited them
was endless, exciting, and filled with enthusiasm and certainty. My peers seemed to possess an
ease that I did not have; a sense that all was right in their world; that they were entitled to every
opportunity that came their way. From my perception, there was no fear in my peers; but for me,
the prospect of the end of Year 12 was terrifying.

Post school: The heritage of being ‘that’ girl

I left school at the end of Year 12 feeling successful. I had two university offers, one in Canberra
and one in Melbourne CBD, a great ENTER\textsuperscript{10} score (88.5), and I was excited about my life. This
feeling only lasted for a moment in time … one perfect moment! It crashed down around me
when my mother uttered these words in a moment of frustration, jealously, and financial
exhaustion:

\textit{We cannot afford to send you to university. You cannot go!}

That was it. In ten words, everything that I had strived for was taken away – or at least it felt like
it was to the 17 year-old me. I was told to get a job and that I would have to start paying rent; it
was time to stop "playing pretend" according to my mother. Over the next couple of months I
felt lost … purposeless … and afraid that all of my hard work at school was going to amount to
nothing and I would simply become a part of another generation of my family that was stuck in
poverty.

I made a decision to defer university; my dream was not completely gone, just put on hold for a
while. I moved out of home and moved back to the town where my boarding school was. I was
fortunate that an old school friend and her mother said I could stay with them. I got a job working

\textsuperscript{10} For all senior high school students who have successfully completed their final school exams, they receive
a Tertiary Entrance Score (ENTER) out of 100 comparing their achievement to other students.
at a hardware store and I tried to save every cent that I could towards paying for university. The reality was much harder than I had expected. The combined impact of being on a reduced wage because I was not 18, only employed part-time, and paying rent, meant that my savings were scant to non-existent. I remember calling my stepfather after I got my first pay-cheque and asking, “How dare the tax department take so much money from me!” and my stepfather offering some sympathy, but unable to offer me any words of comfort: “that’s just how it is” he muttered down the phone. The daily grind of working and saving, combined with watching my friends go off to university while I was stuck behind a timber yard counter earning minimum wage, hurt more than I can describe. My mental health deteriorated, my relationships with friends disappeared and things became very strained with my mother. I was falling off a ledge with no one there to catch me. I was just another poor kid unable to go to university because I simply could not afford it. If I am really honest, the only thing in my life at that time which I felt I had any control over was my body.

I attempted to replace my feelings of failure with short-term ‘love’ from men who did not really care about me. I am not ashamed of this, because in time, I learnt that I could rely on myself to get to where I wanted to be; I just had to find an alternative way.

I went to the doctor and got my mental health under control and I began taking better care of myself. I had just celebrated my 18th birthday and was finding my feet when they were suddenly swept out from under me by a boy called Jamie. We met, we laughed, and we loved … but two short months later, I fell pregnant. I remember feeling stunned; not sad or happy, just … stunned. Jamie and I talked about what we should do and then he said the most profound thing to me that I have ever heard:

I’m in. I’m in forever.

Writing those words is emotional for me. It was that moment when I knew that someone had my back even though so many others turned away once they found out the news of my pregnancy. I battled with other people’s snide comments spoken not so subtly under their breath, angry looks
from random strangers, and worst of all, a wall of silence from my stepfather. I lost friends, lost my confidence and shrunk into myself for the remainder of my pregnancy. In my hormonal-riddled mind, I succumbed to a sense of hopelessness for my future and for the future of my unborn baby.

Leah was born on a frosty July evening in 2004 and she was utterly perfect. Cuddled up in my arms she became a reason to keep going.

Jamie made me promise before I gave birth to Leah that I would enrol in university after she was born. So that is what I did. It was not easy and it did not come quickly, nor without moments of doubt… but I did it! In 2010, I walked across the stage in my gown and hat and received my Bachelor of Education (Hons) degree. It was a glorious feeling and one that I owed to a number of significant women in my life. These women include:

- My Literature lecturer from first year university, who asked me what example I was setting for my daughter if I quit university at the first sign of hardship;
- My Honours lecturer who supported my decision to write about teenage mothers due to my own experience as one, and who never gave up on my ideas and ability to be a writer;
- My best friend – Julie – who never let my mothering duties stop her from including me in group activities; and
- My mother-in-law, Sharon, who believed in me and helped me raise my daughter while I studied.

These women were my saviours because they lifted me up when I felt like I had nothing left to give, and when I thought that my voice was worthless and of no value. For me, finding myself and finding my inner feminist is about knowing that I have worth and that I am capable of more than where I come from. It is from this belief that I situate myself firmly in this research project. I believe that every girl has worth and to share my story with others, highlights that a person’s background does not define who they will become.
Summary and thesis outline

Girls who live within regional and rural Australia have significant challenges that impact on them. The young women, who are the focus of this research project, live in a world where the concerns of regional and rural communities are often drowned out by the concerns of urban populations. This is not to suggest that researchers have ignored these communities. In particular, there is a wide variety of current research that explores the issue of gender roles in rural communities, including the invisible contribution that women make to the local economies (see; Alston, 1995). Research in rural spaces also looks at the impact of globalization on the mental health and wellbeing of rural populations (Edwards, Gray, & Boyd, 2015), including how it impacts on rural men and their construction of masculinity (see; Kimmel & Ferber, 2006). Despite this, there is limited research which focuses on the experiences of young women, adolescent girls, and the role that conflict and violence plays within their lives. This research project aims to rectify this gap.

In short, this thesis documents, analyses, and represents young women’s stories and experiences of how they navigate their friendships when conflict arises. The following chapter summaries introduce the reader to how the thesis is structured in order to explore the research questions.

Chapter One has been an introduction to how this research project evolved from an ‘organic’ conversation between myself and a young woman about conflict and violence into the current research project. It considered the importance of place and stories to the framing of the research approach, as well as methodological consideration and techniques drawn upon. Finally, it introduced the reader to the researcher.

Chapter Two is a critical dialogue with key aspects of the broader literature, including definitions of conflict, the debate about categorising rural/regional Australia, and the current political, social and economic arguments about gender inequality within Australia and the world. This chapter considers the role that neoliberalism and the rise of postfeminism have had in positioning women and girls as no longer in need of social action and looks at the implications this has on debates
around whether research into girls’ disadvantage, and more specifically, girls’ education, are considered necessary anymore.

Chapter Three introduces the reader to the theoretical perspective of critical theory with which this research project aligns. Discussions within this chapter focus on ontology, epistemology and methodology, including how these have guided the method of critical ethnography used to conduct this research project. This chapter concludes with a summary of the importance of data crystallization and narrative portraiture to understanding female-based conflict.

Chapter Four takes the reader through the research methods used to conduct this study. It discusses the selection of ‘Rural Valley High School’ as the research site, as well as how my role was negotiated. Discussions also focus on the observation techniques I used and how these helped contribute to the generation of data. This chapter also considers the ethical moments that impacted on the direction and development of the research project, including issues of representation and reflection.

Chapter Five introduces the reader to the community of Rural Valley. This chapter takes a historical look at how the community came to be, as well as the stereotypes and perceptions that impact on the community and the local high school. The students of 8R are introduced to the reader, as are the representations that are used to describe them.

Following on from Chapter Five, Chapter Six is the first data analysis chapter, introducing the reader to the Girls in T-Bars. This chapter is separated into two sections; section one explores each of the individual Girls in T-Bars conceptualisations and understandings of conflict that has been present within their lives. Section two, analyses the collective friendship of the group and the role that conflict has played out for them during the observation period.

11 Rural Valley is a pseudonym to represent the community where this project took place.
Chapter Seven is the second data analysis chapter and introduces the reader to another group of girls from 8R – the Girls in Vans. This chapter focuses primarily on observational snapshots as a representational mode to show the way conflict plays out for this group of young women.

Chapter Eight draws together all of the previous chapters into a coherent discussion around answering the research questions. This discussion focuses on how the data from Chapters Six and Seven illuminate the structural and social issues which impact on how the two groups of young women engage in, and understand, conflict in their local community. This chapter considers the limitations of the study, as well as avenues for further exploration.

The conclusion draws the whole study together. These final pages explore recommendations for schools in dealing with female-based conflict and consider how observational research methods can help expose the broader structures and discourses that impact on conflict between friends.
Chapter Two: A Critical Dialogue with key aspects of the literature

The literature surrounding ‘girls’ conflict’, and the mechanisms for working with young people engaged in conflict, is both patchy and complex. The research questions that underpin this project require engagement with a wide variety of literature, across a vast array of research topics and methodologies, in order to appropriately situate this study within a foundation of knowledge. This literature review engages with studies across diverse fields including, but not limited to, criminology, sociology, psychology, gender and cultural studies, and education, which all contribute to making the literature complex (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2016). For example, each field of study has a different way of synthesising, evaluating, and generating data on the topic of conflict amongst young people (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2016). Due to the complex nature of the literature, as described, it is necessary to engage in a review of the literature that disentangles this complexity in order to show where research in this area has been ignored, such as conflict amongst young people from regional Australia. Therefore, this review should not be seen as a complete survey of the literature but rather as a critical dialogue with key definitions, key theorists, and key methodologies from within these complex fields as they influence this research project.

Navigating this chapter

This focussed review will be presented in two parts. Part one, will focus on understanding three key concepts that form an intrinsic part of situating this research project within an Australian context. These concepts are: the rural / regional debate, understanding friendship, and discussions and competing definitions of conflict. These concepts all have a variety of meanings depending upon how, when, and where they have been used across the research literature. It is, therefore, important to conceptualise them in relation to this thesis, the theoretical framework, and any underlying assumptions that I may hold around their use.

Part two is concerned with situating this study within broader understandings of what it means to be female in Australia. This section will explore the so-called ‘success story’ that is gender
equality and the many misconceptions and struggles that are still positioning women as unequal to
men, including within our educational system. Finally, this section draws together the ways
broader discussions about women are influencing perceptions of gender-based conflict in schools.

Focusing the literature review on these broad areas assist in building a solid foundation upon
which to inform my research, including understandings of where this research is positioned within
the academic literature, where the gaps are, and how this project helps inform new ways of
understanding female-based conflict.

Part One: Defining key terms

The research question, which underpins this thesis, is specifically concerned with three key
concepts: regional locations, friendship, and conflict. In this first section I unpack what ‘regional
locations’ mean in an Australian context, followed by an exploration of adolescent friendships,
and lastly, I conceptualise, and define, the nature of conflict and how it has come to be understood
within global and local spaces.

Regional Australia: Wide open plains and the importance of place

Kim:

The road between home and boarding school is long – really long. It will take Dad and me just over five hours to get there. The route we take is not straight, rather, we travel a winding path over hills, across rivers, onto highways, past tiny one-shop towns and through large cities. I often spend trips like these just staring at the green and brown hills; they are not remarkable, nor overly large, but they are around every bend in the road until we make it to the city. The funny thing about travelling like this is not the length of time it takes, but rather, the overwhelming sense of vastness and space that is always present and never seems to end until we suddenly arrive at our destination. It is the presence of large buildings and overcrowded highways that make me nervous, not the vast countryside we have just left behind.

The story which precedes this section is a recount of one of the many car trips my stepfather and I took between my home on the Victorian and New South Wales (NSW) border, to get to my
boarding school in south-west, Victoria. What it means to live in Australia, for me, is intrinsically tied up with the regional and urban communities in which I have lived and of which have shaped my particular view of the world. It is from these communities that I seek to explore the experiences of young women and their friendships knowing that place is “profoundly pedagogical” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 621) and contributes to a person’s sense of identity.

Defining ‘regional’ places and spaces is difficult and has long been a matter of contention both within Australia and across the world (Alston, 2016; Carrington & Scott, 2008; Cloke, 2012). One of the biggest challenges is the manner in which the term ‘regional’ and ‘rural’ are often considered interchangeable, especially within Australia (Regional Australia Institute [RAI], 2015). There are a number of factors which contribute to this difficulty, specifically, how the regional and rural spaces of Australia are generally all considered the same way – small, agricultural, and located a significant distance away from a major capital city (RAI, 2015).

According to Cloke (2012), popular discourses about space, place, and society, seems to be firmly entrenched around the concept of regionality and rurality in Australia. Carrington and Scott (2008) suggest that ‘rural’ and ‘regional’ spaces are as much an imagined space, as they are a physical place. These discourses are not homogenous, nor universal, rather, constructions around regionality and rurality mean different things to different people depending upon a range of factors. For example, Cloke (2012) suggests that there are subtle differences entrenched in the key terms used to describe regional and rural spaces in popular culture. Some of the terms he identifies include the ‘countryside’, ‘wilderness’, ‘outback’, ‘up the river / lake / farm’, ‘out in the sticks’ and so on. Each of these terms conjure particular notions and ideas about what they mean and those meanings are constructed differently by each person. For example, for me, the term ‘outback’ evokes images of red desert-sand and wide open spaces; for other people, it may evoke images of dense bushland and impassable mountainous terrain. The mixed imagery that these terms create, make defining rural / regional spaces incredibly complex.

To arrive at a regional definition is also made harder in countries like Australia where our national identity is intimately tied up to historical events that took place in ‘the bush’. For example, some
of the major events in Australian history occurred in regional and rural towns. Some of the most famous historical events include the Victorian Gold Rush (1851-1860s) and Eureka Rebellion (1854) in Ballarat; Ned Kelly’s last stand in the town of Glenrowan (1880), as well as the Burke and Wills expedition (1860) which crossed Australia from South to North for the first time. These historical events have all contributed in some way to the construction of a collective Australian national identity, which is intimately tied up to the people, places and spaces where these events occurred.

The complexity, identified above, between the imagined place and the physical space within Australia, has led to the development of three main conceptual frameworks which have been influential in my understanding of regionality, and which I draw upon in this research project. This framework has been developed by Cloke (2012) and is originally concerned with defining rurality only. Despite this, the three frames that Cloke (2012) developed are useful for helping to conceptualise regionality as well.

Cloke (2012) considers these three frame as being either ‘functional’ concepts, ‘political-economic’ concepts, or ‘social constructions’. ‘Functional’ concepts of rurality seek to identify elements of rural place / landscape / society / existence that “provide an approximation of the overarching concepts of rurality” (Cloke, 2012, p. 20). Three key features of this approach tend to define rurality based on agricultural land use, the existence of small pockets of human settlement and population, as well as a cohesive identity based on respect for the environment and a rural lifestyle (Cohen, 2012). Typically, this type of categorising can be seen in government bodies like the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the RAI. For the RAI, regional Australia is considered to be “all of the towns, small cities and areas that lie beyond the major capital cities … which have populations of over 50,000 persons” (2014, p. 2). This method of categorisation has, however, not been without its critics. Carrington and Scott (2008) argue that the data generated by ABS classifications (and other similar bodies) can be “quite misleading” and “fail to capture the cultural constructions of the country integral to sociological understandings of rurality” (p. 643).
The second conceptual classification, described by Cloke (2012), is the political-economic concept of rurality. Within this classification, rural spaces are not considered as having separate issues from urban areas due to the belief that what happens in rural communities is caused by external factors operating outside of the community boundaries. These factors, identified by Cloke (2012), encompass changes to global economic markets, shifts and changes in local and international governments, including where and when resources are allocated, as well as other domestic and international influences. While this kind of classification could be useful for some government agencies seeking to understand the broader factors which impact on whole countries, this conceptualisation is not suited to this research project. As discussed in Chapter One, this research subscribes to the notion that particular places and spaces play a central role in how a person constructs their sense of identity through the relationships we build with others from within those communities (Anderson, 2015; Casey, 1997; Gruenewald, 2003a). My own background of having travelled extensively, due to my stepfather’s role in the Australian Defence Force, enables me to attest to the differences between places, irrespective of how similar they may appear in government reports.

The final theoretical framing of rurality, as defined by Cloke (2012), is the social construction of rurality. According to Cloke (2012) this framing regards,

rurality as socially constructed … [and] the importance of ‘rural’ lies in the fascinating world of social, cultural and moral values which have become associated with rurality, rural spaces and rural life. (p. 21)

Within this framing of rurality, focus is given to understanding how people make sense of their lives within particular spaces and places (Cloke, 2012; Gruenewald, 2003a). Gruenewald (2003a) argues that all places within a person’s life are inscribed with ideologies that shape cultural identities. By focusing on the stories that people tell about their lives in a particular place, researchers can challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, which, may position communities as deficient or ‘disadvantaged’ into reframing discourses about particular groups of people and their particular issues (Alston, 2016; Cloke, 2012; Gruenewald, 2003a). For example, Huffling,
Carlone and Benavides (2017) explored the intersection of rurality, local politics and environmental conservation and decolonisation with local high school students using a critical pedagogy of place. Huffling et al. (2017) argue that a critical dialogue with students about place can lead to a fuller understanding of their community, their family, and the land upon which they live. Two decades ago, Haymes (1995) argued for a critical pedagogy of place through which Black communities could reflect upon their particular community needs and build a critical consciousness around the struggle for racial, economic, and political equality. While these two studies may have been conducted more than twenty years apart, each study identified the importance of place to the construction of personal, social, and community identity. Furthermore, these studies, and other similar studies (for example, see; Devine-Wright & Clayton, 2010; Gruenewald, 2003b; Zimmerman & Weible, 2016), highlight the role that critical awareness can have for the ongoing development and growth of small communities heavily impacted by discourses created by others about them.

For this research, utilising a social constructionist approach to understanding regionality, means that seeking out stories and experiences from within a particular regional community can illuminate larger patterns of power, domination, and resistance from young women in a world where neoliberal policies and practices have become the norm.

The importance of understanding friendship

Another key definition required to situate this study concerns the nature of ‘friendship’. Defining and theorising the nature of friendship has proven challenging due to the different constructions derived from the literature.

Within the field of psychology, friendship has been defined as “a dyadic, co-constructed phenomenon characterized by reciprocity, closeness and intimacy” (Amichai-Hamburger, Kingsbury, & Schneider, 2013, p. 34). Whereas, within the sociology literature, friendships are considered “emotionally-significant relationships that develop in, and are shaped by, specific circumstances” (Cronin, 2014, p. 71). Other interpretations of what constitutes friendship can be
found within creative works of fiction. For example, the poet David Whyte (2015), defines friendship as “the privilege of having been seen by someone and the equal privilege of being granted the sight of the essence of another” (p. 74). While these definitions all come from different fields of study and exploration, they nevertheless, seem to encapsulate the idea that friendship happens in relationships with others, where all parties engage in aspects of reciprocal emotional and interpersonal support.

According to Amichai-Hamburger et al. (2013), friendship is considered an important component of a person’s overall wellbeing, including their mental, physical, and emotional health. Historically, this understanding had not always been considered in relation to children’s friendships (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Prior to the 1980s, there was a general consensus amongst researchers that children’s friendships were superficial and were only formed through proximity (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2013; Clark & Drewry, 1985; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Over time this belief about children has been reconsidered thanks to researchers like James and James (2004), and Prout and James (1997). More recently, friendships are seen as integral components of a person’s life, irrespective of age (Davies, 2003; Parker, Low, Walker, & Gamm, 2005).

Despite the historic belief that friendships for children were created mainly due to proximity, there are some researchers who argue that friendships are heavily reliant upon being formed within the social and physical spaces we occupy (Spencer & Pahl, 2006). Spencer and Pahl (2006) argue that friendship groups tend to be composed of people who closely resemble characteristics and behaviours that we value within ourselves. This resemblance may be in terms of physical characteristics (i.e. has red hair, or plays a particular sport), similar family, cultural or racial backgrounds, as well as a similar age or community affiliation (Cronin, 2014).

For young people, schools are one such place where proximity to others within their age group is a compulsory requirement of modern education (Campbell & Whitehead, 2015). It is within schools that children and adolescents typically learn how to build and maintain friendships and to
navigate the issues and conflicts that inevitably arise (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2013). Some researchers have suggested that a person’s friendship, or a lack of friendships, are one of the main reasons that young people choose to stay in, or leave, school (Smyth & Hattam, 2004). Smyth and Hattam (2004) argue that school-based friendships should be considered a central category of analysis in understanding how young people construct their identity, especially in relationships with others. Crudda and Haddock (2005) have taken up this call for further research in relation to girls’ friendship-work. Other researchers, such as, Vincent, Neal and Iqbal (2016), also explore the role of friendship for children and young people of different interethnic and interracial groups; Barber and Woodford-Wasson (2015) researches friendships between gifted students. This continued research into the development of friendships suggest that understanding school-based friendships, including how they impact on learning, as well as on the social and emotional wellbeing of students, should be a key consideration for all researchers who research with, and around, children and young people. As this research project is concerned with understanding how conflict is negotiated within female friendships in a regional Australian school, illuminating the stories and experiences of these young women will help inform research within this area.

**Outlining Conflict**

Conflict and violence are considered unavoidable facets of the human experience (Acierno, Resnick, Kilpatrick, Saunders, & Best, 1999). Engaging in conflict with others is something that most people will experience throughout their lives and is considered one of the most common sources of daily stress (Hlavka, 2014; Stephenson, King, & DeLongis, 2016). Therefore, being able to define how conflict manifests in our relationships with others is complex. This complexity is compounded by the manner in which definitions of conflict are often associated with understandings of violence, and violent behaviour, which are themselves socially constructed (Acierno et al., 1999; Burman, Batchelor, & Brown, 2001). The following discussion looks at competing definitions of conflict and how these definitions can be considered in relation to friendship-based conflict.
Definitions of conflict can be found within global not-for-profit organisations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), definitions which are positioned in relation to global forms of conflict and violence. For example, more than twenty years ago the WHO defined conflict as “a situation where parties pursue opposing goals [and] may entail but not equal violence” (Large, 1997, n.p). Aspects of this definition are reflected in more contemporary definitions from the UN, but with additional elements that reflect more contemporary issues. In 2015, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Antonio Guterres, declared that the nature of conflict has evolved and can no longer be considered the province of military bodies and warring governments. Instead, conflict is now considered to be underpinned by global mega-trends, like climate change and human displacement (Guterres, 2015). The nature of these two definitions from global organisations consider conflict in relation to broader structural violence and conflict within warzones. While these definitions are helpful in considering global perspectives on conflict, they fail to encapsulate the nature of interpersonal conflict with which this research is concerned.

In the field of social psychology, Deutsch (1973) is considered one of the key theorists examining the nature of interpersonal conflict over the past five decades. His research suggests that conflict between people, should be differentiated between ‘destructive’ or ‘constructive’ conflict (Deutsch, 1973). For Deutsch (1973), ‘destructive’ conflict tends to move away from the primary issue of contention to related areas of contention and tends to evolve into coercive strategies and threats. Destructive conflicts tend to end in the dissatisfaction of both parties and can often escalate into violence. ‘Constructive’ conflict, on the other hand, stays focused on the main issue of contention while the involved parties engage in problem solving behaviours. Constructive conflict results in a mutually satisfying outcome for both parties and can have positive effects for all involved (Deutsch, 1973). In this definition, conflict can be considered actions and behaviours that stem from an incompatible understanding, or belief, between people and includes the techniques and practices they engage to resolve those differences. This definition by Deutsch
(1973) is relevant to this study due to the differentiation between how different friendship groups engage in, and resolve, their conflict.

The above discussion has focused on outlining the current tensions and debates that underpin an ability to define terms such as regional / rural, conflict and friendship. These three concepts are all important for situating this study. However, there are other areas within the academic literature that have a bearing on the conceptualisation of this research. Part Two of this critical dialogue will explore how girls, and girls’ education, are currently theorised within Australia, and how broader dialogues around gender equality have a bearing on this study.

**Part Two: Girls, a success story?**

**Girl Power and Successful girls**

More than twenty years ago, I was told by my high school English teacher that I could be anything that I wanted to be as long as I applied myself and ‘worked hard’. This belief was an intrinsic part of my schooling identity; I worked hard, paid attention in class, and helped those who needed some extra support. It was not until I completed high school that the false reality of this statement really seemed to take hold. As discussed in Chapter One, financial constraints, and ingrained family beliefs about needing to ‘stop playing pretend’ were the precursors to my adult life. The following discussion focuses on how discourses about girls within neoliberal and postfeminist times come to construct particular ways of viewing girls.

Dominant discourses about girls being architects of their own destiny have existed for more than the past two decades and have been theorised within the paradigm of neoliberalism and postfeminism (Blackmore, 2014; Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2004; Pomerantz, Raby, & Stefanik, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2012b). Gill and Scharff (2011) define neoliberalism “as a mode of political economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision” (p. 5). In other words, neoliberalism is the removal of government supports in favour of personal responsibility,
individual choice, and autonomy over one’s actions. McRobbie (2009) argues that issues of neoliberalism are implicit in the development of postfeminism. For example, McRobbie (2009) contends that postfeminism invokes feminism in order to position issues of equality as being achieved, while simultaneously developing a whole new range of meanings connected to notions of individualism, choice, and freedom which position feminism as no longer being required within girls’ lives.

Pomerantz et al. (2013) argues that there are two distinct discourses which inform current beliefs about girls living within neoliberal and postfeminist times – “Girl Power” and “Successful Girls” (p. 187). The ‘Girl Power’ movement came to prominence during the early 1990s with the ‘Riot Grrrl’ bands which challenged the sexism and racism of punk rock (Chen; 2013; Curry, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009). During the late 1990s the rise of the British pop band, the Spice Girls, took the idea of girl empowerment, sisterhood, and equal rights, into the homes of nearly every adolescent and tween girl within Britain, Australia, and other westernised countries (Chen; 2013; Curry et al., 2009; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Press, 1997). The popularity of the Spice Girls challenged traditional norms about what girls can or cannot be, and as argued by Chen (2013), introduced the ideas of feminism to a new generation of young people. Despite this rise in female empowerment, Taft (2004) argues that Girl Power became corrupted by consumerism and instead came to reflect “the ideologies of individualism and personal responsibility” (p. 73), which aligned with neoliberalist agendas. Within a neoliberal framework, this reframing of Girl Power created a world where structural, economic, and social inequalities are not present in the lives and experiences of girls (Pomerantz et al., 2013), despite data which suggests otherwise.

The second discourse of “Successful Girls”, which Pomerantz et al. (2013) identified, constructs girls’ lives as beyond structural issues and instead focuses on how girls are “the embodiment of neoliberal values” (p. 190) especially within the fields of education, the workforce, and personal relationships. This reframing of girls as “subjects of capacity” (McRobbie, 2007, p. 726) is reinforced by Western governments, media organisations, and within advertising and marketing campaigns, which all present the ideal girl to be one who is a ‘success’ at school and in the work
place, but is also seen to successfully navigate extracurricular activities, romantic relationships and family life; in essence telling girls’ ‘they can have it all’ (Chen, 2013; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2012b; Taft, 2004). There are a number of prominent examples within the entertainment industry where these discourses can be seen under the guise of female empowerment. One example is Beyoncé Knowles’s hit single “Run the World (Girls)” (Columbia, 2011), which suggests that girls are in control of their lives. Another example is the movie series Pitch Perfect (Moore, Cannon, & Rapkin, 2012) and Pitch Perfect 2 (Banks, Cannon, & Rapkin, 2015), which highlight how determination and hard work can overcome any, and all, barriers to success for girls. Ringrose (2007) argues that this positionality of “Successful Girls” has developed a “new seductive narrative about girls’ educational and workplace success, where girls have become a ‘metaphor’ for social mobility and social change” (p. 472). Within these two discourses, girls are positioned in much the same ways as I was as a high school student more than twenty years ago. These discourses suggest that girls are no longer in need of feminism, nor in need of collective political engagement.

It is within the framing of these two dominant discourses that girls’ education is currently situated. For more than two decades, a dominant perception has been that disadvantages associated with girls’ education have been successfully dealt with (Blackmore, 2014; Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Curry et al., 2009; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1997; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007; Wilkinson, 1994). This perception is reflected in a variety of ways, including in school-leaving exams, where girls are seen to be outperforming boys and are now more likely than boys to enter higher education (Osler & Vincent, 2003; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2007). Similar gender patterns have been identified in other western countries, namely the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and New Zealand (Blackmore, 2014; Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Osler & Vincent, 2003; Reay, 2001; Ringrose, 2007). Ringrose (2007) suggests that due to the perceived success of girls in education, a moral panic around the nature of boys’ educational failure has now replaced concerns for girls. However, Blackmore (2014) argues that the “what about the boys crisis?” (p. 505) dangerously misinterprets the issue,
and suggests that attention should be focused on “how different masculinities and femininities are produced in terms of wider unequal social relations of gender and power” (p. 505).

Twenty years ago, Gilbert and Gilbert (1998) in their book *Masculinity goes to school*, argued that there was a gross misrepresentation of blame directed at female students and teachers as the cause of boys’ educational disadvantage. These researchers suggest that this approach draws attention away from schooling cultures and educational equity. These authors question why this debate should be focused solely on ‘who is to blame’ for educational success or failure, when shifting the focus to look at social equity and access for ‘all children’ should be the priority. Following on from Gilbert and Gilbert’s work, Collins, Kenway, and McLeod (2000) point out that it is necessary to ask “which boys” and “which girls” tend to be the beneficiaries of the current school system, and which boys and which girls are likely to be disadvantaged by it.

Kenway (as cited in Osler & Vincent, 2003) notes that “girls and boys from backgrounds that are of ‘low socio-economic status’ (SES) [are] the most disadvantaged students” (p. viii). Similarly, Collins, Kenway, and McLeod (2000) identified specific groups of boys and girls as being most particularly disadvantaged in the Australian school system. The groups identified are: indigenous youth, rural and remote youth, teenage mothers, juvenile offenders, young people with learning difficulties and delays, and homeless young people.

Collins, Kenway, and McLeod (2000), furthermore, argue that young men and women from these groups tend to be disadvantaged in similar ways. Students from the groups identified above tend to have lower school achievement. Low academic achievement, as indicated by low test scores and low grades, especially in literacy and numeracy, have consistently been associated with high school attrition. The Federal government claims that the priority being given to literacy and numeracy skills centres around the idea that without these skills “children’s opportunities are severely limited” (Scutella & Smyth, 2005, p. 18). Students who are not able to achieve these outcomes become disadvantaged in the economic world. Failure to achieve literacy and numeracy skills severely restricts educational and career choices and thus increases the chance of
social exclusion and of cumulative social disadvantage (Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Smyth & Hattam, 2004; White & Wyn, 2004). This stance is supported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2006) which states:

A person’s educational attainment affects their social well-being. Early school leavers, through receiving less education, often have higher unemployment levels, lower occupational status and lower incomes. (ABS, 2006, n.p.)

According to White and Wyn (2004), the real needs of young people are left untouched if efforts are predominately focused on work-related skills. For those who are identified as vulnerable, the chance of social exclusion is, therefore, significantly higher if schools and the education system cannot respond to the needs of the individual.

In relation to the education of girls, it is against the assumption that girls no longer face any educational problems that issues of social equity still need to be addressed. Girls are one particular subset of students who have highly complex and challenging needs, before considerations have even been given to issues of regional disadvantage, and schools have a role to play in helping to address the many inequalities which still exist.

**Understanding how gender is constructed in schools**

*Kim:*

(Monday morning 9.30am)

My week began with a quick read through of my daughter’s primary school newsletter. There were the usual articles - classroom news; sports news; Easter raffle information and the standard news from the fundraising committee. It was the fundraising committee article that drew my attention. The article began in the usual way:

"A huge thank you to all the volunteers we had help out at the sausage sizzle last weekend. Our school stepped in to help at extremely short notice and considering the sweltering conditions, had a successful weekend".
This was a great start. But it was the following two sentences which caused me to pause. It read:

_The most surprising thing we found out over the weekend was even though we had the 'Sausage God' and other blokes cooking the BBQ on Saturday, people bought more snags on the Sunday when we had the school mums cooking. It was surprising because everyone knows that men cook a better BBQ than women. Us blokes put it down to the perve factor_“.

The above article was taken from my daughter’s school newsletter in 2014. This article had been written by the school’s fundraising committee to celebrate a successful fundraising event. This article was likely proofread, and approved, by numerous members of the school’s staff before it was printed and sent to parents. The relevance of this article is an important signifier that traditional gendered beliefs and values are still prominent within schools and society. The following discussion considers how schools are sites of young peoples’ identity work, especially socialisation to gendered norms, and how this constructs stereotypical views of males and females behaviours within schools that reinforce broader structural gendered inequalities.

Over the past couple of decades, considerable effort has been invested in understanding the nature of gender differences in society (Blackmore, 2014; Connell, 2011; Curry et al., 2009; Major & Santoro, 2014; Martino, 1999). Schools are one such place where young peoples’ identity work is carried out, including socialisation to dominant norms, values and beliefs (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Giroux, 2001; Hey, 1997; Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Wexler, 1998). Freire (2005) and Gramsci (1971) argued in the 1970s, that schools encourage, and reproduce, particular ways of living and being in the world that privilege one group of people over others. In a patriarchal society, such as Australia, a form of gendered hierarchy is worked out in the “space between everyday experience, consciousness and social structures” (Smyth & Hattam, 2004, p. 113) which privilege boys over girls. Within schools, this form of gendered hierarchy is negotiated and navigated through, what has been termed, the “unwritten curriculum” (Wren, 1999). The ‘unwritten curriculum’ is a collective of social norms upon which students internalise and act within and is considered an integral part of how young people learn to function effectively in
social environments (Read, Francis, & Skelton, 2011; Wren, 1999). An important component of
students’ identity work involves the construction of gender roles.

The study of children’s gender roles has historically suggested that boys generally display an
active posture whereas girls have traditionally been situated as passive in nature (Coleman, 1961;
Eder & Parker, 1987; Lever, 1978; Major & Santoro, 2014; Read et al., 2011; Reay, 2001). The
gender roles typically assigned to boys encompass rough play, command of space,
competitiveness, and a certain ‘toughness’ indicating both independence and masculinity (Adler
et al., 1992; Major & Santoro, 2014; Read et al., 2011). In contrast, girls’ behaviour has
historically included a focus on passive behaviours, such as compliance, sociability, caring and
empathetic actions (Adler et al., 1992; Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Major & Santoro, 2014; Read
et al., 2011; Todor, 2010). These dominant stereotypes have been observed to be present within
the way that teachers view differences between boys and girls behaviour in the classroom, and the
manner in which teachers convey their expectations of each gender (Major & Santoro, 2014).

It could be argued then, that the assignment of specific gender roles, as either male or female,
depends on one’s ability to display the ‘correct’ gender identity that is linked with one’s
biological sex (Todor, 2010; Tong, 1998). The knowledge and behaviours, which are deemed
appropriate for those roles, are therefore defined and assigned value by those holding power in the
classroom, that is traditionally teachers (Major & Santoro, 2014). Research by Major and Santoro
(2014) found that teachers expressed a form of gender blindness, or a ‘gender neutral’ stance, with
regard to their students, suggesting that giving students the tools to understand, and confront,
gendered inequality is not considered relevant by some teachers or schools. Despite this
reluctance from teachers to consider the role that gender plays within the classroom, Archer and
Francis (2005) found that non-conforming student behaviour, which transcended appropriate
boundaries, was explained away by teachers as an individualistic trait, rather than as an
opportunity to disrupt the gendered discourse.
Historically, girls who transcend traditional notions of appropriate femininity within schools, by being assertive or disruptive, tend to be interpreted more negatively than boys who display similar behaviour (Connolly, 1998; Lakoff, 1975; Reay, 2001). Lakoff (1975) described more than four decades ago, how, when little girls talk ‘rough like the boys’, they would be made fun of, ostracised or scolded. Diane Reay (2001), nearly twenty years ago, observed in her study of gender relations in a primary school, many instances when girls’ behaviour transcended traditional forms of femininity and resulted in them being labelled by teachers as ‘real bitches’, ‘a bad influence’ and ‘little cows’ (p. 161). In more recent times, girls who transcend traditional notions of femininity have been observed to be targeted through labels that attack their sexual identity or experience (Ringrose & Renold, 2012b; Senior, Helmer, Chenhall, & Burbank, 2014). Senior et al., (2014) found that the labels used against girls in secondary schools within regional Australia, tend to target a girl’s moral worth and social standing. Ringrose and Renold (2012b) point out that this form of surveillance and regulation are underpinned by concerns about age-appropriate sexual behaviour and are “typically [a] moralistic call for a return to a middle class fantasy of girl innocence and virginity” (p. 336). This labelling of girls, and girls’ bodies, is indicative of a high degree of anxiety over appropriate gender roles, and gendered behaviour, and has flow-on consequences into the broader community. One area in which this increase in anxiety can be clearly seen, and is of relevance to this study, is in the types of conflict that girls are seen to engage in at school.

**Conflict: How do girls fight?**

Much of the literature seeking to explore girls’ conflict has tended to centre on the subtle ways in which girls express their discontent and anger through relational tactics and behaviours (Bhana & Pillay, 2011; Boyer, 2010; Bright, 2005; Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Cavanaugh, 2009; Curry, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Simmons, 2002). Over the past two decades, however, researchers have also begun focusing on the ways in which girls engage in physical forms of conflict (Barron & Lacombe, 2005; Bhana, 2008; Bhana & Pillay, 2011; Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008; Jackson & Tinkler, 2007; Leach & Humphreys,
2007; Letendre & Smith, 2011). These two depictions of how girls’ ‘fight’ have tended to be framed, overwhelmingly, as a developmental problem underpinned by notions of bullying, rather than as seen within broader social relations of power and inequality (Boyer, 2010; Ringrose & Renold, 2010; Saltmarsh, 2012). For this research project, it is necessary to understand the varied ways in which conflict and violence is understood within the literature, especially how it is seen and dealt with in schools.

According to Simmons (2002), relational conflict is defined as “acts that harm others through damage (or the threat of damage) to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion” (p. 21). Some of the relational behaviours can include, but are not limited to, teasing, name-calling, verbal abuse, humiliation and belittling of others. Curry et al. (2009) extends on Simmons (2002) definition to include other behaviours aligned with forms of indirect aggression, including, but not limited to, spreading rumours, and behaviour that “wilfully intends to damage self-esteem or social status within a group through practices such as social exclusion” (p. 24). All of the behaviours and practices are designed to undermine and affect another person’s inclusion in peer groups and social environments (Bright, 2005; Letendre & Smith, 2011). According to Bright (2005), girls are very good at ensuring that this type of fighting is not overt through portraying a façade of friendship when adults are present. These actions were also observed in Curry et al’s., (2009) research, where they found that the discursive nature of relational aggression is not visible in the same way as physical aggression is, and therefore, teachers and adults do not treat this form of behaviour as seriously as physical aggression. Boyer (2010) argues that for girls, being able to “aggress strategically, in ways that are socially dominant, indirect, and private” (p. 34) can result in an increase in a person’s popularity, therefore, these actions may not be perceived as negative by the perpetrator.

The other form of conflict that have been observed to occur amongst girls in schools is physical conflict and aggression. The physical manifestation of female conflict has been an object of increasingly popular and scholarly interest over the past two decades and has been fuelled by media coverage and stories of “the growing problem of mean, violent, drunk and disorderly girls”
(Burman & Batchelor, 2009, p. 271). These types of depictions of young women have increasingly led to bouts of moral outrage, especially within many western countries, as they are seen to be transgressing idealised gender norms which present women as being passive, docile and sweet (Bhana & Pillay, 2011; Bright, 2005; Mikel Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007; Simmons, 2002). Irwin and Chesney-Lind (2008), however, caution that the data often cited within media articles should not always be taken as an accurate representation. These scholars suggest that upsurges in girls’ violence is often attributed to a perceived increase in arrest data, which has more to do with changes to police policies and practice, rather than drastic changes in girls behaviour (Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008). Furthermore, researchers in the field of criminology (see, for example, Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008; Phillips, 2003) have highlighted how perceived increases in female offending are often connected to, or presented as, a racial and classed issue, with “images of violent girls in media accounts [shown] primarily [as] girls of color” (Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008, p. 838) and are seen to take place within urban, low-Socio Economic Status (SES) communities (Mikel Brown et al., 2007).

Ringrose and Renold (2010) argue that girls’ violence operates in complex, racialised, sexualised and classed ways. They also highlight how friendships and conflict amongst girls are highly heterosexualised, encultured and classed and that exploring these complex relationships will help inform how, why, and when, violence and conflict is mobilised and used (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). For example, Cavanaugh (2009) found in her study that some girls believe that a physical response was acceptable or justified within a specific context, rather than an act with no purpose or thought. An aggressive act, for example, may be judged unjustified by its target or an observer, but considered defensive and justified by a perpetrator who feels wronged. Cavanaugh’s (2009) study then raises questions about how female students determine whether behaviours are aggressive or defensive given that understanding is socially, culturally, and temporally, dependent.

It should be noted that the majority of research which has focused on girls’ conflict and aggression, has typically been conducted within urban spaces and communities in the United
States, United Kingdom, and Canada (Burman, Batchelor, & Brown, 2001; Burman & Batchelor, 2009; Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008; Pomerantz et al., 2013), and more recently as an emerging field of research within Africa (Bhana & Pillay, 2011; Leach & Humphreys, 2007). There has been limited research conducted within Australia (such as, Letendre & Smith, 2011; Keddie, 2009; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2002), but this research as predominately focused on urban centres and capital cities, excluding regional and remote communities. This research will contribute to informing this gap in the literature.

Managing conflict in schools

There are a number of researchers who consider conflict, harassment and violence to be a normal part of everyday life in secondary school (Bhana, 2008; Bhana & Pillay, 2011; Hlavka, 2014; Saltmarsh, 2012; Schute, Owens, & Slee, 2008). For some students, conflict can manifest in unique and particular ways, such as physical and relational forms, which have been discussed earlier in this chapter. Hocker and Wilmot (1995) contend that schools are a mirror image of the way in which conflict and violence are viewed in society. Therefore the management, and resolution, of conflict within schools can have consequences for the wider community.

The way in which conflict is viewed within schools is often the precursor to how it is consequently managed by staff and students. Traditionally, many adults have viewed conflict amongst children as an undesirable event and have tried to intervene or prevent it from occurring (Opotow, 1991). Opotow (1991), in her study of the nature of conflict at school, suggested that teachers viewed conflict amongst students as trivial, petty, and irrational and tended to form negative opinions of those involved in conflict. Some of these views from Opotow (1991) can be seen in current practices around managing conflict and aggression. For example, Longaretti and Wilson (2006) contended that teachers have a habit of responding to conflict amongst students in an authoritarian and bureaucratic way and often resulted in “prejudging the situation, lecturing, separating the disputing students from each other and imposing solutions” (p. 9). For these
researchers, the above responses from the teachers were found to be the most common and were enacted due to an assumption that managing conflict was tedious and time consuming.

For the past twenty years, feminists have argued that teachers do not understand the socially constructed nature, and complexities, of gender and how this impacts on students’ behaviours and attitudes (Skelton, 2006). Todor (2010) argued that as a result of teachers’ lack of understanding about gender, they often reverted to dominant discourses about boys and girls as oppositional, which was observed to play out in the ways teachers related to, and interacted with, their students. For example, Schute et al. (2008) observed that teachers appeared to overlook, and accept as ‘normal’, forms of behaviour that could be described as sexual harassment from boys towards girls within the classroom, and in some instances, teachers would blame the girls for being too sexual. Another example from research in Africa (Leach & Humphreys, 2007), highlights the double standards that operate around permissible displays of sexuality within schools, where girls are “expected to be simultaneously sexuality inexperienced yet available and desirable, whereas male students are expected to demonstrate physical superiority and (hetero)sexual prowess” (p. 56). In essence, the policing of girls’ behaviour within tightly confined gender normative traditions and beliefs, mask broader patterns of gender inequality within society (Mikel-Brown et al., 2007). The way in which teachers and schools tend to react to conflict amongst girls is, therefore, reflective of broader hegemonic understandings of gender roles. As this research is situated within the tradition of critical theory, the hegemonic practices which impact on girls’ conflict from regional Australia can be viewed through multiple lens, in order to observe how gendered practices impact on the construction of female conflict within this space and place.

Despite some of the research literature highlighting the negative impacts of managing and negotiating conflict with schools, there are many positive connotations that conflict can raise for young people. According to Longaretti and Wilson (2006), the students in their study did not share the teachers’ view that conflict was trivial and time consuming. Instead, Longaretti and Wilson (2006) argued that the students considered their conflicts between friends to be constructive and helpful. This position of conflict having positive benefits, is shared in other
research which suggests that when viewed and managed positively, conflict has an important role in social development (Deutsch, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Opotow, 1991; Shantz & Hobart, 1989). Johnson and Johnson (1996) suggest that some of the positive outcomes which can come out of conflict, and conflict resolution, include: higher self-esteem, a positive increase in communication, decision-making, reasoning and thinking skills, as well as more positive relationships amongst peers. Despite this, Longaretti and Wilson (2006) found that the positive attributes for conflict are rarely promoted or acknowledged within schools.

**Moving forward**

This chapter has defined, and discussed, the three main terms that impact on this study. A discussion has also been undertaken of key areas of the research literature that are concerned with understanding the nature of conflict, violence, and aggression in relation to girl’s behaviour. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this review should not be considered a complete overview of the literature, but rather as a critical engagement with the ideas that impact on the construction and framing for this research. The following chapter explores the theoretical perspective of critical theory and how the application of critical ethnography can enable an exploration of female conflict.
Chapter Three: Theory, representation and reinterpretation

In this chapter, I describe and justify the research design for this study, including the key researchers and ideas that have influenced and guided my thinking, especially around core concepts, and issues of representation and reinterpretation.

This chapter is organised into two sections. In section one, I describe the processes I undertook in order to develop my research questions, interrogate my ontological and epistemological perspectives, and explain how this process led to the adoption of critical theory and the works of Paulo Freire (1972; 2000; 2005), Joe Kincheloe, and Peter McLaren (2005; 2011) to develop my theoretical perspective. Section two describes the research design, including key characteristics of critical ethnography as they impact on this project, issues of representation, and the use of narrative portraits as an approach to data sorting and representation.

Section One

Working through questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology

Like most researchers, I did not come to this research project from a pre-set theoretical, ontological or epistemological perspective (Crotty, 1998).

As discussed in Chapter One, I came to the issue of young women’s conflict in what could be described as an ‘organic’ manner; I happened to be in the room with a group of teenage girls who recounted their conflict with other girls and boys in their peer group. These recounts were beyond my understanding and experience and became the issue that I wanted to explore. My desire to inquire into young women’s experiences of confrontations led to the development of my initial research questions. In particular, I was interested in how they encountered conflict within their interpersonal relationships, specifically within their friendships with other girls. I was interested in what caused their conflict; how the girls defined the nature of their conflict; and what long-term effects the conflict had on their educational experience. While the nature of these initial research questions evolved, they nevertheless raised more questions about the overall aim and objectives of
my research, including who this research would benefit, why I consider that group more important than others, and how I know what I know about this phenomenon. Researching the experiences of young women raised a number of issues and personal assumptions that I had to examine, and confront, in order to understand and strengthen my ontological and epistemological position and construct a research project.

Researchers in the field of qualitative research (see for example; Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2014) state that the nature of the research question plays a significant part in structuring any research project (Crotty, 1998). The research question influences not only the choice of design and method, but also the theoretical paradigms that can be called upon to analyse and explore possible answers to that question. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue that each research paradigm has a set of belief systems that attach the user to a particular worldview, each with particular ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies.

According to Crotty (1998), “ontology is the study of being. It is concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality” (p. 10). Noonan (2012) unpacks the definition of ontology further by situating this term within historical understandings. He suggests that ontology was originally a philosophical science concerned with asking questions about the nature of human existence within both the natural and social world. Ontology is no longer considered a fundamental science in its own right (Noonan, 2012), rather more contemporary understandings of ontology are connected to a researcher’s own beliefs about how the nature of social reality can be measured or understood (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gannon & Davies, 2014). Crotty (1998), however, cautions that ontological issues tend to be understood when considered in relation to issues of epistemology. He states, “to talk of the construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). According to Nagy Hesse-Biber (2014):

An epistemology is “a theory of knowledge” (Sandra Harding, 1987b, p. 3) that delineates a set of assumptions about the social world – who can be a knower and what can be
known. These assumptions influence the decisions a researcher makes, including what to study (based on what can be studied) and how to conduct a study. (p. 6)

The way my research problem came about highlights a number of assumptions that underpin my epistemological position, including that each person has particular experiences and understandings which contribute to particular ways of knowing about a phenomenon (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gannon & Davies, 2014; McLaren, 2015; Skeggs, 1999). McLaren (2015) argues that people do not live apart from the social world, rather “we live in the midst of it” (p. 133, emphasis original). He asserts that to claim knowledge as socially constructed usually means that the “world we live in is constructed symbolically by the mind through social interaction with others and is heavily dependent on culture, context, custom, and historical specificity” (McLaren, 2015, p. 133). Anderson (2015) asserts that to claim to know something about the world is to be embodied through sites of experience and interactions with other people in particular places, meaning that personal experiences are unique to each person. As my research is concerned with understanding the situated experiences of young women in regional Australia, their experiences of conflict within this place can help inform a new way of seeing conflict through the dialectical process of engaging with the people who engage in it (Freire, 2005; Lather, 1992; McLaren, 2015; Smyth et al., 2006). This interrogation of my underlying assumptions and beliefs led me to ask, how I might explore the experiences of young women in a way that is robust, systematic and critical (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). This led me back to my research question. I was seeking to explore the experiences of young women in their community as a way to better understand their realities, therefore, I needed to interrogate the various ways of exploring the nature of social reality.

**How to undertake inquiry into the nature of social reality?**

As my research question is concerned with understanding the experiences of young women, it is necessary to work within an interpretive framework that is invested in philosophical and methodological ways of gaining a better understanding of social reality (Bhattacharya, 2012).
There are generally two different ways in which researchers undertake inquiry into social reality, either with a focus on quantitative or qualitative interpretations.

In interpretivist research, the most recognisable, and widely understood of these approaches, is research using a quantitative approach. This approach aligns with a positivism paradigm derived from the scientific method of the physical sciences. According to Nagy Hesse-Biber (2014), this approach to social inquiry is based on logic and empiricism which is underscored by a “specific epistemology of knowing – that truth lies ‘out there’ in the social reality waiting to be discovered, if only the scientist is ‘objective’ and ‘value-free’ in the pursuit of knowledge building” (p. 10). Positivists hold an epistemological position that theory is universal and law-like generalisations can be made across contexts through the application of the scientific method of investigation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Fillafer, Feichtinger, & Surman, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In other words, the scientific method of investigation involves a structured process of experimentation that is based on an ability to provide an explanation about a given phenomenon, and therefore, make predictions about its application to other situations elsewhere in the world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Due to this positioning about the nature of knowledge and of how knowledge is generated, positivist researchers promote the use of quantitative research methods in order to generate precise parameters in the data so as to understand objective facts about the world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2014). While this method of inquiry is generally only associated with quantitative research, researchers situated in other paradigms often use statistical measures, methods, and data sets as a way of locating a group of subjects within a larger population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Thomas, 2011). The current study is one such project that has drawn upon numerically-based data in order to contextualise a broader understanding of regional communities and to provide information as to the issues that women face within these communities.

There are many criticisms of positivism as a form of social inquiry, however. One of the criticisms is that it disregards the characteristics of human beings that cannot be accurately
measured in numerical form. These characteristics reside within every individual and contribute to the uniqueness of each person, such as, choice, individuality, moral responsibility, humour, values and emotions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Sprague & Zimmerman, 1993). These human characteristics are subjective in that every person’s experience is shaped by the particular context of their lives (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2014), therefore, social reality is created through interactions between people in natural settings, not by those who observe them within artificial or controlled environments (Burns, 2000). According to Burns (2000) some quantitative researchers attempt to remove, or limit, all interactions between participants and the researcher. Suter (2012) argues that the “general understanding favored by quantitative, positivist researchers comes from empirical verification of observations, not subjective experiences or internal states (emotions, thoughts, etc.) of research participants” (p. 345). However, many qualitative researchers contest this view that researchers can be objective and value-free (for example, see, Anderson, 2015; Burns, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gruenewald, 2003a; Suter, 2012). Burns (2000) succinctly contends that “whenever researchers are observing … they acquire some role and status” (p. 413). As stated in Chapter 1, I do not come to this research project as an anonymous observer, rather, I am an active participant in this research site. Therefore, all of the observations undertaken will endeavour to describe aspects of the participants that may not be easily observed (i.e. humour, emotions and personal values).

One of the other major critiques lies in the idea that knowledge creation can be objective and value-free when it is conducted using a quantitative approach. A person’s experience is shaped by “specific circumstances, conditions, values, and relations of power, each influencing how one articulates ‘experience’” (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 13). This means that it is impossible for a researcher within the positivist paradigm to separate themselves from their research because they are situated within the world being studied (Wellington, 2000). According to McLaren (2015), “there is no ideal, autonomous, pristine, or aboriginal world to which our social constructions necessarily correspond; there is always a referential field in which symbols, life histories, and experiences are situated (p. 133). Similarly, Harding (1993) argues that the positivist tendency to
offer knowledge creation that is from “everywhere and nowhere” (p. 584) is uncritical and reflexively blind. She argues that subjective judgements are made by the researcher throughout every stage of the research process, including

in the selection of problems, the formation of hypotheses, the design of research, the collection of data, the interpretation and sorting of data, decisions about when to stop research, the way results of research are reported, and so on. (Harding, 1993, p. 584)

My research is concerned with understanding the experiences of young women as they engage in conflict with their friends. The positivist world view of assuming a single truth being ‘out there’ to discover would be at odds with my explorations, therefore, making this an unsuitable model of inquiry for this research.

The other major approach to researching social reality is using a qualitative approach. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is a form of inquiry that is interested in understanding the experience constructed by individuals in their own world. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) offer the following definition of qualitative research being “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world … [and] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). In order to study the properties of the social world, qualitative researchers advocate for a closeness to or immersion in the research site as a way to understand behaviour in the context of the meaning systems through which it occurs (Cheshire, 2016). This means that qualitative researchers reject positivist claims that a social scientist can know and explain properly how the world works as if there is a single, unitary world. Rather, qualitative researchers recognise that any account of an action, thought, and behaviour, comes from somewhere, in some time, written for some purpose, with a particular audience in mind (Gannon & Davies, 2014). Qualitative researchers, therefore, understand that because they are a part of the social world in which they study, any understanding will probably always be partial, contingent and influenced by personal subjectivities (Cheshire, 2016) and will not be generalisable to wider groups (Merriam, 1998). My study does not aim to understand the nature of all female conflict. Rather, it seeks to
understand the unique experience of a particular group of young women in a given time and place, recognising that my background and subjectivities will influence every step of this project.

As with quantitative research, qualitative research is not without its criticisms. Issues such as validity and legitimacy, and judging quality are all considered areas of contention (Cheshire, 2016; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). According to Green (2015) there are many researchers that refute qualitative research because it does not conform to the criteria of being conducted using a scientific method. Traditionally, the ‘gold standard’ of research were studies which adhered to the scientific conventions of “linearity, deductivity and objectivity” (Lather, 2013, p. 636) and had measurable outcomes or ‘impact’. Duberley (2015) argues that neoliberal policies on universities and researchers have made a significant impact on qualitative researchers and the manner in which they undertake and present their research. Cheshire (2016) observed that policy makers and funding agencies tend to have a preference for research which can measure large populations and have statistical significance rather than small scale studies which are context specific. Due to this climate, qualitative researchers feel obliged to defend and justify the quality and importance of their work in an environment where positivist claims of Truth are preferred. Cheshire (2016) argues that these issues will continue as long as there is a lack of internal agreement among qualitative researchers around what constitutes a ‘quality’ piece of research.

Despite criticisms argued against qualitative research, the nature of my research question does not seek to find a universal explanation for why young women engage in conflict. Rather, this project seeks to explore the situated experiences of one group of young women in a particular regional community, because their voices have long been absent from broader discussions around the nature of conflict within Australia. By situating this research in such a way, my study illuminates the temporal and spatial contexts that influence, and impact on, how conflict between the research participants is developed, resolved and managed.
Critical Theory

While qualitative researchers have similar interests in understanding the human experience, there are nevertheless disagreements around the best way in which to conduct any qualitative study and from what theoretical framework. Carspecken (1996) considers the nature of social research to be “like walking into a room of noisy people … full of cliques, each displaying a distinctive jargon and cultural style” (p. 1). There are many diverse research traditions including, but not limited to, constructivism, postmodernism, post-positivism, feminism, postfeminism, and critical theories. Despite the female-centric position of the research question, and the continuing need for research that fights for gender equality, this research project does not situate itself within a feminist paradigm. Rather, this project is situated within critical theory and draws upon feminist scholarship in order to understand the research question.

Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011) argue that any researcher, who attempts to use his or her work as a form of social criticism, accepts the following basic assumptions:

That all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society … are privileged over others … ; oppression has many faces, and focusing on only one at the expense of others often elides the interconnections among them; and finally mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the production of systems of class, race, and gender oppression.

(p. 164)

The above description of what assumptions critical researchers bring with them to their research situates this study within a particular mode of research and analysis that draws upon a rich history of researchers striving to make the world a better place.
Critical theory as a methodological approach, first emerged from the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Germany, and is otherwise known as the Frankfurt School. The work of the Frankfurt School came to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s through the work of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and later Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Haberman (Crotty, 1998; Gannon & Davies, 2014; Giroux, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). These scholars were inspired by the philosophical and social works of Marx, Kant, Hegel and Weber (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). The devastation of World War I, and the many associated economic and social catastrophes which followed, led to an urgent need to reinterpret and rebuild the world (How, 2003). From this perspective, the work of the Frankfurt School developed beyond a narrow inductive reading of Marx to assume a broader dialectical outlook that deepened their belief that “injustice and subjugation shaped the lived world” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p. 286). While there was never a unified approach to cultural criticism represented by these scholars, they were all committed to penetrating the taken-for-granted appearances of the social world to expose the underlying conditions that impact on human beings (Giroux, 2001).

With the rise of Nazism in Germany, the resultant danger to the Jewish members of the Frankfurt School, in addition to the Institute’s alignment to Marxism, saw Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse flee abroad. Eventually they relocated to the United States (Crotty, 1998; Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011) where many of the Frankfurt scholars were shocked by what they saw as “the [American] positivistic social science establishment’s belief that their research could describe and accurately measure any dimension of human behaviour” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 47). This belief embedded in the empirical sciences stemmed from an inflated conviction that this paradigm was accurate, certain, and therefore value free (Crotty, 1998; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010). In criticism to this new emergence, Giroux (2001) argued that positivism acted as a “new form of social administration and domination” (p. 13) which therefore enabled a view of knowledge and science which was without “critical possibilities” (Giroux, 2001, p. 14). In essence, positivism and science had assumed the role of
“legitimating social action” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 132) by its ‘objective’ facts that were then used to justify certain courses of social action.

Many academics credit the ‘coming of age’ of critical theory to the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s (Crotty, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). It was during this period of social and cultural change that scholars saw critical theory as a method in which they could challenge the domination of capitalism and begin to reconstruct the social sciences as a way to lead to a more ‘egalitarian and democratic social order’ (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010).

Underpinning these beliefs were the formative works of Karl Marx and the belief that understanding and explaining the world is not enough; rather the “point is to change it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 117). Critical researchers argue that we have an ethical obligation to speak out and act with, and for, marginalised groups who are oppressed by unequal power structures (for example, see; Cheshire, 2016; Lather, 1992; McLaren, 2015; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010; St Pierre, 2012). This emancipatory agenda has often been cited as informing the development of new theoretical paradigms such as critical race theory, critical multiculturalism, critical psychology, critical feminist theory, and critical pedagogy (Cheshire, 2016; Crotty, 1998; Gannon & Davies, 2014), all of which are aimed at making the world more inclusive, equitable and just. Lincoln and Denzin (2003) claim,

The critique and concern of the critical theorist has been an effort to design a pedagogy of resistance within communities of difference. The pedagogy of resistance, or taking back “voice”, of reclaiming narrative for one’s own rather than adapting to the narratives of a dominant majority … [aims at] overturning oppression and achieving social justice through empowerment of the marginalised, the poor, the nameless, the voiceless. (p. 625-626)

While the intentions of critical researchers align with a desire to make the world a better place, there are nevertheless criticisms of the claims made by critical theorists that their research produces “dangerous knowledge … [that] upsets institutions and threatens to overturn sovereign
regimes of truth” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p. 433). One of the main criticisms levelled at critical-based research projects are claims to ‘emancipate’ groups from the structures that operate to oppress particular people (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010). Critics have questioned the ‘arrogance’ of making such statements especially as researchers point out that “no one is ever truly emancipated from the socio-political context that produced him or her” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 289; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2010). In reality, some researchers have gone as far as to characterise critical research as ‘utopian’ and therefore easily dismissed as impractical (Giroux, 1995; Rasmussen, 2015). Critical theory has also been condemned for being written in such an inaccessible way that it becomes practically incomprehensible to those people not connected to the academy (Apple, 1993; Carspecken, 1996; Giroux, 1995; Rasmussen, 2015). Apple (1993) observes, “Some members of the critical research communities seem to delight in writing in such a way that their insights are nearly lost in a barrage of neologisms and nearly unreadable prose” (p. xi). In my perception, some of the densest writing comes from those theorists that I have drawn upon the most, these being Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2005). Despite this verbosity in critical research, Giroux (1995) argues against the call to make language more accessible for the following reasons:

I argue that the call for clarity suppresses difference and multiplicity, prevents curriculum theorists and other educators from deconstructing the basis of their own linguistic privilege, and reproduces a populist elitism that serves to deskill educators rather than empower them. (p. 24)

While I agree with aspects of Giroux’s (1995) response to critics who argue for greater clarity in critical writing, especially the suggestion that all educators should consider accessible language a source of empowerment rather than a barrier, I find the density of writing within the critical tradition to be off-putting and seemingly inaccessible to those with whom we research with and for. While I can appreciate the need for new language to help describe the multiplicities and contradictions we observe in the world, writing in this manner is not natural or easy for me., This thesis is therefore written in such a way as to be accessible for the young women and their
teachers to read without having to struggle with a text that could enable the reproduction of structures that contribute to their marginalisation.

Despite these criticisms, this research project has enabled me to reclaim my narrative and to help “speak the tapestry” (Richardson, 1995, p. 57) of my life and the lives of those young women who inspired this study, and for those who will come after. By situating this research within the paradigm of critical theory, the opportunity to advocate for the voices and experiences of young women with whom this thesis is concerned, can be placed front and centre with the overarching aim to not only advocate for change, but to also challenge dominant discourses within Australian schools about the nature of female-based conflict and violence.

**Freire, Kincheloe and McLaren: Praxis, horizontal violence and hegemony**

As this study is concerned with the experiences of young women within the Victorian school system, drawing upon the work of Paulo Freire (1972; 2000; 2005), Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2005; 2011) and their research into critical pedagogy, has been of importance to this study. In particular, their understandings of hegemony, praxis and dialogue are central.

Paulo Freire has had a significant impact on the way critical researchers understand and undertake research within this paradigm (Giroux, 2001). His most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2005) stemmed from his personal experience as an educator in Brazil and throughout his years as a political exile (Freire, 2005). Within this work, Freire links the process of ‘conscientisation’ to the relationship between humans and their world, and “to ‘praxis’ as a form of reflection that stems from, and remains indissolubly wedded to, active human intervention in reality” (Freire, 2005, p. 35). Freire (2005) argued that as human beings, we do not exist apart from the world. Because human beings are not separate from the world they can help shape ‘what is’ and ‘what can be’ (Freire, 2005). He argues that as conscious, freethinking beings, women and men are shaping the very conditions of becoming human; in essence, we act upon and transform
the world, opening up possibilities of a fuller and richer life (Freire, 2005). Freire (2005) claims that being in this world is never a static process and that the conditions in which we live must be accepted by men and women. In this view, every human being,

is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it. (Freire, 2005, p. 32)

Freire (2005) states that it is only ‘praxis’, the combination of authentic action and reflection achieved through dialogue and in solidarity with others, which can lead to conscientisation and an ability to confront their situation and achieve their humanisation. It is from this stance, that Freire (2005) observed the capacity for human beings to become ‘dehumanised’ when others exploit, oppress, and create, the conditions upon which injustices are perpetrated against their fellow man (and woman). Freire (2005) argued that dehumanisation is the result of an unjust order that engenders in the oppressors a violence that in turn dehumanises the oppressed (Crotty, 1998; Freire, 2005).

Freire’s (2005) notion of authentic praxis is integral to the development and positioning of this research project. As discussed in section two of this chapter, as well as in Chapter Four, meaningful conversations, theory co-constructed through dialogue, and a prolonged immersion in the community, are key components of the research design. This research draws upon Freire’s notion of authentic praxis being achieved through dialogue, conscientising and a belief in the voices of the oppressed. So too is Freire’s (2005) concept of “horizontal violence” (p. 62) as an analytical lens through which to view the data.

**Horizontal violence**

The concept of horizontal violence is important to the theorising of this research due to the way it positions conflict and violence as being a reaction to oppressive structures and systems. Over the past thirty years, the concept of horizontal violence has been used as a theoretical lens through
which to view acts of aggression and conflict within the medical profession, particularly for nurses (Duffy, 1995; Roberts, 1983; Skillings, 1992). This theorising does not seem to have been taken up within education as a lens to view student behaviour. My research provides an opportunity to view conflict and violence through a fresh lens.

Researchers who use the concept of horizontal violence credit the work of Freire (2005) and his research into oppressed group behaviours. This concept can be found within Freire’s book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2005), where he considers horizontal violence as the behaviour of oppressed people, who have internalised feelings of powerlessness against those groups, or people, who dominate them. Freire (2005) suggests that in order to deal with these feelings, the oppressed people would strike out at each other, rather than onto the dominant social group.

More recently, this definition has been expanded upon by the likes of Duffy (1995), King-Jones (2011) and Schneider (2016). King-Jones (2011) describes horizontal violence as:

> Overt and covert nonphysical hostility, such as criticism, sabotaging, undermining, infighting, scapegoat, and bickering … [and] includes forms of nonphysical intergroup conflict that are manifested in overt and covert behaviours of hostility … including all acts of unkindness, discourtesy, divisiveness, and lack of cohesion. (pp. 80-81)

Freire (2005) argues that one of the main institutions where the maintenance of oppression is transmitted and achieved, is through the education system. He argued, that traditional schooling systems reinforces the dominant group’s ideological beliefs, values and characteristics which served to maintain the status quo (Freire, 2005). Over time, the oppressed group begins to internalise beliefs about their own inferiority which leads to feelings of powerlessness, thus creating a situation where the oppressed displace those negative emotions onto each other in the form of aggressive and violent behaviour.

As this study is concerned with how conflict is negotiated within female friendships, applying horizontal violence as the theoretical lens through which to analyse the data enables a move away
from individualised notions of victim / perpetrator. Instead, it enables a consideration of the role that broader structures of oppression may play on the girls as they navigate through conflict.

**Critical theory for the 21st Century: Hegemony**

In order to situate this research within more contemporary times and understandings, it was necessary to draw upon the work of more recent critical theorists, Joe Kincheloe and Peter McLaren (2005; 2011) and their work on a reconceptualisation of critical theory for the new millennium. Within their new interpretation of critical theory, Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) put forth a number of key concepts that help critical researchers develop questions and strategies for exploring the world under neoliberalism. Some of these concepts deal with issues related to critical enlightenment, critical emancipation; a rejection of economic determinism; the impact of desire; and a reconceptualised critical theory of hegemony (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). It is this interpretation of hegemony that is particularly useful for this thesis.

Like many critical scholars (for example, see; Cunningham, 2014; Giroux, 2001; Mayo, 2015; McLaren, 2015), Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) draw upon the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and his notion of hegemony. Gramsci (1971) understood that domination in the social world was not established through physical force (i.e. through the army, police and prisons), rather power was (and still is) reproduced through a form of ideological hegemony primarily communicated through cultural institutions such as the media, religious organisations and educational institutions which encourage a particular way of living and being in the world (Giroux, 2001). Since the 1970s, Gramsci’s original concept of hegemony has been reinterpreted by many scholars across a wide variety of theoretical frameworks (Cunningham, 2014; Mayo, 2015). It is within this space that Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) offer up their (re)conception of hegemony for the 21st Century critical researcher. They argue:

*critical theory is intensely concerned with the need to understand the various and complex [ways] that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness [understanding] that*
power … is an extremely ambiguous topic that demands detailed study and analysis.

(Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p. 290)

Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) caution that researching practices of hegemony must be done carefully and on a case-by-case basis. They argue that this is a necessary practice as we are all “hegemonised [in] our field of knowledge and [our] understanding is structured by a limited exposure to competing definitions of the sociopolitical world” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011, p. 209). Thus, depicting aspects of social relations as ‘natural and inevitable’ can reproduce the inequalities that had been hoped to overcome (Darder & Miron, 2006).

Drawing upon Kincheloe and McLaren’s (2011) interpretation of hegemony for the 21st Century researcher is important to this study because the young women who are the focus of this research are school aged, and are required to attend their local secondary school. This aligns with Gramsci’s (1971), Freire’s (2005) and Kincheloe and McLaren’s (2011) understanding that consent to domination is often fostered within cultural institutions such as schools. Furthermore, by exploring the situated experiences of the young women within their school I am able to uncover the specific hegemonic practices that are being used to dominate this group and the counter-hegemonic strategies they employ to navigate those practices.

In order to enable this exploration to happen, I require a methodology that could support both the theoretical framework of critical theory, but also has the tools to identify and expose the hegemonic practices that impact on the young women in this study. With all of these considerations in mind, plus the nature of my research question, I decided to draw upon aspects of critical ethnography to help me undertake this study.

Section Two: Ethnography

To understand the day-to-day experiences of the participants in this research, I employ an ethnographic approach to “capture and record the voices of lived experience … contextualise experience [to] go beyond mere fact and surface appearances [and to] present details, context, emotion, and the web of social relationships that join persons to one another” (Denzin, 1994, p.
It is also necessary to ensure that the methodological approach I employ aligns with the ontological and epistemological beliefs of critical theory. As such, I draw upon aspects of conventional ethnography, such as observation-based fieldwork, specific targeting of key informants, and embedded interviews, for undertaking fieldwork and data collection. It is the work of Smyth et al. (2006) on critical ethnography that is used extensively to inform my research design and process. The following discussion explores the history of ethnography, the difference between conventional and critical ethnography, and the key strategies and approaches I use to undertake this project.

**Ethnography: A history**

Ethnography has a rich and varied history as a research method. Ethnography has long been aligned with the epistemological assumption that what we can observe in the world is a correct representation of truth (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011; Skeggs, 1999). These beliefs led to ethnography being used in the past, in what is now considered highly dubious ways by some researchers, in an attempt to generate classifications and knowledge about populations of people who were not white and male (Skeggs, 1999). Similarly, Finch (1993) notes that ethnography was used “as a means by which others could be recognised and kept in their place” (p. 10). In fact, observational characteristics identified as belonging to different communities of people are still prevalent today as a way of assigning moral worth (Skeggs, 1999). For example, my Honours thesis (Hucker, 2009) found that the available discourses for teenage mothers aligned with those used to describe unwed mothers in the 1970s; media outlets and government departments most often describe teenage mothers as being “poor, black, and welfare-dependent” (p. 4), characteristics which are still being used to ‘other’ this group today. The use of observational characteristics continues to reinforce descriptions about women in other areas, including in the areas of rape, abortion, and gay and lesbian partnerships (Waterhouse, Renolds, & Egan, 2016). Therefore, the judgements that we make about people are generally formed based on what their appearance suggests to us.
While ethnography has historically been used as a “legitimating source of the colonial endeavour” (Skeggs, 1999, p. 35), it has also been used by those very same groups (i.e. women, the working class, and African Americans) as a way to legitimate their presence and value in an academic space in which they have been traditionally ignored. This demand for recognition produced a new sort of ethnography that stressed the relationship between experience and structure (Skeggs, 1999; Thomas, 2011; Willis, 1977), or as Skeggs (1999) argues:

The desire was not to know the other as other, or to study the other as a way of knowing oneself, but to understand how previously marginalised groups existed in the circuits of meanings, cultural formation and structural location. (p. 36)

This new way of doing ethnography moved beyond understanding and positioning groups of people as ‘other’, and became a methodology to explore who we, and others, are in a specific social location and context as interpreted through experience and dialogue. Since the 1970s, ethnography has been regarded as one of the key methods in exploring the social worlds of young people (for example, see; Burgess, 1985; Delamont, 1984; Hey, 1997; Thorne, 1993; Willis, 1977). Emond (2005) argues that an interplay of factors have contributed to this positioning with one of the most significant changes being the acceptance in academic circles that “children [and young people] are not [merely] passive receptors of socialisation but are active social agents managing their own experiences and negotiating around adult controls” (p. 124). Another contribution to this repositioning of ethnographic studies regarding young people is the notion of social construction; that childhood and adolescence is socially, culturally and temporally specific (Emond, 2005; James & James, 2004; Prout & James, 1997). These factors require researchers to move away from adult-centric approaches and ‘get down and dirty’ with the young people they are researching in order to understand and engage with the social world that they shape and control. As this current research is concerned with the experiences of teenage girls’ conflict within their school community, the approach that I use has to enable me to engage with them in their social world, on their terms, in a way that is not shaped by adult-centric views. Hence, using an ethnographic approach enables me to be immersed within the school community, but also to not
occupy a position of authority over them, rather, I am an active observer in their classroom; not their teacher.

**Ethnography: A distinction between conventional and critical**

In order to better understand the different ways that researchers can do ethnographic research, it is necessary to first understand the difference between conventional and critical ethnography.

According to Foley, Levinson and Hurtig (2000), elements of conventional ethnography, such as “prolonged, systematic fieldwork, key informant work, and extensive interviews” (p. 42) are utilised within critical ethnographic research. These authors, however, draw attention to the differences which situate critical ethnographic research as different, in that critical ethnography involves the study of societal institutions or subgroups with a view to knowledge production that has a political intent to “change people’s consciousness, if not their daily lives more generally” (Foley et al., 2000, p. 42). Similarly, Thomas (1993) provides some clarification as to how critical researchers engage in knowledge production that is politically charged, as he argues:

*Conventional ethnography* refers to the tradition of cultural description and analysis that displays the meanings by interpreting meanings. *Critical ethnography* refers to the reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgments of meaning and method to challenge research, policy and other forms of human activity. (emphasis in original, p. 4.)

Likewise, Levinson (2001) presents an alternative summation of what it means to do ethnography in a critical way. He says:

Critical ethnography denotes a research method *informed* by a critical theory of some sort, *committed* to an analysis of domination and the search for an alternative project of social justice, and *enacted* through a constantly reflexive approach to the practice of gathering data and generating knowledge. (Levinson, 2001, p. xvi)

What we can see from the above descriptions regarding the difference between critical and conventional ethnography is that the main variance appears to be the intent behind the research
project. As discussed earlier in this chapter, my research question came from an ‘organic’
encounter with young women. It was from there that the research question evolved into a broader
desire to understand the lived experience of regional young women due, in part, to my own
experiences of living in similar communities at the same age. Furthermore, my intent to be a
researcher is situated in a personal experience of being disadvantaged due to my gender, my
background, and from being labelled as a ‘teenage mother’ and all that that entailed\(^\text{12}\). Having a
personal reason to undertake this research has meant that, for me, this project is political in the
sense that I aim to illuminate the hegemonic conditions under which a group of young women
engage in conflict, whilst also challenging dominant discourses present within Australian schools
about the nature of female-based conflict and violence. My intent to study young women aligns
with a commitment to researching an issue of injustice (as I see, and experience it) as well as
making value-laden judgements about the lived experience for these young women which can
contribute to informing research and policy in the future.

While the intent of this research is to challenge dominant discourses about female-based conflict
and violence, I nevertheless understand that by situating myself within a critical paradigm, and by
drawing upon critical ethnography as a methodology, this research is as much about me, and my
subjectivities, as it is about the young women who are the focus. McLaren (1997) suggests that
ethnographers are not “transcendentally removed from the messy web of social relations that
shapes both themselves as observers and those whom they choose to observe” (p. 149). In other
words, all researchers bring socio-historical identities and narratives to any research they
participate in. Situating myself within this study is not only an important component of what it
means to engage in politically-oriented ethnographic research, it is also an ethical decision to be
open and honest with the readers and the participants about who I am, where I come from and
what I believe. This situating can be seen prominently in Chapter One through the
autobiographical narrative, as well as throughout the entire thesis where narratives of my personal

\(^{12}\) Please refer back to Chapter One for a full discussion of my background and personal reasons for
researching the lives of young women.
life, events, actions, and behaviours are used to bring the particularities of place into a meaningful dialogue with the broader social world of the research context. A more in-depth discussion around how these personal narratives evolved will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four. For now, I turn to the specific critical ethnographic approaches and strategies I use to conduct this research project.

**Ethnography: Approaches and strategies**

According to Smyth et al. (2006), any research that aspires to engage in critical ethnography should utilise approaches and strategies that can “operate in ways to uncover [the] perspectives and voices of those who are silenced or muted, and represent them as counter narratives” (p. 129). As this research project is situated within the paradigm of critical theory, the ethnographic strategies and approaches that can be drawn upon must align with the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this perspective. As such, the work of Smyth et al. (2006) has been influential in the strategies that I have drawn upon in order to conduct this research. Of particular importance are the strategies related to fieldwork, observation and the notion of ‘collecting’ data.

Willis and Trondman (2002), suggest that the practice of ethnography is first and foremost a “method involving direct and sustained social contact with agents and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly in its own terms the irreducibility of human experience ” (p. 394). From this way of thinking, ethnography is not simply an observation-based research method or data collection technique, it is a sustained engagement between people who are trying to make sense of their world. Therefore, Smyth et al. (2006) advocate for a prolonged immersion in the settings being studied in order to recognise the depth and complexity of the social structures and relationships which impinge on the participants (see also; Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011; Willis & Trondman, 2002). Smyth et al. (2006), however, caution that many researchers are no longer in a position to conduct long-term ethnographies due to the competing demands placed upon academics and teachers. For this research project, it was
impractical for me to spend six months or more in the field due to family responsibilities and financial constraints. Instead, I spent one school term conducting fieldwork, which covered a period of nine weeks, starting at the beginning of October and ending at the beginning of December. During this time, I attended school for three days a week, Monday-Wednesday, and participated in all classroom and extracurricular activities during those days. Further details of what a typical day during this time consisted of and how I undertook observations, including capturing and writing my field notes, is discussed in Chapter Four.

During fieldwork, I was not a detached observer. Rather, I engage in the practice of “purposeful conversations, embedded interviews and dialectical theory building” (Smyth et al., 2006, pp. 136-137) with my participants. Smyth et al. (2006) acknowledge the importance of informal conversations between the participants and the researcher as a way of co-constructing meaning about what is observed and what is experienced. Building upon this notion of purposeful conversations, Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011), argue that modern-day ethnographers should “consciously seek out and adopt situational identities that give them defined membership roles in the community they study” (p. 468). My role within the school evolved and changed throughout my time there. I was positioned and introduced to the teachers and students as a researcher from the University and while this identity was maintained throughout the fieldwork, over time I also became an extra set of hands in the classroom, a confidant to some of the female students, and even a sounding board for some of the teachers to talk through their concerns about their job or the students. While at times I felt like I had to navigate the nuances with how I was positioned, being flexible and adaptable to the environment meant that I was able to penetrate to deeper levels of meaning than what initially appeared on the surface (Skeggs, 1999; Smyth et al., 2006; Thomas, 2011; Willis & Trondman, 2002). Utilising the technique of purposeful conversations with the participants enabled the individual and group interviews to have a starting point that was grounded by shared experiences. Furthermore, this grounding assisted in generating an environment between the participants and myself that was comfortable and helped create the
conditions upon which we could engage in meaningful dialogue (Emond, 2005; Freire, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Skeggs, 1999).

As I actively interacted with the participants, including participating within their daily classroom activities, another essential strategy that Smyth et al. (2006) advocates for is a “reflexive positioning” (p. 139) of the researcher in relation to the meaning-making process. This is a common requirement for qualitative researchers as a way to acknowledge the subjectivities that they bring to the research process and the implications this has for the research. The notion of reflection is an important aspect of this research project, especially in relation to how it has influenced decisions I have made regarding representation and ethical practice. I now turn to a more in-depth look at the role of reflection as it relates to this research project.

**Being a reflexive scholar: Finding ‘me’ in my research**

One of the key features that situates this research as a critical ethnography, as opposed to a conventional ethnography, is the continual reflexive approach that I have undertaken. According to Emond (2005), there is a need for researchers to have a reflexive approach when conducting ethnographic research with young people due to the understanding that childhood and adolescence are socially constructed, with this construction dominated by adult discourses around notions of what is ‘normal’. Likewise, Willis (2000) in *The Ethnographic Imagination* states:

> the importance of maintaining a sense of the investigator’s history, subjectivity and theoretical positioning [is] a vital resource for the understanding of, and respect for, those under study. (p.113)

By the same token, Ellis (2007) argues that writing about yourself within your research is to openly invite readers into your world. She positions writing research as an act that can be transformative for both the participants and the researcher.

> Telling our stories is a gift; our stories potentially offer readers companionship when they desperately need it. Writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain. (Ellis, 2007, p. 26)
Behar (1995), however, cautions that when a writer makes him/herself vulnerable within their text it does not give them a licence to write anything and everything personal about themselves. Rather, Behar (1995) argues,

> The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise go. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake. It has to move us beyond the eclipse into inertia, exemplified by Rolf Carle, in which we find ourselves identifying so intensely with those whom we are observing that all possibility of reporting is arrested, made inconceivable. It has to persuade us of the wisdom of not leaving the writing pad blank. (p. 14)

Being reflexive within this research project has taken many narrative forms, from my personal biography in Chapter One, to the inclusion of ‘Kim’ the participant throughout most chapters within this thesis. The inclusion of these narrative-based, reflexive pieces has meant, for me, that I can write the emotion of my experience during all phases of the research. By showing ‘Kim’, the participant, to the reader, it reminds them that research is not conducted in isolation, rather, understanding has been generated in conjunction with the people engaged with on a daily basis. Furthermore, these narrative pieces of the participant ‘Kim’ aim to establish a more equitable relationship between the researcher and those researched by “subjecting the researched and the researcher to an analytic lens” (Chase, 2011, p. 423). By including myself as a participant, I aim to demonstrate that through undertaking research with the participants, my beliefs and values are subjected to scrutiny with an overarching hope that my unconscious hegemonic beliefs will be identified and challenged.

How these reflexive pieces came about, what they look like, and how they are presented to the reader, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. For now, I turn to the crisis of representation that I encountered and how this lead me to crystallization (Ellingson, 2009, 2011; Richardson, 1995) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Smyth et al., 2006; Weuffen, 2017).
Representation & (re)interpretation: What we see depends on our angle of repose

Midway through 2013, I began to question what it meant to be a researcher and what it meant to produce meaningful work. I knew what I wanted to do but I felt like I lacked the tools to transfer it from my head and heart into a piece of writing that illuminated my research question and represented the experiences of my participants. I became frightened of my voice, and frightened that I would not be able to represent the young women with tenacity, dignity and compassion. After some probing questions from my supervisor, it became apparent that it was not fear of my ability to produce a piece of work like a doctoral thesis, rather it was fear of words not being ‘enough’ to do this project justice. In essence, words felt like an inexact tool for this project. They seemed to fail to capture the complex and conflicting emotions I felt - the joy, the trauma, and the lifelong marks left. Writing seemed inadequate and consequently I became fearful of the process of writing and of giving ‘voice’ to those stories entrusted to me. I encountered what Laurel Richardson (1995) refers to as a “crisis of representation”. She refers to this crisis as an “uncertainty about what constitutes adequate depictions of social reality” (p. 13), but also suggests that when there is a crisis, an opportunity can present itself where we become “free … from the intellectual myopia of hyperdetermined research projects and their formulaic write-ups” (p. 14).

This reticence to write presented a significant conundrum for me and for this project – how was I to write in a way that captured the unique and embodied details of the research experience using tools that seemed woefully inadequate to explore the complexities of that time and space? According to Altheide and Johnson (2011), words are always a poor representation of the evocative lifeworlds that ethnographers seek to understand and illustrate. They go on to explain that words and texts are not enough to reveal the taken-for-granted ‘tacit knowledge’ that is imbedded within the “nods, silences, humor and naughty nuances” (Altheide & Johnson, 2011, p. 591) that convey shades of meaning not explicitly stated in words. Therefore, a combination of words and subtle crafting of language offer up a poor substitute of the experience with claims to
represent such experiences for those not present. Altheide and Johnson (2011) claim the issue of representation is “the most challenging dimension of ethnography” (p. 591).

Working through these issues was made easier after exploring the writing of researchers who experimented with different writing forms and representations within qualitative research (for example, see; Behar, 1995; Fine & Weis, 1996; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Richardson, 1995; Wolf, 1998). It is from this exploration that I came across Richardson’s (1995) concept of crystallization as a way to experiment with my writing in order to learn more about my topic and to explore a variety of ways of telling, and retelling, this research.

Richardson (1995), first coined the term ‘crystallization’ in her classic essay *Writing as a method of inquiry* (Richardson, 1990) in which she argues for researchers to experiment with form in order to break out of traditional constraints. However, it is from Richardson’s abridged version, published in 1995, that I draw upon here. She states:

> There are far more than “three sides” by which to approach the world. I propose that the central imaginary for “validity” for postmodernist texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose. Not triangulation, crystallization … Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity” (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves); and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. (Richardson, 1995, p. 92, original emphasis)

While Richardson (1995) articulated a vision for creative and courageous writing of social phenomena, and provided citations for others whom she regarded as adopting crystallization (for example, see; Walkerdine, 1990), she did not provide guidance for turning this concept into a
coherent process or methodological framework (Ellingson, 2009). This is not to say that others
have not interpreted this concept and applied their own version to representing research projects
in multifaceted ways. Rather, the nature of crystallization is one that is inherently interpretative
and dependent upon researchers to mould and sculpt it into a framework that works for them.

One researcher who has formulated a framework of applying crystallization in qualitative research
projects is Laura Ellingson (2009; 2011). Ellingson (2009) developed a methodological
framework, grounded in Richardson’s (1994; 2000) concept of crystallization, which brought
together qualitative methods and mixed methodologies as a way to produce multi-genre pieces of
research that resist the art / science dichotomy inherent in academia. Ellingson (2009) suggests
that crystallization manifests in qualitative research projects in a number of ways, including the
use of thick descriptions, the utilisation of more than one genre of writing and other mediums, and
includes a significant degree of reflexivity. Due to the interpretative nature of the concept of
crystallization and its applicability across the spectrum of qualitative research, research projects
will include the above principles to a greater or lesser degree depending upon the nature of the
topic and the choices made by the researcher. As this research project is situated within the
traditions of critical theory and utilises critical ethnography as a means of undertaking the
fieldwork, the concept of crystallization provides an opportunity to think through how I could
represent the lives and experiences of the young women with whom this thesis is concerned, in a
more authentic and meaningful way.

It was at this time I encountered the work of Smyth and McInerney (2013) and their discussion of
using portraiture as a form of textual representational aimed at “honouring the voices of
participants” (p. 4). They offered this as a method to avoid a “riding over … of what they say into
fragments to be used as [an] addendum to our research voices” (Smyth & McInerney, 2013, p. 4).
In short, these scholars were advocating for a form of textual representation in critical
ethnographic research that produced a verbal picture to provide the reader with a greater sense of
being present within the research (Smyth & McInerney, 2013). They credit the writing of
Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) for both a methodological foundation upon which to draw from, and for providing guidance on the creation of portraits.

In order to create textual portraits, Smyth and McInerney (2013) describe the different forms that portraits have taken within their work, including dialogical portraits, school and community portraits, and narrative portraits. For this research, it was their work on creating narrative portraits from transcripts involving dialogue between the researcher and the participants that was of most relevance to my research. From a technical point of view, the process of constructing portraits arose as I was having trouble working with and seeing my data due to the volume I had and the different forms that the data took. For example, I have observations that cover every day that I was in the research site, transcripts from all individual and group interviews, as well as documents from the school, and from publically available sources like the internet. By engaging in the deliberate process of crafting an individual portrait for each participant from the interview data, I was able, for the first time, to gain a level of insight into the issues and perspectives of the participants and how these challenged or reinforced issues. For me, finding the work of Smyth and McInerney (2013) on portraiture within critical ethnographic research was a turning point as it assisted me in representing the lives of the participants in a way that ‘honoured’ their voices and “spoke to me” (Cheshire, 2016, p. 17); aligned with my ontological and epistemological position; enabled me to engage in a method of representation that deconstructed traditional views of academic writing and ‘validity’, but also helped me overcome my ‘crisis of representation’. Examples of how I created my narrative portraits will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four, as will how they have been used with the analysis.

In short, my research has found a place within the traditions of critical theory and critical ethnography. The tools and techniques discussed within this chapter support the aim of my research. These tools have been influential in how I have thought about this research project and how I have chosen to represent the experiences and understandings of these young women. This research does not shy away from being politically motivated to try to make the world a better
place for this group of young people and for the many others who could benefit from what is discussed and represented in this research project.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored my ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives, including how I came to situate this research within the paradigm of critical theory and the strategies and techniques I have aligned with from critical ethnography. The key theorists and researchers who I have drawn upon have been identified and discussed in relation to their impact on my thinking and on the development and design of this study. Furthermore, I have introduced the importance of crystallization and portraiture as it impacts on this project. The following chapter builds upon this framework and takes the reader through how these ideas were implemented for this research project.
Chapter Four: Research Method

In this chapter, I outline the key factors which influenced the direction of this research project, the research questions, and how I have come to use creative techniques to engage with the data, my own subjectivities and produce a project that attempts to ‘honour’ the participants and their stories.

Ethics approval: HREC & DEECD

As this study involves observing, interviewing and interacting with young people and their teachers, it was necessary to seek ethics approval. An application for ethics approval was formally submitted to the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on the 19th April, 2012 with provisional approval being received on the 22nd May, 2012 (ref Appendix A).

The role of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is to ensure that processes and procedures relating to issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, rights to privacy, deception and protecting human subjects from harm (see; Ellis, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) are scrutinised and addressed. Furthermore, these processes safeguard the policies and relevant standards as set out by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2017), as well as ensuring the University is not at risk of litigation.

Ethics approval to conduct research in a government school was also sought from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The DEECD application was submitted on 10th April, 2012 to the DEECD Research and Evaluation Branch with full approval being granted on the 16th April, 2012. This approval document has been included in Appendix C.

A more in-depth discussion of situational ethics is presented further in this chapter. The reasoning for doing this as a separate section from the procedural ethics section above, is the belief that
ethical considerations should be continuously discussed throughout a research project, not just as a tick-box exercise.

**Site selection**

Selecting ‘Rural Valley High School (RVHS)’ as the site for my study came about through a set of circumstances that were both practical and appropriate for the nature of the research question.

While I drew upon my supervisor’s existing relationship to ‘get my foot in the door’ with the Principal of RVHS, this school was also an appropriate site for my research. In particular, this school was co-educational, inclusive of middle and senior school aged students, and existed within the boundaries of a regional city, which were all requirements for my research project.

While I did not approach a number of schools as possible sites for fieldwork, taking the approach I did meant that I was able to build upon an already established foundation of trust and respect.

The Principal gave his permission for me to conduct my fieldwork at the North-West campus of RVHS. He instructed me to email the head of the campus to arrange a meeting to talk about a start date, arrangements for requesting consent from students and their parents, and any other logistical information. This meeting took place on Monday 6th August at the North-West Campus of RVHS.

**Negotiating my role in the field**

The meeting between myself, my supervisors, and the leadership team of North-West Campus was a defining moment in the process leading up to fieldwork. It was during this meeting that issues such as my role within the school, ethical and legal boundaries, as well as which class I would be allowed to observe, were all decided.

In reality, this meeting was more a ‘telling’ of what I would be allowed to do within the school, rather than a negotiation between interested parties. This is not a criticism of the leadership team from North-West campus, nor the manner in which they placed boundaries upon my research, rather it is my perception of what I felt happened at the time. If anything, I feel that I received a great amount of help from the leadership team, more than I could have reasonably expected.
The leadership team was conscious of how I would be introduced to the students and staff and should a situation arise that could cause harm to a student and/or myself, they were interested in how I anticipated managing this.

I had thought long and hard about how I would respond to these questions from the staff and the leadership team prior to this meeting. I had done some extensive research on the nature of ethics and ethical research with children. As this research is an ethnographic study of young women within their school, it is vital that the adults who are responsible for their care (i.e. teachers and other staff) have a clear understanding of the research process and of the researcher’s role as participant observer (Williamson & Butler, 1995). Emond (2005) suggests that in order to conduct a successful ethnographic study with young people it is important first to establish a good level of trust with the adults who care for them. She indicates that taking the time early on to ‘get to know’ everyone and to explain the realities of hosting an ethnographic research project, would help alleviate any potential situations which may arise in the future (Emond, 2005). At this meeting I suggested a ‘meet and greet’ between myself and the staff prior to fieldwork beginning. During this time, I introduced myself and my research project and answer any and all questions asked of me.

In regards to responding to issues of concern, harm or disclosure by students during fieldwork, I answered as honestly as I could. I would ‘seek help and advice’ from the campus Principal should any situation arise that caused me concern. I would also be upfront with the students about my responsibilities towards them should they disclose information to me that could concern me. My response to these questions was heavily influenced by researchers in the field of research ethics (for example, see; Brooks, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Reason, 1993; Slattery & Rapp, 2003; Tierney, 1993). Such researchers consider the role of ethics in research to go beyond the procedural requirements as laid out by institutions and governing bodies. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) outline a form of ethics that deals with the unpredictable moments within the research field that are often subtle, but which can have the most lasting impression on researchers and participants alike. They term this “situational ethics, ethics in practice or relational ethics”.
(Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264). Slattery and Rapp (2003) suggest that all researchers should do “what is necessary to be true to one’s character and responsible for one’s actions and their consequences on others” (p. 55). As this research project is situated within the paradigm of critical theory, the researcher is not removed from those with whom we research. Critical theorists understand that knowledge is socially constructed between individuals through a dialectical process. For me, I was conscious that my engagement with the students and the staff could raise some ethical issues, especially concerning information or experiences the students may share with me over the course of the observations and interviews. Due to the theoretical perspective that I situate my research within, I am conscious of my role within the school and how this could, and would, change as the research progressed.

From this conversation with the leadership team, I was also requested to have a weekly meeting with the campus Principal to discuss any issues/concerns that I was having or that I observed taking place, of which I agreed.

*The class of 8R: Purposive sampling or just luck?*

It was also during this meeting that the class I would observe was discussed. My ethics application stated that “student participants will be aged between 14 and 17 and will be drawn from the school site in consultation with the school Principal and staff members” (HREC Ethics application, 2012). I reiterated this to the leadership team and sought their advice on what class they felt would be appropriate for me to observe and interact with. Alison, one of the senior leaders of the school, suggested that I be placed observing 8R due to the balance between female and male students, with most of them being approximately fourteen years of age, and in her words “a good group of kids”.

While the manner in which the students and class were selected could be considered a limitation, I disagree. By seeking the advice of the school about which students to observe, I was

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13 All of the names used within this chapter are pseudonyms.
implementing a form of purposive sampling that I had indicated within my ethics applications (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdon, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). In particular, I stated that I would recruit participants from the school site in consultation with school staff. As I had no prior history with this campus and its students, I was reliant on the advice of staff around students who could help inform my research.

During this meeting, the leadership team offered also to help distribute, and collect, the Plain Language Information Statements (PLIS) to students and their parents.

**Informed Consent**

All students within the Year 8 class will be given the opportunity to participate in the research project. Informed assent will be obtained in person from the students following a presentation of written and verbal information about the research and its implications, and after opportunities to discuss queries and concerns with the students. The students who assent will be provided with a consent form and Plain Language Information Statement and asked to return the form to the school office with their parents or guardians signature.

(DEECD, 2012)

The above quote was taken from my ethics application to conduct research within a Victorian School (DEECD, 2012) and shows the types of anticipatory statements that (in my experience) dominate these types of forms. Actually being able to do what you have stated is significantly harder in practice.

As mentioned above, the campus leadership team offered to help with the distribution and collection of signed consent forms from the students of 8R. The reason given for this approach was that they could get these signatures much ‘easier’ than I could and are in a position to follow up with the students’ parents directly should there be any issue with their child participating. Alison presented the research to the students, parents and staff and organised the distribution of the PLIS forms and the collection of consent forms.
Alison advised me that all parental consent forms had been returned to her, with consent given for all twenty-four students to participate in the observations. Nine students had elected to not participate in the interview component of the research, but the remaining thirteen students had given consent to be interviewed.

With the procedural boxes ticked, my start date for observations was scheduled to begin on Thursday, 11\textsuperscript{th} October 2012 at 8.30am.

**Introductions and data generation**

I was introduced to all the staff as the researcher from the University. Alison introduced me to Hannah who would be teaching 8R for period one and who was going to ‘officially’ introduce me to the students. Once inside the class, Hannah settled everyone down and introduced me as “Kim, the researcher from the University, who is writing a book about young people and their conflict … Is that right, Kim?” That concluded my introduction to 8R.

**Observations: Journals, techniques, and generating data**

I was unprepared for the realities of fieldwork. I had assumed that noting down my observations in a journal, detailing what I saw, and simply “hanging out” (Wogan, 2004, p. 130) in the classroom would be suitable for immersing myself within the class and generating data that would help answer my research question. While this is exactly what I did end up doing, when I first started generating my observation-based data in my journal, I was filled with a lot of trepidation and second-guessing of the notes that I took.

According to Crang and Cook (2007), novice researchers who undertake participant observation for the first time, are often filled with angst and a sense of “not knowing what to write down, what ought to be written, what’s the most important part of the conversation” (p. 23) and so on. This description sums up how I felt during the first weeks at North-West Campus. My written observations tended towards being overly detailed, focused on describing the physical space, looking at interactions between students and a lot of self-reflective notes that tended towards
being written in a stream-of-consciousness manner. An example is provided in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 of two raw pieces of observation-data written on my first day in the field. Both extracts have been de-identified in an attempt to preserve the anonymity of those involved.

Figure 4.1: Raw data 11th October
Figure 4.2: Raw data, 11th October 1

In Figure 4.1, the observations tended towards the descriptive, noting down book titles that the students were reading, some of the language and words the boys used, and some self-reflective moments, especially at the top of the page. In Figure 4.2, while the notes were recorded on the same day as Figure 1, there is a greater attempt at getting to know student names, as well as some notes jotted in the margins detailing a piece of information about a student that could help contextualise the observation. Crang and Cook (2007) describe this period of writing about “mundane happenings” (p. 54) as an important stepping-stone for researchers becoming more
aware of the unrecognised routines that permeate every environment and being able to recognise when they are disrupted.

For me, this descriptive process became hard to maintain on a day-by-day, period-by-period basis. Overtime, my observations evolved from highly descriptive into observations that were more concerned with understanding the relational aspects of the students and their friends, as well as trying to draw connections between what I observed and the research literature. In Figures 4.3 and 4.4 are two examples of observation notes I wrote on the 14th November, after I had been observing 8R for more than a month.

In Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 we can observe the development of my field notes from those in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. There is a distinct move away from descriptive observations towards observations that appear more assured, confident and aware of the trigger points between students, and how this may correspond with previous events.
Complementing this development, was a change from my initial note book that I used as a journal at the beginning of my observations, to a smaller pink notebook. This change meant that taking notes became less intrusive in the classroom and enabled me more easily to jot down quick notes and comments.

My observation journal morphed over time to also become a space for personal reflections on my observations (see Figure 4.5), as well as a place to record conversations with my supervisors (see Figure 4.6).

This evolution for my research journal was not intentional, rather it was an ‘organic’ development that seemed to work for me. This meant that self-reflection, observations, and supervisor conversations were all situated within the same space. At the time this did not seem like an issue, however, once I began trying to sort my data it became challenging to try to separate the three ways of thinking with, and thinking of, the data.
These issues will be discussed further within this chapter during the process of data sorting. For now, I turn to a situational moment within the observation phase of the fieldwork that set in motion some significant reflection on my behalf.

“Please don’t write about this”: Dealing with disclosure

Doing ethnographic research with the community of Rural Valley and the North-West campus has raised ethical questions throughout every step of this research project. The following recount focuses on a situation that occurred during the fieldwork, between myself and one of the female participants where information of a sensitive nature was disclosed to me. The discussion which follows focuses on the choices I made and the consequences of those decisions, both for the student and myself.

Kim:

“Please don’t write about this in your book”

“Of course not, but you know I have to tell [your Principal] what you told me.”

“I know.”

As the above recount states, I will not be writing about what was said to me that afternoon. What is important to know is that this moment shifted the research project for me; it was in this moment that I recognised that I was not detached or removed from these students and their lives. In fact, I was an active participant in their lives, just like I should have been according to the theoretical perspective I aligned with and the critical ethnographic methods I ascribed to. Despite these claims, it was not until this moment that I truly understood what it meant to engage in research that is not neutral, showing the dominance that positivist notions of objectivity have within broader understandings of research.

The above situation of a confidential disclosure came from nowhere, but the effect of it reverberated throughout the remaining observations and interviews, especially concerning how I wrote observations and asked questions of the students. Furthermore, this situation has impacted
the way I now view the act of researching others. Ellis (2007), in her exploration of relational
ethics, explains:

There are no definitive rules or universal principles that can tell you precisely what to do
in every situation or relationship you may encounter, other than the vague and generic ‘do
no harm’. (Ellis, 2007, p. 5)

In her description of relational ethics, Ellis (2007) describes it as respecting the dignity and values
of those we research with and for, and recognising the sense of connectedness that can bind a
researcher and researched in ways that are unable to be foreseen. My encounter with the student
above changed me. I listened intently, put down my notepad and pen, and simply allowed myself
to be present in the moment, to bear witness to this young person. I tried not to judge. I tried to
listen and not react with shock. The student cried and I hugged them, not knowing if it was going
to be ‘okay’ as I had told them.

Afterwards, I walked to the Principal’s office and knocked quietly, hoping that they weren’t busy.
I explained what happened; what was said and what I did. I was asked if I was ‘okay’ and I
nodded and said ‘yes’ and headed for home.

Home offered respite and comfort in the form of my husband and my children but still I worried
all night. I arrived early to the campus and I waited anxiously for class to begin. When class
began, my student was not at school. I asked their friends if they were sick and was told ‘no’.
Midway through period one, one of their friends came over to me with her phone and showed me
the screen. It was a Facebook message from my student telling her friends ‘goodbye’ and
explaining that she had run away. I reported this to Alison as soon as the bell went for recess.

Later that week, I received an email from Alison asking if she could speak with me urgently. The
police and the DEECD had been notified by the school as to what had occurred with the student.
Alison asked me a few follow up questions about what was said ‘exactly’ and told me ‘I’d done a
good thing’ and to not ‘blame myself’. The sentiment was nice, but nevertheless I felt responsible for what had occurred.

No one prepares novice researchers for what fieldwork will be like. We do not discuss the possibility of what to do when situational events pop up unexpectedly and/or the effect these might have on the researcher. We can consider the words of others who have come before us, like Carolyn Ellis (2007), and Marilys Guillemin and Lynn Gillam (2004), learn from them, and from our own experiences. That is what I tried to take from this situation when I returned to North-West campus a week later, in time for the individual interviews to begin.

**Individual Interviews: Students**

I returned to North-West Campus just in time to spend one last week with my students from 8R before they transitioned to their Year 9 classes in order to prepare for the 2013 school year. Out of the twenty-four students in 8R, thirteen students wanted to participate in the individual interviews. These thirteen students comprised of nine female students and four male students. All of the students were again asked if they still wanted to participate in the interviews, with all agreeing to continue.

These individual interviews were scheduled in consultation with the campus leadership team, the students’ classroom teachers and the students themselves. This ensured that the interviews did not disrupt teaching and learning times, but that they also occurred at school as stipulated within my HREC and DEECD ethics applications.

The research questions were created using a semi-structured approach. According to Bogdan and Biklan (2003) a semi-structured interview is guided by a pre-prepared set of questions but is not confined to those questions during the actual interview. This format helped guide the conversations I had with the students, but also allowed me to draw upon some of the experiences I had observed or been a part of with the students during the observations. This approach aligns with the methodology outlined in Chapter Three, which described the importance of interviews.
being grounded by shared experiences, purposeful conversations and meaningful dialogue (Emond, 2005; Freire, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; Skeggs, 1999).

The interview questions used for all student interviews can be found in Appendix J. However, a small sample of the questions are presented below in Figure 4.7.

| 1. Can you tell me about a time when you had a fight with your friends at school? |
| 2. What is the biggest challenge for you when you are having a fight with a friend? How do you deal with this? |
| 3. How do you and your friends normally resolve your differences during a fight? |
| 4. How do the school/teachers react to you and your friends when you are having a fight? |
| 5. What do you think you learn from having a fight with someone? |
| 6. What is the best thing about a fight? |
| 7. What is the hardest thing about having a fight? |
| 8. If you could change one thing about the school, and the way they deal with fights, what would it be? Why? |

*Figure 4.7: Interview Questions (Student)*

Using a semi-structured interview approach allowed the interviews to be focused and similar for each student, but it also allowed me to respond to any comments by asking clarifying questions, or asking for more detail. This format was also useful in helping to sort the data after all of the interviews had been completed. A more detailed discussion of the sorting process will be discussed further in this chapter.

The interviews took place during school hours and within the school grounds. A small meeting room was set aside for me to use during this time. This room was located near the school office, but was not directly visible to staff or visitors to the school.

As all of the school staff were aware of the interviews taking place, I was able to collect each student from class when it was time for them to be interviewed and walk them to the meeting room.
room. During this walk, I asked if they were nervous, or if they had any concerns that they wanted to talk with me about first. Most students mentioned that they had never been interviewed before so they did not know what to expect. I explained that it was like having a chat with me with the only difference being that it is recorded.

I opened the door for the student to enter first and once they had selected their seat, I sat opposite them. Once we were seated, I placed the digital recorder on the table between us. I asked again if they were happy to be recorded, with all students saying ‘yes’.

The student interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes each depending upon the student, and in some cases, what class they were ‘missing’ during the interview.

Out of the thirteen student interviews, two female students became upset due to the interview process. I asked them if they would like to stop the interview, but both chose to continue. I told them that the student counsellor was available should they need to talk about anything that had been raised for them through the interviews. I also suggested that if they did not want to discuss this with the counsellor then Kids Helpline\textsuperscript{14} was available to them. Despite this strategy being stated in my HREC and DEECD ethics applications, it felt like an ineffective approach for helping the two girls deal with the emotion of recalling their experiences of conflict.

\textit{Individual Interviews: Teachers}

Once the student interviews had concluded, I began the teacher interviews. Of the school staff, five teachers agreed to participate in an interview. Of these five teachers, two occupied leadership positions within the campus, one was a year-level coordinator, with the remaining two teachers identified as graduate teachers. There were four female teachers to one male teacher.

\textsuperscript{14} Kids Helpline is Australia’s only phone-based service, specifically available for young people aged 5-25 for online counselling and support. You can find further information about this service at \url{https://kidshelpline.com.au/about/about-khl}
As with the student interviews, the teacher interviews took place in the meeting room off the school office; they were all digitally recorded, and took place during school hours or directly after school. These interviews were slightly longer than the student interviews, taking approximately 60 minutes each.

The interview questions were semi-structured in nature. These questions were different from the questions used for the students. An example of the questions is given below in Figure 4.8 and a full list is provided in Appendix K.

![Interview Questions (Teacher)](image)

1. Can you give me a brief background on your experience in education? What is your role within the school?
2. Can you outline for me the school’s policy in dealing with students who are having a disagreement?
3. How do you react when you know that students are having a disagreement?
4. What do you think are the hardest aspects of dealing with students who are having a disagreement? Why?
5. What kind of support do you feel the school should provide to help students resolve their differences?
6. Do you every feel that students get any positive attributes out of being able to resolve their differences? Are these promoted within the school or by teachers?

_Figure 4.8: Interview Questions (Teacher)_

**Focus Group Interviews: Students**

After all of the individual interviews were finished, I asked all of the thirteen students who had individual interviews with me, if they would like to have a focus group interview with their friends. Focus group interviews had been approved as a data collection technique within my ethics applications. While it was not necessary to do group interviews, I was interested to see if a group setting would elicit different responses to the same interview questions asked during the individual interviews.
Ten of the original thirteen students agreed to a group interview; all of the four male students participated in the group interview, but only seven of the nine female students did. The conditions for conducting the group interviews followed along the same line as the individual interviews; they took place in the same meeting room, were digitally recorded, used semi-structured interview questions, and took approximately 30-45 minutes.

**Transcription**

Once all of the group interviews were completed, all of the digital recordings were transcribed into word documents. I utilised the services of a professional transcription company, called Blink don’t miss it, to aid in transcribing the twenty-three individual and group interviews.

During this period, I transcribed my observation field journal. This was a multi-step process which included scanning each page of my journal into a single pdf. From this scanned document, I transcribed my observations into a Word document.

Once I received all of the transcribed interviews, and finished transcribing my observation journal, I set about trying to begin the process of sorting through the data using the methods described below.

**Data sorting and management**

Following transcription, there were three hundred and forty two pages of interview data notes that needed to be sorted and analysed, as well as thirty one pages of observation notes. There were three main approaches that I tried in order to make sense of the voluminous amounts of data I had. These approaches included trialling NVivo software, categorical content analysis, and portraiture. Each of these approaches is discussed below.

**NVivo**

NVivo is a data management tool recommended to researchers as a way to organise, store and make sense of large amounts of data (QSR International, 2018). It seemed like an ideal solution to
helping me with the amount of data I had generated. I followed the instructional process to try to create themes within my data, this, however, was slow and required technical knowledge that I was lacking.

With some perseverance, I managed to create a few versions of different ‘coded’ documents. As shown in Figure 4.9 below. As can be seen in Figure 4.9, the manner in which NVivo categorises documents (for me at least) seems to align with positivist notions of sorting data in a numerical manner. This approach was ineffective for my research as it did not align with my theoretical framework.

Figure 4.9: Example of NVivo coding

Categorical Analysis

I then tried coding the data through categorical content analysis. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) describe categorical analysis as the systematic organisation of data in groupings that are alike, similar or homogenous. The categories may be concepts from the literature, or concepts from the data itself (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Le Compte and Schensul (1999) refer to the process whereby the concepts come from the data itself as being bottom up, or inductive analysis.

I tried to do this by hand, using different coloured highlighters to sort through each transcript for particular words or phrases. Some of the phrases I searched for were ‘conflict’, ‘fighting’, ‘trust’, and ‘respect’. I tried this process with the female student transcripts first before moving on to the boys’ and teachers’ transcripts. Due to the amount of data generated, and the length of some of the
transcripts, this process became frustrating and overwhelming. The data was simply too large for me to see patterns or categories. This process did not work and left me deflated and defeated.

**Narrative portraits**

The process which led me to finding narrative portraits has been discussed in Chapter Three on pages 72-73. In short, it was the methodological work of Smyth et al. (2013) that introduced the process of converting interview transcripts into narrative portraits. The process Smyth et al. (2013) took in crafting their portraits was the basis upon which I constructed my portraits.

These researchers advocate for utilising particular editorial strategies. The following quote, while long, gives explicit detail as to the kinds of crafting and editing strategies Smyth et al. (2013) use in their portrait development and which I was guided by.

> Our editorial strategies involved eliminating most interview questions and comments by us as researchers, reorganizing the text to produce a greater sense of coherence and to avoid repetition, and dropping out pauses, most false starts, for example, “uh” and “you know,” and sympathetic noises, such as “ah” and “mm,” which can be an unnecessary distraction … In some of our more lengthy transcripts we find it necessary to edit out material that has little or no bearing on the research topic. Occasionally we use a third person voice in the narrative, to summarize complex ideas and information. In accordance with ethical conventions, we assign pseudonyms to the participants and to the places and institutions named in the portraits to ensure anonymity. (Smyth et al., 2013, p. 12)

These researchers make it very clear that they “do not claim that participants are the authors of the portraits” (Smyth et al., 2013, p. 13). Rather, they acknowledge their role in making decisions about what storyline to follow, what content to select in order to illuminate the research issue, and whether those decisions will engage the reader.

As my research question is directly interested in the experiences of girls, I began crafting portraits from their interview transcripts first. In Table 4.1, I show how I have taken raw interview data (on
the left) and edited it (on the right) according to the guidance of Smyth et al. (2013). In the left column, the interviewer’s dialogue is in italic font, the interviewee in non-italic font.

I tried to remain faithful to the manner in which the participants spoke, the language they used and the way they framed their ideas. Undertaking this process meant for the first time since the observations and interviews, I was able to ‘see’ and access the data. I undertook this process of crafting portraits for all of the female research participants who had provided informed consent. In total, I crafted nine narrative portraits.

After these nine had been crafted, I decided to focus only on the experiences of the female students due to the nature of the research question being female-focused. This meant that I did not craft portraits for the four male students, and the five teachers, who participated in interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview data</th>
<th>Re-written for narrative portrait</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *What do you think it is that I’m doing?*  
The study between boys and girls in the classroom and how girls and stuff. I kind of know.  
*So what I’m doing is I’m looking at how girls fight essentially and I think first and foremost it is really good for you and I to understand what it is that we mean by fight. So if I was to say to you I’m interested in how girls fight what would you think that I’m talking about?*  
Like you want to see how they react to things and like fighting would be like - well I think of it as like bitching and all of those little things that girls seem to do and boys or other people who don’t. Like teenage girls probably would do lots more little things that make fights difficult.  
*What’s your understanding of different kinds of fights? Do you think that there are different kinds of fights and if so what do you think they are?*  
Yeah well there’s probably two that are obvious which are like physical and then the more mental, emotional fights where it’s more just saying things rather than any physical violence.  
| I think that you’re studying the difference between boys and girls in the classroom and like you want to see how they react to things – like fighting. I think of it as bitching and all of those little things that girls seem to do and other people (like the boys) don’t do. Like teenage girls probably would do lots more little things that make fights difficult.  
| There are probably two different kinds of fights that are obvious. Like there’s the physical ones and then there are the more mental/emotional fights where it’s more just saying things to each other, rather than any physical violence. Like if you’re in a physical fight, there’ll be punching, kicking, pulling another person’s hair – you know, kind of like a brawl! It’s where you’re
**Table 4.1: Creating portraits from interview data (Sophie)**

Choosing to forgo using the data generated with the male students and the teachers was a practical decision influenced by time constraints and the amount of data that I had. Their perspectives, while important, are not the focus of my research questions and therefore could be set aside to use later if required. My original intention was to use the perspectives of the teachers and the boys as a way to crystallize the experiences of the girls; showing that there are multiple perspectives to any given event or situation. While my intention was good, the amount of data that was generated meant that I could not do justice to the voices of the girls, who are the focus of the research questions.

By removing the male students and the teachers from the data pool, I was able to engage again in the process of categorical content analysis as articulated above. This time, with less data to work with, I began categorising the portraits via interview questions that were similar or discussed a topic in different ways. As the interview questions were semi-structured, this process was not without its challenges due to the nature of how the questions were asked and how they differed from each other. This method of categorising the data enabled me to move data around on Word documents, as well as highlight similarities and differences in the girls’ responses to each question. Slowly, this process began to illuminate the importance of each girls’ friendship and the

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>So what would physical violence mean to you? Punching, kicking kind of like a brawl, you know like pulling another person’s hair or something.</th>
<th>aiming to hurt another person in a violent way. The emotional/mental fights are where there are people who get excluded from the group.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ok so when you are actually becoming into contact with somebody else and you are aiming to hurt them in a violent way?</strong> Yeah in a violent way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You talked about the emotional sort of conflict that people have, the emotional fights that people have what would that look like?</strong> Yeah well it is really recent when there’s well there are people who get excluded from the group and then...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
role this played in the generation of conflict. This recognition raised a few ethical conundrums about representation and anonymity.

**Representation: Anonymity and shoes**

My initial attempts to write about the participants as individuals were unsuccessful. Every attempt I tried was both shallow, one dimensional, or overly descriptive, which made the participants more likely to be recognisable to those who may know them. No matter how hard I tried it was not possible to write about the students’ experiences independently from their friends, and maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

It became apparent during the data sorting that each student self-identified as belonging to one of four particular friendship group within 8R. Each of these friendship groups displayed a set of collective behaviours, personal quirks and ways of engaging in conflict that were unique to them. In particular, the manner in which conflict was discussed during the interviews was often in relation to their friendships. This suggested to me that I needed to reconsider how I represented these students, not as individuals, but rather as members of their self-selected friendship groups.

I returned to my observational data and noticed that I had described the differences in school shoes that each student wore. After comparing these notes it soon became apparent that each friendship group seemed to wear a particular kind of shoe. These shoes included black leather T-bars, black lace up boots (otherwise known as Dr. Martens), black canvas shoes, and high-top Converse.

This discovery led me to research the role of clothing within sub-group cultures and how fashion choices are important markers of identity construction, particularly within youth sub-cultures (see Hansen, 2004; Kuchler & Miller, 2005; Twigg, 2009). According to Twigg (2009) the fields of sociology and anthropology have a long history of research which regard clothing as a form of material culture, body practice and part of the lived experience of people’s lives. Research conducted by Evans (1997) suggests that within sub-groups, such as youth culture, clothing and body styling can be seen as markers of the boundaries established within a group, which stabilises
identity and helps form a sense of belonging. For the participants in this research, the shoes they wear is one clear identifier of the boundaries of their friendship group.

In conjunction with Evans’ (1997) research into the importance of clothing in the construction of identity formation, was the theoretical framework in which this research is conducted. The use of crystallization (Richardson, 1995) encourages diverse practices for representing qualitative research and I needed a creative solution to help represent, and provide some context about the participants in this research project. Drawing on the work of Pohar-Manhas and Oberle (2015) is the method of using metaphors to help capture the various dimensions of description, experiences and feelings. According to Pohar-Manhas and Oberle (2015), metaphors allow people to describe one thing using an analogy of another which encourages participants and researchers to draw connections and understandings with each other. Pohar-Manhas and Oberle (2015) suggests that a move towards seeking and using metaphors can help develop a more vivid picture of the mood and interpretation of the data and help give insight into the researchers own experiences and perceptions of the data. Based on the above factors, I decided that using a shoe-based description for each friendship group would be a creative solution to the issue of group representation, provide greater anonymity from individual characteristics, and the manner in which the students expressed their understanding of conflict as a collective experience.

While this was a great solution to the issue of representing my students and their understandings of conflict as collective, the act of writing itself still presented challenges.

**The participant ‘Kim’**

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the incident where a student disclosed personal information was an influential moment for my research. Not only did it impact on how I conducted the interviews, but it also impacted on my ability to write my thesis.

After the interviews were conducted, and transcription had taken place, I was left with a considerable amount of written data that I did not know how to manage or write about, and with.
Every time I wrote something it ended up morphing into a stream of emotional consciousness. An example of my emotionally charged writing is shown in Figure 4.10.

Looking back on this incident, it's disconcerting that I wrote nothing about this incident/interaction in my research journal. However, reading it now sends a shiver down my spine. How could I have missed this? I vividly recall the faces of the four girls in the instance that they are told they are unworthy and undeserving of personhood (loser...) by members of their class. I am haunted by the faces of the four girls and the shattering of a tiny piece of themselves that I bore witness to but also, how I did nothing to stop this attack – and even worse still, I did not think that it was a worth more of my time in my research journal upon which to elaborate, or reflect upon.

There is an unjust brutality evident in the manner in which the boys explicitly tell the girls that they are unwanted, underserving and deficient in some way. The boys hold a certain social power within this space that gives them immunity to being treated in the same way that appear to feel is perfectly acceptable in the daily interaction with these particular girls. What appears to haunt me more so now that I am removed from the school environment is that these types of interactions are not out-of-character, nor unique in this context in any way. My research journal is scattered with incidences during which these four girls are subjected to unequal treatment by their peers and by their teachers and school.

**Figure 4.10: Writing with emotion**

Figure 4.10 shows the writing, and the language, I was producing at this time. Much of what I wrote was emotionally-charged, which can be seen in the use of terms such as, “I’m haunted”, “shivers down my spine”, “unjust brutality”, all reflecting a troubled researcher.

I tried to explain this to my supervisors who were incredibly patient and understanding. However, this type of writing was getting me nowhere and was having a detrimental effect on this research project moving forward. Eventually, my supervisor got it out of me that it was the ‘emotion of the experience’ that I could not move beyond. She suggested that I try writing myself in to the research as a participant called ‘Kim’ to distance myself and allow me to analyse the text I wrote during my fieldwork. This process was really helpful.

Over time, the participant ‘Kim’ became more than an emotional-outlet. In particular, she became another participant in the ethnographic study through which I was able to present a different point-of-view to the same event, observation, or interview, that was being analysed through the more objective perspective of the ‘researcher-Kim’. The research of Ruth Behar (1995) was influential during this process. Behar (1995) advocates for vulnerable writing within qualitative, ethnographic texts, however, she cautions that this style of writing must “be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish” (p. 14). Methodologically, the participant ‘Kim’ is a powerful
counter-narrative to the voice of the researcher – even though they are the same person. ‘Kim’, as a writing construct, invites the reader to see beyond the theoretical lens and the academic prose, and instead, experience the contradictions and tensions that I felt and experienced during the fieldwork and data analysis for this study.

Writing the emotion through the participant ‘Kim’ is a very visible mode of reflecting on the fieldwork. All of ‘Kim’s’ comments have come from my observation journal, personal voice recordings, while others have been crafted during particular stages of writing when a memory or emotion was triggered unconsciously.

Working through the emotion of the research experience opened up a range of creative possibilities for me about how to represent young women’s experiences, as well as challenging dominant discourses around how a PhD thesis should be constructed.

**Being creative: Fonts, icons and snapshots**

Once my thesis writing was moving forward, so too did the manner in which I explored creative ways to ‘see’ the participants voices within the data and within the text of the thesis.

One of the main strategies that I took up was colour coding each participants’ narrative portrait in a different coloured text. Originally, the colour coding allowed me to identify each participants’ narrative at a glance. It was also a quick indicator to show me whose voice was being privileged over others within the text and whose voice was not as widely used.

Another concept, which stemmed from the colour coding, was the utilisation of face-icons. These icons were used originally to break up large chunks of participant data. Even though there was already the coloured text, the icons personalised the written text; it reduced the dominance of the written text and helped to add a visual clue as to who was speaking.

I originally used pre-made face icons taken from the internet, from free image sites like dreamstime.com. Unfortunately, these icons were created by a variety of artists and did not have a
sense of continuity between them. I then enlisted the help of a friend who is a graphic designer\textsuperscript{15} to help create icons that I could use within my thesis.

I was not responsible for the icon characteristics that she created. I left the interpretation of each participant’s icon up to the graphic designer with the brief to ‘create nine female icons and six male icons that you feel could represent the voices of teenagers’. The only other direction I gave her was to ensure that they did not all look the same; I specifically requested that the icons show diverse features. No further direction was given by me. This ensured that I did not subtly reveal known physical characteristics of each participant (i.e. hair length, hair colour, skin tone etc.) and that their anonymity was further guarded.

After the icons were created, the graphic designer then created a particular icon for me to use for the participant ‘Kim’ that matched my physical characteristics. An example of the female icons that were created are presented in Figure 4.11.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{icons}
\caption{Icons developed for each female research participant}
\end{figure}

The use of the icons, while practical, was also another methodological decision that aligned with crystallization and using diverse techniques to represent the research so that it may be seen in different or contrasting ways (Ellingson, 2009). The icons are a different medium from text that

\textsuperscript{15} I want to acknowledge the work of my friend - Jaimee Westin from Jailea Design, Australia – in designing these icons.
adds a layer of clarity about which participant is speaking, provides another layer of anonymity, and ensures that my voice as the participant ‘Kim’ is clearly acknowledged.

In Chapter Seven, face icons were not suitable for the manner in which this group ended up being represented. Chapter Seven is focused predominantly on data generated from my observation journal due to some of the ‘Girls in Vans’ not participating in the interviews. Therefore the data that was available around this friendship group had to be acknowledged and considered differently from the data used in Chapter Six. Each observation was crafted into a succinct snapshot as it was necessary to show how much time had passed between each observation. The use of calendar icons was one way to capture the passage of time. Again, these calendar icons were created by Jaimee, the graphic designer.

**Reflecting on the process**

While the above method has been informed by critical theory, critical ethnography, and the work of Smyth et al. (2013), Richardson (1995), Behar, (1995), and many more, the manner in which I came to do my research was distinctly my own. The above events were forged by a mixture of decisions relating to my methodology and theoretical perspective, but more significantly, they were heavily influenced by the participants, the students of 8R and the teachers who worked with me to do this project. The following chapter introduces the reader to the community of Rural Valley, and the community who calls it home.
Chapter Five: The community of Rural Valley, Victoria

Chapter Five introduces the community of Rural Valley. This introduction provides a partial account of the community and demonstrates the important role that the local high school plays in keeping young people connected to their community and to their education. Representing this community in an unbiased way has been of importance throughout this chapter; government statistics and other publicly available information has been carefully selected to show a balanced representation of a community, and high school, which can also be represented as deficient and unworthy. It is my intention to illuminate the unique characteristics that define the community and high school of Rural Valley, while also showing the challenges it faces.

The chapter is separated into two parts. The first part is an overview of the municipality of Rural Valley including key definitions and statistics about where it is located, population characteristics and other socio-economic details to provide context to the research. This section will incorporate comments from the teachers who work at Rural Valley High School (RVHS) as a counter-narrative to government-generated statistics and to illuminate what it means to them to work in this community. The second part of this chapter introduces the reader to the class of 8R and the established friendship groups that are the focus of this research project. To begin, I offer my thoughts on Rural Valley and how my perceptions have been shaped by outside stories of the community’s history, geography and social/economic factors.

Initial thoughts of Rural Valley

Kim:
I’ve arrived early; this is not a meeting that I want to appear anything less than professional. I’ve taken every effort to appear older – I’ve got on my best professional dress and I am holding a black folder with all of my plain language information statements. This meeting is not happening at the research site, rather it is in town. The school Principal makes small talk
with my supervisor and I just sit here equal parts hoping to speak, but terrified that I will mess this up.

“I promise I do not normally dress like this”

I am not sure why I said that … Two sets of eyes just look at me for a heartbeat and then the moment has passed.

“Kim, when would you like to start?”

The above recount was my first ‘real’ engagement with the community of Rural Valley and it did not even take place within the actual community. From my vantage point in the corner office of the school Principal, I knew that the community of Rural Valley was situated only fifteen minutes down the road from my house, but it always seemed much further, both geographically and economically. Being an outsider from this community meant that the only stories I heard about it were told to me by other people. These stories were based on ‘bogans’, and ‘westies’¹⁶ and the low socio-economic community where these labels are used to prejudge and humiliate locals.

Before I introduce the reader to a more thorough and detailed review of the aspects of disadvantage within the community of Rural Valley, I now turn to a brief history of the area and what governments and local history reports.

There are few available documents that describe the Rural Valley community. What is written is tied up within state government statistics of the regional city which it borders, or within the dusty annuals of local historians. Officially, Rural Valley is a community of around 10,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016) and is situated geographically on the fringe of a regional city. The community of Rural Valley has its own postcode and has access to a variety of amenities including supermarkets, doctors and public schools. The Community Profile created by the ABS (2016) from Census data, depicts the people who live in this community as English speakers who were born in Australia and depending upon their age, either attend school or work in some form of community-service, or as a trades-person/labourer (ABS, 2016).

Another measure commonly used by the ABS (2009) to give some context around a local area is through

¹⁶ These two definitions can be found from urbandictionary.com
the Socioeconomic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). SEIFA is calculated by the ABS using the latest Census data with the aim of identifying socioeconomic variables that represent disadvantage and/or advantage in particular areas (ABS, 2009). The SEIFA calculations are based on an area’s average income, educational attainment, employment levels and occupations of those employed in a given geographical area. Each geographical area is ranked according to these characteristics and given a score. The higher the score the lower the level of disadvantage; a lower score means a higher level of disadvantage. After the last census in 2016, the area in which the community of Rural Valley resides has a SEIFA number of 854.8 (Rural Valley Shire*, 2018). To put this in perspective, the regional town which Rural Valley fringes has a SEIFA index of 1028.8 (Rural Valley Shire, 2018), indicating higher levels of advantage compared to the Rural Valley community. Overall, the lower SEIFA number suggests that the community of Rural Valley experiences a higher level of disadvantage than the local regional city (ABS, 2016) especially in the area of educational attainment, income and occupation.

Aside from the government statistics, the only other available historical information about the community of Rural Valley was located in the local shire and local history books. Archival information shows that the settlement of Rural Valley can be traced as far back as 1838 where it was once a small agricultural community (Rural Valley Shire*, 2018; Victorian Places, 2015).

The current iteration of Rural Valley began in 1951 with the development of a large State Government public housing estate to meet the demands of a growing industrial economy (Rural Valley Shire, 2018). Significant investment by the State Government and private investors resulted in a variety of manufacturing and industrial estates being established around the outer fringes, including food processing plants and production plants for the building of agricultural machinery (Victorian Places, 2015). Through the increase in manufacturing around the Rural Valley community, factory workers and their families moved into the area, which led to an increase in population and housing demand. In order to accommodate the growing community and their housing needs, the State Government continued to invest in public housing throughout the 1980s with the construction of a range of basic weatherboard, and fibro-cement houses (Rural
Valley Shire, 2018). According to the local shire records, little publicly funded development has occurred within the community of Rural Valley since the 1980s aside from the building of a shopping centre, childcare facilities, public primary and high schools and some other recreational facilities such as skate parks and community centres.

Presently, public housing from the 1950-1980s is still in use and offers a variety of public and private accommodation to locals. In 2003, the State Government of Victoria invested approximately four million dollars into upgrading the local community as part of its Neighbourhood Renewal Program (State of Victoria, 2016). This renewal included upgrades to approximately two-hundred homes, the installation of light sensors to deter thefts, and the training of one-hundred and fifty local residents in a range of skills including childcare, computer skills, and building and landscaping (State of Victoria, 2016). While there are still some local manufacturing companies operating around the fringes of the area, more retail-focused companies have moved in. Depending upon who you ask and for what purpose, the community of Rural Valley can appear unremarkable. The government statistics and brief historical documents I could find all indicate a community that has continued to operate on the margins of economic and social life. This information informs a particular deficit view of the community of Rural Valley, and while it has been used to do so throughout its history, it is not the only way.

Another way in which to situate and explain the uniqueness of the community to outsiders is to walk amongst, and talk to the people who call this place home. As such, I went back to the voices of my participants and listened to what they had to say about life in Rural Valley. I do not claim for these voices to be all-encompassing of a cohesive, local perspective/experience; rather I was drawn to the voices of the teachers who participated in this research project. It is to these voices that I now turn.
Teaching in Rural Valley: “It was the last place I thought I would end up!”

As stated above, the only stories/exposure that I had to the residents and community of Rural Valley was from the stories told to me by other people and from the history presented through statistics and demographic information. Those stories painted a picture of a community besieged by disadvantage, crime, welfare dependence and unemployment. I had no personal experience with this community; I had driven through it on a number of occasions but I had never lived there. I had gone shopping at the Rural Valley supermarket a few times and it was not somewhere I felt comfortable. My perception of this community was founded in ‘hearsay’. It was not until I spent time there that I came to see how “hearsay” can misrepresent the residents and community of Rural Valley.

The misrepresentations around the community of Rural Valley are not easily ignored nor forgotten by the teaching staff of Rural Valley High School* (RVHS). When I asked the teachers about their initial impressions of the school and the local community, I received a range of similar responses. Miss. M*, a graduate teacher17, gave me her first impression:

My own impressions [of the school] was the kids are bad, you will never have a class that’s controlled - everything is hectic, nothing is under control in the school - like the kids just run wild… pretty much … just the scariness of the whole [community]. It’s just like your worst fears come [to life in] the school. (Miss. M, RVHS)

For another teacher, Ms. A*, the poor reputation of the broader community was a large factor in her reluctance to consider applying for a teaching position.

You wouldn’t apply for a job here, or most people wouldn’t, if because - like me [they] kind of make a judgement and I misjudged [the school] … I never wanted to work at

17 ‘Graduate teacher’ means a teacher with no more than five years’ experience teaching from receiving their teaching qualification.
Rural Valley High School. If a job came up I didn’t look at it and the reason for that was because … I simply went on hearsay. (Ms. A, RVHS)

For Ms. A, boredom with her previous teaching position saw her reconsider her initial reluctance and apply for a teaching position at RVHS. She told me she “hasn’t looked back”. The implications from these two statements go beyond the personal, rather, it puts into perspective the power that hearsay and reputation can have over communities and their residents. Gramsci (1971) argues that having power over oppressed groups of people is not necessarily expressed through brute force, rather it is the subversive social/psychological conditioning from cultural institutions, such as the media and schools, which can be most harmful. For example, the community of Rural Valley have not just been the recipients of local government reports and gossip, they have also been the subject of a number of national newspaper articles which all contribute to deficit discourses about the people and the place. Prior to conducting my fieldwork, I stumbled upon one of these newspaper articles, and I now present to the reader an abridged version of this article. It reads:

THEY call it the ghetto. Nothing good comes out of Rural Valley, they reckon. In truth, few locals ever leave. Curtains are drawn down every street of this struggling suburb, five minutes' drive from [the main town’s] grand facades. Broken windows are boarded up or covered over with corrugated iron.

People here are poor and almost exclusively white, out of work and out of luck. But there's something confounding about this place they call home.

Social dysfunction stalks the streets and with it crime, busted-up families, mental illness and substance abuse. And yet the streets are named for flowers and the footpaths lined with pink blossoms in bloom. Kids play on scooters on the roads.

"Outsiders" see them as dole bludgers, no-hopers, drug addicts and thieves. Here they wear slander like a badge of honour.
"The people here are good but beset with many social challenges - there is a lot of poverty and family dysfunction, and then you have people trying to self-medicate through drugs and alcohol. Many people here would be in survival mode."

They are not forgotten; a new school and some renovated homes stand as testaments to a recent community renewal program. But are they forsaken? (Published in a national newspaper18, 2011)

Another article, written in 2003, coincided with the Victorian State Government’s Community Renewal Project. I offer a snapshot of this article for the reader as a comparison to the one published above:

For more than 40 years the community of [Rural Valley], home to 2500 people, was neglected. It was a rundown public housing estate and its residents were pushed to the edge of society. But that is changing, as the residents work with the State Government and welfare agencies to reinvigorate a sense of community pride … [the local] convener of the residents' group, said the initiatives had turned the suburb around. "We were neglected and dismissed and now we have a voice and we can have a say about what goes into our community," she said.

Mr. Brown*, who has lived on the estate for two years, said the community renewal program had changed his life. "I never thought that I would give up illicit drugs, but the program has given me so much more. Now I'm part of the community and working with it, not against it," he said.

Mrs. Black*, who has lived in the suburb for 35 years, said it was about time residents and the Government worked together to improve the quality of life on the estate. "We're now building a strong foundation for the future and it's about working with the Department of Housing. It's not a case any more of us against them," she said. (Published in a national newspaper, 2003)

The two newspaper articles above both describe a community beset by substance abuse problems, mental health issues, and ongoing neglect and dismissal from successive government bodies, both local, state and federal. There appears to be a limited attempt to re-frame the discourse of a

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18 I have chosen not to identify the national newspaper where this article comes from in an attempt to preserve the anonymity of the school, community and research participants.
community besieged by disadvantage and neglect, rather the focus of each newspaper article suggests government intervention will ‘rescue’ the community from itself because the community is incapable of doing it themselves.

For another teacher, Mrs. C*, the daily prejudice the school faces is exhausting and exasperating, “I’m sick to death of having people go *gasp* "gees you work out there, do you have a stab proof vest on?" Mrs. C’s statement suggests that to contradict the dominant discourses about the community is an exhausting endeavor for her. Another teacher, Mr. M* recalls a conversation with a Year 7 boy about how exasperating it is to speak back to the negative commentary. The student was recalled by Mr. M as saying: "I get on a bus with [students from] at least four different schools and as I walk down the aisle every night they say, "oh you’ve been at that westie school again." He said; "I’m getting sick and tired of it.” From the above comments, it appears that negative community sentiments are a constant source of frustration for staff and students alike. The teachers I interviewed report that they are exhausted by the negative perception of their workplace, and the students are “sick of” the verbal reminders of how they are ‘lacking’ in some way because of the school they attend. While the community context and broader socio-political understandings are important to demonstrate a sense of the tensions experienced by the community of Rural Valley, it is to the local high school that I now turn as the site of the fieldwork component of this research project.

**Rural Valley High School**

Rural Valley High School (RVHS) is a multi-campus, government secondary school with a total student population of over 1000 students (ACARA, 2012). This high school has four campuses. The smallest campus is designed to help local young people who are considered to be disengaged from school. This small campus aims to reconnect students back into some form of education, either through vocational training, apprenticeships, or a return to traditional schooling. The inner
city campus is designed for senior students in Years 11 and 12 who are working towards their Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The two remaining campuses focus on teaching students from Year 7 to Year 10 and are located on the boundaries of the regional city.

Overall, the school principal and school council are responsible for strategic learning and teaching direction, but the day-to-day campus operations are the responsibility of each campus principal. In total, there are approximately 100 teachers who teach across the four campuses (ACARA, 2012). How and where the teachers are allocated is dependent upon their subject specialisation, student enrolments, and the preference of the teacher. During fieldwork, two teachers moved to another campus midway through the term, with another teacher requesting a transfer at the beginning of the 2013 teaching year. One of the leading teachers mentioned in her interview that the school had a high staff turnover with a large reliance on casual relief teachers (CRT), which is something that I observed during fieldwork.

While the school has four campuses, the fieldwork for this research project was conducted at one of the campuses on the fringe of the regional city. I now turn my attention to this campus of RVHS.

**North-West campus**

This study focuses on the Year 8 students who attend North-West campus of RVHS. This campus has approximately 200 students. The students who attend this campus are a mixture of young people who live within walking distance of the school; teenagers who live in another part of the regional city, but who are driven to school or catch the bus; the remaining students are bused into school from outlying rural towns. Some of the rural based teenagers spend more than two hours traveling to and from school each day.

The campus buildings are predominately freestanding and constructed of brick; a range of portable classrooms sit on the edges of the buildings along the fence line. The basketball courts and main oval are located further back from the main buildings along the boundary.
While the school has ownership of the basketball courts and oval, access to these spaces from within the campus grounds is limited by a locked gate, which is opened daily for students. The community can gain access to these facilities from a gate in the boundary fence, but the community is unable to gain access to the amenities through the school campus.

To give the reader a better understanding of the mix of students enrolled at the school, I turn to the voices of the five teachers who participated in this research project and who occupy a range of positions within the North-West Campus of RVHS. One male teacher, Mr. M*, and one female teacher, Ms. A* are school leaders and have a high level of authority within the campus. Miss. M* is a Graduate Teacher having taught for approximately two years, mainly as a casual relief teacher (CRT) and on short-term contracts. Ms. H* is a Leading Teacher19 and works as a year level coordinator. Mrs. C* has been a classroom teacher for the past five years having worked at a variety of local secondary schools.

The following comments from the teachers’ help give a perspective on the students, their lives, and the broader community of Rural Valley. This is what they say:

**Ms. A:** I know a couple of families [privately to school] from Rural Valley and they have kind of got a strong hold [on this area] – ‘This is our area. We love it’ - they’ve got local basketball based here and they are really community-minded, family-minded and this is their area. These families wouldn’t even question why they would send their child somewhere else.

**Mr. M:** I think the families [within the broader] communities look at the place and say it looks tired, it looks old and of course that’s [peoples’] first perception. So

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19 ‘Lead teacher’ is a teacher who has worked within the profession for a long period and demonstrates innovative teaching practices, lead processes to improve learning and mentor colleagues and pre-service teachers.
getting people to come to an information night to have a look [is tough] and [it’s] always a very consistent response from the families that come in for information nights – “wow we are glad we came, we didn’t realise what fantastic things are happening inside.

Ms. H: I think the kids that are here, the majority of them are fantastic kids. We’ve got probably more than our fair share of kids that have got huge potential… but we do have some kids that have some really serious issues as well. Drug and alcohol abuse with parents is big for quite a few of the students. There’s mental health issues as well, both at home and with some of the kids here.

Mrs. C: We’ve got, gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous, kids that come in and who are accelerated and have lovely homes and that’s the one thing I wish the Rural Valley community would see, is that we have some fantastic staff and some fantastic kids and just because the reputation used to be bad twenty years ago does not mean that that’s what the place is like now. It frustrates the hell out of me.

Ms. A: What I like about everything here is that anything goes - it doesn’t matter if you’ve got two cents to rub together or twenty dollars in your pocket everyone pretty much accepts each other. At other schools you might get picked on for not having the right stuff, whereas we just accept it because we are thankful that they have turned up in the morning.

The teachers appear to recognize that both the wider community and the local community perception of the school is often negative and that this is compounded by the run-down appearance of the school buildings, which is suggested to be a barrier to getting parents and students to even consider attending this school. It is also acknowledged that some students come from families that struggle with drug addiction and mental health issues, but irrespective of home life circumstances, the teachers appear grateful that the students have
'turned up' and indicate that they are overall ‘fantastic kids’. The above comments are not a representation of every staff member and I recognise that there may be other teacher views towards the students of North-West campus that have not been presented here. However, these comments are reflective of the five staff members who participated in this research project and provide insight into the school which is the focus of this thesis. I now take the reader inside the classroom of 8R and introduce the students who are the participants in this research project.

**The characters of class 8R**

*Kim:*

I’ve got my bag packed with my notebook, a small pencil case with pens and highlighters, and my lunch for the day. I am not sure that I will be able to eat it as I am feeling really nervous – a bit nauseous actually.

*You can do this!*

I walk into the main office and explain who I am and that Allison is expecting me. I am directed to wait in the staff room. The staff room has a wall of windows on the left hand side which overlook the yard and through this I see kids everywhere; walking in small groups; some running around, others playing hacky-sac. It is like I have been teleported back in time to when I was in Year 9.

*Hi Kim … Welcome to North-West. We’re really excited to have you here.*

The class that I followed for this research project is 8R*. There are twenty-four students in total, all aged between 13-14 years of age with an equal split of male to female students. Their typical school day consists of six periods each lasting 50 minutes. The fieldwork for this study commenced at the beginning of Term Four, 2012, which meant that the students were starting some new classes. The curriculum typically consisted of at least one English, Math and Science class, with a combination of either Physical Education, Music, Art, Information Technology or
History/Geography filling in the remaining school periods. I was able to attend every subject with the class of 8R.

Over the course of the fieldwork I came to know the characters and characteristics of the friendship groups that existed within the class of 8R. The class of 8R tended to interact as clusters of people/friends; the students seemed to naturally self-select into specific, established friendship groups. Observationally and through interviews, the stories, anecdotes and observations always seemed to occur through the lens of a group experience, rather than an individual experience involving others. Consequently, it became necessary to conceptualise my thinking (and research experience and preparation) around finding a way of providing information about the participants, but not writing about them as individuals, rather as a group with unique characteristics, meanings, ideas and behaviours that was reflective of how I saw them.

The idea of representing the students’ friendships through particular school shoes started to emerge naturally from the participants themselves. For example, one group of girls wore black Clarks20 T-bar school shoes that had a silver buckle on the outside which was always undone; another group of girls commonly wore chunkier black shoes that they had modified or drawn pictures on which reminded me of Dr. Marten21 leather school shoes and the self-expression that those shoes historically exemplified (drmartens website, 2018). It was from these two observations that I began to identify different friendship groups based on the choices in school shoes. Further detail is provided in Chapter Four (pp. 96-97) around the methodological reasoning behind this decision. Therefore, the following images22 and descriptions of each established friendship group from 8R are now presented to the reader contextualising the unique characteristics of each friendship group.

20 Clark’s school shoes are a shoe brand commonly used in Australia.

21 Dr. Marten is an international shoe company that is known for its distinctive yellow stitching and leather boots.

22 All of the shoe images used in this chapter have been photographed by Kim Pappaluca specifically for use within this thesis.
The soles of friendship

As described above, the class of 8R had established friendship groups before I came into the class. Over time, I observed particular characteristics belonging to each of those groups with these characteristics lending themselves to a particular shoe.

There are four distinct friendship groups that I identified within the class of 8R. The first two friendship groups I present to the reader – ‘Girls in Dr. Martens’ and ‘Boys in Converse’ - are a part of 8R but are not a central focus of this research project. The students in these two friendship groups are important to understanding the class dynamics of 8R, but for a number of reasons, which I have explained on pages 94-95, they did not end up being the main focus of this research.

Girls in Dr. Martens: Harper, Clair and Katie

Harper, Clair and Katie are the girls who sit quietly up the back of the class and comply with the teacher’s instructions. They appear unobtrusive, attentive to the teacher’s instructions and no matter how loud the class gets they always seem to get their work done. They are often found sharing headphones and listening to music while doing their school work. They ask questions in class and appear to demand information and learning from the teacher. They can often be found with their hand up during class or talking quietly with each other. They do not create ripples in this class, rather they seem to operate in a bubble where the daily conflicts appear not to touch them. Unlike some of the other girls in the class, they do not wear make-up, although they do experiment with a range of hair colours and styles on a regular basis. Their uniform is always correct, but there are small alterations; a small hole in the jumper sleeve to put the thumb through as a way to keep the hand warm; black socks instead of the classic white; not forgetting the handmade bracelets or anklets. Like the classic Dr. Martens boots, these girls conform to the rules but with small observable, subversive movements of rebellious expression.
The following portrait of ‘Kim’ is reflective of the interactions these girls and I had. There were moments of shared intimacy, but often I was kept at arm’s length from them and their lives.

*Kim:

It is Wednesday afternoon and I am sitting up the back next to Katie and I am watching the Math teacher try to get some of the boys to do the work. It feels like I am watching a comedy of errors although I am sure the teacher does not see it that way. Katie lifts her head up from her textbook and nudges my arm “… *Kim, can you help me with this question? Sure, let’s have a look …” Once we (more realistically Katie) figure out the answer Katie asks me what I am writing down so I show her my observation notes. She takes a moment to read them and seems to think about what I have written “… *do you ever notice me?” … “*All the time”.

**Boys in Converse: Will, Noah, Ryan, Nathan, Zac, Andrew and Ollie**

Out of the twelve boys in the class, there are only seven* who consistently attend class. The boys that I observe on a daily basis are noisy, sociable and always prepared to have a chat. They always seem to be shouting or laughing at each other even if they are only sitting a few seats away. They are physical with each other during class; touching, hitting or kicking with what often appears to be no reason. The boys all seem to take the physical side of their friendship with good humour and a ‘give as good as they get’ attitude. They often can be found talking with the Girls in T-bars and trying to find out the latest gossip. They appear indifferent to the Girls in Vans and the Girls in Dr. Martens and will either make fun of them or ignore them completely. The same applies to the  

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* The other five boys in 8R spent a large amount of each school day away from the main class either in a specially designed learning space for students with disabilities and additional learning needs, or not attending school at all.
relationships they have with their teachers. Some teachers appear to find a way to navigate the personalities of the boys and engage them in schoolwork; other teachers appear to find them uncontrollable. Like the classic Converse Chuck Taylor’s, these boys can appear to be complicated - you either love them, find them entertaining but they are not really for you, or you just do not like them.

The following portrait of ‘Kim’ explores the tensions that I felt around being drawn into the boys’ world while knowing that the focus of this research was not on them. I found them both charming and frustrating; charming as they always included me, but frustrating because they always appeared to do what they wanted at the expense of my ear drums.

* Kim:

Its period six on a Friday afternoon and the boys have gone mad! Four of the boys are wrestling on the floor and crashing into anyone who happens to get in their way. I am not immune ... *whack* and the desk I’m sitting on wobbles and I worry that I am going to fall off. “Shit! Sorry Kim ... you okay? We didn’t hurt you did we?” … I am okay but before I can say that, Ollie has charged back towards Andrew shouting at him to watch out for me. If only they were that courteous to everyone else.

Introducing the two groups under study

The following two friendship groups – ‘Girls in T-Bars’ and ‘Girls in Vans’ - are the two groups that I came to explore in this thesis. The analysis of their data informs both the discussion and the conclusion. This is not to suggest that these two groups are more valuable or worthy of exploration than the two groups discussed above; rather due to ethical and methodological decisions, I decided to focus on these two friendship groups with some insights offered by the voices and experiences of the other class members described above. I now turn to the two friendship groups - ‘Girls in T-Bars’ and ‘Girls in Vans’ – to give the reader a sense of who these participants are and the way in which I came to know them.
**Girls in T-Bars: Anna, Sophie, Livvy, Ava and Charlotte**

Anna, Sophie, Livvy, Ava and Charlotte are the girls who I would have wanted to be friends with when I was at school. They are the epitome of what I consider ‘cool but smart’. They seem effortless in everything they do. School seems easy for them; boys seem to like them and want to talk to them. The teachers ask for their opinions and ideas and they always seem to have the right answer. They never seem to get pimples; they always wear the ‘right’ clothes and shoes (black T-bar polished leather school shoes with white GLOBE socks) and never seem to have a ‘bad hair’ day. They wear makeup and dye their hair but it doesn’t matter because they never appear to get in trouble for it. If they did, the teachers would give them a ‘caution for this time, but do not let it happen again’ speech and send them on their way with a headshake and a slight grin. They get good grades, follow the rules and get along with everyone. Like the stylish Clarks’ black T-bar school shoes, I see these girls as popular, smart and classic.

The following portrait of ‘Kim’ gives a small glimpse into how this group of girls made me feel welcome, but also subconsciously made me change the way in which I acted around them.

*Kim:*

It was a hot day and my hair was long, almost waist length. I was wearing my hair up in a bun. This style kept it off my neck and helped keep me cool in the sweltering classrooms. Today, I took it out in class to re-tie it and Livvy and Ava noticed it was down.

“Kim, your hair looks soo good left out! You should definitely wear it out for the rest of the day...”

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24 GLOBE is a popular surf brand in Australia who specialises in footwear and socks and is popular amongst the student participants.
I wanted to tie it back up, but it felt good to be noticed; to be seen in a space where I am normally invisible, so I left it down. It got tangled; it was hot and irritating… but the girls liked it left out and they made sure to let me know.

**Girls in Vans: Grace, Addi, Lucy and Mia**

Grace, Addi, Lucy and Mia were the girls who I most struggled to understand and feel comfortable hanging around with. They always appear to be having a laugh; as if they are in-on some big joke and no one else is invited to play along. They seem ‘naughty’ and are often the target of the teachers’ ire. They often run late for school and class, but they are also the first ones to leave when the bell rings. They move in tight packs and when one of them is kept back in class the rest magically turn up to support them as if from nowhere. These girls are a mass of contradictions – they are loud but silent; quiet but heard; shy but bold; fearless but unsure. These girls operate on the fringes of the class; they are neither separate from their peers, but nor are they intimate with them. This friendship feels external to the other friendship groups in the class; there are limited times when they interact, and those interactions are generally forced by the teacher or the school. Like the classic Vans shoe, these girls seemed to me to be low profile, moody, but authentic within themselves.

The following portrait of ‘Kim’ is reflective of a typical observation/interaction that I had with Addi and Grace. I often felt amusement at their antics and behaviour, but this amusement was always tempered with a maternal concern that one of them would get hurt.

*Kim:*

It is the end of the day and I am knackered. I have just sat through a long day and my head is swirling with thoughts, ideas, concerns and no idea where or how I am going to collate everything I have observed. These thoughts occupy my mind as I round the corner into the locker bay where I see Addi and Grace mucking around. From what I can see Addi has taken Grace’s pencil case and
will not give it back. So Grace starts pulling Addi’s hair and then kicks her in the shins until Addi gives in and hands back the pencil case. There is laughter and squealing coming from both girls. I do not think anything more of it, until I remember how much it hurts to have your hair pulled!

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the history of the community of Rural Valley and the many ways in which it can be viewed through available statistics, media reports and through the lived experiences of those who call the community home. I have described the set-up and layout of Rural Valley High School (RVHS) and given a glimpse into the characteristics and experiences of the students who attend one of the four school campuses. I have introduced the reader to the North-West Campus of RVHS and the class of 8R. Finally, I have offered an overview of each of the four self-selected friendship groups, which were observed within the class of 8R, and how I came to describe them according to their choice of school shoes. The insights and experiences of the friendship groups - ‘Girls in T-Bars’ and ‘Girls in Vans’ – are presented and analysed in the following two chapters.
Chapter Six: Girls in T-Bars

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the role that conflict plays in the friendship of Anna, Sophie, Livvy, Ava and Charlotte, otherwise known as the Girls in T-Bars. I present my analysis of interview data from each of the Girls in T-Bars, as well as including supplementary interview data from other participants, mainly from the teachers and boys from the class of 8R. The data presented in this chapter has been analysed using Freire’s (1972) concept of ‘horizontal violence’ and also draws upon Harris and Shield-Dobson’s (2015) call to reframe vocabulary around young women and girls into more accessible terms that enable an “articulation of the complexities of girls’ relationships to the structure/agency binary” (p. 146). One of the concepts drawn on in this analysis is the identification of “small moments of ruptures” (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 54) or agentic moments of resistance to oppressive discourses within the girl’s everyday lives. Using these two different concepts to examine the data opens up an opportunity to explore possible responses to the research question, and to begin cultivating new understandings of female conflict outside of urban centres and away from notions of ‘victimhood’.

This chapter has been separated into two sections. Section one is titled ‘Individual experiences of conflict’. This section focuses on each member of the Girls in T-Bars and her explanation of what conflict means to her. Section two, builds upon these individual understandings and analyses the female research participants’ collective friendship experience and how one particular conflict played out for them during the fieldwork of this study.

Navigating this chapter

In this chapter, I use two unique representational features in order to help guide the reader through the analysis. Firstly, graphically designed icons have been used for each participant to indicate which participant is quoted or speaking. The use of these icons has been discussed in Chapter
Section One: Individual experiences of conflict

This section separately explores each individual girl’s conceptualisation of conflict and how these understandings are influenced by broader hegemonic practices and beliefs. To begin this section, I introduce the reader to Anna’s understanding of how conflict plays out in her life before moving on to the other four members of the Girls in T-Bars.

Anna

Anna described herself as “quiet” and often stated to me that she felt, “stuck-in-the-middle” in this group. When I asked Anna about her views on conflict between friends, she responded:

*I think the most common fights amongst girls have to be verbal fights because girls don't tend to do punch-ons very often, at least I don't think. You know it tends to be more starting rumours about their friend or something.*
When I asked her about the kind of rumours that she has heard, or started, Anna was reluctant to give me any examples. She told me very clearly, “I’m not one of those people. I’m never really involved in these kinds of fights – maybe only every one or two years (shrugs)”. She explained that from her experience of conflict, she had seen incidences where, “people just start making up random things, and normally over the smallest things too”. She recounted for me one example of these small comments - “oh the way they walk annoys me so much”. When Anna shared this example with me, she grimaced and shrugged. When I asked her why she reacted in this way, she told me:

I guess that girls just like think of something new to keep the fight going and then be like "oh you said that and you did this"- it can turn things pretty weird, pretty quick. I suppose that we sometimes lose the point of why we're fighting in the first place.

From Anna’s comment above, it appeared to me that the conflicts that she has seen or been involved in tended to escalate quickly. For Anna, conflict appeared to have little reason and could suddenly shift away from the original issue. While Anna found these behaviours ‘weird’, she nevertheless suggested that conflict is a “normal part of growing up”. The following excerpt from our interview, illuminates how Anna normalises conflict in her life. She stated:

I think that fighting with your friends is a normal part of growing up, but when people make fun of it, it's like 'you don't know what we've been through' or 'you don't know what we're fighting about'. I mean it could be something really big compared to what they think it's about. They probably think it's always about something small. So, I guess it is a part of growing up but then everybody has fights even if they're an adult. Like adults will have a fight with their friend and they won't speak to each other for a month or so. Like teenage [girls] fight - you know we don't speak to the person for like a year then all of a sudden you're best friends again - it's weird.

Coyne, Archer, and Eslea (2006) argue that learning how to do conflict, aggression and violence can come from a variety of sources within a person’s life. They argue that the behaviour of parents and friends is influential in how young people come to justify their actions (Coyne et al.,
Furthermore, Coyne and Archer (2004) argue that the way conflict, aggression and violence is presented on television and within movies is a reflection of the way it is seen and used within the world. For Anna, her view of conflict as a natural part of growing up has been trivialised by adults and normalised through the people, places and spaces where she has experienced conflict occurring. Furthermore, if we view Anna’s comments through the lens of horizontal violence (Freire, 2005) and hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), the manner in which conflict occurred between Anna and her friends could be described as a set of behaviours normalised within the social and cultural institutions that Anna was a part of. From within these institutions, such as school, how conflict is done, seen, and managed, all reinforce a particular way of acting and behaving in line with broader notions of acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. While the behaviours of ‘not speaking’ and ‘excluding people’ from her life appeared to be common tactics for Anna, her awareness of how others may judge her conflicts seemed to be of concern. This perception of how others viewed her, and her behaviour when doing conflict, reinforces the power and influence that social and cultural institutions have over shaping the behaviour of young people.

**Ava**

Ava was in a similar position to Anna in this friendship group – it appeared to me that she was not a dominant person within the group and self-described herself as being “sorta stuck”. The boys in the class recognised Ava’s position when during the group interview, they told me that Ava was “just along for the ride” and “just you know, in between” (Interview transcripts, William & Noah, 2012). Ava’s perception of the role that conflict played in her life is therefore influenced by this in-between-ness. For Ava, conflict tended to be something that happened around her and to other girls. During our individual interview, she described how ‘other’ girls reacted to conflict differently to her and her friends.
Other girls don’t fight like we do. They sorta yell at each other. Like they make this big attention thing which makes everyone crowd around them calling them names. Some people at school will even do punch-ons, but they get real bad reputations from it. People say they’re ‘psycho’, ‘crazy bitches’ and all this other stuff. I don’t think it’d be good to have a reputation like that. I mean no one would like to be called bad things. Would they?

For Ava, she appeared to conceptualise conflict in relation to how ‘other’ girls were fighting. She made it clear to me that she did not agree with how other girls made their conflict public. In particular, she highlighted the way that public displays of conflict drew attention to the girls, and as a result, they were labelled as, “psychos and crazy bitches”. These labels have particular negative historical meanings and connotations when used in relation to women’s behaviour (Smith, 2016; Zaccour, 2018). Smith (2016) argues that labels such as ‘mad’, ‘hysterical’, and ‘evil’ are all designed to reinforce historical perceptions of women’s mental instability and irrationality. In particular, Smith (2016) notes that these terms are often used against women, when they are engaging in some form of passionate debate, as a way to shut down a women’s voice and perspective. The hegemonic dissonance which these terms raise, appeared to me to be influential in how Ava navigated the social rules of conflict amongst her friends.

For Ava keeping the conflict ‘low key’ or making sure that there was not, “big [amounts of] attention” focused on her friends, was seen as an important component of doing conflict and managing the friendship. This behaviour that Ava described aligns with research that suggests that girls are more likely to behave in ways that preserve relationships during periods of aggression and conflict (Leadbeater, Boone, Sangster, & Mathieson, 2006) and this will often take the form of behaving in a socially acceptable manner and masking negative emotions like anger (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003). From the above description, Ava appeared mindful of the way labels became attached to girls when they argued, or displayed their emotions publicly, and thus the way she therefore navigated conflict with her friends was carefully considered in order to minimise damage to her, and her friend’s, reputations.
When I asked Ava to describe how she behaved around people when she was mad or angry at them, she described the following as typical for her:

Mostly I just ignore people if they piss me off. I think ignoring them is the sensible way to tell them I’m angry. Like the non-sensible way would be to just go up to them and yell at them.

Ava’s comment about ignoring people as a “sensible way” of letting them know she was angry appeared to be one tactic that allowed her to negotiate the social rules of female-based conflict. Her suggestion that there was a “non-sensible way” of dealing with conflict, highlighted internalised beliefs about what are ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ behaviours. It is possible too, that Ava’s response about ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ ways to do conflict could be a reaction to the interview situation and she is therefore responding to the question in a way that she thinks I might like her to. In spite of the multiple reasons that could have caused Ava to respond to this question like she did, it nevertheless appeared that she was unwilling to participate in actions or behaviours which would impact on her friends and herself. Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) highlight that for young people, recognising emotions and choosing how to respond to the feelings they create, offers an opportunity for an agentic response that may lead them to “unexpected or nonconformist types of actions” (p. 338). Ava’s response, when viewed in this way, could indicate a rupture to the status quo within the school environment where publicly yelling was seen to be the norm. In this sense, Ava’s refusal to engage in public conflict could be understood as an act of agency against the hegemonic structures which positioned conflict to be done in a particular way within this school.

Ava expanded upon what kinds of conflict she believed that the school took seriously, when during our interview, she said:
‘Non-physical girl fights are not taken seriously’ was the message that I interpreted Ava was hearing from the school. This message reinforced to the girls that unless they were physically, and loudly, confrontational, their private conflict was of little concern to the school. This suggests that the broader cultural and social messages Ava has been socialised to believe, reinforces Gramsci’s (1971) understanding of hegemony being conveyed through educational institutions. It could be argued that the school is socialising the students to know what kinds of conflict would be taken seriously, and as Ava observed, verbal fights did not fit within that category.

Livvy

Livvy, to me, was a key antagonist within this group. In my observations, Livvy was an active member of the class and appeared friendly with most of her peers. The following portrait of ‘Kim’ explores how Livvy may be more than she outwardly showed to those around her.

Kim:

There is so much about Livvy that you do not see. She sits with me from time to time, just us, and we talk about boys, friends and everything in between. I have a little sister who is close to Livvy’s age and I see glimpses of her in Livvy. The big smile when she sees you; the too-cool persona that she puts on in front of the people whose opinions she values or feels judged by, and the quiet intelligence that sits behind the ‘shrieking laughter’ that comes out in class when she’s bored.

Livvy’s understanding of conflict was similar to those expressed by Ava and Anna. She suggested that there were two kinds of conflicts that girls had – “punch-ons and arguments and stuff”.

Livvy gave the following insight into what kind of conflict tended to dominate her experience.

She said:
I reckon arguments happen more cause girls sort of don't really like punch-ons as much as boys. Mostly girls just like yelling, name-calling, and stuff. I've been called ‘ho’, ‘slut’, ‘bitch’ and [other] stuff like that. Girls do this sorta stuff because they know that’s how they hurt you the most, even if it’s not true, but someone might think that it’s true and then you like start second guessing yourself. I mean this is something that I’ve done; most girls do this.

Livvy was honest about her role in conflict. She stated, “yelling [and] name-calling” were tactics that she used, but also acknowledged that the same tactics have been used against her. Livvy described using these tactics as a way to undermine and hurt people because, “they know that's how they hurt you the most”. Coyne et al. (2006) considers indirect and relational aggressive attacks such as making fun of, ignoring friends, gossiping, and backbiting to be examples of a real attempt at causing harm to the target person by social manipulation. These researchers suggest these types of attacks are “behaviours that harm … through damage to relationships or feelings of acceptance, friendship, or group inclusion” (Coyne et al., 2006, p. 295).

Livvy acknowledged that the tactic of name-calling and yelling, “hurts you the most, even if it’s not true, [because] someone might think that it’s true”, which for adolescent girls could directly damage their feelings of acceptance and inclusion into activities, friendships and other social events. The normalcy of this tactic being used towards, and by, Livvy was something that she articulated when discussing why she acted in particular ways towards her friends. During our interview, Livvy acknowledged her desire to, “push people's buttons for their reaction”. When asked why she did this, she responded:

At the time it’s fun, but then you realise that it wasn't so fun or funny for the person. I think that often we laugh off things and say they don't matter, but inside, you know, they do matter.

The above comment by Livvy offers a glimpse into how a girl might act in a particular manner that is at odds with how she feels emotionally and empathetically. Livvy was aware of her actions
and the consequences they could have on her friends, because in the previous section she acknowledged first-hand experience with others directing such behaviours towards her. Literature on indirect, relational and social aggression (Coyne et al., 2006; Leadbeater et al., 2006; Zahn-Waxler & Polanichka, 2004), suggests that one of the most important aspects of an adolescent girl’s life is her social standing amongst her peers and that one of the most effective ways of harming that standing is through publically, or directly, making fun of her. For Livvy, she acknowledged that sometimes she “goes too far” and that this behaviour could “hurt her friends”.

Livvy was aware that her behaviour during conflict could hurt her friends, however, when Livvy’s behaviour is viewed through the lens of horizontal violence, her actions are more than a personal deficit or pathology. For example, King-Jones (2011) states that horizontal violence can manifest as acts of unkindness, sarcastic comments, abusive language, gossiping and verbal abuse. She suggests that horizontal violence is a behaviour done by oppressed people in order to cope with feelings of powerlessness (King-Jones, 2011). When viewed in this light, Livvy’s behaviour towards her friends could be symptomatic of the standing of women and girls within the school. This is demonstrated through Livvy’s comment about how, “often we laugh off things and say they don’t matter, but inside … they do”.

**Sophie**

I considered Sophie, like Livvy, to be one of the dominant personalities within this friendship group. Sophie was described as “bubbly” and “mature for her age” by both teachers and boys in her class (Interview transcripts, Miss. M, 2012; Noah, 2012).

Sophie described conflict for her as, “like bitching and all of those little things that girls seem to do and boys and other people don’t”. When probed for more information during the interview she discussed the difference between physical fights and emotional/mental fights. She described the difference in the following way:
“There’s probably two that are obvious which are like physical [fights] and then the more mental, emotional fights where it’s more just saying things rather than any physical violence”.

So what would physical violence mean to you?

“Punching, kicking, kind of like a brawl, you know like pulling another person’s hair or something.”

So what about the emotional fights that people have? What would that look like?

“Well, it’s when there’s people who get excluded from the group and then they do hurtful things. Like Livvy and Ava, it seems to be like they’re bitching behind my back and things like that. It’s the constant little comments or faces they pull, like Livvy won’t speak to me at the lockers and it’s little things like that that really hurt you because we were best friends two weeks ago.”

It appeared that Sophie categorised conflict as either physical or emotional, in a way similar to the other Girls in T-Bars. While she provided some detail about the physical nature of conflict – “punching, kicking and brawling”, she, however, referred to the, “little things” as being more hurtful than the physical fights. The emphasis she placed on the “constant” nature of these acts and behaviours suggests that conflict does not have to be public, nor physically violent, for harm to occur. To gain a sense of how common some of these behaviours were, I asked Sophie how often these fights happened. She responded, “at the moment this kinda stuff is happening everyday. But it has kind of been off and on a bit all term but now it’s just been worse.”
Conflict in this friendship group, according to Sophie, triggered a wide variety of emotions. These emotions appeared chaotic, multilayered, and challenging for Sophie to describe. She could only describe conflict for her as, “hurtful” and “feeling excluded”. Researchers in the field of emotional psychology tell us that thought, behaviour and feelings are closely connected (Lindner, 2006) and that our emotional responses to situations are “comprehensive packages of meanings, behaviours, social practices, and norms that crystallize around primordial emotions (such as thirst, hunger and pain)” (Lindner, 2006, p. 270). Researchers such as Lindner (2006), and Deutsch (2006), suggest that emotions serve three functions; they help us monitor our inner world; they monitor our relationships with the outer world; and they help us act (Lindner, 2006). However, Lindner (2006) cautions that this order can quickly deteriorate and become chaotic if we are unaware or insufficiently in control of our emotions. For Sophie, it appeared that the chaotic nature of conflict was hard to articulate due to the range of emotions generated.

Charlotte

Charlotte suggested there were two kinds of fights that girls participated in. The first kind she described as “two-second fights”, and the second kind she described as, “fights that just keep going”. When asked to describe the two-second fights, Charlotte explained them in the following way:

So like the two-second fights might go like one person would say something and then the other [person] may not like it but then both of them agree that they’re kind of stupid and then they’re like ‘oh I’m sorry cause that was just pretty stupid of me to say that’. Often its stupid cause like someone says something that you took in the wrong way. Mostly those two-second silly fights will happen a lot during class or at lunchtime.

From Charlotte’s description of two-second fights, it appeared that these conflicts were more common due to their regularity and the time involved. From Charlotte’s description of “two-second silly fights” it appeared that these girls were capable of engaging in very quick and complex self-reflection at the beginning of the conflict starting. For example, they appeared to
openly acknowledge their fault, which could lead to a mutual acknowledgment of what happened, and that what was said, was “silly” and that it should be forgotten and moved on from. This recognition by both parties appeared to resolve and sooth any misunderstandings or hurt feelings. The nature of these two-second fights could be considered in line with Deutsch’s (1973) description of ‘constructive’ conflict.

While Charlotte was able to explain the two-second fights with some detail, it was more difficult for her to explain the, “fights that just keep on going”. When probed for further detail, Charlotte became quiet and did not immediately respond. After a moment, Charlotte commented, “I think that growing up we have to have these kinds of fights with your friends [but] I don’t see why it has to be like that” Charlotte did not elaborate any further on what she conceptualised, “on-going fights” to mean.

**Reflections on Section One**

In this first section, the Girls in T-Bars all differentiated between physical and emotional forms of conflict. Despite some differences in how those understandings were discussed, there was nevertheless a consensus that the Girls in T-Bars did not engage in physical conflict. They all expressed some recognition and acceptance about conflict being a normal part of growing up and occurring between friends. These girls all indicated that they actively avoided public confrontations with each other to escape being labelled like they know some other girls are, and instead relied on verbal tactics, such as name calling, making up things and spreading rumours, as a way to confront, manipulate, and hurt each other. Charlotte was the only girl who described a form of conflict that could be construed as ‘constructive’, in her description of two-second fights. All of the other girls seemed to identify conflict as a negative thing that caused them to be upset and hurt by the actions of others. These understandings of conflict as a negative behaviour aligns with research conducted by Hocker and Wilmot (1995), Johnson and Johnson (1996), and Longaretti and Wilson (2006), who all argue that conflict is mostly viewed as a negative phenomenon and should, therefore, be avoided.
When viewed through the lens of horizontal violence, the descriptions of conflict being seen as negative could be reframed away from individual traits, behaviours and deficits, and instead be considered within understandings of broader social and cultural constructs. For example, the way that the Girls in T-Bars articulated conflict at school, was intrinsically tied up to how ‘other’ people would judge or view them. To avoid this level of judgement by others, this group of girls tended to engage in conflict in less obvious, subtle, quieter, and more private ways using tactics that each of them understood, enabling them to subtly manipulate each other within their relationship. This suggests that the tactics and strategies these girls used within their conflicts are in response to the hegemonic practices and beliefs situated within the school about young women and the nature of their conflict.

The following section explores these broader hegemonic beliefs and practices as they impacted on a particularly destructive conflict the Girls in T-Bars experienced during the final weeks of fieldwork.

**Section Two: A group experience of conflict**

Towards the end of my fieldwork, the Girls in T-Bars had a particularly distressing conflict (for both them and me) that dominated our conversations, classroom interactions, and interviews. It was unclear what triggered this conflict, but as each girl tried to make sense of it during our interviews, it became apparent to me that they were each ‘feeling hurt’ by the actions and behaviours of others. This section of analysis explores the ‘hurt feelings’ that each girl described. In particular, this section illuminates how feelings of rejection and the spreading of rumours influenced how each member of the T-Bars navigated conflict and the effect this had on their learning.

**The conflict**

The following two pages outline the conflict which occurred at the end of Term Four, just before the individual interviews took place. I present every section of data in a coloured box as a way to
illuminate each girl’s voice without attaching any analysis to her thoughts. Each coloured box is presented as a short narrative portrait which aims to explain the nature of this conflict in their own words. Presenting the data in this manner is a deliberate attempt to display the voices of the girls as they try to make sense of this conflict.

**Livvy:** Well me and Sophie have been friends for like eleven years then all of a sudden Charlotte comes into the picture and me and Sophie aren’t friends anymore and ... I left the class one Thursday and she [Sophie] told everyone all these secrets about me that weren’t true. She told everyone that I like William and all this and that I like have dated like fifty hundred guys and all this and I was like it’s not true and everyone asked me about it and I was like “oh my god! Go away! It’s not true!” and then Sophie always gives me a dirty look when Charlotte is around and now won’t talk to us.

**Ava:** There’s some stuff going on, you know between Sophie, Charlotte, Livvy and me at the moment. I don’t really know what’s going on. All I know is that we were talking in math and then Charlotte and Sophie just go off at me and Livvy for talking. Then before, Charlotte and Sophie had showed all the guys Livvy’s Facebook status from last night, which was directed at Sophie, said something like ‘When your best friend ditched you and starts talking about you behind your back, true friend you are’. Then the guys are all laughing at Livvy … I really want to sort it out because we were really good friends and really close, but I don’t think Livvy really wants to.

**Anna:** I guess it was just like Sophie kept going off with Charlotte all the time and then like during class they’d be like together. Then Livvy and Ava will be like together and then I’d be like ‘mmmm’ and then I get told things from one group and then I get told from another one - but they are completely different. I’m in the middle of it and I’ve had enough of hearing all these different things and I’m like ‘we need to mend it’ but then when we are about to they walk off or something, it’s just annoying - I can’t actually fix something between all my friends!
**Sophie:** We are all friends and then Livvy and that seems to be like they are bitching behind my back and so then I decided to go to another friendship group, which would be Charlotte and Anna and all them, and I am happy with that. Then on Thursday I had band practice and I walked into Art and all the boys were like; "Sophie! Livvy has been talking about you. Calling you a two faced slut" and blah blah blah “You’re a bitch” blah blah blah. So I’m just like ‘umm ok’ and I went and sat with the boys and then they’re like ‘she even drew you a picture’ and then they [the boys] got the picture and showed me. I was just laughing it off, but inside I was like ‘my god! You bitch! Like really?’ Sooo, at the point I was really overwhelmed and I was just laughing it off, but inside I was sooo angry ... sooo angry!

**Charlotte:** Well from my understanding it was like on Friday and Olivia and Ava, Sophie, Anna and I were all together and then Sophie had to go to the canteen. So Sophie and I went to the canteen and it took really long. Anyway Olivia and Ava and Anna went to sit with like all them other girls and Sophie and I stayed in the line. Then Sophie and I started talking and then like Sophie went to see someone as she hadn’t seen them for ages and then we were just kinda like gone - we didn’t really forget we just kinda started talking to like heaps of other people. We spent that lunch together and then when we came back to school on Monday they just like ignored me. Like we haven’t spoken about what happened. Like if we speak to them they’re just all quiet or they’ll say something silly. They’re just not making it easy to have a conversation about what’s happened.

The above portraits display the many interpretations that underpinned this conflict. Each member of the Girls in T-Bars had a different interpretation about this conflict; what started it, why it began, and how it made them feel. The epistemological stance of this research is built on the argument that meaning is constructed through our interactions with others and the meaning we attach to those experiences (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gannon & Davies, 2014; McLaren, 2015; Skeggs, 1999). Viewing each girl’s interpretation of this conflict through this stance indicates that all of the above explanations are equally influential in the manifestation of this conflict. Each explanation highlighted some of the key ruptures that were present. Some of these ruptures were consistent across the group, such as Charlotte and Sophie’s friendship; whereas some of the ruptures were unique to that girl, for example, Livvy’s use of Facebook.
From each girl’s narrative portrait, however, we gain a sense that the act of spreading rumours, misinterpreting another’s actions, and feeling rejected by a friend are all important factors to this conflict. The following section continues to discuss how these factors contributed to the creation of moments of ruptures within the friendship of the Girls in T-Bars.

**Rumours and ruptures**

One of the key questions asked of all the participants during each interview was ‘why do girls fight?’ and ‘how does this begin?’ For Anna, Ava, Livvy, Sophie, and Charlotte, they all indicated that spreading rumours and sharing personal information with other people were two of the main reasons behind why they believed girls fought. This action was perceived as a violation of trust and was viewed negatively by the girls.

Livvy gave the following insight into how rumours are utilised by girls:

> **Rumours and stuff are the reason that girls normally fight. And then they try and work it out but that doesn’t normally work – it makes it worse.**

Charlotte suggested:

> *I just feel like every day that I go to school now they are going to say something about me behind my back and like I hate people who do that because it makes me feel uncomfortable and yeah. Because I don't know what they are saying or who they're saying stuff to, I just don’t know if it’s only about me.*

For Ava, the tactics and triggers that girls use when fighting are intrinsically intertwined with being female, “I think all girls are just really bitchy and like anything can set them off into having a fight”. However, when thinking through her response, Ava clarified, “It's easy for others to say to you [think] about how much your friends mean to you, but like we don't always think the same thing and this makes us fight”. Ava appeared to contradict herself. On one hand, she suggested that biology was a factor in how girls chose to engage in conflict. Nevertheless, on the other hand,
she expressed the individuality of each person to ‘think differently’ as a potential trigger for the
generation of misunderstandings and conflict.

While it appeared easy for some of the girls to identify actions that triggered a fight, it was harder
for them to identify ‘why’ those actions caused conflict to escalate in the first place. During our
interview, Anna gave an example of a time she was in Grade Five where the use of rumours and
gossip caused a personal rupture which led to the involvement of teachers. She explained:

I remember a time in Grade 5 where I had this verbal fight with a friend. It
was the most childish thing ... like it was over music. They kinda said some
stuff - like calling me names and starting some rumours and gossiping
about me - and I just kept ignoring it. Then it kept going and I said
something back and then the teachers got involved. Once they got involved
I was like 'oh ok, sorry' and then just forgot about the whole thing.

The impact of rumours and innuendo is something that resonates within current research around
girl fighting in schools, as well as identified in studies of horizontal violence (King-Jones, 2011).
The types of behaviours identified by researchers within these fields include acts of teasing, name
calling, verbal abuse, humiliation and the belittling of others (Bright, 2005; Cavanaugh, 2009;
Duffy, 1995; King-Jones, 2011 Simmons, 2002). Letendre and Smith (2011) suggest these types
of tactics are designed to exclude and affect another person’s inclusion in the peer group and
beyond. In the case of Anna’s experience in Grade Five, she acknowledged her refusal to respond
at first – “I just kept ignoring it” – but as Anna continued to describe how it, ‘kept going’, her
capacity to remain silent was ruptured and she spoke out against this behaviour. Anna’s response
to those behaviours was influential in the teachers becoming involved in the conflict and the
implementation of a resolution.

For Anna, this intervention by the teachers seemed to be a circuit breaker; it forced a resolution to
the conflict, but did not necessarily stop the impact that the rumours and gossip had on Anna’s
social standing. While Anna stated that she apologised to the girls and then, “forgot about the
whole thing”, it nevertheless showed an imbalance to the manner in which schools ‘see’ and
‘manage’ girls conflicts. From Anna’s perspective, she was a target for these girls to spread rumours about, however, Anna was the one who ultimately apologised for her actions. Anna’s memory of this conflict and her ownership of the fault, echoed Ava’s suggestion that girls’ fights are often trivialised and not taken seriously by schools unless there is an overt reason to. For Anna, speaking back to the girls was the rupture which forced the teachers to become involved, resulting in a resolution. This is indicative of the power held by teachers over students and in particular, over female students.

Having power over the behaviour of girls in schools does not just sit with the teachers. For Livvy, she was often the target of rumours and innuendo by other girls and boys from within the school. Livvy told me during our individual interview that she felt targeted by the broader peer group over her changing relationship status and ‘perceived’ sexual experience.

People think that if you've had a lot of boyfriends that you're a slut - that's only if you get around and like ‘do it’ - I haven't. People say that I've done it and that I'm pregnant and stuff and some people believed it. This type of shit makes me feel really bad and like I get really angry and stuff. Like if I hear that they think this stuff is true and that they're spreading it around, I'll like yell at them and tell them that it's not true and then yeah ... Like when they walk past sometimes they say something at me under their breath and I'll like turn around and have a go at them, but I wouldn't do it in class though.

From Livvy’s description above, we are given insight into the nature of the rumours which she said were spread about her. Both Livvy’s comments, and evidence gleaned from other interview data, highlighted how the rumours used against her, resulted in her being labelled as sexually promiscuous, “unclean”, and diseased. This labelling of Livvy was present within the boys’ focus group interview. The following extract shows the boys discussing Livvy in sexualised ways.

William: *Do you know what she said about you [to Ryan] ... She said that if she had sex with you - you would squish her!*

Ryan: *Oh yeah, yesss!*

William: *And then you called her a slut.*
Ryan: Oh yeah, yeah no I called her a slut ... Yep. [I don’t take no shit no more ... [all laughing] ... Why would I have sex with her anyway?

Nathan: You’d get STD's.

Ryan: Yeah.

Interviewer: We don’t ... [long pause] Why did you say that? [William laughing].

William: That’s too far.

Nathan: Sorry.

Interviewer: Why did you say that? … Why would you say that?

Nathan: I don’t know... just ... because...

William: Because it’s Nathan.

Noah: Don’t say heat of the moment because there was no heat and there was no moment.

Nathan: There was a moment ... [quietly].

William: There was a bit of a moment there [laughs].

Nathan: And I just say what comes into my head.

Noah: I don’t think he likes Livvy that much.

Nathan: Nah.

The above comment by Nathan claiming that if any of the boys had sex with Livvy they would get an “STD” (sexually transmitted disease), is reiterated by Livvy’s experience of the rumours which targeted her. She revealed that people think that she was a “slut” and that she was “pregnant”, however, Livvy was very clear in our interview where she told me that she does not get around and “do it” like some girls do. According to Senior, Helmer, Chenhall, and Burbank (2014), in their study of rural and regional young people’s perceptions of sexual risk, if a girl is caught out having sex by falling pregnant, or catching an STI, she is likely to be ridiculed, lose friends and be punished and vilified. These researchers argue that rumours which target a girl’s sexual experience align with discourses which suggest they are morally and socially suspect (Senior et al., 2014). This type of rumour-mongering is purposefully designed to discredit and
manipulate girls and women into behaving in ways that conform to predetermined constructs of acceptable behaviour. For Livvy, it appeared that her rejection of these rumours did little to squash them. Her angry responses and denials only served to make those rumours gain traction.

The following commentary from ‘Kim’ is an example of the power that rumours have, not only over young people, but also over adults, especially in relation to the actions of young women and girls. The following reflection from ‘Kim’ was written during a classroom observation in November, by which stage I had become aware of Livvy’s reputation within the school.

*Kim:*

The stairwell is an interesting space within the classroom – only certain individuals go into the stairwell (Livvy, Andrew, and Nathan plus a few others depending upon the day). It is like a dark, hidden sanctuary away from the realities of the classroom. I get a sense of it as a bit of a sexual/reclusive space where little secrets and romances happen – I am not sure if this happens, but I get a vibe about the stairwell that is not present in any other space within the school plus it is also about who occupies that space – [in my opinion] they are physically more developed, more articulate about sexual matters – this space cocoons those conversations and has a status about it.

Reflecting back on these moments with Livvy, it was possible that the only reason I observed her going into the stairwell, was because I was looking for her to be there. I was aware of the rumours which surrounded her and thus, her behaviour during this observation seemed to reflect those rumours. Reflecting on this observation highlights to me that my commentary about the stairwell is not the only explanation that could have been made. In hindsight, reflecting on my journal entry has allowed me to recognise the hegemonic beliefs I hold about young women, especially surrounding their agency in expressing themselves sexually, emotionally, and physically.

Walkerdine (1986) argued more than thirty years ago that “women of all classes have been placed as guardians of an order from which it is difficult to escape” (p. 63). In essence, without this study being situated within the paradigm of critical theory, and drawing upon the work of Freire (2005) and the practice of critical reflection, I could have positioned Livvy’s behaviour as another example of working-class kids engaging in sexualised behaviour (Skeggs, 2004). Furthermore, I
could have been complicit in reinscribing a social order that would continue to disadvantage girls like Livvy. Instead, by applying the theoretical lens of horizontal violence, Livvy’s behaviour could be considered as a form of agentic resistance to oppressive discourses within her life, which aim to position her as deviant and sexually promiscuous.

As seen above, the tactic of spreading rumours played a significant role in the development of conflict for the Girls in T-Bars. Stemming from this tactic, however, is the belief that a friend had rejected or betrayed you. The following section explored this belief as it influenced the Girls in T-Bars and their navigation of this particular conflict.

**Feeling rejected**

The narrative portraits on pages 134-135, show a range of feelings expressed by each of the Girls in T-Bars. Underpinning those emotions was a belief that Sophie “kept going off with Charlotte” and excluding the rest of the Girls in T-Bars. This belief triggered feelings of hurt and sadness for some members of the Girls in T-Bars.

The following comments by Livvy, illuminate some of these feelings and emotions when she gives her opinion on how this conflict began:

*All of a sudden Charlotte comes into the picture and me and Sophie aren’t friends anymore. Sophie always gives me a dirty look when Charlotte is around and now won’t talk to us.*

For Livvy, it appeared that the introduction of Charlotte, and the perceived closeness developing between her and Sophie, had generated some negative feelings. From Livvy’s comments above we can make some interpretations around the kinds of emotions she may have felt, such as anger (e.g. “Sophie always gives me dirty looks when Charlotte is around”), sadness (e.g. “me and Sophie aren’t friends anymore”), and some anxiety (e.g. “now she won’t talk to us”). Research by Parker, Low, Walker, and Gamm (2005) suggest that feelings such as anger, sadness and embarrassment can manifest in an individual feeling jealous because they perceive they are in...
danger of being replaced due to a personal failure. From the above comments, it could be suggested that Livvy felt like she was being replaced by Charlotte and thus, was causing her some concern.

Livvy was not alone in feeling replaced. Anna recalled during her interview how, “Sophie kept going off with Charlotte all the time and then like during class they’d be like together”. This statement suggests that Anna was noticing the growing closeness between two of her friends to the exclusion of her and the other girls. While Anna did not elaborate on how this made her feel, in another part of our interview Anna commented about how the boys were persistently telling her how Charlotte has rejected Anna. She commented:

*I know that the boys in the class are aware of what's going on between Sophie and Livvy. Knowing that the boys know so much about what's going on makes me really apprehensive I guess because they tend to make everything worse. They say things and then somebody will get upset they are like "oh Charlotte, you traded Anna in for Sophie"... it's stupid and it makes everyone feel even worse. Like it's pretty low to say that stuff. She didn't trade me in; she's just hanging around with a different person. There's nothing wrong with that.*

The boys comment to Anna, about how Charlotte traded her in for Sophie, appeared to be difficult for Anna. She highlighted how apprehensive she felt knowing that the boys were involved, because as discussed previously, the girls’ all expressed how they preferred to keep their conflict private and away from public discussion. From Anna’s comments though, the boys were actively participating in the girls’ conflict in the form of saying something that caused one or more of the Girls in T-Bars to become upset. In particular, Anna highlighted how the boys’ comments seemed to target her relationship with Charlotte and the connotation that Anna was not ‘enough’.

According to Leary (2015), in his study of emotional reactions to interpersonal rejection, “people’s feelings are hurt when they believe that others do not sufficiently value their relationship… [and these feelings are] often accompanied by fear of losing the relationship entirely” (p. 437). While Anna rejected the boys’ statements about her friendship with Charlotte,
she nevertheless acknowledged, “these comments make everyone feel even worse [and that it’s] a pretty low thing to say”. While Anna said that she disliked the role that the boys were playing in this conflict, she was nevertheless aware that there was nothing wrong with Charlotte wanting to be friends with Sophie.

For Ava, this conflict caused uncertainty for her about which of her friends she believed, and which side of this conflict she wanted to be on. For example, Ava commented how she, “really wants to sort it out because we were really good friends and really close, but I don't think Livvy really wants to”. From this comment it could be argued that Ava was feeling torn between wanting to sort it out and respecting the way that Livvy felt about Sophie and Charlotte. Being able to navigate and balance out competing friendship demands and responsibilities appeared to be something that Ava was conscious of and was something that could cause her to push aside her own feelings for the betterment of her existing friendships with Livvy.

Researchers such as Parker et al. (2005), suggest that outsiders coming in to a group, or a group member having a friendship with someone outside of the main members, can “threaten the quality, uniqueness, or survival of friendships … [and] feelings of jealousy can arise and pose challenges to the partner, the perceived interloper, and perhaps the encompassing peer group” (p. 235). Leary (2015) provides another perspective to feelings of rejection and jealousy in adolescent friendships, as an internalised belief that “others do not sufficiently value their relationship as much as they desire” (p. 437). He suggests that people typically experience these kinds of events as a personal rejection that can influence a person’s self-esteem, or one’s relational value (Leary, 2005). For the Girls in T-Bars, one of the main triggers for this conflict appeared to be due to Sophie extending her friendship with Charlotte. While Anna believed that there was nothing wrong with this, the boys’ comments highlighted for her how it could be perceived as Charlotte abandoning Anna, and Sophie abandoning Livvy and Ava. For the Girls in T-Bars, feeling rejected by a friend is one of the more significant factors to the manner in which this conflict played out.
For this group of girls, feeling rejected stimulated a consideration of what it meant to be a ‘good friend’ and how trust could be rebuilt. The following section discusses how the Girls in T-Bars try to move forward from the negative connotations raised within this conflict, and into reflecting upon the positives that could be taken away for each of them personally, and as a friendship group.

**Confronting issues of trust and friendship at school**

The role of conflict for the Girls in T-Bars raised some significant issues for each of them to reflect upon as individuals and as a friendship group. For all of the Girls in T-Bars, the conflict discussed in the previous section provided a space for them to consider what they valued in a friend, which for some of them, could be considered a positive outcome to this conflict.

For Sophie, the issue of trust was raised during our individual interview when she stated:

> You learn how to trust someone when you’re fighting. But then you learn that you get judged and how people react to things. Like I suppose I’ve learnt that the people who I thought the girls who were my friends have got another side to them and a side that I don’t really like. Like I think that they think the same about me.

Charlotte, also raised the issue of trust during our interview. She said:

> When you fight with someone you kind of think about if you want to be friends again because of the way that they have treated you and then it's... I don't know it's kind of weird - yeah it's like you just don't know if you want to be friends with them because like trust takes ages to get.

For Sophie and Charlotte, their concept of trust and friendship was intimately connected to their experience of being on one-side of this conflict in opposition to Livvy, Ava and Anna. These two girls, therefore, have particular views of trust being something that is ‘earned’ not given. According to Lewicki (2006), the relationship between conflict and trust are considered to be the foundation upon which friendships are held together. In other words, trust is the ‘glue’ that holds
relationships together. However, when conflict arises in relationships then issues of trust, and subsequently distrust, are exposed and can make resolution of the conflict more difficult and problematic. Lewicki (2006) suggests when there is lack of trust in relationships, conflict can become destructive and lead to bitterness, animosity, and pain which is not easily forgotten and overcome. For Charlotte and Sophie, we can see how this conflict caused them to reflect upon the behaviours of others and to consider if they are able to overcome those actions. This reflective process could be considered a positive outcome to the emotion raised by this conflict for these two girls.

For Anna and Livvy, their understanding of trust is not considered in explicit terms like Sophie and Charlotte. Rather, for these two girls, communicating with friends around the issue which caused the conflict, and being able to move on from it, were considered important to them. For example, Livvy stated:

\[ Like \ I \ reckon \ that \ you \ can \ still \ be \ friends \ and \ have \ a \ fight, \ but \ like \ you'll \ have \ to \ talk \ about \ it \ and \ explain \ why \ it \ started, \ how \ it \ started \ and \ how \ it \ affected \ you \ and \ stuff. \ Like \ Sophie's \ really \ the \ only \ person \ that \ I've \ had \ a \ fight \ with \ out \ of \ my \ friends, \ so \ I \ don't \ know \ if \ talking \ about \ it \ will \ work \ it \ out. \]

For Anna, her ability to trust her friends again was connected to the idea of being able to mend the conflict and re-establishing communication.

\[ I \ suppose \ the \ biggest \ challenge \ is \ mending \ it, \ getting \ over \ it \ and \ everything \ cause \ when \ I'm \ ready \ to \ get \ over \ it, \ they're \ not. \ The \ hardest \ thing \ for \ me \ is \ trying \ to \ get \ close \ with \ the \ person \ again, \ trying \ to \ talk \ to \ them \ when \ they \ don't \ want \ to \ talk \ to \ you, \ that's \ kind \ of \ hard \ for \ me \ to \ do. \]

While Ava did not have a lot to say on the issue of trust, she did discuss how it was important to her to consider whether she was prepared to lose a friend over a conflict. She said:
Most of the time it's not worth like fighting over something like little or big cause you might lose that friend. I suppose it depends on whether you want to lose them or not.

One of the issues which arose from this particular conflict for the Girls in T-Bars was the question of trust and how this intersected with being a ‘good friend’. For this group of girls, trust was considered to be an integral component of their friendship. They discussed how conflict affected their capacity to resolve their differences in a meaningful way and to consider what the long term consequences might be for their friendship and their capacity to move beyond the conflict. For the girls in this friendship group, being able to repair the trust that was damaged appeared to be one of the key factors which would determine whether they were able to move forward in their friendship.

It is of importance to note that the above reflections from the Girls in T-Bars, shows a clear ability for these young women to learn from, and reflect on their conflict. These behaviours show that conflict can be a constructive process for young women to work through, even when it may appear destructive on the surface. From the Girls in T-Bars, we can observe positive outcomes for them individually, such as a capacity to make decisions about their friendships, an ability to engage in communication strategies, as well as reasoning and critical thinking skills. All of these positive attributes align with research conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1996), who found that when managed positively, conflict can help the social and emotional development of young people.

Conflict and learning: “It's no longer a happy place”

Despite the positive attributes that have been observed to come out of this conflict, managing and navigating conflict while at school has had a significant effect on how the girls felt about being at school. For the majority of the Girls in T-Bars this conflict made school an unhappy place for them. Charlotte said:
Anna expresses similar sentiments to Charlotte about school becoming a difficult place to be when she was in conflict with her friends. Anna also highlighted the complexities of navigating classroom work, including deciding who she could or could not talk to, and the impact these thoughts had on her ability to engage in school work.

School's difficult when there's a fight cause usually all my friends are in the same class and they will be in different areas and it will be like 'who do I talk to' or something. And then yeah it kinda mucks up your work too. You don't think straight and if exams are coming up and you're in a fight, it's like you are kind of not focused on your work - you're more focused on what they're thinking of you, what they're saying to other people I guess. It makes it hard to focus and about how much you wanna come to school.

Ava also discussed the unseen day-to-day moments that conflict impacted for her while at school. She said:

These kinda fights really affect me at school cause I'm like thinking about being harassed and all the things that have been happening during the day. Like well all my fights are mainly with friends and then we just separate and don't talk to each other. Like when you've separated and you like see them as school, you just walk faster and not look at them, like you just walk away and don’t pay attention to them

For Sophie, she tried to put on a brave face while at school in order to not let on to her friends that their behaviour was affecting her. For Sophie, once she got home from school she was able to let her feelings come out.
This fight makes me feel horrible! I don’t know how to feel about it because they are doing hurtful things to me. But then I’m trying to put on a brave face and then some days I get home from school and I just cry and cry because I just don’t know how I feel, but that’s how I react to it.

While Sophie is able to hide her feelings during school, Livvy confessed that being in the same space with those she was in conflict with, was distracting and impacted on her ability to concentrate.

It's weird at the moment with like us and them fighting. I don't like being jealous but I look at Charlotte and Sophie and then I just like see what they are doing and then I lose focus on what I'm actually meant to be doing.

The above comments highlighted some of the barriers that conflict for these friends’ placed on their learning. These girls identified feeling isolated from their peers, being hyper vigilant of others actions towards them, and trying to maintain a façade of indifference and unconcern, as all being barriers to engaging in learning. The above comments suggest that these girls are incredibly good at hiding their conflict from the school. Crudda and Haddock (2005) argue that for girls, there is a “hidden curriculum of friendship work that either supports or sabotages the learning environment” (p. 169). They contend that girls spend a large amount of their school time exploring, analysing and negotiating their friendships (Crudda & Haddock, 2005), which suggests that when friendships are constructive and positive, they can have a powerful effect on supporting learning to take place. However, when conflict occurs within a friendship group, as we have observed above, there can be detrimental consequences for student learning. It is, therefore, vital that the school provides opportunities for girls to work through their conflicts in a constructive way, and that they are not trivialised or disregarded by teachers, especially considering the detrimental effect on learning that the Girls in T-Bars highlight above.
**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how the members of the Girls in T-Bars conceptualise, and navigate, conflict within their friendship. We have observed each individual member of the Girls in T-Bars discuss how conflict is considered either distinctly physical or emotional/relational. For this group of girls, conflict typically took the form of emotional conflict and included the use of tactics such as spreading rumours, ignoring and excluding, and calling each other names. Public displays of conflict are preferably avoided and behaviours kept within the group, where possible, to avoid attracting attention (and intervention) by teachers who were recognised as not viewing such conflicts as important or requiring a response from them. These behaviours, for this group of girls, are enacted against each other because of underlying hurt feelings, including feeling rejected by a close friend. Despite these tactics being used to harm each other, we have also observed the complex processes that each girl has adopted in order to reflect upon what she values, believes and ultimately wants from a friend. These are sophisticated processes which illuminate the positive effect that conflict can generate under the right circumstances. For the Girls in T-Bars, as female students, the nature of their conflict is also impacted on by school-based hegemonic beliefs and values about what it means to express anger and discontent with peers.

The following chapter continues to explore how another group of young women from 8R negotiate their friendships when conflict arises. In Chapter Seven, the friendship group of the Girls in Vans is discussed in relation to their experiences of conflict.
Chapter Seven: Girls in Vans

In the previous chapter, the role that conflict played in the relationships between the Girls in T-bars was explored. I now turn to the participants Grace, Addi, Mia and Lucy, otherwise known as the Girls in Vans, and the conflict that can be identified within their relationship. I have chosen to use observational vignettes, otherwise termed ‘snapshots’ for this chapter, as a representational mode through which to illuminate the moments of hegemonic dissonance that underpin the everyday interactions of this group of girls as they engage with each other and the rest of their class. As in Chapter Six, these snapshots have been analysed using Freire’s concept of ‘horizontal violence’ as well as drawing upon Harris and Shield-Dobson’s (2015) call to recast girls as “suffering actors” as a way in which to move beyond the agent/victim dichotomy. Using these two conceptual lenses offers an opportunity to describe the “small moments of ruptures” (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 54) for the Girls in Vans as they struggle for coherence, social acceptance and survival in a world where pain and suffering are normalised.

Navigating this chapter

Like all chapters in this thesis, it is necessary to give the reader some guidance. Firstly, the observational snapshots were all recorded during the period covering October 11 to November 26. All of the snapshots are displayed in chronological order as a deliberate strategy to show the related events that transpired between the four girls, their peers, and myself over this period of time.

Secondly, these snapshots were written from my perspective and are my interpretation of comments, actions and behaviours I observed, or overheard, between the participants in an attempt to portray the events that took place. This is not a comprehensive account of all of the observations I wrote during the time I spent at North-West Campus, rather the snapshots presented here are observations that directly relate to events that transpired between the Girls in Vans, and their peers, over the period of time I spent with 8R.
Finally, this chapter has not been broken up into key sections as was done during Chapter Seven, instead, each snapshot is identified by a dated calendar icon and surrounded by a coloured square box. At the end of most snapshots, there is a piece of reflective commentary from the participant ‘Kim’ which is represented by a small icon of a red-haired female in glasses. Following on from each reflexive account is an analysis of the snapshot which draws together the intersections and ruptures that underpin the Girls in Vans’ relationship.

The first set of snapshots presented below were observations from my first week with the class of 8R, as I wrote them verbatim in my research journal, starting with my first day, October 11.

**October**

**Snapshots: October 11**

[Calendar Icon: October 11]

**Period 3**

I’ve been at the school for two periods so far, and today for the first time some of the students keep looking over at me. Ms. H is walking around the tables asking students questions. She makes her way over to where I’m sitting and begins asking the student some questions about the work. Then I hear:

*Mia: Who is that?*

*Ms. H: You don’t ask ‘who is that?’ in that way. Use your manners.*

*Mia: Okay.*

*Ms. H: This is Kim. Kim, this is Mia.*

*Kim: Hi.*

*Mia: I’m a ratbag!*
Nothing else is said between Mia and I, except now every time Mia looks over at me, she laughs to herself and looks away.

**Period 4 & 5**

As we line up outside the library, the usual teacher doesn’t show up for class. Instead, a different staff member comes to let us into the computer lab.

Everyone picks a computer and sets about logging on. I wait until everyone has chosen a spot and I choose a spare seat off to the side. I’m sitting near Charlotte and Anna, but I have a pretty good view of the whole class. As I look over at Charlotte’s screen, I see that all of the students appear to be playing math games.

Kim: *Why are you playing math games?*

Charlotte: *... we complained that all we ever did in math was book work and board work; we never had any fun. So we complained to the teacher that math was too serious and now we get every Thursday to play computer lab games.*

Around the room, most students are playing the math games. A couple of the boys are talking and leaning back in their chairs; scraps of paper are thrown around; the teacher is working on their own laptop with an occasional glance up at the students, and two girls are playing ‘slaps’ over near the door. Addi and Grace are slapping each other on the hands, taking it in turns to see if they are quick enough to move their hands out of the way before the other slaps them. Every now and then one makes contact and there is giggling and screams of “OWWW”. It seems like no one is paying them any attention except me.
Kim:

I see them, so why does it feel like no one else does?

Period 6

It is my first art lesson and I’m not sure where to sit. Addi and Grace call out to “come sit with us” so I make my way over to them. The lesson begins but I’m not sure what the instructions are because Grace has taken Addi’s diary and is hiding it from her by sitting on it. Addi has not yet realised that her diary is missing.

Everyone starts moving around, taking out their workbooks, pencils and whatever else they need to begin their task. During this time Addi realises that her diary is missing and begins pinching Grace on the neck, demanding its return:

Addi: Give it back to me or I won’t let go!

Grace: No... [giggling] ... owww ... [giggling harder] ... okay, owww, okay ... here have it. [Throws the diary at Addi].

Grace then slaps Addi hard on the leg, which leads Addi to slap Grace back. Next thing I know Grace and Addi are trying to use their pencils to ‘stab’ each other in the hands and legs. The ‘stabs’ are hard enough to leave an indent and a red mark, but there is no broken skin and both girls are laughing the whole time, with an occasional loud “OWWW” and this reassurance from Addi ...

Don’t worry Kim, we’re just playing.
Kim:

“Don’t worry Kim, we’re just playing”...

I needed this reassurance from Addi.

I was feeling out of my depth on my first day as a ‘serious’ researcher and the simple reality was that Addi and Grace included me in their ‘group’ without reservation or hesitation. There seems to be no pretence with these two girls, rather, they inhabit a bubble of intimacy that seems to exclude all others. No one in the class appears to pay them any attention when they play ‘slaps’ or steal and hide each other’s property.

On the surface, the relationship between Grace and Addi in the above vignettes appears highly physical with a tendency for inflicting pain on each other. The ‘slapping’ game and the pencil stabbing could all be considered behaviours that on the surface, appear aggressive. My adult instinct at the time was to stop them from hurting each other; I needed Addi to tell me “not to worry” during the peak of their play because at times I found it quite distressing to watch. It was only after this reassurance from Addi, that I could look beyond my feelings and observe the subtle and nuanced way in which the girls negotiated the boundaries of their game. For example, when playing slaps during period four and five, both Addi and Grace could be observed engaging in game-like rules and behaviour, for example, each waiting for their turn to slap the other. We also observe in period six how Addi and Grace are ‘stabbing’ each other with their pencils, but neither of them are doing it hard enough to break the skin. According to Mikel-Brown (2003), the ways girls negotiate their games tell us a lot about their social lives and about the subtle ways they communicate and negotiate their relationships. For Grace and Addi their performance of slaps and ‘stabs’ is more complicated than what it appears to be on the surface. For instance, there appears to be subtle rules that allows each person to have a turn in the game, all negotiated without speaking. Trust is conveyed through allowing the other to stab and slap them, and enjoyment of the game is conveyed through their shrieks and laughter. The above snapshots indicate that what we observe during girls fights, or conflicts, is often different from what appears on the surface (Mikel-Brown, 2003).
Observing Addi and Grace during the selected vignettes from October 11 highlights a number of contradictions about what it means to be an adult observing and analysing the actions of teenage girls. First, it is likely things are often not what they appear to be. My own understanding of young people, and the perceptions that I carry about what is ‘normal’ behaviour, may have dictated how I saw Grace and Addi on this day, how I wrote the observational vignettes concerning them, and the features within the vignettes that I choose to describe. Without Addi telling me that they were simply ‘playing’, and without reflecting on my role and emotions during the observations and analysis, the conclusions that I could have drawn may have been perpetuating normative discourses about girls’ behaviours and conflict.

Secondly, it is possible that both girls were observing me as closely as I was observing them, especially because I had only been in their class for a few days. If this is the case, then subconsciously, my observation of them may have triggered the girls to ‘show-off’ in front of me and when my reaction was noticed, Addi reassured me that things were not out of hand and therefore did not need intervening. According to Apter and Josselson (1999) the “social cauldron of girls’ friendships” (p. 22) ensures that girls develop a rich sensitivity to the meanings, actions and scrutiny of others, especially adults and other girls. My scrutiny of the girls’ behaviour could have affected both the nature of the game played and/or whether the game was played at all on October 11.

**Snapshots: October 18**

In the intervening week between October 11 and October 18, it seemed that Grace and Addi were involved in a conflict that was very different from the conflict described above. While I was not present for the beginning of their conflict, the following snapshots show how I learnt about what had occurred and details the observations I took of Grace and Addi and the many tools they employed to navigate their friendship through this event.
Staffroom: Morning briefing

I’m in the staffroom waiting for the morning briefing to begin. Ms. A is running the briefing this morning. There is a notice about the Year 10 school camp; a Year 9 student who has been suspended, and Addi and Grace are having a ‘serious’ fight. Ms. A elaborates to the staff:

/Addi was away yesterday and today is her first day back since their fight on Tuesday

... she [Addi] is feeling ‘quite threatened’ by Grace at the moment so let’s keep an eye on both girls. Any questions? Have a great day!

Ms. A catches my eye and comes over to say ‘hello’. I ask about how the Addi and Grace situation is and she said that both of the girls’ families had come up to the school yesterday afternoon. According to Ms. A, the families were “very verbal and upset … quite threatening... but this will be interesting for your research”.

Kim:

I am feeling a bit excited and nervous about what I have just been told by Ms. A. It is a strange sensation knowing that you are going to ‘see’ something that relates to your research and that, in some ways, the teachers are looking out for me. I am also a bit nervous about what the conflict will actually look like for the girls involved and whether they will talk to me about it.

Reflecting back on this moment highlights some of the unpreparedness I felt about doing fieldwork. I was a novice researcher who had never observed people before. I was excited knowing that an incident had happened and that I would get some ‘good’ data for my project, but I was also concerned about the girls involved. I felt that Grace and Addi had welcomed me with open arms and had made my transition into their class easier. I remember wanting to do the
observations ‘right’ but not really knowing what that even meant. All I could do was hope that I ‘did no harm’ (Ellis, 2007) and respected the girl’s wishes should they not want to talk to me.

**Period 1**

As I walk into period one, Addi and Grace are not sitting next to each other like usual. As I make my way over to ‘my’ seat I count the distance (in tables) between the girls – there is five tables. Grace is sitting next to Lucy down the far end, near the heater, while Addi is sitting by herself.

I decide to go sit near Addi. I sit close, but not right next to her. I ask Addi “how are you going?” and she tells me she is “fine ... but there’s lots of stuff going on”. That was all that is said between us.

I take a moment to study Addi and this is what I see – she looks tired and pale. She does not look around the room or play with her phone. She simply sits at her table, with her head resting on her hand, reading her book.

Grace is talking quietly with Lucy, and the rest of the class do not appear to be paying attention to either Grace or Addi.

*Kim:*

I decide to go and sit next to Addi.

The snapshot for period one, October 18, reveals the close attention I paid to Grace and Addi. I make note of how many tables are between them (five) and note details of Addi’s appearance being tired and pale. Everything that is observed and described in the snapshot has been heavily
influenced by the conversation I had with Ms. A at the morning staff briefing. The snapshot also highlights the capacity for ethnographers to influence engagement with the participants and how/when/where to position themselves in relation to the perceived ‘action’. By positioning myself next to Addi, I became acutely aware of the physical rupture between the two girls as evidenced by the space between them. The relational rupture is also evident by the lack of eye contact and body positioning of Addi and Grace towards each other. There appears to be a large attempt by both girls to not look at each other, and a large attempt by me to watch their every move.

While methodologically engaging with participants and opening up a dialogue is a feature of socially critical research (McLaren, 2015), my response was also emotionally driven in an effort to show compassion and empathy towards a girl who appeared to be isolated and separated from her friends.

**Period 2**

Period 2 is focused on a project aimed at each student creating a business plan for a new company. This also means the class is noisier with lots of talking. I ask Addi if she would like some help with her project and she says ‘yes’.

After a while, I mention Grace and how I notice that they are not sitting together today. After a moment, Addi fills me in:

[According to Addi] Grace stole Addi’s iPod and would not give it back. In retaliation, Addi took Grace’s books and threw them in the bin. Grace then kicked Addi in the leg and that is when “things escalated” with Grace biting, hitting and slapping Addi. This made Addi upset and she went home and told her mum. Addi said that later that night, Grace posted a message on Facebook
about Addi and that it was “really mean”. Addi also said that her mum had come up to the school yesterday and had blasted Ms. A about Grace hurting Addi. Addi said that her mum had Ms. A “… quivering in her boots”.

After a time, Addi mentions that she is worried about being alone and of people looking at her because she has no friends. We then lapse into silence again.

Kim:
There is a lot going on here according to Addi. Facebook has become involved; parents are up at the school demanding answers, and Addi is feeling all alone. This has got to be a rough situation. Even I am feeling unprepared for how this might play out.

The above snapshot illustrates a rupture within the friendship of Grace and Addi and highlights some of the actions the two girls have engaged to try to navigate their relationship through this. One of the noticeable tactics that Addi used was the physical distance she puts between herself and the other Girls in Vans. She opted to sit by herself away from the others and remained withdrawn and silent. According to Waite-Miller, Roloff, and Reznik (2014) the ‘silent treatment’ is often used as a tactic within interpersonal conflict as a way to ‘correct’ an undesirable behaviour of the other person. The silent treatment often includes not making eye contact, not talking, making a definite effort to ignore the other person, and actively going out of the way to avoid contact (Waite-Miller et al., 2014). In period one and two, we can see some of these behaviours being used by Addi and by the other Girls in Vans; both groups are not looking at each other, not talking, and seemingly avoiding all forms of contact.

The physical distance between Addi, and the other Girls in Vans, is one tactic that these girls use as a way to show dissatisfaction and relational disengagement from their relationship. This tactic also could serve another purpose being a withdrawal of the emotional and social support that friendships provide to the people they include (Waite-Miller et al., 2014). This withdrawal of support appears to be of most concern to Addi who told me about her fears of being alone and
appearing to have no friends during our interview, “every morning I try and think of a way to get out of coming here [to school] so I don’t have to be alone … I don’t want to be alone at school”. Through Addi’s retelling of the events that caused this current conflict, it appears that the social consequences outweigh the emotional consequences for her. When I asked her during our interview ‘why she stayed friends with Grace?’, Addi responded by saying “cause I need someone to hang around with at school … so I don’t look like a loner… you know … where I sit alone and people stare at me and all that [which] makes me feel like a complete and utter idiot”. Addi’s use of “I need someone … so I don’t look …” could suggest that her sense of self-worth is dependent upon the approval of others. She does not want to appear alone because the feelings she associated with being alone were negative and attached to her sense of identity and her capacity to belong. Yet, her sense of belonging to the Girls in Vans was ruptured by the conflict between her and Grace, which could place Addi at risk of social isolation and of having to navigate secondary school alone.

The rupture which has formed between Addi and Grace, in the above snapshots, also highlights outside school tactics that both girls have drawn upon to navigate this conflict, one being their parents, and the other being social media. By involving outside spaces and people into the conflict, the rupture between the two girls becomes public and accessible to others, many of whom will only receive one version of the events that led up to this point. By using social media platforms, like Facebook, conflict can escalate in an immediate way that can be easily misinterpreted due to the artificial nature of how the message has been sent (Zeitzoff, 2017). We can see this in the above snapshot where Addi interpreted Grace’s Facebook message as “really mean” even though Grace may not have intended it to be so. Zeitzoff (2017) suggests that social media can help publicise perceived wrongs committed by others in an immediate way that has not previously been possible prior to the introduction of these media platforms. Zeitzoff (2017), however, warns that conflict can be amplified for all parties as others within their social networks can quickly modify, or exaggerate, the conflict by spreading misleading information or rumours to the rest of their social spaces/places. While it is not possible to know how Grace’s Facebook
message was interpreted or spread through their social networks, we do know that the conflict was escalated through both Grace and Addi’s parents coming up to the school to discuss the incident with some of the teachers.

At the staff morning briefing I was told by Ms. A that both of the girls’ families had come up to the school the previous afternoon and were “very verbal and upset [and] quite threatening” to the staff. Addi’s recount to me of how her mother had “come up to the school ... and ... blasted Ms. A about Grace hurting [her]”, which left Ms. A “quivering in her boots”, highlights how quickly conflict can escalate when outside places and people are included. In this instance, the involvement of Addi and Grace’s mothers in the girls’ conflict, and the manner in which they expressed their feelings, model to their daughters one way in which conflict can be navigated. Mikel-Brown (2003) suggests, “… children learn an enormous amount about how to compromise, address conflicting needs and negotiate power relations” (p. 211) from their parents. She states that girls are incredibly observant about how adult women (in particular, their mothers) voice their feelings, express their anger and disappointment, and more importantly how they work towards resolving conflict (Mikel-Brown, 2003). The literature tells us that the way in which conflict is viewed and dealt with in schools is often mirrored by community and social understandings of conflict; conflict is a negative phenomenon that should be avoided, but if it does occur, then a solution should be imposed on those involved (Longaretti & Wilson, 2006). These solutions are often handed down by people in the Australian judicial system who occupy powerful positions such as judges and law makers. It should be noted that those positions are predominantly occupied by men, and in some cases male judges outnumber female judges at a rate of three to one (ABS, 2017). Based on these statistics, how conflicts are managed within the broader community are reflective of a male gaze and perpetuate ongoing understandings about women needing to be protected. This notion of protection for women and children fulfil a historical notion

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25 According to the ABS 2017 Gender Indicators, there are 53 female and 95 male Commonwealth judges and justices, with male Federal Court Justices/Judges outnumbering female Justices/Judges by three to one (76% compared with 24%). In the Australian Federal Parliament, one in four federal government cabinet ministers are women (26%) (ABS, 2017 Gender Indicators).
of womanhood and femininity as being passive, vulnerable, and in need of protection. How conflict was therefore managed for the Girls in Vans, especially when there were outside parties involved (like mothers and teachers), reflects hegemonic practices that support a worldview of conflict needing to be ‘managed’ for those that are historically and socially positioned as unable to do so themselves. In other words, groups such as women, children, and young people need to be protected (Schwenzer, 2008).

Period 3 & 4

Addi stays close to me for the majority of the lesson, avoiding Grace. Both girls stand around and avoid looking at each other or being near each other. It seems like they are both aware of each other, often orienting or re-orienting themselves when one or the other moves/changes position. I deliberately move closer to Charlotte and Anna and strike up a conversation with them. Addi stays close to me but does not engage in the conversation I’m having with Charlotte and Anna.

Towards the end of class Ms. H asks Charlotte (quietly) to invite Addi to “hang out with them” during lunch. I watch as Charlotte goes up to Addi and asks her if “she’d like to hang out”… Addi says “no thanks” and walks off, leaving Charlotte standing there. Charlotte looks up and sees me, shrugs and walks off.

The bell goes and we head off towards math. Both Addi and Grace turn up to class with no textbook, pencil case or book. When the teacher arrives it is someone I do not recognise. Anna tells me it is a substitute teacher. As everyone is going into the classroom Grace and Addi are held up by the teacher who asks where their books are. Grace insists that she does not have the books; Addi echoes this to the teacher. The teacher tells them to “go and get your stuff from your lockers now”.
I watch out the window as the two girls walk off together in the direction of the lockers. It is not long before they both return with their books and sit next to each other at the front of the class. They do not appear to be talking much, if at all. They do, however, appear to be doing their schoolwork.

**Kim:**

I deliberately move closer to Charlotte and Anna and strike up a conversation with them because I wanted to see what will happen between Addi and Grace if I am not available to be their crutch. Looking back, I am not proud of doing this; it feels like I was manipulating the environment for my own benefit.

Period three and four, on October 18, show some of the techniques that Ms. H used to subtly offer support towards Addi. We observe this happening when Ms. H asked Charlotte to invite Addi to “hang out with them” during the lunch break and how Charlotte complied with this request. In this snapshot, the student-teacher relationship between Ms. H and Charlotte reveals some components of Freire’s (2005) “banking concept of education” (p. 73). With the teacher asking Charlotte to help Addi, we can observe how a teacher chooses a course of action that will impact Addi directly. The teacher may believe that they have a professional level of expertise and knowledge about how to handle this situation, despite not consulting with Addi or Charlotte beforehand. Despite not being consulted, we can observe how Charlotte confirmed her role as a “receptacle” and as a ‘good student’ by permitting herself to be filled with knowledge given by the teacher. According to Freire (2005), “in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72), thereby negating the process of inquiry which leads to knowledge production. If we view this interaction according to Freire’s (2005) banking concept of education, and through a horizontal violence perspective, it means that this teacher considered her course of action to be the most appropriate solution which will superficially ‘fix’ the problem (i.e. as a way
of addressing Addi’s isolation from her friends). What appears to not be accounted for by Ms. H is Addi’s non-compliance, which effectively ruptures the assumed authority of the teacher as the knowledge giver. Instead, we see Addi refuse Charlotte’s ‘offer’ to "hang out" by simply saying “no” and walking away. Addi’s refusal towards Charlotte’s ‘offer’ could be Addi’s way of ‘showing’ Grace that she was willing to patch things up with her. Alternatively, Addi could also be revelling in her isolation and by refusing Charlotte, she gained another tactic to use in her conflict with Grace. However, if we view Addi’s behaviour towards Charlotte through the lens of horizontal violence, it shows an example of nonphysical hostility between the two girls.

While Addi does not want to “hang out” with Charlotte and the Girls in T-Bars, she also appeared hesitant to “hang out” with Grace. However, towards the end of the snapshot of period three we observe a small moment of solidarity between Grace and Addi as they stood together against the substitute teacher’s demand for workbooks. In this moment, it appears that despite their current conflict, Grace and Addi will continue to support each other, especially when it comes to dealing with their teachers.

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**Lunchtime:**

When the bell goes, I leave class and walk with Addi towards the locker bay. I comment to her that, "it seems that she and Grace look like they had patched things up." She says that Sharon was lying to them both. Addi says that during class she had written a message on Sharon’s Facebook wall telling her that Sharon was a “liar and that they weren’t friends anymore”. Addi tells me that Sharon’s been telling Grace “mean things” about her and during math she and Grace figured it out.

Addi tells me that she would only be friends with Grace if she did not punch Addi in the face … but Addi was worried that now Sharon might punch her instead because of the Facebook
message. I tell her to tell Ms. A or Ms. H if she is scared. Once we get to the locker bay, I say goodbye and head into the staffroom for lunch.

I’m halfway through eating my lunch when there is a knock at the staffroom door. It is Addi, Grace and Lucy asking to speak with Ms. H. The girls are told to wait outside as Ms. H is on the phone and she will be with them shortly. As Ms. H finishes up her phone call and opens the door to speak with Addi, I see Sharon come around the corner and head in the direction of the staffroom. Addi sees Sharon and the next thing I know, Addi has run off leaving Grace, Lucy and Sharon all staring after her.

**Kim:**

My advice to Addi was no different to that given to her before – “seek help from the adults as they will know what to do because they are older and wiser.” I did not act any differently to other adults; I am a product of believing that children require help navigating their relationships with their friends. What if the advice adults give to young people is wrong? How authentic is the role adults play in the lives of young people, if we are unable to allow them spaces to shape their own possibilities?

Lunchtime brought opportunities for the Girls in Vans to confront each other and the role that each person has played. Based on my conversation with Addi, we learn that Facebook has once again been used as a communication tool between the girls within this conflict. As seen during period one, Facebook has been used by Grace to say “*mean things*” about Addi; now we see Addi use the same technique to tell Sharon that she is a “*liar and that they weren’t friends anymore*”.

Current research (see Patulny & Seaman, 2017; Westlund & Bjur, 2014; Zeitzoff, 2017) suggests that the rise in media-based interactions, facilitated by increased rates of mobile phone ownership, increases the pressure on people to be available “anywhere and anytime” (Patulny & Seaman, 2017, p. 287) adding a new dimension to peoples’ relationships. Westlund and Bjur (2014) suggest that young people are now “living social media lives [where] experiences are framed by, made immediate by and mitigated through media” (p. 24). In the above snapshot, we observe how
Addi has used Facebook to tell Sharon that she is upset in a more immediate way than would have been possible prior to social media. While social media can help foster relationships differently, for the Girls in Vans, social media has been used as a tool to escalate their conflict. For example, King-Jones (2011) notes that “horizontal violence includes all acts of unkindness, discourtesy, divisiveness, and lack of cohesiveness” (p. 81), which, in the case of Addi’s Facebook message to Sharon calling her a “liar”, could be interpreted as a discourteous and divisive act by Sharon, especially because Addi has done it publically through social media. Thus, in this observation, social media is used as a tool to perform horizontal violence between the members of the Girls in Vans.

**Snapshots: October 22**

The following snapshots took place four days after we last saw the Girls in Vans. At this stage, it was unknown to me what had become of the girls conflict from October 18.

Addi and Grace are the last to arrive at class and both girls sit together down the front. They are both playing on their mobile phones and talking together. I cannot hear what they are saying but it sounds like it is something good. There is lots of giggles and excited whispers coming from the two.

The bell goes and Grace is told by the teacher to stay back “to talk about her lack of work and attitude”. Grace stays behind with the teacher while Addi lingers just outside the door. While Grace is inside, Sharon turns up and talks with Addi. Both girls then start banging on the door, walking back in and out of the classroom. Addi and Sharon call out:

*Addi: How much longer are you going to be?*
**Sharon: Come on Grace, hurry up**

The teacher confronts Addi about the banging on the door and the comments she has yelled out and asks her to come inside to discuss it. Instead, Addi and Sharon walk away without waiting for Grace. The teacher continues to talk to Grace.

**Kim:**

I honestly cannot understand these two girls. Last week Addi was walking away from her friendship with Grace and now she is hanging around the door waiting for Grace to finish up with the teacher … and making a significant amount of noise; Sharon too! I wonder how this makes Grace feel. It is almost like she has got her own cheer squad, but at the same time, how will the behaviour of the other girls’ impact on Grace and her punishment from the teacher?

Once again, we observe the use of mobile phones for the Girls in Vans. In the above snapshot, Grace and Addi were using their mobile phones for entertainment and socialising, which is very different to the way we have seen them use their devices previously. Current research (see Patulny & Seaman, 2017; Westlund & Bjur, 2014) suggests that the increased use of mobile phones in our everyday lives has meant that technology, and how people use that technology, has become invisible to our lives, in essence, it fades away from conscious thought. According to Westlund and Bjur (2014), mobile phones now occupy a domestic place within society, so much so that we tend to take their usage for granted. This everyday usage is visible in the above snapshot where the students used them to listen to music while they worked, to search for information, and in the case of William, used them to take down notes and keep a record of their homework (Interview transcript, William, 2012). At the beginning of the fieldwork, I asked Ms. H about the students’ use of mobile phones within class and she told me that she does not mind the students’ using them because “at least they are taking down the notes”, indicating that the role of mobile phones at North-West Campus has been reframed as an educational tool for students rather than as a distraction to learning.
While the mobile phone usage of Grace and Addi appears to be innocent in the above snapshot, there is nevertheless conflict between Grace and the teacher. From the snapshot we know that Grace has been told to stay behind after class to discuss her “lack of work and attitude”. Keeping Grace back after class also created a situation where the other members of the Girls in Vans appeared at the classroom and attempted to rupture the authority of the teacher over Grace. We observe Addi and Sharon attempting to disrupt the teacher by banging on the door, yelling into the classroom and opening and closing the door during Grace’s discussion with the teacher. These tactics by Sharon and Addi displayed a level of group unity and cohesion amongst the Girls in Vans that has not been observed before. If we view the actions of Addi and Sharon through Freire’s (2005) concept of horizontal violence, and the oppressed group’s struggle for freedom and self-affirmation, we can observe how issues of authority can be challenged more effectively by a group of people, rather than by those individually. In this instance, Grace may be unable to challenge the teacher alone, but the introduction of Addi and Sharon could help Grace feel empowered to speak back in defence of her actions. Freire (2005) suggests that oppressed groups will “little by little” (p. 64) try out forms of rebellious action against those who occupy authority over them. If we view the actions of Sharon and Addi in this manner, it could be suggested that they are trying out these behaviours in an attempt to show solidarity to Grace. However, this act of solidarity was short-lived when the teacher confronted Addi and invited her in to the classroom to discuss her behaviour. It is at that moment, when Addi and Sharon stopped their behaviour and left the classroom, and Grace, indicating that group solidarity and cohesion within the Girls in Vans was not guaranteed and was very dependent upon the context and a perception of discipline.

**Period 3 & 4**

Grace has not come to class, which is unusual because she was in the last class. Addi is here and working quietly, sitting next to Lucy and Mia down near the heater. After about 20
minutes, Grace comes into class with her books and takes a seat next to Addi. Grace starts getting her books organised when Ms. H walks over to them. Ms. H asks Addi to help Grace work through the worksheet that the class has already started.

I do not hear or see what happened next, but when I look back I heard the following:

*Ms. H: Distracting, stop bickering, please move!*

*Grace: But I haven’t done anything wrong.*

*Ms. H: I’m asking you (Grace) to move because Addi has recognised that you can be a distraction to her ...*

*Grace: This is bullshit! I haven’t done anything wrong!*  

Grace picks up her books, slams shut her folder and throws her pencil case down a couple of seats to where Ms. H told her to move to. She is red in the face and frowning at her work. She does not look up, even though Addi is looking over at her. Grace keeps her eyes on the page where she is drawing scribbles on the worksheet. The scribbles are circles that are ripping the worksheet apart. Once her paper is destroyed, Grace pulls out her iPod and puts her headphones in.

Mid way through the class, three students arrive from another class. They go up to Ms. H and have a brief chat. I hear her sigh and watch her direct them to some spare tables and chairs and tells them “well I guess you’re working with us today”. The newcomers talk with some of the boys. Sophie and Livvy are busy talking with Ava all the while laughing and making large gestures. The class feels loud to me. The bell rings for lunch and Ms. H tells Grace to stay behind to sign her Behaviour Plan. Once everyone has left, Ms. H asks Grace the following:

*Ms. H: What do you think I should write?*

*Grace: I dunno... [shrugs].*

*Ms. H: ... wouldn’t follow instructions?*

*Grace: This is bullshit. I didn’t do anything wrong.*
Grace turns around and walks out of the classroom. Ms. H and I watch her leave. She does not look at either of us as she leaves the classroom.

**Kim:**

“Unusual” to me.

I notice Grace is missing, which suggests that I am still an outsider in this class. I do not have the same understanding of who is where, when and why. Perhaps I have already established some baseline sense of what is ‘normal’ for this class. If anything, noticing when things are ‘off’ influences who I am observing and what they are doing and with whom. I fear that I may have established a false sense of familiarity with the places and spaces and therefore, I am only conscious of what appears at odds with that.

In the above snapshot, we observe an incident between Grace and Ms. H that appears to have started when Ms. H asked Addi to help Grace with the worksheet as Grace was late to class. My interpretation of the situation is based on what I overheard while sitting away from the Girls in Vans. At the beginning of the class I observed Addi working quietly and when Grace returned something prompted Ms. H to ask Grace to move away from Addi, telling her that she was “distracting”. Grace repeated to Ms. H twice that she hadn’t “done anything wrong” and that as far as Grace was concerned Ms. H’s request for her to move was “bullshit”. While Grace eventually complied with Ms. H’s request, her act of compliance was not done without consequences, mainly a rupture to Grace and Addi’s relationship. In this snapshot, Grace was adamant that she was not at fault and while her denial was loud, it appeared to have fallen on deaf ears.

The analysis of this particular snapshot will be continued over the page as this incident between Grace and Ms. H created an opportunity for ‘Kim’ and Ms. H to reflect upon the incident after Grace left the classroom.
Debrief with Ms. H

The sound of the door slamming leaves the room in silence. Ms. H leans on the back of the chair and exhales slowly.

Kim: Are you ok?

Ms. H: Yes … Grace doesn’t normally act like this. She only does when she feels ‘wronged’… Do you think I did the right thing?

I take a moment to gather my thoughts. I tell Ms. H the following:

From what I observed, Grace did not distract Addi. In fact, I feel that Addi might have been ‘playing’ you [Ms. H] against Grace simply because she thought that Grace would probably get in trouble.

Answering this question makes me feel uneasy.

Kim:

“Did I do the right thing?”

What a loaded question! I feel torn about what I should say. Do I go with my gut and say what I observed? Or do I keep silent so as not to disrupt the research site with my own thoughts and feelings? I want to advocate for Grace because it feels like no matter what she said it isn’t going to change the outcome for her. She is still going to get ‘written up’. But, is that my role here? Isn’t part of being a critical researcher to challenge the status quo? To help those whose voice is drowned out? So, in the end, I offer her my opinion; maybe timidly, but I offer it nevertheless.

I have reflected on this incident many times since October 22. I can recall the look on Grace’s face as she stormed out of class as though it happened yesterday. I saw an angry young woman beaten down by her teacher and betrayed by her friend, struggling to deal with not being believed.
I do not feel any guilt about my response to Ms. H, rather I feel saddened that I witnessed a young woman’s voice be silenced in an environment where adults strive to make lives better; worse still, I am saddened that I never followed up by discussing this incident with Ms. H to see what impact my reflection may have had for Grace and Ms. H.

After Grace’s departure from the classroom, Ms. H and I were left alone with our own thoughts. Seeking to break this silence I asked the first thing that I could think of, “are you okay?” Expecting the socially appropriate response, I received a “yes” from Ms. H, surprisingly though it is her follow up question of me that was unexpected: “do you think I did the right thing?” Despite my hesitation to respond, I answered with honesty about what I saw and what I felt in that moment.

The above snapshot, while brief, highlights Ms. H’s need for professional and social approval regarding her actions towards Grace. However, it was apparent that Ms. H already has some insight into why Grace responded in the way she did, “Grace doesn’t normally act like this … She only does when she feels ‘wronged’”. Despite having some insight into why Grace responded in the manner that she did, Ms. H nevertheless still sought reassurance from me regarding her actions towards Grace, which I did not provide.

Unable to reassure Ms. H that her actions towards Grace was “the right thing” to do, the conversation we had after Grace had left the class nevertheless created an opportunity to engage in a dialogue whereby reflection and action (i.e. praxis) could take place. Falk-Rafael, Chinn, Anderson, Laschinger, and Rubotzky (2004) write that one cannot empower another, but can only create the conditions under which another can reflect and act, which aligns with Freire’s (2005) description of what it means to achieve authentic praxis. Freire (2005) tells us that “when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection” (p. 66) which he cautions can only take place through authentic dialogue within a “historical situation, a criticism of that situation and a wish to change it” (Freire, 2005, p. 67). The above snapshot highlights the opportunities ethnographers can help
facilitate during their engagement with participants while undertaking fieldwork. While my intent at the time was not to create a set of circumstances upon which Ms. H could engage in personal reflection about her actions that may or may not lead to sustained changes. Rather, reflecting back on this incident, I can see how I could have engaged in this practice, at this time, if I was more aware of my role as a critical ethnographer and how I could have better facilitated a conversation with Ms. H about the incident with Grace.

**Snapshots: October 24**

The next snapshot was taken two days after the incident between Grace and Ms. H. The following five snapshots all took place during October 24.

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**Period 1 & 2**

The bell goes for period one so I make my way over to the gym. The students are all milling around waiting for their teacher to come and let them in the gym. Addi is sitting by herself on the benches outside the gym playing on her phone. She does not look up from her phone. The teacher arrives and opens up the gym telling the students to get changed and then to head into the gym. As everyone goes to get changed, I make my way into the gym and take a seat on the wooden benches. Addi is one of the first to come out of the change rooms in her PE gear. She heads towards the wooden benches where I am sitting and seats herself at the very end of the row – about three benches down from me.

Once everyone is changed, we (the students and I) all take a seat on the gym floor where the teacher introduces a student teacher to the class and tells us that he will be running the lesson. The lesson is on playing volleyball. I spend the next hour playing volleyball with Addi, Mia, Lucy and Grace and it is great fun!
After class, Addi is the first to emerge from the change rooms. As we wait for the bell to go, I ask her “how are you going?”… She says that she is “sad and sick of the way Grace treats her”.

*Kim:* Why do you stay friends with them if they make you sad?

*Addi:* So I can have friends in high school.

The bell for recess rings and Addi says “bye” to me and heads off in the direction of the lockers.

*Kim:*

It makes me sad that Addi chooses to sit away from me. I feel as though I have been rejected by a friend, which stings a little bit. However, on the flip side, noticing that she sat away from me and everyone else makes me more conscious of observing her. I would really like to know what is bothering her and whether there is something I can do to help.

In my observations, Addi typically waited for classes to begin by hanging out with the Girls in Vans. I observed this for all the other friendship groups as they waited for the teacher to arrive and to be let into their respective classroom. In the above snapshot, Addi was not observed waiting with the other girls, rather she isolated herself from everyone, physically by sitting on the bench, and relationally by playing on her mobile phone. This self-isolation continued once we were in the gymnasium but disappeared during class when she was observed playing volleyball and laughing at our attempts to spike and serve the volleyball. It was only after class when I asked Addi how she was that I became alerted to a rupture between her and Grace. She told me, “[she’s] sad and sick of the way Grace treats her”, but when questioned about why she stayed friends, she responded with, “so I can have friends in high school.”

This was the second time that Addi had mentioned to me that it was important for her to be seen to have friends in high school. The first time she stated this was October 18 and was during the
first significant conflict I observed between her and Grace, the one where both parents and Facebook was used to escalate the girls’ conflict (pp. 158-159). Addi’s comment on October 24, did not appear to reflect those circumstances, rather it seemed at odds with the nature of the Girls in Vans conflict that I had observed up until that point. While the nature of this conflict appeared different, the tactics that Addi used were the same tactics we observed her use on October 18. For Addi it appeared that keeping a physical distance between herself and the other girls was a tactic that she drew upon to show her dissatisfaction and relational disengagement from the friendship. Viewing these tactics through a horizontal violence lens shows how these behaviours, used during conflict within this friendship group, do not have to be overt or visibly destructive to be considered harmful (King-Jones, 2011).

Alternatively, the tactics that Addi used towards the other Girls in Vans could be considered a response to her own sense of powerlessness within the class, school/ community, thus displacing those feelings onto the Girls in Vans. Research by Christie and Jones (2014) found that groups who experience horizontal violence from within their relationships, either professional or personal, reported having an increased negative view of themselves, other people and the world in comparison to those groups who did not identify as having experienced horizontal violence. By viewing Addi’s behaviour as a response to her feeling powerless, and having an increased negative worldview, may help to explain some of Addi’s responses towards the other Girls in Vans. We have seen in previous snapshots that Addi does not want to “hang out” with other people, but nor does she want to be seen as a “loner” despite not wanting to hang-out with her friends because they make her “sad”. It is plausible that even though Addi relied on tactics that reflected behaviours associated with horizontal violence, and these tactics harmed both herself and her friends, it nevertheless could be the only way that Addi knew how to navigate the social rules and regulations which demand adherence to hegemonic practices that reflect a particular way of ‘doing’ adolescence and ‘girlhood’ (Ringrose & Renold, 2012a).
The teacher has written five questions up on the whiteboard. She asks everyone to get out their workbooks and answer the questions. Students begin opening up books, borrowing pens, and set about the task. As I watch, I see Miss. M approach Grace’s table.

Miss. M: Hi girls. You need to be getting out your books and start answering the questions on the board.

Grace and Addi get out a piece of paper and tear a hole in the middle of it. They proceed to wear this ‘holey’ piece of paper over their faces, pulling funny faces at each other through the mask. All I hear is laughing and giggling from both Addi and Grace.

Miss. M: Grace, you need to stop what you’re doing and do the work that’s on the board! ... Grace? ... Grace? ... Are you listening to me? If you don’t stop this silly behaviour you will be sent to another class.

Grace: I’m not going.

Miss. M: Grace, pack up your stuff.

Grace: Tell me what I’ve done wrong? This is fucked. I’m not going to another class!

Grace packs up her books, throws her pens into her pencil case and slams her books shut. At the same time as Grace is packing up her stuff, Miss. M tells Addi to get the Year 8 coordinator to “escort Grace to another class”.

Addi: No, I’m not. I’m not going!

As Addi says this, Grace walks out of the room, throwing open the door and then slamming it shut on her way out. Ryan calls out, “Bye Grace”, but the door has closed.
Miss. M stares out the window and watches Grace walk away. She turns back to the class who have all been watching her and tells them to “keep working”.

_Kim:

It is always Grace who is removed from the class even though she is seldom acting alone. I sometimes worry that I do not ‘see’ Grace as a person in her own right; same goes for Addi, because I always tend to think about them together. Yet I might be the only one who sees them as being linked; after this period it is becoming more obvious to me who the teachers tend to ‘see’ and therefore blame/punish/remove.

Throughout the above snapshot there are a number of small and large ruptures which can be observed and when viewed through the lens of horizontal violence, these ruptures can illuminate a range of beliefs and practices that impact on the Girls in Vans. Firstly, there appeared to be a large focus on Grace’s behaviour to the exclusion of recognising other participants who may also have been acting in a similar way. We observe this when Miss. M told Grace, and only Grace, to “stop what [she’s] doing and [to] do the work that’s on the board”. From my observations both Addi and Grace were participants in making the paper face masks and were both laughing and giggling. However, we see in the snapshot that Grace is the only one demanded to account for her behaviour by the teacher. There could be a range of reasons for the teacher’s focus on Grace’s behaviour only; on October 22 Grace was asked by Miss. M to stay back after class to “talk about her lack of work and attitude” which suggests a past history between the two and could indicate some pre-conceived ideas about Grace and her behaviour.

During our one-on-one interview Grace was able to shed some light on her relationship with some of the teachers. While the following comment from Grace is long, it provides a unique perspective into her observation as to why the teachers responded to her in particular ways:
Sometimes I feel like the teachers don’t listen to what I’m saying. I suppose it’s probably got something to do with my past where I was like lying to the teachers and stuff [but] I don’t really lie to the teachers now ... sometimes; maybe I do, but not all the time. Mostly I’ll lie about having done work or something ‘cause the work’s boring and hard. Most of the time the teachers don’t even help me. Miss. J just ignores me and walks off. Other teachers will say that they always come to me and try to help me with my work, but they don’t. Instead you’ll see them like go to other people. They’ll tell you to put your hand up but that’s useless cause when you do that it’s like they just go past you. It’s annoying, so I don’t do the work. It’s like some of the teachers just aren’t that interested in teaching me ... I don’t think that this kinda thing will ever stop until I finish school and get a job. (Grace, 2012)

Grace’s insights into why her teachers responded to her in particular ways suggest that Grace’s past history was an important factor in her engagement with teachers, and them with her. For instance, her observation that “[it] feels like the teachers don’t listen to what I’m saying” can be seen to be occurring in the above snapshot, where we observed Grace appeal to Miss. M to give her an explanation regarding her behaviour, “tell me what I’ve done wrong? This is fucked. I’m not going to another class!” Despite Grace asking for an explanation, this request appeared to go unheard, or unacknowledged, by Miss. M suggesting that Grace saw herself as invisible to the teachers and that her voice and questions were not heard, nor answered.

Grace also shed some light on why she did not do her school work. Her comments, “Mostly I’ll lie about having done work or something ‘cause the work’s boring and hard. Teachers will say that they always come to me and try to help me with my work, but they don’t. It’s like some of the teachers just aren’t that interested in teaching me”. King-Jones (2011) found in her study of horizontal violence and nursing students, that when relationships between students and their teachers were considered unsuccessful, students became disheartened and frustrated, resulting in stress and disillusionment with the role of education and its relevance to their lives. She found that students who experienced conflict with their teacher, reported it as having a destructive impact on
their self-image and their self-esteem (King-Jones, 2011). The lack of reciprocal dialogue from Miss. M appeared to be very frustrating for Grace. We have observed in previous snapshots where Grace’s voice was actively ignored by teachers and her response to that has been to become loud and aggressive in her speech and actions, as she removed herself physically from the space by slamming doors and throwing equipment. The actions by Grace in the above snapshot could point towards how a student comes to feel powerless in the classroom, which is considered a key factor in the development of feeling powerless and contributing to the displacement of negative emotions and aggressiveness onto others (Freire, 2005). Despite Grace leaving the class, one of the positive observations for the Girls in Vans was Addi’s support of Grace by refusing to “escort Grace to another class”, suggesting that a sense of cohesion and group unity was still present, irrespective of how they made each other feel.

**Period 6 & 7**

It is the last two periods of the day and the class is in the computer lab. Ollie arrives late to class and makes his way over to where his friends are sitting. After five minutes or so, Andrew gets out of his chair and walks towards the back of the classroom where there are a small set of steps and a locked door. Andrew disappears down the stairs with only his head visible. Ollie stands up and throws his diary at Andrew, hitting him in the head. Andrew throws the diary back at Ollie and hits him in the leg.

*Ollie: OWWW... you son of a *

*Andrew: [laughs]*

Ollie checks his leg and rubs the spot where the diary hit him. There is a visible red mark on his calf. The teacher looks over and tells Ollie to “*return to his desk and stop mucking around*”. She does not appear to notice Andrew in the stairwell. Most of the students are
getting up out of their chairs and moving around the classroom, talking with their friends. As some of the boys move around I hear snippets of what they are saying:

Miss is being a faggot; fucking mole; she’s acting like a slut.

I do not know who they are talking about or even who says these things. These comments just seem to float around. I watch as Livvy tries to turn off Ryan’s computer and he smacks her hand away. Mia and Lucy are talking loudly to each other down the front of the class.

The teacher stands at the front of the class and is trying to get everyone’s attention “Okay everyone… can everyone stop what they are doing and listen up? …”. None of the students seem to hear her. After a minute I hear the teacher yell, “All students need to stop their behaviour and return to their seats, immediately!”

No one moves. All right, seeing as no one is listening. Everyone is to stand up and face the front.

Slowly everyone starts standing up and the talking gradually disappears until the room is silent. Suddenly I notice Will walking towards Ollie. He comes up behind Ollie and smacks him on the back of the head. His face whips forward and Will walks away. Ollie looks over at Will and smiles. I have missed what the teacher has said to the class while I have watched Will and Ollie.

Ok, everyone sit back down. Keep working.

The teacher goes over to Addi, Lucy, Mia and Grace and asks Addi a question. I do not hear what the teacher asks, nor Addi’s answer, but it appears that Addi’s answer is noticed by Noah and Nathan who turn in her direction and say:

Noah: Why do you have to be so lippy?

Nathan: Caveman’s rags* is on.

Addi says nothing, just stares at them for a moment and turns back to her friends.
Kim:

I am sitting in the drive-thru of McDonalds with my husband and two kids. We are chatting about my day at the school and just debriefing. At the top of the drive-thru two teenage girls walk over the pedestrian crossing and my husband says to me:

"Would you look at those two girls!? That’s mutton dressed up like lamb!!"

“What!? Why would you say that?”

"'Cause it’s true."

“Well that’s your opinion.”

I’ve often wondered how many times I’ve been talked about by strangers because of my clothes; How many times have I been referred to as a slut? A whore? A fucking mole? I hate those terms! They have always silenced me and these girls at McDonalds do not deserve to be objectified by my husband and for me to feel like I cannot defend them.

Reflecting back on this incident I felt cowardly but resigned to my behaviour; as if commenting is never worth the effort.

The above snapshot is the first time that the Girls in Vans were not the main focus of the observation, rather this observation shows some of the contextual factors that operate around, and impact on, their friendship, namely the comments and behaviours that are done to them by others.

At the beginning of the above snapshot we heard some of the boys commenting on the female teacher and describing aspects of her behaviour in terms such as, “faggot”, “acting like a slut” and “fucking mole”. While I was able to hear these comments in a noisy classroom, I cannot say whether the teacher was able to hear them. Irrespective of whether the teacher was aware of their use towards her, it is important to acknowledge that the use of these kinds of terms are dependent upon the historical, social, and cultural context in which they have been used. In this place and
space, I interpreted these terms to be derogatory and insulting, acknowledging that other people may have a different interpretation depending upon the context in which the terms are used26.

According to Attwood (2007), the term ‘slut’ has historically been used to police women. In more contemporary understandings, being called a ‘slut’ is used as a means of branding and exclusion (Attwood, 2007), while White (2002) notes that the category of ‘slut’ is “one of power and powerlessness” (p. 50). For the boys in 8R their use of the terms “slut”, “faggot”, “fucking mole” and “caveman’s rags is on”, conveys an insulting, degrading and sexist attitude towards women. However, Robinson (2005) cautions that the use of “derogatory sexualized language such as ‘slut’, is so entrenched within … the language of popular culture operating in schools (and outside schools) everyday” (p. 24) that the perceived enormity of its use is often minimised and ignored (Ringrose & Renold, 2012b). In the above snapshot, we observed Addi do nothing about the language that the boys were using towards her. While this non-response may highlight entrenched hegemonic notions of what it means to be a female in this space, place and time, it nevertheless also highlights particular ways for the boys in 8R to perform their understandings of hegemonic masculinity within this school (Robinson, 2005). We can observe that those understandings include the use of sexist language aimed at humiliating or intimidating the gendered ‘other’, which in this instance, was Addi and the teacher.

On the other hand, Addi and the teacher’s lack of a response does not automatically represent their passivity or immunity to the behaviour of the boys. Robinson (2005) explains the complex negotiations that women (in particular) go through when confronted with sexist behaviour. She states:

Though many victims find the behaviour degrading and humiliating, how they react to it can be influenced by a number of contextual factors, including, but not limited to, who the harasser is and how many; where the harassment takes place; whether the victim is alone;

26 For a comprehensive history of the term ‘slut’ and the many meanings it holds, see Attwood (2007) ‘Sluts and riot grrrls: female identity and sexual agency’ in the Journal of Gender Studies.
whether there are other friends around; and what the consequences of their own reactions
to the harassment will be. (Robinson, 2005, p. 26)

In the above snapshot there are a number of contextual factors that could influence how both Addi
and the teacher may have chosen to respond. These factors may include prior experiences with the
boys; issues of self-confidence; and what consequences could be perceived for both Addi and the
teacher. As we have seen in previous snapshots, Addi often remained silent in the face of conflict.
The decision by Addi to stay silent could be an act of survival when faced with hegemonic
dissonance between herself and some of the boys in 8R. Addi’s silence, we have come to observe,
is an active strategy she employs under stressful conditions in order to minimise herself, her
opinion and her agency.

Snapshots: October 29

The following snapshots took place five days after October 24. While there is only one snapshot
presented for October 29, the interactions between members of the Girls in Vans highlight a form
of horizontal violence that has not been observed before.

Period 1 & 2

The class is working in the library today. Addi and Grace are sitting together at the computers,
while Lucy and Mia are sitting together but on the opposite side of the library.

Addi and Grace have loaded up some computer games. Miss. M is roaming around the class,
looking over shoulders at work on the computer, asking questions of students. She reaches
Addi and Grace, tells them to turn off the computer games “now”, and then takes a seat right
between them. The girls open up the web browser and start the task while Miss. M continues
to sit between them.
After the bell goes for the end of period one, I walk to the next classroom with Addi and Grace who tell me that they do not like Miss. M.

    Kim: Oh, why’s that?
    Addi: Because she made us do work.
    Kim: How dare she make you do work at school [extreme sarcasm with an eye roll or two].
    Addi: Exactly, what a bi-atch.

Both girls laugh and walk off towards the classroom.

Period 2

Everyone has returned to the classroom and have taken out their textbooks. Miss. M asks for volunteers to read a paragraph. No one volunteers. Miss. M then starts selecting people. After Nathan has read the first paragraph, she calls on Grace to read. “No” is Grace’s response.

    Miss. M: Come on, you can do it.
    Grace: No. I don’t want to.
    Addi: Grace won’t read. You might as well give up.
    Miss. M: Fine. Charlotte you can read the next paragraph.
    Charlotte: I had to read three times last week and it’s not fair to ask me to read again!

Miss. M sighs’, and asks Claire to read. Claire takes up reading from the top of the paragraph. When the reading is finished, Miss. M tells the class to work through the questions at the bottom of the page. They can work with the person sitting next to them “if they like”.

Addi stands her textbook up at the edge of the desk so that it is covering her book and her playing on her phone. Miss. M tells Addi to “put the phone away and begin the work”. Mia, who is sitting next to Lucy, reaches over and tries to snatch the phone out of Addi’s hand. Addi snatches the phone back from Mia and tells her, “fuck off, you little cunt”, and puts the phone
in her dress pocket. Miss. M. heads over to the girls and tells Mia to “sit down and leave Addi alone”.

Miss. M: Addi, go outside and wait for me please.
Addi: No.
Miss. M: Addi, outside now!
Addi: [shakes her head and stares straight ahead] Nope.

Miss. M stands directly in front of Addi, just staring at her and waiting. The rest of the class has stopped to watch. Eventually, Miss M. looks up.

Miss. M: Anna, can you please go and get Ms. H?
Anna: Can I take someone with me?
Miss. M: No! You don’t need someone to hold your hand.

Looking unhappy, Anna leaves. Five minutes later, she returns by herself. Anna walks over to Miss. M and has a whispered conversation with her, and returns to her seat. Addi continues to sit in her seat and the class returns to the distinct hum of pens writing and people talking.

**Kim:**

“Fuck off you little cunt!” … whoa!!!!

Ten minutes before this Addi was walking with me and Grace and she was joking with me and having a laugh. I have never seen this from Addi and to be honest it kind of scared me a bit. The word ‘cunt’ does not sit well with me irrespective of how many times I’ve heard it used by my friends. I simply do not like it!

Throughout all of the snapshots we have predominately focused on the relationship between Grace and Addi. In some snapshots we can observe them being fierce friends and each other’s collaborator and supporter; in other snapshots, the nature of their conflicts are emotionally challenging and fraught with tactics that are designed to hurt the other. However, in the above
snapshot we observed for the first time other members of the Girls in Vans, namely Mia, and the effect she had on Addi.

The beginning of period two highlights the solidarity and support Grace and Addi sometimes share when Grace is called upon to read. Despite telling Miss. M that she did not want to read, Miss. M nevertheless tried to cajole Grace into reading with a friendly, “Come on you can do it”. Still the same refusal is observed by Grace. Addi broke the stalemate and told Miss. M, “Grace won’t read. You might as well give up”, again indicating that Addi and Grace have each other’s backs, especially when one of them is in conflict with a teacher.

While it appears that Grace could sometimes rely on Addi’s support, the same cannot be said for Addi receiving support from the other members of the Girls in Vans. This is observed when Miss. M told Addi to “put the phone away and begin the work”. Mia, who was sitting next to Lucy, reached over and tried to snatch Addi’s phone out of her hand. Addi reacted to this and told Mia to, “fuck off, you little cunt”, and put her phone away in her dress pocket. Following on from this, Addi is told by Miss. M to “go outside and wait” which Addi refused multiple times.

We have observed in previous snapshots the importance mobile phones seem to play, not only in the Girls in Vans conflict, but also in their everyday lives, with current research suggesting that mobile phones now occupy a significant place in a person’s identity construction (see, Gordon, Al Zijdaly, & Tovares, 2017; Patulny & Seaman, 2017; Rambe, 2013; Westlund & Bjur, 2014). For Addi, her mobile phone could be an intrinsic part of who she is and this ‘violation’ by Mia, to strip her of that object, could have been a trigger for her reaction. Furthermore, Mia’s actions could be seen by Addi as a violation towards the Girls in Vans friendships, especially because it appeared that Mia has taken it upon herself to ‘make’ Addi do what Miss. M asked her to do in the first-place. Mia’s actions are a rupture to one of the fundamental unwritten rules that we have observed for the Girls in Vans, that being, solidarity and unconditional support for each other against teacher demands.
From a horizontal violence perspective, Addi and Mia’s conflict in the above snapshot exhibits characteristics of oppressed group behaviour patterns including, rudeness, abusive language and humiliation towards peers (King-Jones, 2011). In this snapshot, Addi’s use of the term “cunt” towards Mia is considered a form of abusive and offensive language in the Australian State of Victoria, as written in the Summary Offences Act 1966 (s 17). According to Wilson (2008) “‘cunt’ is the most confronting word in mainstream Australian English, and perhaps in every major variety of English spoken anywhere” (p. 116). Cover (2002) sums up how this term steadfastly occupies contemporary notions of offensiveness in the following quote:

‘Cunt’ can be understood as a protected term: protected from usage such that it be most offensive in its deployment – a term of injury which cannot be pinned down to a group identity (such as racial and homophobic terms) but is widely available – if rarely used – as a term of intense injury. The term in its use today can probably be said to offend at least two identifiable groups. Firstly, those opposed to the use of ‘foul’ or ‘vulgar’ language who view the term as fixed in signifying offence always and are possibly – if unconsciously – reinforcing a taste-based demarcation of class. The second ... group ... are women following a feminist reclamation of the term in order ... to further a cultural project of divorcing womanhood from terms of abjection. (Cover, 2002, p. 278, emphasis in original)

It is important to acknowledge that my distaste for the term “cunt” is reflective of Cover’s (2002) understanding of groups who oppose ‘foul’ and ‘vulgar’ language, which can be seen in the portrait of ‘Kim’ at the beginning of this section. In the context of the above snapshot, Addi’s use of the term “cunt” towards Mia is not a way of reclaiming the feminist term, rather it was used by Addi towards Mia in an offensive manner indicating an awareness of its effectiveness to cause harm and potentially give Addi some semblance of control in an environment that has been observed to silence her.
Snapshots: October 31

The following snapshots took place on October 31, two days since we last observed the Girls in Vans. There are multiple small snapshots that occurred throughout this day; the first one beginning as I made my way into school.

Before morning briefing

As I am coming into school this morning I see Grace and Sharon standing around just inside the main entrance – I say “hello” to Grace first and then to Sharon. I ask what they are doing in the hallway and Grace mentions that Sharon has received a bad text message. Sharon then reads it to me. This is what I remember of the text:

“Your mum should have drowned you when you were born you filthy Ranga*”

I ask Sharon if she knows the person who sent this text.

Sharon: Yes.

Kim: Do they go to this school?

Sharon: No.

Kim: Okay ... You need to tell someone, either at home or at school, about this message.

Sharon: I will.

Kim: Promise?

I enter the staffroom just as morning briefing is ending. As staff start moving out of the staffroom to get ready for period one, I head over to talk with Ms. A. I tell Ms. A what Sharon and Grace have told me about the text message. She opens her diary, writes herself a note, and tells me she will “follow it up”.

* Note: The term “Ranga” is a derogatory term for people of mixed race in New Zealand.
* Ranga is a taunt for people with red hair, derived from the word ‘orangutan’.

Kim:

This is one of those moments where being a researcher and adult do not mix that well. I want to help Sharon but my default mode is to tell her to tell an adult because ‘adults know how to fix everything … right? I made her promise to tell, yet I did not wait for her to do this because I wanted to help make it better for her. I know what being called a ‘ranga’ feels like and trust me, it is not a term of endearment.

The colour of my hair caused me a lot of angst when I was a child and teenager. I have vivid memories of women (mostly older) coming up to me and touching my hair, generally without my permission, and preceding to swoon over the rich auburn colour that was my ‘crowning glory’ as my mother often said. I hated being different and I hated the kids in primary school who made up names for me based on my hair colour - ‘red-headed rat rooter’ and the always classic ‘carrot top’. High school was worse with the inclusion of ‘Kick a ginger day’ and the dreaded question, “Does the carpet match the drapes?” My heart went out to Sharon when she told me about what had happened. I wanted to stop the name calling for her and the all too familiar feelings of shame and disgust that we weren’t born with different hair colour.

Period 1 & 2: PE

I must admit that cricket is not my best sport but I nevertheless participate on the team that has Addi, Grace, Lucy and Mia. We’re playing cricket down one end of the gym.

As the lesson goes on, I look around for the student teacher who hasn’t come over to my group. I watch for a little while and notice that the student teacher is working closely with a group of
boys down the other end of the gym who all appear to be competent at cricket. This continues for some time.

The class comes to an end and I find myself upset that the student teacher did not really engage with Addi, Mia, Lucy and Grace. I do not know if I should mention this to the usual PE teacher … I do not. Instead I tell the girls how much fun I had playing with them and we head out to recess.

Kim:

*Why didn’t I speak up?*

The following paragraph has been taken from my field journal, written directly after the class.

I can sense a bit of bitterness within my observation above – I feel that the staffroom conversation on the previous day has given me a different opinion of how certain teachers may look upon conflict, and how I may look at certain teachers comments and actions – especially who might be the ‘wronged’ party – It makes me wonder whether the teachers even care about the underlying tensions between students or whether all they see is the manifestations and therefore the consequences for them (i.e. paperwork, time, energy) – Is it more important for the teachers to be kept happy at the expense of student welfare???

The above snapshot of cricket coaching during physical education (PE) does not show any form of horizontal violence, nor ruptures, between the Girls in Vans. What it does show are some of the hegemonic contextual factors that may impact on the Girls in Vans. Researchers who identify horizontal violence (see Christie & Jones, 2014; Duffy, 1995; King-Jones, 2011; Mooney & Nolan, 2006) suggest that while individual acts of hegemony by teachers may appear harmless on the surface, the cumulative effect of inequitable power relations within society and therefore within education systems, can intensify feelings of powerlessness within students that can contribute to negative emotions and aggressiveness being displaced onto individual peer groups (King-Jones, 2011).
In the snapshot above, we observe how ‘Kim’ saw the male PST engage with the Boys in Converse, but did very little teaching of cricket with the Girls in Vans. There may be a number of reasons for this, including the skill level/experience of the PST in teaching secondary school students; the teaching expectations from the teaching mentor; or broader perceptions and understandings of girls’ dis/engagement from physical education (Oliver & Kirk, 2016) especially in sports that are male-dominated, like cricket and Australian Rules Football (AFL). Exploring the teaching experience and mentor expectations for the male PST are beyond the scope of this thesis, as is an exploration of gender inequality within Australian sport. However, research into this area would be worthy of further exploration.

**Period 4 & 5**

Grace arrives late to class and mentions to the teacher that Addi is “wagging” class. Addi arrives a few minutes later. Mia yells out from the back of the class:

*Mia: Addi needs a late pass! Addi needs a late pass!*

Addi: *Shut the fuck up!*

Mia says nothing else.

**Period 5:**

Miss. M looks up from her desk and watches the class for a few moments. She stands up and says:

*There is far too much noise and chatting go on in here and very little work. If you don’t want to be here, then you can leave.*

Michael looks over at the table where Addi, Grace, Lucy and Mia are sitting.

*Michael: Nobody wants you here.*
Zac: Retards. [said through a cough]

Mia: Shut up!

Mia is the only one of the girls to respond to the two boys. Grace, Lucy and Addi just stare at their books.

Kim:

“Nobody wants you here!” I simply do not have the words to describe how this one statement makes me feel. I cannot imagine what it felt like being on the receiving end of this comment.

At the beginning of period four and five, we see Addi and Mia clashing with each other over a late pass. This behaviour is very similar to the situation we observed from October 29. While the words Addi used towards Mia in the above snapshot, “shut the fuck up!” , might not be considered as ‘foul’ or ‘offensive’ as the term “cunt”, Addi’s intention towards Mia seems clear; she was commanding Mia to ‘be quiet or else’. This behaviour by Addi and Mia towards each other are behaviours associated with horizontal violence.

While we observe Addi and Mia have a small, but aggressive, conflict, it is the later part of the snapshot that provides insight into the hegemonic dissonance that underscores the classroom reality for the Girls in Vans. During period five we witnessed Michael tell the Girls in Vans, “nobody wants you here”, with Zac following up this statement with a subtle comment of “retards” directed at them. It is only Mia who was observed to tell the boys to “shut up!” while Addi, Grace and Lucy stared at their books in silence. Over the course of all of the above snapshots, we have witnessed many moments where individual members of the Girls in Vans had been silenced or chosen to silence themselves. For example, when the girls had been put in a situation that they felt ‘wronged’ by their teachers or by each other; or when silence in the face of conflict appeared to be the most effective strategy to ensure social cohesion. Yet, it is only in the above snapshot, and briefly in the snapshot from October 24, that we see the control that the boys
of 8R have over the voices, perceptions of worth and value, and ability to feel like they ‘belong’, for the Girls in Vans.

Freire (2005) holds to the notion that oppressed groups internalise the opinion their oppressor’s hold of them, causing them to distrust themselves, their voice, their feelings and their knowledge. He states, “so often do they [the oppressed] hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness” (Freire, 2005, p. 63). Over the course of October 31, I observed instances for the Girls in Vans where they were, either explicitly or indirectly, told that they hold no value. The classroom teacher in period one did not spend time instructing the girls on how to play cricket, but he did spend a large amount of the lesson instructing the boys. We saw Michael and Zac tell the girls that they were not wanted and were “retards”; Sharon was told that her mum “should have drowned [her] when [she] was born”, followed by comments telling her that she was “filthy”. When these incidences are viewed separately they may appear to be meaningless, inconsequential moments that happen in secondary schools everywhere. When these incidences are viewed together, however, and in concert with the rest of the snapshots, we begin to see how over time the cumulative effect of these meaningless, inconsequential moments can intensify every perceived harm done to the members of the Girls in Vans, thus setting up the conditions under which horizontal violence can flourish.

**November**

During the period October 31 to November 6, I was unable to attend North-West Campus due to illness and am unsure about what has happened with the Girls in Vans and their peers in 8R. However, as I returned to 8R the teachers and students were all preparing for the upcoming end of year examinations. The following snapshot was observed on my first day back.
Snapshots: November 6

Period 3 & 4

Ms. H is sitting on the far side of her desk and is explaining the task she wants the class to complete. Ms. H has her back to Grace, Lucy and Mia while directing her questions towards the rest of the class. After a few minutes of asking, and answering questions from the far side of the room, Ms. H turns around and faces Grace, Lucy and Mia. She asks, “Have you girls been listening?” Mia nods and Ms. H turns back to the rest of the class and continues talking. Grace, Lucy and Mia continue listening to their iPods.

Kim:

Ms. H has her back turned to me and to the Girls in Vans. I feel invisible today, granted that might be a good thing as I am now just seen as another member of the class. However, it stings a little bit not feeling included in the discussion, or even being given the opportunity to opt out. Watching over the Girls in Vans, I wonder what they feel about having the teacher’s back to them.

Period 6 & 7

Surprise!!! The teacher has announced that there will be a math test during period 6. This announcement causes some of the class to shout out:

What? ...

We didn’t know this was happening today!

I’m not prepared!
You can’t do this...

This isn’t fair!

All of the students are given one version of the test to complete and Nathan and Grace are given a different version. Mia has not been given a test and is left to her own entertainment. She plays on her phone for a little while and then switches to her iPod. After a couple of minutes Mia starts talking to Grace and Lucy. Mia is laughing at them for “having to do work” and is punctuating these comments with swear words.

At one point, Nathan tells her to “shut up”; then Zac tells her to “shut up” too. Mia doesn’t respond to the boys, she simply keeps on laughing, throwing paper and fiddling with her pencil case until the math test is over.

Kim:
I am not sure why Mia isn’t taking the test. I must admit that observing students sitting a test is really boring. I can understand why Mia might be irritating to everyone as they are trying to concentrate because she is irritating me too.

In the above snapshot, Mia appeared to be the only student who was not given a test to complete, nor was she given an alternative activity. This left Mia in a situation where she was not invited to participate in the learning process, nor was she allowed to leave the classroom and/or participate in an alternative activity. This left Mia time to talk with the other Girls in Vans, make comments to them about having to do work, and generally rupturing the testing ‘conditions’ that the teacher had set. The consequences for Mia appearing to have nothing to do was that she distracted and frustrated a number of the boys in the class leading Nathan and Zac to tell her to “shut up”.

For the students of 8R, having a test sprung on them without warning was observed to cause some outrage and angst; “I’m not prepared!” , “you can’t do this”, “this isn’t fair!” suggesting that
feelings of frustration were already evident. In regard to Mia not being given a test to complete or an alternative activity to do, I can only speculate on the reasoning behind this action.

**Snapshots: November 7**

There is only one snapshot presented for November 7. This snapshot, while brief, illuminates aspects of the Girls in Vans friendship that shows solidarity, understanding and support.

**Period 1 & 2**

Waiting to be let in to the gym, I notice that Lucy has arrived and is hanging at the back of the girls’ line. She appears to me to be visibly upset; it looks like she has been crying as her face is red and blotchy. As I am looking over at her I try to make eye contact. For the briefest of moments, she looks at me, then hides her face behind her hair, and casually moves to stand behind Mia as they enter the gym. Everyone goes straight into the change rooms once the doors are open. When all the students emerge from the change rooms, there is no evidence on Lucy’s face that I can see that she has been upset. I later find out in the staffroom that her brother punched her in the face on the way to school.

*Kim:*

Her brother punched her in the face on the way to school. What!!! I do not know how I feel, but one thing I do know is that the rest of the Girls in Vans have ‘got’ her this morning. Right now she does not need me to look at her with pity and outrage and attempt to ‘help’ her in my middle-class notions of what will make this better. Honestly, I am as useful to her as a pat on the back today.

It is 1:07am and I am reading back through this chapter because I cannot sleep tonight. Events have been happening in Victoria after the death of Eurydice Dixon, a young woman who was
raped and murdered whilst walking home after her stand-up comedy performance, and I am angry with the media coverage and the empty ‘thoughts’ of politicians. It is not that I do not care about what happened to Eurydice, I think it is the most horrendous act. Rather, the bigger issue is the ever rising statistics concerning the rates of domestic violence Australian women encounter on a daily basis, usually within their own home, and generally perpetrated by someone known to them (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2018) and the very little coverage this issue receives. Lucy was assaulted by her brother, in her home, at the age of fourteen, and like many other women, Lucy hid this.

**Snapshots: November 12 and 13**

It has been five days since the last snapshot involving the Girls in Vans. The following two snapshots present two different ways that teachers have responded to the Girls in Vans and to the horizontal violence that can be observed happening within the classroom.

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**Period 1 & 2**

Ms. H. is sick today and the students have a relief teacher. Livvy tells me that she is really excited about this teacher because, “*male substitutes are great fun*”.

As the students are working, I talk to the relief teacher. He tells me that he has just returned from teaching overseas and that he has never taught at this school before. He has a relative who is an ongoing teacher here and this is how he “ended up here”.

Mia arrives late to class. As she gets to her seat next to Lucy, she slams her books down on the table and yells, “*I was in the fucking computer room!*” Across the room Nathan looks at Mia and turns to his friends and says, “*what the hell is wrong with this? What’s wrong with her?*” He nods his head in Mia’s direction as he’s talking. There is no response from Mia.
As Mia is getting her books ready, the relief teacher comes over and begins talking with Mia and Lucy. I do not hear the whole conversation, except for the following comments, “... it’s all about personal management ... you need to come to class having had enough sleep ... take some responsibility for yourself and your learning ...”

Kim:

While I was not involved in the conversation between the teacher and the Girls in Vans, it was hard not to hear what was being said. I am actually quite outraged by this teacher’s assumptions about how ‘easy’ it would be for these students to simply sleep and manage themselves better. From the observations over the last week, I can only assume how difficult home could be for some of the Girls in Vans. What right do teachers/adults have to ‘tell’ kids to simply “take responsibility for yourself” when the very act of surviving day-to-day takes precedent.

The above snapshot highlights two very different situations for the Girls in Vans, the first being Nathan’s response to Mia as she entered the classroom; the second is the substitute teacher’s comments about what the Girls in Vans “need” to do in order to “take responsibility” for themselves and their learning.

Within the observational snapshots so far, Mia could be interpreted as being polarising for some members of the Boys in Converse, in particular Nathan and Zac. The above snapshot highlights how Mia’s behaviour, while not directed at Nathan, triggered a response from him. We see this as Mia entered the classroom and loudly declared that she was in “the fucking computer room!” and preceded to slam her books down on the table, at which point we see Nathan nod in her direction and ask the other Boys in Converse, “what the hell is wrong with this? What’s wrong with her?” With no apparent answer to his questions, the class returned to its normal rhythms as if nothing untoward had happened.

The behaviour by Nathan, in particular, is at odds with what the Boys in Converse said about the Girls in Vans during our group interview. When they were asked whether they noticed the Girls in
Vans’ conflict, I received the following responses; William “[doesn’t] really notice them because they always sit down the corner or back”. Ryan indicated that “nothing really goes on with them [Girls in Vans] … not that I see anyway”. Noah commented that he “never talks to them [because] … I just don’t get along with them”. Nathan “ignores them”, and Ryan said he “ignores them [too]” but he also said, “I throw paper at them [as well]”. Based on the interview comments, it would appear that the Boys in Converse believe that they ignore the Girls in Vans, however, the observations do not support that. Rather, what the observations suggest is that members of the Boys in Converse actively go out of their way to comment on, discuss, and label the behaviour of the Girls in Vans often in terms that are offensive, sexist and cruel. We have observed Addi be called “caveman” who is on her “rags”; Michael has told the Girls in Vans that, “nobody wants [them] here”; Zac has called them “retards”, and in the above snapshot we see Nathan question what is “wrong with this?” directed at Mia.

These behaviours by the Boys in Converse have been discussed in previous snapshots outlining how they perform particular performances of hegemonic masculinity within this school (Robinson, 2005). We observed on October 24 that one of the ways the boys in 8R performed their masculinity was through the use of sexist language aimed at humiliating or intimidating the gendered ‘other’. Robinson (2005) argues that for some boys and men the success of doing masculinity is “often measured by the dominance, aggression and intimidation shown towards the gendered ‘other’” (p. 20), with this type of performance being rewarded with power and popularity for young men in schools and within the broader community (Carrington & Scott, 2008; Robinson, 2005). In the above snapshot, Nathan appears to take the ‘othering’ of Mia to a whole new level of humiliation that has not been observed previously. This is seen when he referred to Mia as “this” when asking the other Boys in Converse, “what is wrong with this?” with the result being the dehumanising of Mia as a full person. This particular performance by Nathan towards Mia effectively silences her voice, contributing to what Gilligan (1990) refers to as “the process of silencing the self that is so emblematic of women’s [lives]” (p. 531).
Period 1 & 2

The class is writing up their science report for their last practical experiment – rock weathering. Everyone seems to know what they are doing and are working away with the usual chatter. With about ten minutes to go Miss. A, tells everyone they can pack up their stuff and play some computer games until the bell goes.

Suddenly, there is a commotion over near Grace, Lucy, Addi and Mia. It looks like Mia has pulled out Lucy’s chair while Lucy was sitting on it. Lucy has reacted by yelling at Mia, “Fucking bitch! What’d you do that for?” Miss. A, intervenes and tells Mia to “Go and sit in the corner”. Mia does what she is told and Miss. A checks with Lucy that she is not hurt. Lucy assures her she is “okay”.

The bell goes for recess and Mia gets up and tries to leave the room with everyone else. Mia makes it halfway out the door when Miss. A tells her to come back or she’ll receive an after-school detention. This works and Mia returns. A discussion ensues with Miss. A telling Mia to “act more mature” and to come and inform the teacher if this happens again (because Mia insists that Lucy pulled out her chair first).

Kim:

“Act more mature” by coming and getting an adult to deal with the conflict on your behalf. This statement aligns to an adult-centric view of young people; I am not immune to this thinking either. Looking back over my behaviour I recognised that this is the default stance that I have taken with the Girls in Vans, especially with Sharon (October 31) and Addi (October 24).

The above snapshot shows a new dynamic in the friendship between the Girls in Vans, this being an observable rupture in the relationship between Lucy and Mia. Up until this point, Lucy and
Mia have been relatively absent from the broader conflicts that have impacted on Addi, Grace and to some extent, Sharon. We have witnessed them engage in the group conflict from the margins, but they have never been observed in this study as active participants, or as the main protagonists in the Girls in Vans conflict. In the above snapshot, we see some of the tactics these two girls used to engage in conflict and observe how they align with, or challenge, those used by their friends.

We have seen in previous snapshots how acts of rudeness, abusive language and humiliation have been behaviours that the Girls in Vans have all employed towards each other, at some stage during conflict. The above snapshot reinforces those tactics as commonplace for all the members of the Girls in Vans as we see Mia humble Lucy by pulling her chair out from under her causing Lucy to fall. Lucy responds to Mia by calling her a “fucking bitch!” and asking Mia to explain her actions. Lucy’s use of “fucking bitch” is considered a form of abusive language and in this context could be seen as an act of rudeness.

Observing how Lucy and Mia utilise similar tactics to those observed by the other Girls in Vans suggests particular ways of ‘doing’ conflict amongst this group of girls that is specific to them, in this time and place, and is reflective of broader circumstances which impact on them. Some of those contextual factors we can observe in previous snapshots and in the above snapshot where Miss. A inserts herself into the girl’s conflict when Lucy yelled at Mia. Miss. A told Mia to “go and sit in the corner”, effectively employing punishments that might appear better suited to naughty toddlers than to teenagers. Furthermore, Miss. A took it upon herself to tell Mia to “act more mature” and to seek help from an adult next time there is a conflict, demonstrating an adult-centred approach to conflict and behaviour management that may not be reflective of the strategies the Girls in Vans would use to resolve their conflict away from the classroom. This observation and analysis is not to judge the teacher, nor her actions, rather it is to highlight how teacher perceptions of student conflict amongst girls (and boys) are often viewed through an adult lens, with adult notions of what conflict should and should not look like (Longaretti & Wilson, 2006). This adult-centred approach is not unique to teachers and parents, it is also something that
I have struggled with in my role as a researcher and is reflected in the commentary at the beginning of this snapshot.

**Snapshots: November 19**

There has been six days between the November 13 snapshot and the following snapshot observed on November 19. Following on from November 13, the below snapshot follows the actions and behaviours of Mia and Lucy as they continue to navigate teacher authority and the challenges this presents for them.

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**Period 1 & 2**

Lucy has caught my eye this morning. She arrives late to class and did not get a late pass. When the teacher asks her to come and explain, Lucy ignores her and walks off with Mia, Grace and Addi. After the roll is taken, the class is directed to head over to the library.

Once everyone arrived at the library and starts their task, the teacher heads over to talk to Lucy. I cannot hear a lot of what’s said, but it appears to be the teacher telling Lucy to go to the office and get a late pass. Lucy refuses to get a late pass and demonstrates this by sitting on the floor and saying “… no, I won’t go”. After the teacher continues to tell Lucy to go, and then threatens her with a week of after-school detentions, Lucy finally gets up and leaves with Mia tagging along.

To me, it feels like Lucy and Mia are gone for a long time; long enough for me to wonder if they have skipped class. The two girls eventually return to class after the bell for period two has rung. Lucy hands the teacher her late pass.

What ensues next is a verbal exchange between the teacher, Lucy and Mia about leaving the class without permission and how disappointed she is in their behaviour. The teacher tells them...
they will be “written up” for their behaviour. The teacher writes up the ‘pinkie’ (pink slips are detention slips written by teachers), then goes and helps some other students.

After a little time has passed, I watch Mia walk over towards the teacher’s desk and flip open the teacher’s diary. Mia finds the ‘pinkie’ and quickly takes it, closes the diary and walks back towards Lucy. Mia gives the slip to Lucy who hides it in the middle of one of her school books.

Ten minutes go by until the teacher heads back to her desk where she notices the ‘pinkie’ is missing.

_Whoever took the slip needs to return it immediately or another two will be written up!_

For a moment, no one moves … Suddenly, Mia stands up and returns the slip. Mia says to the teacher that she had “borrowed the slip” not “stolen it”. The bell for recess rings and everyone starts to leave. As I do not know the teacher very well, I do not stay to see the outcome for Mia.

_Kim:_

The sneaky little buggers! I would never have the guts to do what Mia has just done by taking the detention slips. That is a bold move and one that I have a certain amount of admiration for. Not sure how I would have handled that situation, but full credit to the teacher who was put in a very unusual position by the two girls.

The above snapshot for Lucy and Mia shows a side of the girl’s friendship that we have not previously been privy to, that being, peer solidarity and support when confronted by teacher authority.

For the students of North-West campus, one of the fundamental requirements for any student arriving late to school is to receive a last pass from the school office. This practice ensures that the school has an accurate record of student attendance to comply with the legal requirements as set out by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (2018). As observed in the above snapshot, the teacher told Lucy that she needed to go and get a late pass from the office, but Lucy
refused by sitting on the floor and stating, “No, I won’t go!” It is only when the teacher threatened Lucy with a week of after school detentions that Lucy got up and presumably went to the front office. As stated at the beginning of the observation, I noticed Lucy when she arrived, which meant that I was more aware of her actions throughout the class because I was specifically observing her. Therefore, the length of time that Lucy and Mia were absent from the class was something that I took notice of, and presumably the teacher did too, because when the two girls finally returned after the bell had rung for the beginning of period two, both girls were made aware that they would be “written up” for their behaviour.

“Writing up” for North-West Campus students means that the teacher will fill in a pink form (hence being called a ‘pinkie’) with details of the student’s behaviour and the consequence given, which is generally a detention. These slips are then given to the school office, who passes them on to the appropriate senior staff member where they are reviewed and documented on the student’s file. In my experience with the students of 8R, the use of pinkies to discipline students is absolute; a teacher will write up the incident, outline the punishment and submit it to the office. From my observations, the students do not see what is written about them and they are not given an opportunity to discuss the penalty imposed. Research in the area of classroom discipline suggests that teachers’ use of punishments, such as detentions, group punishment when only a few students are misbehaving, and humiliation and yelling, appear to be of limited usefulness in promoting responsible student behaviour (Lewis, Romi, Latz, & Qui, 2008; Pierkarski, 2000). Lewis et al. (2008) suggest that when teachers increase the severity of the punishment when they are ignored, or resisted by students, these actions can increase student misbehaviour and result in higher levels of negative student attitudes towards learning. In the above snapshot, we can observe Mia escalating the conflict between the two girls and the teacher by removing the pinky from the teacher’s diary and hiding them with Lucy, resulting in the teacher threatening to “write up two more [pinkies]!”

While Mia ended up handing back the pinkies to the teacher, we can observe that her actions, while ineffective in changing the girls punishment, nevertheless highlight the solidarity between
Lucy and Mia, in the same way that we have observed this cohesion and solidarity between Grace and Addi in previous snapshots (e.g. October 22 and October 29).

**Snapshots: November 26**

It has been seven days since I last saw the class of 8R, due to end of year exams. This day marked the first individual interviews with the students of 8R and I was anxious to hear what they had to say.

**Interviews**

I arrive a bit later than normal to school. As I am making my way to the staffroom, Addi sees me coming down the hallway and stops me. She tells me that she and Grace have had another fight on Friday. Addi appears upset. I offer her the option to come and have an interview with me instead of going to class. She agrees quickly. I ensure that Addi tells her teacher where she will be (all staff had been informed students would be participating in interviews this week) and off we go to the room which has been set aside for me.

The interview goes well until one of the questions I am asking Addi causes her to get upset. She starts to cry and I repeatedly ask if she would like to stop. She tells me, “No ... I’m okay,” so we continue.

After Addi’s interview I remind her that if she is upset about anything we talked about she can go and see the student counsellor or contact Lifeline.
Kim:

“Remember, if you’re upset about anything we talked about in the interview you can go and see the student counsellor or call Lifeline.”

This comment makes me feel like a dick! It is almost like I do not care enough; like it is easy for me to let Addi walk away when I know that she is upset! It is actually really hard to tell her to ‘talk to someone else’. I want to be the person that she talks to about this, but I am not sure that I can or that it would be the ‘right’ thing to do.

Bearing witness to the lives of these young people has taken a toll on me. According to my HREC ethics application to the University, I did the right thing by telling Addi that she can go and see the ‘student counsellor or contact Lifeline’. The problem is that these processes are often inadequate and do not always adequately address the issues that researching with people can arise. Ruth Behar (1995) in her book *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart*, articulates this dilemma faced by those who engage in the act of ‘witnessing’. She writes:

> In the midst of a massacre, in the face of torture, in the eye of the hurricane, in the aftermath of an earthquake, or even, say, when horror looms apparently more gently in memories that won’t recede and so come pouring forth in the late-night quiet of a kitchen, as a storyteller opens her heart to a story listener, recounting hurts that cut deep and raw into the gullies of the self, do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? Are there limits – of respect, piety, pathos – that should not be crossed, even to leave a record? But if you can’t stop the horror, shouldn’t you at least document it? (Behar, 1995, p. 2)

**Conclusion**

The snapshots presented in this chapter showed how the Girls in Vans engaged in conflict with each other, their peers and their schoolteachers. Each snapshot described moments of rupture that are either instigated by the Girls in Vans, or happen against them by others. Each rupture demonstrated particular tactics that the Girls in Vans used independently or collectively when
conflict occurred. The use of these tactics suggest particular ways of ‘doing’ conflict amongst this group of girls that is specific to them and their relationship, in this time and place. The snapshots also highlighted how broader hegemonic understandings and behaviours, specifically by the boys in 8R and some of the teachers, contributed to the creation of a set of circumstances for the Girls in Vans where acts of horizontal violence could manifest and play out. The following chapter will explore these issues in more detail and discuss how horizontal violence can contribute to broader understandings of school-based conflict amongst young women who live in regional communities.
Chapter Eight: Horizontal violence and the ‘doing’ of conflict

This discussion is concerned with unpacking the role of hegemony within Rural Valley High School, North-West Campus, and demonstrates how Freire’s (2005) concept of horizontal violence can better inform understandings of female-based conflict. I reflect on how agentic resistance to hegemony is mobilised and played out for the girls of 8R and, from this, I consider how horizontal violence can inform understandings of conflict, violence and aggression within school communities. This discussion concludes with a consideration of the limitations of this study and how the notion of horizontal violence could be extended and used in future research about school-based conflict.

Using the concept of horizontal violence as a theoretical lens to view the issue of female-based conflict in secondary schools is rarely evident in the education literature. Based on the theorising of horizontal violence within the nursing literature (Duffy, 1995; King-Jones, 2011; Mooney & Nolan, 2005), the application of this concept to this study, is an important contribution to the academic literature that seeks to understand conflict, violence, and aggression by women and girls. Use of this theoretical lens, in conjunction with a critical ethnographic method, has illuminated entrenched hegemonic practices within the class of 8R. These practices contribute to everyday forms of gender-based victimisation that creates a set of circumstances where acts of horizontal violence can manifest as conflict. Before looking specifically at the nature of hegemony and horizontal violence, it is important to summarise how the girls of 8R enact conflict within their friendships with respect to the research question: How do young women in regional locations negotiate their friendships when conflict arises?

So, how do girls negotiate conflict?

The girls in this research project negotiated conflict through a range of group-specific behaviours and practices as outlined earlier in the thesis. According to Deutsch (1973) the nature of conflict tends to fall within one of two categories: constructive or destructive conflict. Each of these forms of conflict have a set of characteristics that help identify the nature of a conflict. From the data,
both groups of girls can be seen to engage in forms of destructive conflict through their use of tactics that they know are hurtful and can be used to manipulate other girls. These tactics include name-calling (as seen on pp. 125; 134; 179, 182; 186), spreading rumours about each other (pp. 131-132; 156), and increased sensitivity to perceptions of hostility and deception (pp. 125; 127; 128; 161; 166; 187). For both groups of girls these tactics are utilised to varying degrees. These tactics differ according to the person using those behaviours, who it is directed towards, and where it occurs, highlighting the spatial and temporal nature of conflict. These kinds of behaviours indicate that doing conflict within the class of 8R is shaped by a perception of intent to harm, manipulate, or deceive, as explicitly shown in the behaviours presented in Chapters Six and Seven.

When conflict is viewed through the lens of horizontal violence, however, girls’ conflict may be an outlet of frustration that is underpinned by broader hegemonic understandings and behaviours about what it is to be female within this school, and within this community. This research is founded on a notion that within Australian society, young women and girls are a disadvantaged and oppressed group within an education system that reinforces traditional gendered practices. Using horizontal violence as a theoretical lens enables the researcher to delve beyond surface appearances within the school to attempt to see the manner in which such hegemonic practices reflect entrenched male-female power inequities.

**Hegemonic dissonance within schools**

Schools have long been considered to be one of the primary places within a young person’s life, after their family, where they learn about what it means to be a member of society. This learning includes the socialisation of a young person to the dominant norms, values and beliefs that underpin that culture (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Peguero & Bracy, 2015; Wang & Dishion, 2012). Almost half a century ago, Freire (1972), and Gramsci (1971), argued that schools did more than just socialise young people into becoming members of society, rather, they argued, educational institutions contributed to the reproduction of forms of oppression and domination through a
process of ideological hegemony (Freire, 1972; Gramsci, 1971). In particular, this process was executed through privileging particular ways of being and living that supported continued forms of domination over others (Freire, 1972; Gramsci, 1971). Within this study, these ideological forms of hegemony are identified within the North-West Campus of Rural Valley High School, specifically, in the way in which female-based conflict was viewed broadly within the school, and therefore managed by the teachers.

One of the foremost hegemonic practices, which was observed to be directed towards the girls of 8R, was the manner in which emotional expression by individual girls was dealt with by the teachers during class time, and by the school more broadly. In particular, emotional outbursts by the girls were managed by them either being removed from the classroom or being ‘written up’ for their perceived ‘poor’ behaviour. One of these incidents was directed at Grace on October 22 (pp. 166-167), when she was instructed to move away from Addi for being ‘distracting’ and when she responded emotionally (“this is bullshit”), her outburst was used as a justification for giving her a ‘pinkie’ after class. Another example from Chapter Seven is when Addi recalls her mother coming up to the school and “blasting Ms. A for allowing Grace to hurt her” (pp. 158-159), resulting in clear directions being given by the school leader to other staff to “keep an eye on both girls” (p. 156). When this situation did escalate, (i.e., when Sharon threatened to punch Addi), teachers imposed their chosen ‘solution’ by insisting that the girls stay away from each other.

These examples highlight how the teachers are responding to situations involving the Girls in Vans in ways that keep the emotion and behaviour of the girls controlled, confined, and under close supervision. This can also be seen in Chapter Six where some of the Girls in T-Bars identified how their conflicts are trivialised by teachers. In this place, these techniques are used as a way to reinforce a form of social control over girls’ behaviour. In particular, the teachers appeared to penalise forms of emotional expression that are associated with non-feminine traits, such as anger, aggression and frustration. This adult surveillance, and control over girls’ actions and behaviours, continues to support a social hierarchy within the school that minimises girls’ from claiming their reactions, personal conduct and agentic capacity. As discussed in Chapter
Seven (pp. 161-162), these controlling, oppressive, and restrictive actions by teachers mirror forms of hegemonic social control over populations of people considered vulnerable, such as the elderly, children, and women (Schwenzer, 2008). These groups have been positioned as vulnerable due to a social and cultural perception that they lack an ability to make sound decisions to protect themselves from harm (Schwenzer, 2008). In Chapter Five (p. 106), Miss. M mentioned that a dominant stereotype which surrounded the school is that “nothing is under control” and that the students are “bad” and “run wild”. In light of this perception, I argue that these stereotypes directly influenced the types of behaviour management strategies that teachers used towards the girls within this study due to the perception that girls’ are a vulnerable group.

These hegemonic practices are also present for the Girls in T-Bars. The acts of surveillance and intervention for this group of girls, however, was observed to come from the boys’ in 8R, rather than the teachers. For the Girls in T-Bars, the boys of 8R directed a pattern of masculinity towards the girls that appeared agentic and action-oriented. For example, some of the boys were observed to reveal information to particular girls in this friendship group about what others had said or done behind their back (pp. 139-140), thus inserting themselves in the girls’ conflict (pp. 141-142). Furthermore, the boys contributed to the spread of rumours about particular members of the Girls in T-Bars (pp. 138-140). These techniques used by the boys in and around the Girls in T-Bars is symptomatic of existing regimes of practice (Martino, 1999).

These regimes of practice, however, extend beyond the Girls in T-Bars and were observed to have a significant impact on the nature of horizontal violence for the Girls in Vans. For example, throughout Chapter Seven, there are many examples of comments made by various boys, directed at the Girls in Vans which were subtle, brutal in their deliberateness, and appeared to go unnoticed by the teachers. These comments never appeared to be made in a moment of anger, rather they seemed to occur in response to individual members of the Girls in Vans flexing their agency by being assertive, angry, aggressive, and loud towards a teacher. The nature of these comments included observations about the young women’s body and female functions - “Caveman’s rags is on” (p. 180), their physical appearance - “Your mum should have drowned
you when you were born, you filthy Ranga” (p. 188), and would often target their social standing within the class - “Nobody wants you here!” (p. 191). These comments by individual boys were observed to quickly subdue the behaviour of one of the girls by shutting down the original agentic moment that had triggered the boy’s reaction in the first place. The personal nature of these comments focused on reducing a member of the Girls in Vans back to something less than ‘human’ (pp. 196-197), which is comparable to Freire’s (2005) contention that people become “dehumanised” when others create the conditions upon which acts of injustice take place against them (p. 47). In these examples, individual boys in 8R deliberately, yet subtly, created a set of conditions around the Girls in Vans where each girl is rendered powerless due to the observation, and surveillance, undertaken by the collective boys in this class.

Reflecting back on the second research question for this study, *How do dominant gendered practices impact on young women’s negotiation of conflict within their friendships?*, in the space and place bounded by this ethnographic study, the dominant practices drawn upon by the boys and teachers appear to be constructed through a set of social and cultural practices that reject girls’ agency and their ability to manage and resolve conflict without intervention. These practices reinforce, in subtle and nuanced ways, the lack of power and authority these girls have within the school. The application of the concept of horizontal violence to these data, illuminates a set of hegemonic practices that enable the policing of girls’ behaviour within the school environment, thus making visible the manner in which these practices impact on the girls’ conflict.

**Agentic moments of resistance within conflict**

From the above discussion, it would be easy to suggest that school is a challenging place to be female. However, one of the overarching aims of this study was to reframe the manner in which the lives of girls are construed, especially the nature of their conflict as a form of negotiation rather than as an act of meanness, or bullying. The work of Renold and Ringrose (2008), as well as Harris and Shield-Dobson (2015), was especially helpful in providing an avenue to consider the small agentic moments within girls’ everyday lives as a way of moving beyond the agent/victim
dichotomy. The following discussion focuses on how the everyday moments observed, and discussed, with the girls of 8R can enable a new way of interrogating the taken-for-granted assumptions that circulated within this school about conflict being a negative behaviour that needed to be suppressed or managed.

Throughout Chapters Six and Seven, I drew attention to moments of ruptures within the two friendship groups. The ruptures identified were sometimes very large and obvious, or subtle and concealed. One of the bigger ruptures, for example, occurred when Grace demanded to be told why she was being removed from the class on October 24 – “Tell me what I’ve done wrong? This is fucked” (pp. 176-177). Another example can be seen when Ava discussed the need to make the Girls in T-Bars’ conflict unavailable for the whole school to see and comment on, because of the labels that had become attached to similar behaviour (p. 125). Sometimes the ruptures were miniscule and barely perceptible, such as when Lucy arrived at school having just been assaulted by her brother. At this point she was physically sheltered from my view, and from the teacher’s view, by the rest of the Girls in Vans (pp. 196-197). Another significant, but imperceptible rupture occurred during the boys’ group interview when Nathan demeaned Livvy by attributing her relationships with other boys as a reason to consider her sexually diseased and unclean - Nathan: You’d get STD's ... (pp. 139-140). When this comment was brought to his attention, it caused a rupture to the boys’ hegemonic display of sexualising and ridiculing Livvy on the basis of rumour and innuendo. These ruptures highlight the importance of the friendship work that all of the girls were negotiating, either collectively, or as individuals (Crudda & Haddock, 2005). While these ruptures occurred during tense and, what could be considered, challenging moments, they nevertheless highlight the positive strategies the girls used in resisting hegemonic practices directed towards them on a day-to-day basis at school.

For the Girls in T-Bars, positive strategies that were observed as a result of these ruptures, included the capacity to confront and reflect on personal issues regarding what it means to ‘trust’ and ‘respect’ another person, as well as what it means to be a good friend. All of these positive
outcomes can be seen throughout Chapter Six, however, explicit examples which show the girls’ working through issues of trust in their relationships with each other are described on pages 144 to 146. On the particular pages, all of the Girls in T-Bars highlighted how trust and open communication were integral components of their friendships and why respect for each other, and for working towards a solution to their conflict, was important to them. We see each of the girls’ reflecting on the behaviours they adopted during their conflict in order to construct new understandings of themselves and to actively learn from their experiences. This form of reflection is likely to lead them to modifying their future actions and behaviours in situations involving friendship-based conflicts. The danger here, however, is that without some form of intervention or exposure to strategies that could help foster growth and development, these girls could end up reproducing the same kind of behaviours that continue to cause harm to themselves and their friends into adulthood. Interventions, such as counselling, could be beneficial in supporting future personal growth through guided reflection on, and around, the nature and practice of managing and responding to conflict.

For the Girls in Vans, the nature of their ruptures were observed to be carried out in a more public and aggressive way, and often occurred in opposition to teachers. These ruptures, however, displayed a level of solidarity and support towards each other when confronted by hegemonic practices within the classroom. For example, when the teacher told Grace to stay behind after class, Addi, Sharon and Lucy all showed up to support her (pp. 166-168). In another example Grace was asked to read aloud in class and she refused. In this moment, Addi spoke up in defence of Grace and her actions (pp. 184-185). This solidarity can also be seen when Grace and Sharon told me about the nasty text message Sharon had received the night before at home (p. 188), and when Mia takes the ‘pinkie’ from the teacher because both she and Lucy had been ‘written up’ for their earlier behaviour (pp. 202-203). All of these examples show everyday moments of group solidarity in opposition to a perception of unjust treatment by the teachers and the school system. These support systems are an integral component of the friendship for the Girls in Vans and show
a sophisticated understanding of each other’s lives and how simple gestures and practices can enhance a sense of belonging, solidarity, and cohesion.

To borrow from Crudda and Haddock (2005, p. 169), the “hidden curriculum of friendship work” is evident in the analysis of the data within this study. This ‘friendship work’ not only illuminated the kinds of dominant gendered practices that impacted on the girls’ of 8R, but it also highlighted the strategies and nuanced ways in which the girl’s sometimes resisted the hegemonic practices which positioned them as powerless and in need of ‘saving’. These strategies show a high level of personal and group awareness of the social and cultural activities and practices that are often used to oppress them. The use of critical ethnography, and horizontal violence, as theoretical concepts have enabled these resistant behaviours to become apparent and reframed as purposeful and agentic ruptures to highlight how girls can “deterritorialize normative discourses of femininity” (Renold & Ringrose, 2008, p. 319) as they engage in conflict.

As can be seen from this discussion, the theoretical framing of horizontal violence has enabled girls’ conflict to be reconceptualised away from it being a form of deficit individual behaviour. Instead, the nature of female-conflict can be considered as an outlet of frustration for girls in response to the systemic practices within schools that continue to reinscribe forms of hegemony against girls. Furthermore, horizontal violence has illuminated the many subtle and unrecognised strategies that girls employ in order to resist these forms of hegemony.

**Working through the limitations**

Despite the application of horizontal violence and its contribution to the theorising of conflict for young women within schools, it is important to acknowledge that this research has some limitations that restrict its application beyond this thesis.

Firstly, this study involved the examination of one group of students, from one high school, in one regional Australian community. Regional populations have unique social, cultural and historic beliefs and practices about conflict, women, and schooling, which tend to be unique to that place.
It would be advantageous to explore the nature of young women’s conflict in other regional and remote communities, around different parts of Australia, to see how conflict is enacted.

Secondly, the application of horizontal violence as a theoretical lens in which to view school-based conflict, has not been used before (to my knowledge) within educational research. Due to the lack of other educational studies, there were limited references that I could draw upon, and therefore, extend the theorising of horizontal violence within school environments. This theoretical lens has the scope for application to other research projects concerned with understanding the nature of female conflict, or any form of conflict within schools.

As the interviews were conducted at the end of the fieldwork period and following my classroom observations, I had established a rapport with most of the student and teacher research participants and there was a general expression of willingness by them to participate. This, however, could have implications for the manner in which the participants answered questions, especially because my role as ‘researcher’ was always mentioned and reinforced over the duration of the fieldwork. It is possible that the participants’ answers were a reflection of what they thought I wanted to hear. This limitation could also be extended to include a change in their behaviour during the fieldwork, because they were all aware of being under observation. Despite this, there were many benefits for having spent a significant period of time within the classroom prior to conducting formal interviews. I was able to get to know the students and teachers on a personal level and this prior history helped provide an environment of trust where the participants seemed open to expressing their thoughts and opinions about their conflicts.

Another limitation is that this study has not looked at other combinations of friendships beyond female friendships. It would be interesting to look at friendships in other groups, such as between male students, and students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTIQ) and their experiences of conflict. Moving beyond one gender-based friendship group would assist in the reformation of conflict as more than individual traits and behaviours and could contribute to informing programs and resources that better equip
schools to work with all students in understanding how conflict can be influenced and, therefore, how it could be better resolved.

One of the final limitations that influenced this study was the overall length of time that it took from beginning to end. Due to a variety of personal and professional circumstances, this thesis has taken a period of almost eight years to complete. The length of this project has had implications for staying connected to the community of Rural Valley and the North-West Campus of RVHS, including my ability to follow up with the student and teacher participants. In an ideal world, this thesis would have been completed in a shorter timeframe and the participants would have been more actively involved. This, however, did not occur, and therefore the interpretations made about the data was not as dialogical as had been anticipated, or as I would have preferred.

Despite these limitations, this study has made a significant contribution to theorising female-based conflict within regional Australia, and within secondary schools. The following discussion focuses on how this research could be extended further.

**Moving forward: Applications for further research**

This study has made a significant contribution towards understanding how dominant gendered practices are complicit within the manifestation of girls' school-based conflict and how they are negotiated within the classroom. Further research, however, is required to investigate other female-friendship groups within other schools, other communities, and from different socio-economic backgrounds would further illuminate this issue. By studying other female-friendship groups, it is likely that we would begin to see the range of gendered practices and beliefs that impact on particular communities, and the schools which support them. This extension would enable a better understanding of the nature of female-based conflict that is unique to regional and rural communities.

Furthermore, conducting additional research into this topic, in comparable communities to Rural Valley, would contribute to the development of school resources and teaching supports that would
help both students and teachers be able to engage in a critical dialogue about gender roles, gender-based beliefs, and how conflict can have positive benefits. In doing so, schools would be better placed to move beyond reactive practices that suppress and penalise young women’s acts of agency and consider longer-term strategies that support opportunities for critical reflection and learning about managing friendships and negotiating relationships in healthy and supportive ways. These strategies could contribute to enhancing the nature of people’s friendships and impact on social and cultural change within individual schools.

As mentioned above, it would also be advantageous to extend the theorising of horizontal violence to more diverse friendship groups, including but not limited to, young men, LGBTIQ students, mixed-gender friendships, and other combinations of students. This would enable a broader understanding of the nature of hegemony, and how it plays out in particular ways and spaces, for particular groups of young people. This application would also enable other oppressed groups to have their voices and stories heard in spaces where they have long been silent. However, it would be important to utilise the methodological approach of critical ethnography in these explorations due to the breadth and depth that such methods can provide around understandings of conflict and friendship.

**In summary …**

This chapter has focused on addressing the two research questions that have underpinned this project. The first research question was concerned with exploring how young women from a regional community negotiated their friendship when conflict arise. It has been shown that the girls of 8R utilise group-specific behaviours and practices similar to those seen in previous research around interpersonal and relational aggression. These behaviours and practices have been extensively analysed within Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis.

The major discussion points in this chapter, however, focused on considering how dominant gendered practices impact on young women’s negotiation of conflict. Using horizontal violence to
explore this question, illuminated the hegemonic practices and beliefs that impacted on creating a set of conditions where conflict could manifest and play out in particular ways. This discussion focused on how the behaviour and management of girls’ conflict intrinsically connects to a set of social and cultural beliefs that deny girls’ agency and authority within the school environment. Despite these practices, the small agentic ruptures that occurred in everyday moments showed how the girls of 8R pushed back against hegemonic actions. From this, I argue that despite the role that broader gendered beliefs play in reinscribing dominant practices on girls, the girls themselves do not passively accept these behaviours, nor see them as immovable or insurmountable. Rather, these girls are active in resisting acts of domination against them by structuring opportunities within their friendships, where moments of critical reflection, and support building, can take place in solidarity.
Conclusion

The genesis of this thesis arose from my encounter with a young woman who shared a story about her life as a secondary school student in a regional Australian school. It seems fitting then that this thesis concludes with a story too.

Kim:

Six years ago I entered a secondary school in a community I was unfamiliar with. I had hoped to observe some interesting moments between young people, knowing that the success of my study depended upon that. Over the next nine weeks, however, I came to know, and care about, the young people of 8R, their friends, their teachers, and their hopes and dreams for their future. I laughed with them, I cried with them, and I came to care about every single one of them.

My last day of fieldwork was emotional for me. I did not know if I would see them all again, but I hoped that I would. That day I received a homemade card from the class of 8R that I have looked at every day since. This card became the motivation to keep writing and to not give up on sharing the stories entrusted to me because I made a promise that I would ‘write a book about them’. Here is that book.

The stories within this thesis highlight the important role that conflict plays between friends, either as a catalyst for reflection, personal growth and development, or as the trigger to end a relationship. We have seen throughout this thesis that conflict creates heightened emotions for the young people involved, but also for the adults around them. This emotional toll, however, is further exacerbated by the subtle, private and often unacknowledged, beliefs about the ways women and girls should or should not act. These beliefs play out in a multitude of ways through the everyday actions and behaviours that we, either individually, or as a society engage in.

The stories of these young women illuminate a period of time in their lives where their friendships are important to them. The challenge of understanding just how important friendships are to young people requires a researcher to disregard adult-centric notions of adolescence and be open to seeing the world through the eyes of the young people themselves.
The young women who participated in this study illuminated for me the many ways that their friendships help sustain them in a world where it is challenging to be female, both in and out of school. Further critical ethnographic research to explore the everyday moments, and experiences which impact on young people, and also illuminate systems of oppression and inequalities within our society that are complicit in ongoing gender inequality, is needed. Without such research, our education system is likely to continue to reinscribe values and beliefs that privilege one group of people over another.

This thesis is personal. Every decision I made involved a choice to advocate for a better understanding of the lives of young women from regional Australia as they negotiated their friendships in schools. Their voices, stories and experiences are compelling, powerful, and important. This experience will continue to motivate me to keep fighting for research that is unapologetically focused on girls’ education, and girls’ lives within regional communities.
References


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27 *** Has been used to ensure anonymity of the community where this research took place.


Evans, C. (1997). Dreams that only money can buy … or, the shy tribe in flight from discourse. *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture, 1*(2), 169-188.


Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1996). Writing the “wrongs” of fieldwork: Confronting our own research/writing dilemmas in urban ethnographies. *Qualitative Inquiry, 2*(3), 251-274.


28 *** Has been used to ensure anonymity of the community where this research took place.


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29 *** Has been used to ensure the anonymity of the community where this research took place.


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30 *** Has been used to ensure the anonymity of the community where this research took place.


## Appendix List

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval (HREC)

Approval
Human Research Ethics Committee

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<tr>
<th>Principal Researcher:</th>
<th>John Smyth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other/Student Researcher/s:</td>
<td>Kimberley Hucker</td>
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<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls</td>
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<tr>
<td>For the period:</td>
<td>25/5/2012 to 31/12/2016</td>
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Please quote the Project No. in all correspondence regarding this application.

REPORTS TO HREC:

An annual report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
25 May 2013
25 May 2014
25 May 2015

A final report for this project must be submitted to the Ethics Officer on:
31 January 2016

Ethics Officer
25 May 2012

Please see attached ‘Conditions of Approval’.
CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

1. The project must be conducted in accordance with the approved application, including any conditions and amendments that have been approved. You must comply with all of the conditions imposed by the HREC, and any subsequent conditions that the HREC may require.

2. You must report immediately anything which might affect ethical acceptance of your project, including:
   - Adverse effects on participants;
   - Significant unforeseen events;
   - Other matters that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

3. Where approval has been given subject to the submission of copies of documents such as letters of support or approvals from third parties, these must be provided to the Ethics Office before the research may commence at each relevant location.

4. Proposed changes or amendments to the research must be applied for, using a ‘Request for Amendments’ form, and approved by the HREC before these may be implemented.

5. If an extension is required beyond the approved end date of the project, a ‘Request for Extension’ should be submitted, allowing sufficient time for its consideration by the committee. Extensions cannot be granted retrospectively.

6. If changes are to be made to the project’s personnel, a ‘Changes to Personnel’ form should be submitted for approval.

7. An ‘Annual Report’ must be provided by the due date specified each year for the project to have continuing approval.

8. A ‘Final Report’ must be provided at the conclusion of the project.

9. If, for any reason, the project does not proceed or is discontinued, you must advise the committee in writing, using a ‘Final Report’ form.

10. You must advise the HREC immediately, in writing, if any complaint is made about the conduct of the project.

11. You must notify the Ethics Office of any changes in contact details including address, phone number and email address.

12. The HREC may conduct random audits and/or require additional reports concerning the research project.

Failure to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and with the conditions of approval will result in suspension or withdrawal of approval.
Appendix B: Ethics Final report (HREC)

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Please note: For HDR candidates, this Ethics annual report is a separate requirement, in addition to your HDR Candidature annual report, which is submitted mid-year to research.degrees@federation.edu.au

1) Please indicate the current status of the project:

| 1a) Yet to start | ☐ |
| 1b) Continuing   | ☐ |
| 1c) Data collection completed | ☒ |
| 1d) Abandoned /Withdrawn | ☐ |

| 1e) If the approval was subject to certain conditions, have these conditions been met? (If not, please give details in the comments box below) | ☒ Yes | ☐ No |

Comments:

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<th>None</th>
</tr>
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</table>

| 1g) Have ethical problems been encountered in any of the following areas: | |
| Study Design | ☐ Yes | ☒ No |
| Recruitment of Subjects | ☐ Yes | ☒ No |

CRICOS Provider No: 00103D  VI 2018
### Annual/Final Project Report

**Finance**

Facilities, Equipment

(If yes, please give details in the comments box below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Comments:

---

2a) Have amendments been made to the originally approved project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2b) If yes, was HREC approval granted for these changes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Provide detail:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Application for Amendment to an Existing Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Change of Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Extension Request</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>If you have made changes, but not had HREC approval, provide detail as to why this has not yet occurred:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2c) Do you need to submit any amendments now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Provide detail:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Change of Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Extension Request</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* NB: If 'Yes', download & submit the appropriate request to the HREC for approval:

Please note: Extensions will not be granted retrospectively. Apply well prior to the project end date, to ensure continuity of HRE approval.

---

3a) Please indicate where you are storing the data collected during the course of this project: (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.2.2, 2.5 – 2.7)

On an external hardrive stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of Kimberly Pappaluca, as well as saved on Federation University’s OneDrive system which is only accessible with a username and password.

3b) Final Reports: Advise when & how stored data will be destroyed (Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research Ch 2.1.1)

Data will be permanently deleted from the One Drive system, as well as from the external hardrive.
4) Have there been any events that might have had an adverse effect on the research participants OR unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project?

☑ No ☐ Yes * NB: If 'yes', please provide details in the comments box below:

Comments:

5a) Please provide a short summary of results of the project so far (no attachments please):

The data for this project indicated that conflict for the participants was intimately connected to their interpersonal relationships with their friends. Each friendship group had a particular way of 'doing' conflict which included the use of tactics that were mirrored by each other, but not necessarily by the wider peer group. Each group of girls had particular values and beliefs about what each conflict was aiming to achieve, which were often at odds with how teachers perceived female-based conflict. The data also highlighted the influence of the male participants, and their ways of 'doing' hegemonic masculinity within this community to be of concern. In particular, the manner in which the boys dehumanised particular behaviours of one group of girls and the ongoing observable effect this had on their welfare and on their educational engagement. In short, the data highlights that school-based conflict for female students is a complex set of behaviours that is influenced by a wide variety of contextual factors.

5b) Final Reports: Provide details about how the aims of the project, as stated in the application for approval, were achieved (or not achieved).

(Australian code for the Responsible conduct of Research 4.4.1)

The aims of the research project, as stated on the application for approval, sought to explore the impact of student conflict on girls in the areas of health and wellbeing, educational engagement, and their perception of life chances and aspirations. This research gathered the perceptions and experiences of the young people from a regional high school about these issues. Data gathered from observations and interviews enabled the research aims to be explored and analysed within the framework of critical theory and critical ethnography.

6) Publications: Provide details of research dissemination outcomes for the previous year resulting from this project; eg: Community seminars; Conference attendance; Government reports and/or research publications

None
7) The HREC welcomes any feedback on:
   - Difficulties experienced with carrying out the research project; or
   - Appropriate suggestions which might lead to improvements in ethical clearance and monitoring of research.

8) Signatures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Researcher:</td>
<td>Jenene Burke</td>
<td>20/07/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print name: Dr. Jenene Burke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Student Researchers:</td>
<td>Pappaluca</td>
<td>20/7/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print name: Kimberly Hucker-Pappaluca</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print name:</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Submit to the Ethics Officer, Mt Helen campus, by the due date: research.ethics@federation.edu.au
Appendix C: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) Ethics Approval

Ms Kimberly Hucker
School of Education and Arts
University of Ballarat
PO Box 663
BALLARAT    3353

Dear Ms Hucker

Thank you for your application of 10 April 2012 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled King Hit by Queen Bees: Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in any publications arising from the research.

6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study’s indicative completion date.

7. If DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department’s Research Register.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Kathleen Nolan, Research Officer, Research and Evaluation Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 3244 or by email at nolan.kathleen.j@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Dr Elizabeth Hartnell-Young
Director
Research and Evaluation Branch

16/04/2012
Appendix D: Student Participants Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS)

Plain Language Information Statement for Student Participants

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & ARTS

PROJECT TITLE: Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER: Professor John Smyth

STUDENT RESEARCHERS: Kim Hucker

We would like to invite you to be involved in a research project that will form part of a research project that Kim Hucker is completing as part of her PhD study. The research project will help to find out how girls experience conflict at school and how schools can help those students learn to resolve their differences in a better way.

The research project has been approved by the University of Ballarat Human Research Ethics Committee, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The research will be conducted by a small team from the University of Ballarat consisting of Professor John Smyth as Principal Researcher and Kim Hucker as a student researcher. The researchers both have significant experience in working and researching in schools.

We would like to talk to you about your experience of being a teenager. Your knowledge as a teenager and as a student can help give us a really good understanding about what school is like in helping you and your friends out when you have an argument with each other. We would like to use the information you give us to find better ways in which your school, and other schools, can work with students who have had a falling out with their mates.

The research we are asking you to participate in will be in two parts. The first part will involve Kim being in your class to observe how you and your friends act together. This is not about how well you work at school or whether you are a good or bad student — it’s about Kim being able to see what happens in class between you and your friends. Kim will take notes about what she observes. In order to ensure that no one knows who you are Kim will use different names for you and your class mates.

The second part will involve you being interviewed twice for around 30-50 minutes each. In these interviews we will talk to you about your friends and about where you go for help when you’re having an argument with them. We will also ask you to talk about the role schools and teachers play in helping you and your mates resolve your arguments.

With your permission we will make voice recordings of the interviews that will later be transcribed into a written record and the voice recording will be permanently erased. We will not use your real name to identify you in the written record so that your privacy will be protected. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer during the interview you do not have to answer them.

Your participation in every part of this research project is voluntary. If you do not want to be involved that is your choice and you do not need to explain this decision. If you agree to participate and then wish to withdraw from the research at any time before, during or after the observation and interview process that is also fine. Any unprocessed information that you have provided will be withdrawn from the project. However once the results have been combined it is not possible to withdraw.

Any data we obtain from you will be managed to ensure your privacy and anonymity. Any information you have provided will be kept in a secure place and will only be accessed by the researchers. The written transcripts and our field notes will be stored for five years and then disposed of in an approved, secure way.
Plain Language
Information Statement
for Student Participants

The research interviews will provide important information that will be included in Kim’s PhD report. The research data may also be used for presentations or in articles. While every effort will be taken to present the information in such a way as to ensure your privacy, there are a small number of students participating in this research which may impact on guaranteed privacy. However pseudonyms will be used for your name and for your school and community to ensure as far as possible your privacy.

While I do not anticipate that the research will cause you any distress, should you feel distressed at any stage the interview will stop immediately, and you will be encouraged to contact Kids help Line on 1800 551 800 or the Lifeline Counselling Service on 13 11 14. Alternatively you may also contact your schools student counsellor [insert contact details]

If you have any questions, or would like further information regarding the project titled "Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls", please contact the Principal Researcher, Professor John Smyth of the School of Education and Arts.
PH: (03) 5327 9731
EMAIL: jsmyth@ballarat.edu.au

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the University of Ballarat Ethics Office, Research Services, University of Ballarat, PO Box 663, Mt Helen VIC 3353. Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, Email: ab.ethics@ballarat.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D
Appendix E: Parents Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS)

Plain Language Information Statement for Parent Participants

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & ARTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT TITLE:</th>
<th>Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:</td>
<td>Professor John Smyth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT RESEARCHERS:</td>
<td>Kimberly Hucker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We would like to invite you to be involved in a research project that Kim Hucker is completing as part of her PhD study. The research project will help to find out how girls experience conflict at school and how schools can help those students learn to resolve their differences in a better way.

The research project has been approved by the University of Ballarat Human Research Ethics Committee, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The research will be conducted by a small team from the University of Ballarat consisting of Professor John Smyth as Principal Researcher and Kim Hucker as a student researcher. The researchers both have significant experience in working and researching in schools.

We would like to talk to you about your experience of being a parent of a teenage girl. Your knowledge as a parent can help give us a really good understanding about what school is like for your child when they have had an argument with their friends. We would like to use the information you give us to find better ways in which your child’s school, and other schools, can work with students who have had a falling out with their mates.

The research we are asking you to participate in will involve you being interviewed two times for around 30-60 minutes each. In these interviews we will talk to you about your child and their friendships and about where they go for help when they’re having an argument with their friends. We will also ask you to talk about the role schools and teachers play in helping your child and their friends in resolving their arguments.

With your permission we will make voice recordings of the interviews that will later be transcribed into a written record and the voice recording will be permanently erased. We will not use your real name to identify you in the written record so that your privacy will be protected. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer during the interview you do not have to answer them.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you do not want to be involved that is your choice and you do not need to explain this decision. If you agree to participate and then wish to withdraw from the research at any time before, during or after the observation and interview process that is also fine. Any unprocessed information that you have provided will be withdrawn from the project. However once the results have been combined it is not possible to withdraw.

Any data we obtain from you will be managed to ensure your privacy and anonymity. Any information you have provided will be kept in a secure place and will only be accessed by the researchers. The written transcripts and our field notes will be stored for five years and then disposed of in an approved, secure way.

The research interviews will provide important information that will be included in Kim’s PhD report. The research data may also be used for presentations or in articles. While every effort will be taken to present the information in such a way as to ensure your privacy, given the small number of parents participating in the research this cannot be guaranteed.
Plain Language
Information Statement
for Parent Participants

However pseudonyms will be used for your name, your child's school, and community to ensure as far as possible your privacy and anonymity.

While I do not anticipate that the research will cause you any distress, should you feel distressed at any stage the interview will stop immediately, and you will be encouraged to contact the Lifeline Counselling Service on 13 11 14. Alternatively you may also contact your schools student counsellor [insert contact details].

If you have any questions, or you would like further information regarding the project titled "Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls", please contact the Principal Researcher, Professor John Smyth of the School of Education and Arts.

PH: (03) 5327 9731
EMAIL: j.smyth@ballarat.edu.au

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the University of Ballarat Ethics Officer, Research Services, University of Ballarat, PO Box 663, Mt Helen VIC 3353. Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, Email: ub.ethics@ballarat.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D
Appendix F: Teacher/Principal Plain Language Information Statement (PLIS)

Plain Language Information Statement for Teacher/Principal Participants

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & ARTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT TITLE:</th>
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<td>Professor John Smyth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT RESEARCHERS:</td>
<td>Kimberly Hucker</td>
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</tbody>
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We would like to invite you to be involved in a research project that will form part of a research project that Kimberly Hucker is completing as part of her PhD study. The research project will help to find out how girls experience conflict at school and how schools can help students learn to resolve their differences in a better way.

The research project has been approved by the University of Ballarat Human Research Ethics Committee, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The research will be conducted by a small team from the University of Ballarat comprising Professor John Smyth as Principal Researcher and Kimberly Hucker as a student researcher. Professor Smyth has 30 years experience in supervising higher degree by research students and in conducting nationally funded research projects in the area of education. Kimberly Hucker has experience in working within schools as part of the equity program at UB as well as teaching undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Education program.

We would like to talk to you about your experience of working with teenage girls. Your knowledge as a teacher can help give us insight into how girls engage in conflict with each other and the strategies they use to resolve their conflict. The research aims to explore how student conflict impacts on girls in the following areas:

- Their health and wellbeing
- Their engagement with school
- Their aspirations for the future

By investigating how conflict is manifested within a school environment, this research will provide an opportunity to reflect upon this issue and help raise awareness of other educators about positive ways to redress and reconceptualise the issue of youth conflict.

The research we are asking you to participate in will be in two parts. The first part will involve Kim being in your class with the purpose of observing how the students interact with each other. This is not an appraisal of your role as a teacher or of the manner in which you teach. This is rather an opportunity for Kim to observe the students in their school environment and to see how conflict amongst students develops and resolves itself. Kim will take notes about what she observes. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure that no student or staff member will be identifiable.

The second part will involve no more than two interviews of around 30-60 minutes in duration. In these interviews we will talk to you about the impact which school-based conflict has on girls and the numerous strategies they use to resolve their disagreements. We will also ask you to reflect on the role schools and teachers play in supporting students in the resolution of their issues.

With your permission we will make voice recordings of the interviews that will later be transcribed into a written record and the voice recording will be permanently erased. We will not use your real name to identify your in the written record.
Plain Language Information Statement for Teacher/Principal Participants

so that your privacy will be protected. If there are any questions that you do not want to answer during the interview you do not have to answer them.

Your participation in every part of this research project is voluntary. If you do not want to be involved that is your choice and you do not need to explain this decision. If you agree to participate and then wish to withdraw from the research at any time before, during or after the observation and interview process that is also fine. Any unprocessed information that you have provided will be withdrawn from the project. However once the results have been combined it is not possible to withdraw.

Any data we obtain from you will be managed to ensure your privacy and anonymity. Any information you have provided will be kept in a secure place and will only be accessed by the researchers. The written transcripts and our field notes will be stored for five years and then disposed of in an approved, secure way.

The research interviews will provide important information that will be included in Kimberly Hucker’s PhD thesis. The research data may also be used for presentation at conferences or in journal articles. While every effort will be taken to present the information in such a way as to ensure your anonymity, given the small numbers of teacher participants in the research this cannot be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used for individuals and localities to ensure as far as possible the privacy of individuals and their communities.

While I do not anticipate that the research will cause you any distress, should you feel distressed at any stage the interview will stop immediately, and you will be encouraged to contact the Lifeline Counselling Service on 13 11 14. Alternatively you may also contact your school’s student counsellor [insert contact details].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you have any questions, or you would like further information regarding the project titled “Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls”, please contact the Principal Researcher, Professor John Smyth of the School of Education and Arts:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PH: (03) 5327 9731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMAIL: <a href="mailto:j.smyth@ballarat.edu.au">j.smyth@ballarat.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Should you (i.e. the participant) have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research project, please contact the University of Ballarat Ethics Officer, Research Services, University of Ballarat, PO Box 963, Mt Helen, VIC 3353. Telephone: (03) 5327 9765, Email: ub.ethics@ballarat.edu.au

CRICOS Provider Number 00103D
Appendix G: Principal letter of request to conduct research

To: Principal

Dear Principal,

We are writing to request your permission for some of the students and staff at [redacted] to participate in a research project currently being conducted through the School of Education and Arts at the University of Ballarat. This research project is concerned with understanding important aspects of the relationships girls have with their friends, class mates and school.

This research will be conducted by a small team from the University of Ballarat’s School of Education and Arts lead by myself and including a doctoral student, Kimberly Hucker. I have 30 years experience in supervising higher degree by research students and in conducting nationally funded research projects in the area of education. Kimberly Hucker also has experience in working within schools as part of the equity program at UB as well as teaching undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Education program.

The research project we are requesting to conduct within your school includes an element of observation of students within a Year 8 or Year 9 class room. This part of the research will provide an opportunity to understand the students’ social environment, how they interact on a day-to-day basis, as well as how they interact within the school environment. All students, staff, and school will be non-identifiable in any notes taken.

The observation phase of the research design would be followed up with interviews with some of your staff and students who have volunteered to participate. All requests for access to staff and students will be made through you and appropriate settings and times for any interviews will be negotiated with you or your delegate. You will of course be a key informant in the research process.

Accompanying this letter, for your information is:

- Notification of approval from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Notification of approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Ballarat.
- A copy of the letter from the Department of Education giving me approval to approach school Principals
- A plain language statement for Principals
- Plain language statements and consent forms for teachers, students and parents

If you have any questions regarding any aspect of the project please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor John Smyth,
School of Education and Arts,
University of Ballarat
(03) 5327 9731
j.smyth@ballarat.edu.au
Appendix H: Student Participants Informed Consent Form

Consent Form for student participants

PROJECT TITLE: Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls
RESEARCHERS: Professor John Smyth & Kimberly Hucker

Consent – Please complete the following information:

I, ................................., of _______________________________ hereby consent to participate as a subject in the above research study.

The research program in which I am being asked to participate has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that:

- My participation in this research is voluntary
- My participation will involve Kim being in my class to observe how my friends and I act together
- My participation involves a 30-60 minute interview which will be audio taped
- All information I provide will be treated with the strictest confidence (within the limits of the law) and the data will be stored separately from any listing that includes my name and address
- As there are only a small number of participants involved in this research project, and all participants are involved in some way with this school, my anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as other participants may associated comments made by me in the final report.
- I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from it will not be used.
- Once information has been processed it is unable to be identified, and from this point it is not possible to withdraw consent to participate.
- Results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals

SIGNATURE: ________________________ DATE: ________________________

Consent of Parent/Guardian:

I, ........................................, parent/guardian of .................................. (minor’s name) of .................................................. (address) hereby consent to ........................................ (minor’s name) participating in the above research study.

SIGNATURE: ________________________ DATE: ________________________
Appendix I: Teacher Participants Informed Consent Form

Consent Form for Teacher Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT TITLE:</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCHERS:</td>
<td>Professor John Smyth &amp; Kimberly Hucker</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Consent – Please complete the following information:

I, ........................................................................... of ................................................
herewith consent to participate as a subject in the above research study.

The research program in which I am being asked to participate has been explained fully to me, verbally and in writing, and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that:

- My participation in this research is voluntary
- My participation will involve Kim being in my class to observe how my students interact
- My participation involves a 30-60 minute interview which will be audio taped
- All information I provide will be treated with the strictest confidence (within the limits of the law) and the data will be stored separately from any listing that includes my name and address
- As there are only a small number of participants involved in this research project, and all participants are involved in some way with this school, my anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as other participants may associated comments made by me in the final report.
- I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from it will not be used.
- Once information has been processed it is unable to be identified, and from this point it is not possible to withdraw consent to participate.
- Results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals

SIGNATURE .................................................. DATE ...........................................
Appendix J: Student Participant Interview Questions

Conflict development and resolution amongst teenage girls
Interview questions 15/11/12

Student participants

- What part do fights play in the lives of kids your age?
- Are there any rules that you have to observe when you are having a fight with someone? Do the rules change if you are having a fight with a close friend? How so?
- Who do you discuss your fights with? Why do you go to this person? What advice do they give?

- What are your experiences of seeing people have fights? Can you give me an example where this has happened?
- Are there different types of fights? Can you give me an example of these?
- Is it ever ok to physically fight with someone? Where and when might kids do this? Why here?
- What behaviours would you consider to be fair and unfair in a fight?
- What would the school normally do once people have gotten into a fight? Do you think this is fair? Why/why not?

- Can you tell me about a time when you had a fight with your friends at school?
- What is the biggest challenge for you when you are having a fight with a friend? How do you deal with this?
- How do you and your friends normally resolve your differences during a fight?
- How do the school/teachers react to you and your friends when you are having a fight?

- What do you think you learn from having a fight with someone?
- What is the best thing about a fight?
- What is the hardest thing about having a fight?

- If you could change one thing about the school, and the way they deal with fights, what would it be? Why?
Appendix K: Teacher Participant Interview Questions

Teachers Participants

- Can you outline for me the school’s policy in dealing with students who are having a disagreement?

- What is the standard response by the teaching staff when you know that students are having a disagreement?

- What kind of support do you feel the school should provide to help students resolve their differences?

- In what way do students get positive benefits out of being able to resolve their differences? Are these promoted within the school or by teachers?

- If you could choose one thing that the school could change, or do, to help the students resolve their disagreement, what would it be? Why?