

McGill University, School of Social Work

# Negotiating risk and autonomy: Teenage girls' involvement with child protection in the aftermath of sexual abuse

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Ph. D. in Social Work

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation ventures into the previously uncharted terrain of sexually abused teenage girls' intersecting experiences of the involvement of child protection services (CPS) and female adolescence. Starting with an appreciation of the notions of risk and autonomy as central features of this terrain, this dissertation explores how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Employing a girl-centred interpretive framework and a case-study approach to qualitative research, this dissertation seeks to privilege girls' voices, circumstances and experiences and to unearth in-depth and nuanced accounts of risk and autonomy as they are understood and negotiated within the context of sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS.

Drawing from theoretical insights developed in scholarship attending to CPS legislation, policy and practice and the larger context of Canada's welfare state within which CPS is embedded as well as Girls' Studies scholarship on discursive constructions of contemporary girlhood, this dissertation elaborates on the influence of prevailing risk thinking, neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies on sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS. The central argument is that these perspectives intersect in ways that contribute to the identification of sexually abused teenage girls as simultaneously at-risk – and thus subject to the protective efforts of CPS professionals – and verging on autonomous womanhood – and thus deemed responsible for recognising and managing circumstances of risk in their lives. This dissertation illustrates how these seemingly competing identifications serve to transform sexually abused teenage girls into neoliberal/postfeminist subjects who are regularly scrutinised for their capacities and failures to assure their own safety from a host of risks associated not only with sexual abuse, but also with their own risky behaviours as well as their transition to autonomous womanhood. In this way, sexually abused teenage girls are construed as willing and able to recognise and manage risk and to participate in investing in their future autonomy regardless of their circumstances. Those girls demonstrating unwillingness or inability are viewed as having failed in their responsibilities of self-protection and thus subject to increasingly intensive protective interventions on the part of CPS. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for CPS policy and practice as well as research dealing with sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS.

## Résumé

Cette thèse s'avance sur le terrain encore inexploré de l'intersection des expériences de la participation des services de protection de la jeunesse (DPJ) et l'adolescence féminine d'adolescentes ayant subi des abus sexuels. Il faut tout d'abord comprendre que les notions de risque et d'autonomie font figure centrale dans ce terrain. Cette thèse explore comment les adolescentes et les professionnels de la DPJ comprennent et naviguent les préoccupations de risque et le souhait d'autonomie de ces dernières à la suite d'abus sexuels. Selon un cadre interprétatif axé sur les filles et une approche d'étude de cas à la recherche qualitative, cette thèse cherche à mettre les voix des filles, leurs situations et leurs expériences au premier plan et à faire la lumière sur des comptes rendus exhaustifs et nuancés du risque et de l'autonomie tels qu'ils sont compris et gérés dans le contexte de la participation de la DPJ auprès des adolescentes victimes d'abus sexuels.

S'appuyant sur des connaissances théoriques élaborées dans les études érudites sur la législation, les politiques et les pratiques de la DPJ et sur le contexte élargi de l'État providence canadien dans lequel la DPJ est intégrée ainsi que sur les études féministes sur la construction discursive de la jeunesse féminine, cette thèse aborde les influences des idéologies dominantes de la pensée sur le risque, néolibérales et postféministes sur l'implication des adolescentes ayant subi des abus sexuels avec la DPJ. L'argument central est que ce point de vue contribue à caractériser les adolescentes qui ont subi des abus sexuels d'une part comme étant à risque, donc ayant besoin de l'intervention professionnelle des services de la DPJ, d'autre part comme se rapprochant de l'autonomie des femmes adultes, et tenues notamment responsables de reconnaître et de gérer les circonstances de risque dans leurs vies. Cette thèse illustre comment ces deux caractéristiques apparemment divergentes servent à transformer des adolescentes abusées sexuellement en sujets néolibéraux et postféministes régulièrement jugés sur leurs capacités et leurs échecs à assurer leur propre sécurité face à une multitude de risques associés non seulement aux abus sexuels qu'elles ont subis, mais aussi à leurs propres comportements à risque et à leur transition vers l'autonomie. De cette façon, les adolescentes ayant connu des abus sexuels sont considérées comme étant capables de reconnaître et de gérer le risque et de participer dans leur autonomie future nonobstant leurs situations. Les filles qui démontrent une réticence ou une incapacité sont perçues comme ayant échoué dans leur autoprotection donc ayant recours à des interventions protectrices de plus en plus intensives de la part la DPJ. Cette dissertation se conclut avec une discussion sur l'impact de ces observations sur les politiques et les pratiques de la DPJ ainsi que sur les recherches examinant l'implication des filles abusées sexuellement avec la DPJ.

## Acknowledgements

*This is a wonderful day. I've never seen this one before – Maya Angelou*

As I write these words that mark the conclusion of my doctoral journey, I breathe a sigh of relief and feel a sense of pride for achieving what I set out to do such a long time ago. Producing this dissertation has been a rather extended process filled with mixed emotions, struggles and surprising insights – both personal and academic. There were many times when, troubled by doubt, I wondered what I was doing, where I was going, and whether working in a kitchen might be a better plan. But thankfully my journey was not a solo one. Throughout these past years, I have been surrounded by family, friends and colleagues who have supported me every step of the way. In the words that follow, I hope to convey the depth of my love and gratitude for those people who have accompanied me in completing this dissertation. My name may appear on its cover, but all of yours ought to be there as well.

I first want to acknowledge that this dissertation would not have been possible without the financial assistance of Canada's *Social Science and Humanities Research Council*, who awarded me a *Canadian Graduate Scholarship* from 2007-2010. I want to thank the council for valuing and supporting my research.

My research would also not have been possible without the assistance of certain key professionals at Batshaw Youth and Family Centres and the Montreal Children's Hospital who helped me in navigating their respective systems and putting me in touch with potential research participants. Thank you for your generosity in taking time away from your incredibly busy days to collaborate with me, and thank you for having confidence in both my research goals and me.

To those child protection professionals and sexually abused teenage girls who agreed to take part in my research interviews, I will be eternally grateful. I am humbled by your willingness to take risks in sharing with me your thoughts, emotions and experiences. To the CPS professionals who took time to talk with me, I want to express my utmost respect for the work that you do day in, day out. I hope that even in some small way my research might one day positively contribute to your practice with sexually abused teenage girls. And to the teenage girls who trusted me with their stories, I want to express my heartfelt admiration for your courage and perseverance. You were the inspiration for my research and I only hope that I have done justice to your voices in this dissertation. Thank you for speaking up.

Pursuing doctoral studies had for a long time been a dream of mine but it was thanks to Julia Krane, my Ph.D. supervisor, that it became a reality. It was Julia who encouraged me to return to academia after a number of years of social work practice in the field and it was Julia who guided me with wisdom and thoughtfulness throughout the past years. Thank you Julia for your encouragement, your faith in me as a scholar, your insistence on the importance of making research matter to social work practice, your rigour, your reminders to simplify my writing and, of course, your bottomless coffee pot. You have been and are an incredible mentor and friend.

I could not have achieved this dissertation without the support of my family. To Stephanie, my twin sister, I may be a few minutes older than you, but I have always looked up to you and admired your intelligence, talent and commitment to whatever you set your heart to. Without your extraordinary presence through the final weeks and days of writing this dissertation, I don't

know if I would be writing these words now. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for always being there when I need you. I love you.

To my mom and dad, Sally and Colin, I wish I had the words to fully express the depth of my gratitude, admiration and love for you both. I owe you both so much. From my earliest years you inspired in me a love of learning and encouraged me to live with compassion and an awareness of social ills and privileges. Dad, thank you for modeling to me a solid work ethic and thank you for your constant quiet support, your thoughtful proofreading and for challenging me to think more deeply about treating risk with optimism. Mom, in those moments when I doubted myself and considered giving up, I looked to you. You show me every day what strength, courage and perseverance really look like. How could I abandon any challenge with you as a role model and support!? I can't thank you enough for your boundless encouragement, your perfectly timed words of reassurance, the countless cups of tea and conversations, and your unwavering belief in me. There is so much in my life that I could not have done without the two of you. I love you.

I must also thank my furry loved ones – Maddy, Matis, Charlotte and Beatrice – who, despite being blissfully unaware of the stresses associated with completing a dissertation, offered welcome distractions, constant companionship and unconditional love.

And last, but far from least, Hicham. When I announced that I wanted to go back to school for my Ph.D., you encouraged me wholeheartedly. When I doubted myself, you believed in me. When I wrote late into the night, you fortified me with glasses of single-malt. When my dissertation took longer than expected, you were patient. But when I procrastinated, as I am wont to do, you subtly (or not) suggested that you were looking forward to our life post-Ph.D. Me too. Thank you for your constant support, your patience, your well-timed distractions, and your confidence that this day would come. I couldn't have survived this journey without you. I love you and can't wait to explore together whatever lies around the next bend.

Today is a wonderful day thanks to all of you.

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

*Doing all the little tricky things it takes to grow up, step by step, into an anxious and unsettling world.*

— Sylvia Plath<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Bell Jar* (1963).

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

*Sanni – a 17 year old girl of South Asian and South American descent – was removed from her home after child protection services (CPS) substantiated allegations that her father had been sexually and physically abusing her over a number of years. At the outset, she was placed in a foster home, together with her younger sister. As Sanni's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday approached, she was urged by her social worker to move into an apartment partially subsidised by CPS. Being on her own, Sanni was expected to develop ways of taking care of herself. But juggling school and work as well as the fallout related to her past abuse and current life changes proved intensely difficult for Sanni. She had excelled in high school, but was struggling at CÉGEP and eventually dropped out. Working full time at a fast food restaurant, Sanni hoped to one-day return to school – an aspiration that was strongly encouraged by her social worker. However, with little connection with her natural or foster families, Sanni invested more and more time with her peers. She started experimenting with alcohol and drugs as well as sexual intimacy. Sanni worried constantly ... she worried about her sister, who was still living in the foster home; she worried about being a “drop out” and what that might mean for her future; she worried about being judged as “bad” by her social worker, her family, as well as her South-Asian community; and she worried she'd never learn to trust herself ... let alone anyone else.*

Sanni's story, derived from my research interviews, provides a glimpse into the experiences of sexually abused teenage girls involved with child protection services (CPS). For Sanni, doing *all the little tricky things it takes to grow up* was complicated by her world having become particularly *anxious and unsettling* in the aftermath of sexual abuse and the ensuing involvement of CPS. As an account of CPS involvement following a disclosure of sexual abuse, Sanni's story is not atypical. Identified as being at risk and vulnerable to further abuse, protective measures that included removing her from her home environment were put into place so as to assure her safety. Weaving through Sanni's story, however, are notions of risk as well as autonomy that extend beyond a straightforward reading of CPS intervention. Added to concerns for the risk of further abuse are concerns related to Sanni's choices and behaviours that could exacerbate her situation of risk or could jeopardise her development into an autonomous woman. Well aware of being under surveillance due to such concerns, Sanni was preoccupied by expectations for her to choose and behave in a manner appropriate for a teenage girl nearing adulthood. Unsurprisingly, the risk of failure weighed heavily on her.

My dissertation delves into the interrelating notions of risk and autonomy that influence sexually abused teenage girls' experiences of CPS involvement. Specifically, conducted within a

girl-centred interpretive framework and employing a case study approach to qualitative research, my dissertation explores how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse. At the intersection of two discrete areas of inquiry – child protection in situations of child sexual abuse and female adolescence – my aim is to provide insight into how teenage girls and CPS professionals navigate the often tricky terrain of female adolescence while at the same time managing CPS involvement.

My dissertation is based on qualitative interviews with seven sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS and nine CPS professionals. I invited participants to talk about their understandings of risk and autonomy and to reflect on their experiences of both concepts in the context of CPS involvement with teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Emergent in their voices were seemingly competing discourses. Given prevailing messages currently circling around teenage girls, this observation is perhaps not surprising. Expressly, teenage girls today receive a great deal of public and professional attention for the multitude of risks they are assumed to face, the riskiness of their own actions, as well as their promise as autonomous, productive citizens. Girls are often portrayed as simultaneously at risk or in crisis as well as powerful, liberated, and autonomous with all the world at their fingertips. Perhaps nowhere does the confluence of these discourses of risk and autonomy exert such profound impact on the lives of teenage girls as within the context of CPS involvement following disclosures of sexual abuse.

The central argument of my dissertation is that discourses of risk and autonomy permeate CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls who are simultaneously deemed to be at risk, and thus scrutinized and regulated for their own safety and best interests, and expected to perform as autonomous young women capable of individual choice, action and success. I further contend that these coinciding discourses of risk and autonomy reflect and reinforce neoliberal and postfeminist messages common to the wider socio-political context within which these girls are growing into adult women. Simply put, according to a neoliberal ideology, individuals are ultimately expected to bear the responsibility for managing or, even better, avoiding any variety of risks in their lives – with those deemed unable to do so by virtue of their age, capacity, choice

or action being potentially subject to the intervention of state authorities, of which CPS is one example (Webb, 2006). A postfeminist perspective, or “sensitivity” (Gill, 2007) includes messages that, at least in the Western world, feminism has done its job, gender equality has been achieved and women (and by extension girls) are empowered to succeed in whatever endeavour they choose (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2004, 2009). In the context of child protection in the aftermath of sexual abuse, neoliberal and postfeminist perspectives intersect in ways that contribute to the identification of sexually abused teenage girls as both vulnerable – thus requiring the intervention of CPS professionals – as well as able and required to take responsibility for making appropriate choices and adopting behaviours that promote not only their safety from further abuse but also their potential as productive citizens. While I do not deny either the appropriateness of privileging sexually abused teenage girls’ safety from risk or even the optimism evident in encouraging their autonomy, I do suggest that this dual and contradictory emphasis carries with it a range of consequences for individual girls like Sanni. In this dissertation, I draw from the detailed portrait produced by my study of participants’ understandings and experiences of risk and autonomy so as to bring closer attention to such consequences, and also to explore avenues for enhancing CPS practices that take into account the complex real-life experiences of sexually abused teenage girls.

## **1.1 Introducing *risk* and *autonomy***

The concepts *risk* and *autonomy* recur throughout my dissertation. But what constitutes *risk*? And what does *autonomy* mean? Rather than providing strict definitions of either concept, the following brief discussion serves as a point of departure from which to embark on my exploration into how risk and autonomy are understood and negotiated within the particular context of CPS involvement with teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse. A quick perusal of dictionary definitions reveals a widely shared understanding of risk as exposure to the possibility or probability of loss, injury, damage, harm or any other adverse or unwelcome circumstance. Whereas historical usages of risk referenced the possibility of either positive or negative outcomes, in contemporary Western societies “risk” is used virtually exclusively to

refer to negative, hazardous or dangerous potentials (Kemshall, 2002; Lupton, 2013) and thus to be avoided (Lupton, 2013). In essence, risk indicates a danger or hazard that has not yet occurred but may very well happen if efforts are not taken to predict, control and avoid it. Garland (2003) added to our understanding of risk by explaining that notions of risk could extend beyond events or happenings to people or things. He observed that people or things might be characterized “as ‘risks’ when they are prone to create hazards, or as being ‘at-risk’ when they are more than usually vulnerable to being adversely affected by some problem or danger” (50).

Again drawing from dictionary definitions, “autonomy” can be defined simply as the freedom and ability to self-govern or to think, choose and act on one’s own. Rather than passive recipients of experience, autonomous individuals are considered active participants within their respective lives and circumstances. It is not difficult to observe, however, that not everyone uses his or her autonomy in the same manner or necessarily wisely. Further, autonomy is not available to everyone nor is everyone judged to be capable of successful autonomy. Children and youth, for example, are largely viewed as dependent or as being in the process of developing autonomy. Meanwhile, certain other individuals may be limited in terms of their autonomy due to any number of reasons including physical or mental ability, material or relational context, as well as political or social circumstance.

Important to my dissertation is how interactions between expectations of autonomy and concerns for risk influence sexually abused teenage girls’ involvement with CPS. So as to provide a more detailed backdrop to this exploration, in Chapters 2 and 3, I elaborate on how risk and autonomy have been conceptualised in CPS legislation, policy and practice and, in Chapter 4, I examine conceptualisations of risk and autonomy as they appear in contemporary discourses associated with female adolescence.

## **1.2 Research rationale**

While the rationale for pursuing this dissertation is both professional and theoretical, its impetus is firmly situated in my almost 15 years of social work practice with sexually abused children and youth and their families. During these years, my concern, respect and curiosity were roused

as I was repeatedly witness to the strengths and struggles of teenage girls as they lived through the aftermath of sexual abuse. As I listened to girls during the typically confusing and painful periods following their disclosures, I became increasingly preoccupied with how they dealt with the ensuing CPS involvement while at the same time traversing the perils and possibilities of female adolescence. Thus, as I set out to pursue my doctoral dissertation, I wanted to achieve a better understanding of how sexually abused teenage girls *do all the little tricky things it takes to grow up* within the context of CPS involvement driven by concerns for risk.

A second rationale for my research centres on responding to a dearth of scholarship on teenage girls' intersecting experiences of teenage girlhood and the aftermath of sexual abuse. In working to protect sexually abused teenage girls from further risk, it can be all too easy to overlook issues relating to being a teenage girl in today's Western world. The girls with whom I worked often reminded me that alongside coping with the sexual abuse and its aftermath, they were also negotiating everyday experiences as teenage girls and were in the process of developing their identities as young women. Social work scholarship on child protection and sexual abuse offered me little direction in terms of better understanding these concurrent and intersecting experiences. For this reason, I turned to Girls' Studies<sup>2</sup> – a now well-established, “unique and significant area of critical inquiry” occupied by scholars from various academic disciplines committed to researching and theorizing around girls, girlhood and girls' cultures (Kearney, 2009: 2). Bringing together these two seemingly disparate academic domains – social work scholarship on child protection and sexual abuse and Girls' Studies – thus became an important aspect of my dissertation.

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<sup>2</sup> With close ties to third-wave feminist research and writing, Girls' Studies has been described as “a sub-genre of ... academic feminist scholarship that constructs girlhood as a separate, exceptional and/or pivotal phase in female identity formation” (Wald, 1998: 587). Wald (1998: 587) elaborated that Girls' Studies emerged

not only from fields such as psychology, with its long-standing interest in human social and psychic development, but also from ... fields such as cultural studies, which has its own traditions (by way of Birmingham and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) of analyzing youth and the politics of youth subcultures (particularly working-class, predominantly male youth subcultures). The popularity and visibility of the “girl” within popular youth/music cultures, combined with renewed interest in forms of violence/trauma that primarily affect girls (e.g., incest, eating disorders, self-mutilation or “cutting”), may have had the effect of spurring academic interest in studying the specific cultural formations and cultural practices of girls.

Integrating social work scholarship with Girls' Studies allowed me not only to contribute something new to the field of social work but also to respond to an identified gap in contemporary Girls' Studies. As noted by Mazzarella and Pecora (2007: 116) in their review of the evolution of Girls' Studies, despite the field's increased visibility, respect and interdisciplinarity over time, Girls' Studies still maintained a distinct concentration on "popular cultural content – or at least [on] the kind of studies in which adult feminist scholars deconstruct girls' culture and leave it at that." Answering the question "where do we go from here?," the authors called for studies that listen to the voices of girls in order to understand their experiences; make efforts to include the voices of girls from a range of social locations rather than concentrating primarily on middle class White girls; and focus more keenly on the various "political, economic, and educational issues related to girls lives" (116). Kearney (2009: 19) similarly encouraged shifting Girls' Studies toward exploring "how girlhood functions in various social institutions" and giving "greater attention to socially marginal girls and their multiple components of identity." My dissertation answers these calls by shifting the spotlight to the voices and experiences of girls, specifically girls marginalized by virtue of their socio-economic and educational status as well as their designations as being at risk and/or risky. Also, my dissertation addresses how prevailing understandings of girlhood have come to influence CPS, a distinct social institution embedded within Canada's welfare state. Ultimately, my dissertation draws from respective theoretical and substantive insights from both social work scholarship on child protection and sexual abuse and Girls' Studies with the aim of building knowledge relevant to both fields of study.

### **1.3 Research context**

The practice context within which I pursued my research is child protection. Child protection services, or CPS, refers to that distinct segment of Canada's welfare state responsible for protecting children from maltreatment. Concretely, in Canada, child protection services are guided by provincial/territorial legislation and housed within institutions set up across the country to provide a range of protective interventions to children and their families. These

interventions are carried out by professionals authorised to intervene in the private lives of families. Child protection services are not provided to all Canadian children and families. Rather, *only* those children – and their families – deemed to be at risk and in need of protection from abuse or neglect receive services from CPS professionals. CPS practice involves assessing allegations that a child is at risk of abuse or neglect; taking protective actions to ensure the immediate safety of a child determined to be at risk; and pursuing any intervention necessary to prevent the recurrence of a situation of danger to the child. The driving force guiding all CPS practice is the child's safety. For example, as seen in Sanni's situation above, the paramount concern of those CPS professionals involved with teenage girls deemed to be at risk for sexual abuse is assuring their safety from any further maltreatment.

In this dissertation, rather than considering CPS to be a bounded system untouched by outside influences, CPS is understood as being informed by the wider socio-political landscape within which it exists. To be more precise, I embarked on my dissertation with the recognition that prevailing neoliberal perspectives and risk thinking influence current CPS policies and practices. As has been noted by authors writing on the evolution of CPS in Canada, recent decades have witnessed a shift in CPS away from a concentration on the immediate needs and welfare of the child towards a heightened, but narrower, concern for identifying and managing risk (Lonne, Harries, Featherstone & Gray, 2016; Krane, Strega, & Carlton, 2013; Swift & Callahan, 2009). This preoccupation with risk rather than need signifies a changed relationship between CPS professionals and the children and families with whom they intervene. Instead of focusing on collaboration and sharing responsibility for responding to children's needs, emphasis is now placed on – quickly – identifying, monitoring and regulating risky situations and individuals. Reflective of a neoliberal view, individuals involved with CPS tend to be treated as responsible for the creation and management of the risks in their lives. As observed by Lonne et al. (2016), such responsibility is closely tied with notions of individual potential and, by extension, failure. For parents, their potential is viewed as residing not in their ability to fulfill their own needs and hopes but rather in their ability to meet their parental obligations and, most specifically, their obligation of eradicating or, at the very least, minimising the risk for child

abuse or neglect. While CPS interventions necessarily involve parents, their attention remains securely fixed on the child and his or her potential to escape risk and eventually develop into an autonomous productive adult. A central concern of my dissertation is how the concurrent influences of neoliberal thinking and a preoccupation with risk affect sexually abused teenage girls' understandings and experiences of risk and autonomy within the context of CPS involvement.

A further contextual factor taken into consideration in the conduct of my dissertation relates to the influence of common notions of female adolescence and girlhood. Throughout the research process I wanted to pay attention to how such notions trickle into and impact CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls. I took as a starting point the argument put forth by Girls' Studies' scholars that girlhood is not simply a fixed and biologically or psychologically determined stage of life. Rather, girlhood or "what it means to be a girl" is complex, situated in time, place, and culture, and shaped by "a number of competing, often contradictory, discourses" (Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009: 10). Particularly pertinent to my dissertation is the wealth of Girls' Studies' research and theory produced over the last two decades that has revealed the dominance of two distinct but interconnected discourses in present day conceptualizations of girls: *girls-at-risk* and *powerful girls* "who have it all" (Harris, 2001 cited in Pomerantz, Currie & Kelly, 2004: 548). How and with what effect for sexually abused teenage girls have these wider discourses infiltrated CPS policies and practices? How might they have shaped my study participants' understandings and experiences of concerns for risk and aspirations for autonomy?

## **1.4 Structure of dissertation**

My dissertation is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 2 offers a detailed overview of child sexual abuse and the CPS response to it. In Chapter 3, I situate CPS within Canada's welfare state and explore the influence of neoliberalism and risk thinking on present day CPS policy and practices. Drawing extensively from Girls' Studies' scholarship, in Chapter 4, I present the theoretical framework guiding my study. In this chapter, I discuss the socio-political climate within which discourses of risk and autonomy or *girl power* have proliferated and exerted influence on

perceptions and expectations of girls. In Chapter 5, I elaborate on the methodology and methods entailed in completing this dissertation.

What follows, in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, are my research findings. In Chapter 6, I focus on the influence of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies on the processes of assessing and identifying risk in the context of CPS with sexually abused teenage girls. In Chapter 7, I examine how sexually abused teenage girls' dual identification as at-risk and risky influences CPS involvement. In Chapter 8, I examine participants' discussions of aspirations for sexually abused teenage girls' autonomy and concerns for their risks that extended beyond official CPS discourses – yet were incorporated into day-to-day CPS practices. With Chapter 9, I conclude my dissertation. Here, I revisit the intersections between social work scholarship on child protection and sexual abuse and Girls' Studies scholarship dealing with contemporary girlhood and offer insights into perceptions and experiences of risk and autonomy that influence protective efforts with sexually abused teenage girls. Drawing from these insights, I discuss implications for CPS policy and practice and propose directions for future research.

## Chapter 2: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTION

*At the end of the day, the goals are simple: safety and security.*

— Jodi Rell<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jodi Rell is a former Republican politician in the United States. She served as the Governor of Connecticut between 2004 and 2011.

## **Chapter 2:** **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROTECTION**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Today's parents and other caregiving adults are likely acutely aware of the potential of child sexual abuse. Alongside disturbing and often graphic news stories, a host of websites, programs, pamphlets, professionals as well as caring friends and family are available to offer reminders of the lurking danger of child sexual abuse and provide tips and advice around children's protection. While history has shown vacillating acknowledgment even of the existence of child sexual abuse (Conte, 1994; Olafson, Corwin & Summit, 1993), today it is recognized as a very real risk. Child sexual abuse has occurred throughout recorded history, but only in the 1970s, as a result of the concerted efforts of women's movements and victims' rights and child protection advocates alongside the advent of empirical scholarship on the subject of child sexual abuse, did it begin to be considered a social problem compelling public and professional responses (Ondersma, Chaffin, Berliner, Cordon, Goodman & Barnett, 2001). As put by Krane (2003: 38), "whereas children's allegations of sexual abuse were once commonly dismissed as the product of a child's rich fantasy life or as acts of maliciousness, today's helping professionals are more prone to listen, believe, act, and prevent."

This chapter addresses the subjects of child sexual abuse and child protection services (CPS) as the distinct public response aimed at eliminating the risk of sexual abuse to children. The chapter begins with an overview of child sexual abuse, giving particular attention to its definition, prevalence in general populations, incidence according to reports of abuse or neglect, and the range of potential outcomes for child and youth victims. The rest of the chapter focuses on CPS as Canada's official public mechanism responsible for assuring children's protection from all forms of maltreatment including sexual abuse. The discussion opens with a brief commentary on the orientation of CPS in Canada in comparison with other international approaches as well as an elaboration on the shifting philosophies underpinning legislation and practice over the past decades. With specific consideration accorded to CPS involvement in situations of child sexual abuse, I then present the legislative framework, administration and day-

to-day functions of contemporary CPS in Canada and, more particularly, Quebec. Against this backdrop, I conclude the chapter by exploring how expectations surrounding responsibility for protecting children and youth from maltreatment are played out in CPS practices. Here I introduce the concept of failure to protect, a concept that has previously been identified as having a profound impact on parents' – especially mothers' – interactions with CPS professionals following allegations of child maltreatment in general (Strega, Krane, Lapierre, Richardson & Carlton, 2013) and child sexual abuse in particular (Carlton & Krane, 2013a; Krane, 2003; Strega et al., 2013).

## **2.2 Child sexual abuse**

### **2.2.1 Definition**

The term child sexual abuse is used throughout this dissertation to refer to sexual abuse perpetrated against any child or youth under the age of 18. Though definitions are numerous, the *World Health Organization (WHO)* (1999: 15-16) offers a sufficiently broad definition which includes attention to sexual exploitation as a particular category of child sexual abuse:

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to:

- The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity.
- The exploitative use of child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices.
- The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

#### *Exploitation*

Commercial or other exploitation of a child refers to use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour and child prostitution. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, or spiritual, moral or social-emotional development.

The *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008* (CIS-2008) (Trocmé et al., 2010) defines child sexual abuse by virtue of the various sexually abusive acts encompassed by the term. Specifically, the authors of the study identified nine forms of child

sexual abuse: “penetration, attempted penetration, oral sex, fondling, sex talk or images, voyeurism, exhibitionism, exploitation, and ‘other sexual abuse.’” (30).

Amongst the vast number of child sexual abuse definitions, I chose to present these two partially due to their breadth of scope and partially due the inclusion of notions of consent and responsibility. Firstly, in terms of scope, child sexual abuse is understood as inclusive of not only physical acts of or attempts at sexual touching or penetration but also noncontact abuses such as sex talk (which could include sexual harassment or threats of sexual abuse), exposure to sexual acts or pornography, taking of unwanted sexual images (such as filming or photography), and exploitation through prostitution or trafficking. As noted by Murray, Nguyen and Cohen (2014: 322), the acknowledgment of the wide range of child sexual abuses “reflects the recognition that imposing sexual intent of any sort on someone against his or her will is an inherently violent act, regardless of the use of physical force or resulting contact or injury.”

By including attention to the issue of consent, the *WHO*’s definition of child sexual abuse provides some detail as to who might be considered able to freely agree to sexual activity. Age is often considered central to consent. In Canada, section 150.1 of the *Criminal Code* identifies 16 as the age at which a young person is considered legally capable of giving consent to sexual activity. While certain exceptions are written into the law for young persons under the age of 16 who have consensual sexual activity with someone close in age, the law further clarifies that these exceptions do not apply if the sexual partner is in a position of trust or authority; is a person with whom the young person is in a relationship of dependency; and/or, is sexually exploiting the young person (*Criminal Code*, 1985: s. 150.1). These legal precisions indicate that age is but one category by which to evaluate consent. Other considerations are the young person’s state of development, ability and/or consciousness or intoxication as well as his/her sense of autonomy, authority or power to refuse sexual contact (e.g. fear of reprisal or harm to him/herself or others, trust in his/her right to refuse, etc.).

While Canada’s *Criminal Code* defines child sexual abuse in terms of a criminal act, child protection legislation across the country provide expanded definitions that are inclusive not only of the act of sexual abuse but also the responsibility for protection. For example, in

Quebec's *Youth Protection Act (YPA)*, sexual abuse – which represents only one of a number of categories of maltreatment necessitating official state intervention<sup>4</sup> – is defined as

- (1) a situation in which the child is subjected to gestures of a sexual nature by the child's parents or another person, with or without physical contact, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation; or
- (2) a situation in which the child runs a serious risk of being subjected to gestures of a sexual nature by the child's parents or another person, with or without physical contact, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation (*YPA* (article 38(d)).

The inclusion of the notion of *failure to protect* in the definition of sexual abuse represents an important element in current CPS legislation in that parents are perceived as active participants in situations of child sexual abuse regardless of whether or not they are directly involved in the sexual abuse itself. As will be discussed later in this chapter, incorporating *failure to protect* into CPS definitions of child sexual abuse carries with it significant implications for CPS policy, service provision and decision-making involving child victims as well as their non-offending parents.

## **2.2.2 Victims and perpetrators**

### ***Scope of child sexual abuse – prevalence and incidence***

Beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the 1980s, a surge of attention to child sexual abuse as a social problem instigated a wave of research aimed at documenting the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the general population of North America. Adult retrospective surveys undertaken at the time, in Canada and the United States, revealed that anywhere from between 25-50 percent of females and between 15-30 percent of males reported having experienced sexual abuse during their childhood (Badgley, 1984; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990; Russell, 1986; Wyatt, 1985). A more recent adult retrospective survey conducted in Ontario revealed prevalence rates of child sexual abuse to be approximately 13 percent for females and 4 percent for males (MacMillan et al., 1997). And, even more recently, Briere and Elliot's (2003) randomized adult

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<sup>4</sup> According to article 38 of Quebec's *Youth Protection Act*, "a child is considered to be in danger if the child is abandoned, neglected, subjected to psychological ill-treatment or sexual or physical abuse, or if the child has serious behavioural disturbances."

retrospective survey conducted in the United States produced results indicating child sexual abuse prevalence rates of 32.3 percent for females and 14.3 percent for males.

In Quebec, two recent studies yield comparable results. Tourigny, Gagné, Joly and Chartrand's (2006) telephone survey conducted in 2002 with 822 adult respondents generated prevalence rates for child sexual abuse of 18.2 percent for females and 9.5 percent for males. Using a similar methodology, Tourigny, Hébert, Joly, Cyr and Baril (2008) collected data from a representative sample of 1002 adults during a one month period in 2006. Of the study participants, 22 percent of the women and almost 10 percent of the men reported experiencing sexual abuse during their childhoods.

Noting the wide variance in prevalence rates of child sexual abuse published in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bolen and Scannapieco (1999: 281) embarked on a meta-analysis of all prevalence studies using methods of random sampling that concentrated on North American populations and were conducted between 1980 and 1998. These authors proposed "reasonable" prevalence estimates of between 30 and 40 percent for female child sexual abuse and approximately 13 percent for male child sexual abuse (299). These estimates led Bolen and Scannapieco (1999) to assert that "child sexual abuse is a problem of epidemic proportions" (281). International prevalence studies provide evidence that child sexual abuse is a global issue. For example, three recent meta-analyses of prevalence studies using samples from across the globe revealed child sexual abuse prevalence rates of between 15 and 20 percent for girls and about 8 percent for boys (Barth, Bermetz, Heim, Trelle & Tonia, 2013; Pereda, Guilera, Forns & Gómez-Benito, 2009; Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011).

While such studies have been crucial to establishing child sexual abuse as a social problem worthy of urgent public response, a glance at current incidence studies reporting on the number of cases seen by CPS authorities in Quebec, Canada and the United States suggests that only a small percentage of children experiencing sexual abuse in any given year are subject to CPS interventions. To elaborate, in the most recent *National Incidence Study* (NIS-4) conducted in the United States, 180,500 children were found by to have been sexually abused in 2005–2006 (Sedlak et al., 2010). This number represents an incidence rate of 4.5 children per every 1000

children in that country. The *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2008* (CIS-2008) (Trocmé et al., 2010) revealed that in 2008, sexual abuse cases comprised 3 percent of all substantiated investigations of child maltreatment across Canada. This number represents an estimated 2607 children or 0.43 children per every 1000 in Canada. Slightly higher than the national incidence reported in 2008, sexual abuse cases constituted 6 percent of all substantiated investigations of child maltreatment in Quebec in the same year (*Étude d'incidence québécoise sur les situations évaluées en protection de la jeunesse en 2008* (ÉIQ-2008) (Hélie, Turcotte, Trocmé and Tourigny, 2012). This number represents 1204 children or an incidence rate of 0.78 children per every 1000 in Quebec.

#### ***Accounting for gender and age – overrepresentation of adolescent girls***

Both incidence and prevalence studies indicate the gendered nature of sexual abuse victimization. Consistent across studies is the finding that girls as compared to boys experience child sexual abuse at much higher rates. According to the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003* (CIS-2003) (Trocmé et al., 2005), 63 percent of all cases substantiated for sexual abuse involved female children and 37 percent involved male children. In Quebec, the ÉIQ-2008 (Hélie et al., 2012) produced results indicating an even greater gendered distribution of incidence rates: 73 percent of substantiated cases of sexual abuse involved girls while 27 percent involved boys. Echoing earlier *National Incidence Studies*' (NIS-1, 2 &3) results, the NIS-4 also found girls to be at a much greater risk than boys to be sexually abused.

Introducing age as well as gender as identifying factors in the incidence of cases of sexual abuse substantiated by child protection services in Canada and Quebec reveals an overrepresentation of adolescent girls. The CIS-2003 revealed that the proportion of females to males varied by age group. While the ratio of male to female victims was virtually equivalent for children 8 years old and under, the numbers shifted significantly as age increased. Girls represented 62 percent of all substantiated cases between the ages of 8-11 years and 79 percent of all substantiated cases of adolescent victims (65). Further, adolescent girls between the ages of

12-15 years represented the largest group of all children substantiated for sexual abuse (at just over 27%). The ÉIQ-2008 similarly revealed the significance of the intersection of age and gender with respect to child sexual abuse substantiation. According to the 2008 data, as age increased, girls were determined to be at risk of sexual abuse at rates greater than those for boys. Additionally, it was determined that the greatest proportion of all cases of substantiated sexual abuse involved girls between the ages of 12-17 (36%).

Here, I would like to point out that while important to establishing the overrepresentation of girls, particularly teenage girls, as potential victims of sexual abuse, national and provincial incidence studies provide only a partial portrait of the incidence of child sexual abuse amongst CPS populations. Drawing data from official CPS records, such studies reflect only the number of cases in which sexual abuse was identified as the primary category of maltreatment provoking a CPS investigation (and potential substantiation of risk). Left out are those situations in which child sexual abuse was not disclosed as well as those in which child sexual abuse was known or suspected to have occurred but was not identified as the maltreatment category for which a CPS investigation was undertaken.

Two recent studies conducted in Quebec illuminate the portrait of the actual rather than simply the reported and/or substantiated incidence of sexual abuse experienced by children and youth involved with CPS authorities in the province. Both studies were aimed at detailing the “victimization” or maltreatment experiences of children and youth involved with CPS in the province of Quebec (Collin-Vézina, Coleman, Milne, Sell & Daigneault, 2011; Cyr et al 2012). The studies’ respective findings revealed rates of child sexual abuse within CPS populations to be significantly higher than those reported in either national and provincial incidence studies or prevalence studies of general populations. Of the 53 participants – all aged between 14-17 years – involved in Collin-Vézina et al.’s (2011) study, 38 percent reported having been sexually abused. Cyr et al. (2012) reported that 21 percent (or one in five) of the youth, aged 12-17 years, involved in their study had experienced some form sexual abuse. The studies also produced similar findings indicating that female adolescent participants reported having suffered sexual abuse at rates greater than any other group classified by age and gender.

In sum, these studies provide a more concerning portrait of child sexual abuse in CPS populations than do national or provincial incidence studies: they confirm that a significant proportion children involved with CPS has experienced child sexual abuse and add weight to the understanding that teenage girls are disproportionately at greater risk of sexual abuse in comparison with younger girls or boys of any age. While my social work practice experiences spurred my interest to embark on a research study with sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS, evidence of their overrepresentation in the context of CPS lends considerable support to my focus on this population.

Cyr et al. (2012) hypothesized that teenagers' amplified risk for any form of victimization, including sexual abuse, could be explained by their increased exposure to the public sphere and reduced accompaniment by adult caregivers. While this perspective remains a hypothesis, I suggest that it does not stray far from common opinion about the risks faced by teenage girls as they autonomously step out into the surrounding world. In Chapter 4, I further explore such discourses relating to teenage girls' risk and autonomy so as to provide a backdrop for my interest in better understanding how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

### ***Perpetrators***

It is widely understood that child sexual abuse perpetrators are most often male but a number of recent studies have suggested that the rate of child sexual abuse committed by women may be underestimated (Bourke, Doherty, McBride, Morgan & McGee, 2014; Briere & Elliot, 2003; Peter, 2009). However, even taking the findings of such studies into consideration, it remains evident that men vastly outnumber women as perpetrators. For example, Briere and Elliot's (2003) survey of a randomly selected sample of 935 adults (who were equally divided by gender) revealed that for women the gender breakdown of sexual offenders was representative of findings previously reported. Specifically, 93 percent of those women reporting child sexual abuse had been abused by at least one male, and 9 percent had been abused by at least one female. The authors noted, however, that the numbers differed for men reporting a history of

child sexual abuse with 39 percent reporting having been sexually abused by at least one female and 70 percent by at least one male. Briere and Elliot (2003) concluded that while their study provided no contradiction to the common notion that most child sexual abuse perpetrators are men, their findings did point to the potential underestimation of women's sexual offending, especially against boys. In an attempt to add some detail to the portrait of female child sexual offending, Gannon and Rose (2008) conducted a review of available literature examining characteristics of female offenders and their potential treatment needs. Gannon and Rose (2008) pointed out that while a great deal is either unknown or unclear regarding characteristics of female offenders and their victims, the literature does appear to show some consensus relating to the age of their victims. Specifically, they found that current research shows that female offenders' victims tend to be young and pre-pubescent, thus suggesting that adolescent victims regardless of their gender are most likely to be sexual abused by males.

It is also commonly believed that most child sexual abuse perpetrators are known to the victim and are often in relations of trust or authority. In the United States and Canada, for example, retrospective surveys found that between 25 and 29 per cent of perpetrators were relatives, about 60 per cent were known to the victims but unrelated, and between 11 and 16 per cent were total strangers (Badgley, 1984; Russell, 1986). With respect to CPS involvement in situations of child sexual abuse, social workers regularly deal with male perpetrators who are known and trusted individuals or relatives often with care giving responsibilities. To elaborate, the CIS-2003 identified non-parental relatives as the largest group of perpetrators (35 percent), followed by children's friends (15 percent), stepfathers (13 percent), biological fathers (9 percent), other acquaintances (9 percent), and the boyfriends and girlfriends of the parents (5 percent). Another 5 percent of cases where sexual abuse was the primary substantiated maltreatment involved biological mothers as perpetrators (Trocmé et al. 2005). No comparable categorization of perpetrators was made in the latest CIS – 2008 (Trocmé et al. 2010). Once again, it is worth noting that data from incidence studies on CPS involvement do not include information relating to those sexually abused children and youth for whom a different category of maltreatment was identified as the primary reason for protective intervention. For this reason,

I looked to statistics on police-reported violent crimes in Canada. While also limited in terms of scope, given the impossibility of attending to unreported child sexual abuses, this data reveals a similar picture of child sexual abuse perpetration. According to a 2008 incidence study of child and youth victims of police-reported violent crimes, sexual violence against children was most commonly perpetrated by someone known to the victim (75 percent), including family members, friends or acquaintances (Ogrodnik, 2010). The findings, however, showed a shift associated with age in terms of the identity of perpetrators of sexual violence: “As the age of the victim increase[d] the proportion of sexual assaults perpetrated by a family member decrease[d]” (13). Specifically, youth between the ages of 12 and 17 – the distinct majority being girls – reported being sexually abused by someone outside the family (around 61 percent) at rates higher than did children less than 12 years of age. While strangers were identified as perpetrators in 10 percent of all police-reported sexual violence against children and youth, the vast majority of children or youth victimized by a stranger were over the age of 12 (80 percent). The results of the study further indicated that about 28 percent of all reported sexual violence against youth aged 12-17 was perpetrated by “casual acquaintances.” The age of these accused (62 percent of them were between 12 and 24 years of age) suggests that they were likely in the youths’ peer group. Ogrodnik (2010) theorised that for youth, the nature and likelihood of violent victimization, including sexual violence, alters age. She suggested that teenagers’ increased independence and unsupervised time with peers might motivate more risk-taking behaviours and augment their vulnerability to victimization by non-family members.

These findings offer some insight into teenage girls’ experiences of sexual abuse and may contribute to understandings of the risks facing teenage girls as they navigate their developing autonomy. As previously mentioned, this is a subject upon which I will elaborate in Chapter 3 as I explore common discourses of risk and autonomy that surround and influence the lives of teenage girls.

### **2.2.3 Impact of child sexual abuse**

Over two decades of research into the effects of child sexual abuse has led to a common understanding that child sexual abuse typically brings about wide-ranging consequences for individual victims (Briere & Elliot, 1994, 2003; Putnam, 2003). Empirical research has identified a range of possible short and long term negative effects of child sexual abuse<sup>5</sup>, including post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>6</sup>, emotional distress, depression, anxiety, fear, anger, low self-esteem<sup>7</sup>, childhood sexualized behaviour<sup>8</sup>, and socializing or inter-personal disturbances<sup>9</sup>. Added to these effects are those that researchers have identified as potentially emerging during adolescence such as antisocial or delinquent behaviour and substance use<sup>10</sup>; pregnancy<sup>11</sup>; engaging in high risk sexual behaviours (i.e. early age of consensual sexual activity, multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex)<sup>12</sup>; sexual revictimization<sup>13</sup>; and, suicidal thoughts and/or actions<sup>14</sup>. A recent longitudinal study also determined that the experience of childhood sexual abuse, physical abuse, and/or neglect is likely to have serious and enduring economic consequences for victims (Currie & Widom, 2010). The researchers further noted women, in comparison with men, to be especially vulnerable to the long-term economic effects of being abused or neglected as a child. To elaborate, findings revealed women with histories of childhood maltreatment had completed fewer years of schooling, had lower IQ test scores; were significantly less likely to be employed, have a bank account, own a vehicle, home, or stock; and, reported considerably lower earnings than women without such histories. This last study is interesting to me in that it suggests child sexual abuse to have potentially long ranging consequences for female victims' aspirations for

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<sup>5</sup> Beitchman et al., 1992; Briere & Elliot, 1994, 2003; Kendall-Tackett, Williams & Finkelhor, 1993; Putnam, 2003

<sup>6</sup> Avery, Massat & Lundy, 2000; Briere and Elliot, 1994, 2003; Feerick & Snow, 2005; Masho & Ahmed, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Beitchman et al, 1991; Beitchman et al, 1992; Briere & Elliot, 1994; Feerick & Snow, 2005; Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993; Neumann, Houskamp, Pollock, & Briere, 1996

<sup>8</sup> Briere & Elliot, 1994; Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993

<sup>9</sup> Cole & Putnam, 1992; Conte & Schuerman, 1987

<sup>10</sup> Bergen, Martin, Richardson, Allison & Roeger, 2004; Herrera & McCloskey, 2003

<sup>11</sup> Brown, Cohen, Chen, Smailes & Johnson, 2004; Erdmans & Black, 2008; Noll, Trickett & Putnam, 2003

<sup>12</sup> Cinq-Mars, Wright, Cyr & McDuff, 2004; Fergusson, Horwood & Lynskey, 1997; Noll et al, 2003; Raj, Silverman & Amaro, 2000

<sup>13</sup> Roodman & Clum, 2001; Smith, White & Holland, 2003

<sup>14</sup> Martin, Bergen, Richardson, Roeger & Allison, 2004

and development of certain aspects of their autonomy – aspects closely tied to neoliberal expectations of social and economic independence.

Research into the impact child sexual abuse for its victims indicates that while it is impossible to narrow the impact to just one symptom or even a set of symptoms (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993), any number of consequences associated with sexual abuse could negatively influence victims' lives with potentially long-term significance. Today's helping professionals – including CPS social workers – are undoubtedly aware of the possible fallout relating to experiences of sexual abuse. As such, they are likely to be concerned not only with youths' risk of being sexually abused but also about the risks associated with potentially wide-ranging and enduring consequences of child sexual abuse. Not only is sexual abuse itself considered a risk to be avoided, so too are the detrimental effects of its experience. Recognising this multifaceted nature of the risks associated with child sexual abuse is important to my exploration of how risk is understood and negotiated by sexually abused teenage girls as well as by the CPS professionals responsible for their protection.

## **2.3 Child sexual abuse and protection**

In Canada, child sexual abuse is widely considered to be a social problem demanding official public reaction and, as such, policy and practice responses to it have been embedded in the country's welfare state in the form of child protection services. It is within this system – or, more specifically, Quebec's system of child protection services – that my research study is grounded. The following discussion provides a portrait of Quebec's CPS by giving attention first to the child protection approach upon which it is based and then elaborating on the philosophical and historical shifts influencing how CPS is organised and practiced in Canada and Quebec today.

### **2.3.1 Responding to child abuse and neglect – Child protection or child welfare?**

Cross-national comparison studies aimed at understanding how countries across the globe respond to child abuse and neglect have identified two predominant orientations to practice: child protection and family service or child welfare (Hetherington, 2006; Gilbert, 1997, 2012;

Gilbert, Parton & Skivenes, 2011; Munro & Manful, 2012)<sup>15</sup>. These two orientations differ in a number of ways. To elaborate, a child protection orientation tends 1) to view public responses to child abuse and neglect as distinct from the range of universal, preventative or supportive services offered to children and/or families deemed to have a lower level of need; 2) to frame child abuse and neglect as resulting from the harmful acts or omissions of parents or caregivers; 3) to pursue protective interventions in a highly legalistic manner through investigations of risk and the application of measures aimed at monitoring and managing parents' deviant or deficient behaviours; and, 4) to produce adversarial relationships between parents and child protection professionals (Gilbert, 1997, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2011; Gilbert et al., 2009; Munro & Manful, 2012). Gilbert et al. (2009: 176) also noted that public responses to child abuse and neglect that are oriented toward child protection often "take an actuarial or risk assessment approach, using risk assessment methods to predict the likelihood of future harm." In contrast to child protection, family service orientations are essentially needs based and thus tend 1) to situate responses to child abuse or neglect within a continuum of services for children and families in need; 2) to understand abuse and neglect as a manifestation of family conflict or dysfunction arising from social and/or psychological difficulties; 3) to intervene early by providing comprehensive, therapeutic and preventive services; and, 4) to pursue collaborative – often voluntary – relationships with parents (Gilbert, 1997, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2011; Gilbert et al., 2009; Munro & Manful, 2012). With a consideration of these identifying factors, Gilbert (1997) analysed the public responses to child abuse and neglect of nine countries in North America and Europe. He found that the six Nordic and mainland European countries adopted a family service orientation while Canada, the United States and England tended toward a child protection orientation.

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<sup>15</sup> With specific consideration of the Canadian context, Cameron, Freymond, Cornfield and Palmer (2007) added a further potential orientation to responding to child abuse and neglect: community caring. This community caring orientation integrates Aboriginal perspectives rooted in Canadian First Nations, Inuit and Métis beliefs about the "interdependence among the environment, people, and the Creator.... When change occurs in an individual, it necessarily impacts the family, community, and surrounding environment" (Cameron, et al. 2007: 24). As the authors noted, with this ideology at its base, a community caring orientation to responding to child abuse and neglect recognises communal rather than individual responsibility for the care, safety and well-being of children. As such, interventions may include the use of traditional healers and elders as well as extensive consultation and decision-making with parents, extended family members, and local community members (or leaders). And, child removal remains the very last resort.

### **2.3.2 Responding to child abuse and neglect in Canada**

Despite there having been a number of developments in the legislation and practice aimed at responding to situations of child abuse and neglect in Canada since the 1990's, "the basic direction of Canadian child welfare [CPS] has not changed over the last decade from its focus on child protection" (Swift, 2011: 36). Classifying CPS in Canada as "decidedly residual," Swift (2011: 36) noted that while "family service is not entirely absent, it remains ... a lesser and sometimes invisible goal." As a residual system, CPS does not provide services to children or families on the basis of need, voluntary request, or prevention; rather, services offered by CPS are non-voluntary and provided only to those children deemed to be at risk of abuse or neglect. In other words, CPS intervenes only with those families thought already to be failing to ensure an appropriate level of care and safety for their children.

The Canadian CPS system is decentralised, meaning that responsibility for protecting children from maltreatment falls to the country's 13 provinces and territories as well as the various First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities who have participated in developing their own CPS agencies (Sinha et al., 2011). Despite this geographic distribution of services, a child protection orientation uniformly informs legislation and the ensuing practices across the country. As noted, the services provided are residual; they are based on a threshold approach wherein definitions of minimal standards of parental care and behaviour as well as children's developmental trajectories constitute the benchmarks (or thresholds) by which protective intervention is determined as required or not (Cameron et al., 2007). In other words, designated authorities – CPS – are legally sanctioned to intervene with children and their families only when parental care or behaviour is deemed to have fallen below a prescribed minimum standard. Foundational to this approach is the understanding that parents carry both the right and the responsibility for the care, nurturance and protection of their children. Deeply entrenched in Canadian society and its range of social policies and programs since the signing of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 is the belief in the value of individual autonomy and freedom from state interference. Reflective of this belief, CPS authorities have the legal right to intervene in the presumed private sphere of families only in those situations considered to pose

serious risk to a child's safety, wellbeing or development (Bala, 2011; Hetherington, 2006). Thus, while many parents might struggle to care for their children, the expectation is that parents can and ought to overcome their struggles with minimal to no support from the welfare state in the form of CPS (Krane, Strega and Carlton, 2013).

### ***Shifting terrains – Balancing parental rights and risk to children***

CPS practice is very much about balancing the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit with ensuring children's protection from harm. In Canada, CPS policies and practices have been likened to a pendulum, swinging over time between emphasizing children's safety to emphasizing parents' rights (Dumbrill, 2006; Swift & Callahan, 2009). Responding to situations of child abuse and neglect was first formally recognised as a public responsibility in this country in Ontario near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, Children's Aid Societies were established across the province and Canada's first laws associated with protecting children from abuse and neglect were enacted (Cameron, Freymond, Cornfield & Palmer 2007). Other Canadian jurisdictions shortly followed suit. Based on an extended understanding of the English doctrine of *parens patriae* (parent of the nation) – which accorded the king (and later the state) the right to intervene on behalf of children – social responsibility for the well-being and safety of children was manifest in the interventions of child welfare agencies and their workers (Krane, 2003; Swift, 2011). The chief intervention philosophy underlying the legislation, policy and practice at the time was that of child-saving. CPS social workers were thus granted broad discretionary powers to enter into families, decide what was best for children, and then act accordingly. Practice tended to centre on the most obvious cases of abuse and neglect and child-rescuing interventions consisted primarily of removing children from unsafe care or circumstances (Bala, 2011). With an emphasis on child safety and a deeply interventionist approach, there was little room for consideration of parental rights and intrusion into private family life was easily justified.

State interventions aimed at protecting children from abuse and neglect in Canada did not alter much in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; however, from the 1960s onward, they have

undergone significant changes (Bala, 2011; Swift & Callahan, 2002). A particularly important influence was the identification of ‘battered child syndrome’ by Dr. C. Henry Kempe and his colleagues in 1962. This discovery spurred an understanding that parents may deny having behaved in an abusive or harmful way towards their children or may describe inflicted injuries as having occurred accidentally and that children may not disclose abuse out of loyalty to their parents or fear (Bala, 2011). Resulting from the increased awareness of the signs, symptoms and complexities of disclosures of child physical abuse was the addition of mandatory reporting requirements in the CPS legislation across Canadian jurisdictions (Bala, 2011; Swift & Callahan, 2002). Professionals involved with children as well as members of the public are now required to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect to local CPS authorities. Similar to the uncovering of physical abuse, was the discovery of child sexual abuse in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time researchers revealed important insights into the dynamics of children’s disclosures and the difficulties and hesitations experienced by both parents and professionals to hear and accept stories of sexual abuse (Bala, 2011). With an enhanced appreciation of the hidden nature of child sexual abuse and the realization that children – often the only ones who could provide information about the abuse – often felt too guilty or fearful or even were too young and lacking in knowledge to be able to easily or voluntarily disclose sexual abuse, a greater focus was put on the investigative aspects of CPS intervention (Cameron et al., 2007). Improving detection by making reporting of suspected child maltreatment obligatory and enhancing investigation procedures was seen as essential to reducing the risk of a child suffering continued abuse or neglect.

Another important and devastating event impacting the evolution of Canada’s state intervention aimed at protecting children from maltreatment was “the sixties scoop” wherein thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their homes and placed into care – usually non-Aboriginal foster homes and group homes – by provincial CPS agencies (Sinclair, Bala, Lilles & Blackstock, 2004). Saving Aboriginal children from the unfavorable conditions associated with living on reserves “through practices of apprehension and adoption became standard and widespread” (Cameron et al., 2007: 8). Only later were the high numbers of

Aboriginal children being removed from their families and taken from their reserves seen as evidence of racial and class biases being played out in the practice of CPS (Bala, 1998)<sup>16</sup>. This recognition was one of a number of influences instigating a policy swing towards a seemingly family service orientation to practice in the 1980s (Bala, 2011). At that moment in the history of Canada's response to child abuse and neglect, concerns for the risks associated with children's separation from their families and/or communities were brought to the fore.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, changes to the policies and practices relating to protecting children from maltreatment across the country were driven by concerns that current efforts were not adequate to meet the needs of children removed from their homes and by a growing unease that children were suffering harmful, long-term consequences of placement. Specifically, concerns were raised with respect to children being victims of abuse while in the care of CPS (i.e. foster homes, group homes, or residential units) or being left to "drift" through a series of less than satisfactory or stable placement settings (Bala, 1998). Added to these concerns was an increased sensitivity to the detrimental effects thought to result from separating children from their primary caregivers. With an influx of attention to the notion of attachment, the removal of children from their family homes was challenged as being emotionally damaging even in those instances in which parents and their capacities to provide appropriate care were deemed less than ideal (Bala, 1998; Krane, Davies, Carlton & Mulcahy, 2010). Taken together these developments prompted the pendulum to swing in the direction of supporting children in their own homes through minimally intrusive methods usually characterized as 'family preservation' practices. Rather than relying on the removal of children from risky or potentially harmful circumstances, interventions involved providing in-home services aimed at responding to family dysfunction.

Adding fuel to this swing was the escalating legalization of CPS across Canada. Heightened attention to individual rights arose alongside the enactment of the *Canadian Charter*

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<sup>16</sup> Despite this recognition, Aboriginal children still today remain vastly overrepresented in the CPS population relative to their proportion in the general Canadian population (Blackstock, Trocmé & Bennett, 2004; Sinha, et al., 2011). The question as to why and how this overrepresentation persists continues to occupy a significant amount of academic and political effort.

of *Rights and Freedoms* in 1982. Both parents' and children's rights were written into legislation and, with the goal of ensuring fairness, court involvement in decision-making was encouraged (Bala, 2011). CPS professionals were thus required to provide evidence to justify involuntary interventions into family life, especially the most intrusive interventions such as the apprehension of a child. With an emphasis on respecting family autonomy, there was no acceptance of imprecise reasoning for the removal of a child from his/her home and instead grounds for such intervention were restricted to situations in which there was obvious risk of serious harm to the child (Bala, 1998). Across Canada, legislative amendments reflected this shift towards respecting individual rights and family autonomy. For example, in Quebec, the *Youth Protection Act* was amended in 1984 to include the following four principles:

- to act in the interest of the child and protect his/her rights;
- to acknowledge that primary responsibility for children rests with their parents;
- to maintain the child in his/her family setting, when at all possible; and
- to recognize the need for prevention and involvement in the community (ACJQ, 2004: 4).

While an emphasis on respecting family autonomy and individual rights and a commitment to pursue intervention through minimal intrusion remain entrenched in legislation, the general swing toward a family service orientation to practice was short-lived.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the late 1980s and early 1990s in Canada were marked by a political impetus to reduce welfare state expenditures on public policies, programs and services. With the resulting diminishment of public resources, a family preservation approach which relied on the availability and accessibility of a range of preventative and support services for families became unfeasible (Bala, 1998). Concurrent with this fiscal withdrawal of support for family services was a noticeable rise in attention to the apparent failures of the state to respond to situations of child maltreatment. A spate of public inquiries following the horrific abuse or tragic deaths of children under the supervision of CPS authorities in Canada, as well as other English-speaking Western countries, urged a shift “back in favour of protecting children, hopefully before harm occurred” (Swift & Callahan, 2009: 119). Concerns for child safety or the risk of child maltreatment came to outweigh concerns associated with loss or disruption of familial attachments. Reports arising from prominent inquiries across the country included the

*Gove Inquiry Report* released in 1995, in British Columbia, Hatton's *Report of the Panel of Experts on Child Protection* released in 1998, in Ontario, and the report of the *Jasmin Task force*, released in 1992 and the *Report on the Beaumont Affair* released in 1998, in Quebec. Evidence that moral panics over CPS failures have not receded and continue to impact CPS legislation, policy and practice, was provided by the release of the *Turner Report and Investigation* in 2006, in Newfoundland. Consistent within these reports, amongst others, was the indictment of CPS systems and professionals for having taken risks with children's lives by prioritizing family autonomy and parental rights over children's safety and protection. Thematic throughout these reviews has been a call to renew an emphasis on child safety. To this end, subsequent organizational reforms have tended to revolve around standardizing CPS practice, so as to facilitate quick decision-making and reduce uncertainty in calculating and managing risk of harm to children.

Similar to the child protection oriented systems of the United States and England, CPS systems across Canada have become more and more 'bureaucratized;' they are characterized by "increasingly detailed procedures and guidelines [including prescribed time frames for assessment and intervention], strengthened managerial control to ensure compliance, and steady erosion of the scope for individual professional judgment through use of standardized protocols, assessment frameworks and decision making aids" that treated risk as identifiable, measurable, quantifiable, and ultimately preventable (Munro 2005: 533). With some provincial/territorial variability, comprehensive risk assessment instruments were introduced across the country with the goal of assuring social workers' consistency and accountability in their decision-making and planning around risk to children (Swift, 2011; Swift & Callahan, 2009). In reference to child welfare reforms in England, Parton (2008: 259) observed that an increased "emphasis on the need to collect, share, classify and store *information*" came at the expense of "coherent causal accounts...[of clients] in their social context." A parallel is evident in Canadian CPS systems wherein the shift towards making child safety paramount in procedures and practices served to intensify the focus on the collection (and documentation) of forensic data used to determine the nature and extent of risk to a child and, subsequently, the required degree of intrusion by

authorities into private families. In place of putting time and attention towards listening for and responding to detailed accounts of individual family members' concerns, experiences and needs, CPS professionals were asked to concentrate on investigating and identifying specific factors contributing to children's risk of abuse or neglect. As put by Swift (2011: 53), as CPS systems became more intensely concentrated on safety and risk, they became "front-end loaded," requiring such significant resources in the investigation phase that little money remained to fund resources." Left out – or at best, left as secondary – were families' circumstances and needs. Underscored once again was the presumption that adequate or functional parents will cope with child-rearing without public assistance and that only the most risky of family situations demand CPS intervention.

Research into social workers' experiences of this organisational emphasis on identifying, documenting and ultimately managing risk has shown social workers to be sensitive to – and discouraged by – expectations that they privilege risk before need in their day-to-day involvement with children and their families. In Spratt's (2001) qualitative study with social workers practicing in the field of child welfare in the United Kingdom concerns for risk were prioritized over recognizing and responding to need. Spratt (2001) observed that while social workers expressed wanting to intervene in a supportive manner, an organizational and public concern for risk to children's safety superseded their professional or personal aspirations and served to inform a continued focus on risk. Asking similar questions to social workers 13 years later, Hayes and Spratt (2014) found that risk-thinking remained solidly entrenched in child welfare practices in the UK such that service delivery in response to families' needs continued to take a back seat to assessing and responding to risk. The authors added that concerns for risk are so deeply entrenched in "cultural expectations" of organizations and government that there is little if any room for social workers to feel truly free or safe to practice in a manner other than focusing on risk. In a similar vein, Parada's (2004) research into CPS practices in Ontario found that CPS social workers tended to feel constrained in their abilities to support families given the contemporary organizational emphasis on identifying, documenting and managing risk. He noted that while CPS social workers did not want to "do away with the risk assessment model," they

wished for a system that allowed for a balance between concentrating on risk and spending time “attempting to help clients deal with some of the socio-economic and other oppressive conditions that force them to be in constant contact with a child welfare system” (83).

Not surprisingly, public inquiries into particularly tragic cases have contributed to creating an atmosphere of fear, blame and defensiveness – experienced largely by front-line social workers as well as by the families with whom they work – within CPS systems (Ayre, 2001; Littlechild, 2009; Macdonald & Macdonald, 2010; Munro, 2005; Parton, Thorpe & Wattam, 1997; Swift & Callahan 2009). Without a doubt, no social worker wants to make a mistake resulting in any danger or harm to a child. Still, there is little question that the work of child protection is not easy and the prediction of risk to a child can never be fully certain. Today, with CPS professionals acutely aware not only of the possibility of making mistakes but also the prospect of being “publicly named, shamed and sacked when mistakes are made” (Brown: 2010: 1216) the work is likely to feel that much more complicated and risky. As suggested by Swift and Callahan (2009: 168), CPS social workers and their supervisors “understand that evidence showing that procedures were followed is their own best protection in case at some later point harm comes to a child in the family being investigated.” The authors attested that “for this reason alone, it is likely that risk assessment in some form or other is here to stay” (168).

Philosophies associated with intervening around child abuse or neglect may have shifted over time but concern for the risk of harm to children has remained constant. In this dissertation, I am interested in exploring how risk comes to be interpreted within CPS legislation, policy and practice and with what effect for sexually abused teenage girls.

### ***What does CPS practice in Canada and Quebec look like today?***

As previously stated, child protection services comprise the distinct segment of Canada’s welfare state officially mandated to protect children from maltreatment. For the most part, funding and legislation of CPS are provincially or territorially determined and services are provided to families through locally established CPS agencies. Additionally, a number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities have negotiated tri-partite agreements with provincial/territorial and

federal governments so as to take on the responsibilities of providing child protection services to families living on reserve themselves. With federal funding, these First Nations, Inuit and Métis agencies deliver CPS services in accordance with provincial or territorial legislation. Local CPS agencies are awarded the legal mandate to intervene in situations of suspected or substantiated child abuse or neglect by virtue of provincial or territorial legislation. This legislation also serves as a guide for CPS professionals – the majority of whom are social workers – who carry out the day-to-day activities related protecting children from abuse or neglect. While there are some, albeit slight, differences in provincial/territorial statutes, CPS legislation across the country includes attention to the central guiding principles of CPS; the conditions under which a child may be considered to be in need of protection; and, the functions designated to each agency and its CPS professionals.

All provincial/territorial legislation contains a statement of principles that is intended to guide both CPS professionals and the courts as they engage in the practice of protecting children. Simply put, the paramount objective entrenched in legislation across Canada is to promote children's "best interests," safety and protection. Alongside this cardinal principle is the conviction that any intervention into families should be done in a manner that supports their autonomy, integrity and dignity. Other guiding principles set out in provincial/territorial statutes give added direction to social workers as they become involved in individual family situations. These principles include: giving priority to intervening on the basis of mutual consent; pursuing the least disruptive course of action; taking into consideration the importance of providing services that respect a child's need for continuity of care and stable family relationships; promoting early and collaborative assessment, planning and decision making to achieve permanent plans; and providing services that respect cultural, religious and regional differences (Bala 2011).

The principles outlined in Quebec's *Youth Protection Act (YPA)* correspond with those entrenched in legislation nationwide. The *YPA* takes as its starting point the recognition that "the primary responsibility for the care, maintenance and education of a child and for ensuring his supervision rests with his parents" (article 2.2). Analogous with CPS statutes across Canada,

however, parental rights and duties are secondary to the best interests or safety of the child which are named in legislation as being of paramount concern. To be precise, the *YPA* avows that the ultimate goal of any interventions is “to put an end to and prevent the recurrence of a situation in which the security or the development of the child is in danger” (article 2.3(a)) and attests that “decisions made under this *Act* must be in the interest of the child and respect his rights” (article 3).

Further principles encourage CPS social workers and courts to pursue interventions in a manner that:

- “[allows] the child and the child’s parents to take an active part in making decisions and choosing measures that concern them” (article 2.3(b));
- “[treats] the child and the child’s parents with courtesy, fairness and understanding, and in a manner that respects their dignity and autonomy” (article 2.4.1);
- “[gives] the child and the child’s parents an opportunity to present their points of view, express their concerns and be heard at the appropriate time during the intervention” (article 2.4.4);
- “[opts] for measures ... which allow action to be taken diligently to ensure the child’s protection, considering that a child’s perception of time differs from that of adults, and which take into consideration the ... (a) the proximity of the chosen resource, (b) the characteristics of cultural communities, [and] (c) the characteristics of Native communities” (article 2.4.5); and,
- “[is aimed] at keeping the child in the family environment” (article 4).

Important to my consideration of how sexually abused teenage girls’ and CPS professionals negotiate risk and autonomy in the context of CPS involvement, are those principles that relate to “the child’s” participation in interventions and decision-making on their behalf. Legislation clearly requires social workers and courts to share information in a manner that supports girls’ understanding and to take into consideration their views and wishes throughout the process of intervention and decision-making. Still, legislation permits some leeway in this regard. As Bala (2011: 11) observed, the views and wishes of children “are not necessarily determining factors in the final decisions that are made” in the context of interventions wherein children’s safety is paramount. In Chapter 7, I will comment on how understandings of risk and autonomy might influence sexually abused girls’ involvement in interventions and decision-making aimed at ensuring their best interests. As will be presented, in the context of CPS, these girls’ autonomous

decision-making becomes an area of scrutiny and potential regulation wherein the perceived “right choices” are bound up with the paramount objective of ensuring safety.

Provincial/territorial statutes refer to, and offer brief definitions of, specific categories of child maltreatment, thereby delineating the circumstances under which a child may be considered to be at risk and in need of protection. Commonly, these categories include abandonment, neglect, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, deprivation of necessary health care, or a child’s serious behavioural problems. In addition to suspected or actual neglect or abuse, provincial statutes now include clauses stating that a child may be deemed to be in need of protection when s/he is exposed to a significant risk of being subjected to any of these forms of maltreatment. In Quebec, those categories of maltreatment deemed to warrant the involvement of child protection authorities are presented in articles 38 and 38.1 of the Youth Protection Act (see *Appendix A*).

As well as establishing the fundamental principles of and the circumstances necessitating CPS involvement, provincial/territorial statutes clarify the functions mandated to CPS professionals – usually social workers. In general CPS social workers are responsible for investigating reported incidents that a child might be “in need of protection” from some sort of harm, assessing the degree of risk to the child, and taking the necessary actions to ameliorate the circumstances placing the child at risk of harm. Article 32 of Quebec’s *Youth Protection Act* (2007) lays out the “exclusive duties” of authorized CPS social workers. Thus, as detailed in legislation, CPS social workers are responsible for receiving reports of suspected abuse or neglect, analysing them and deciding whether they must be evaluated further; assessing a child’s circumstances; determining whether the child’s security or development is in danger; deciding on an intervention plan aimed at resolving the circumstances placing the child at risk of further harm; putting the plan into action; reviewing the child’s situation at a predetermined later date; and putting an end to the intervention when or if the child’s security or development is no longer in danger. The actual CPS intervention with a child and his/her family can involve any number of a range of potential services or measures including but not limited to counselling and guidance; the restriction of contact between the child and certain individuals; the facilitation of

access to particular health or psychological services; an assurance of the child's educational participation; or, the removal of the child from the family's home and his/her placement in a foster home, group home or residential unit. Any intervention plan can be pursued either through a court order or a voluntary agreement signed by the CPS social worker, the parent(s), and the child if s/he is of a particular age – 12 years or older in Quebec.

Specific to concerns around sexual abuse, when a CPS social worker becomes involved, s/he is responsible for (1) finding sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegations of sexual abuse; (2) removing any risk of sexual re-victimization usually by ensuring the separation of the victim from the perpetrator of the abuse; and (3) and taking steps to address any physical or emotional harm experienced by the victim as a result of the abuse (Daigneault, Hébert, & Tourigny, 2007). The central foci of CPS decision making and action in situations of child sexual abuse are to bring an end to the abuse, minimize the risk of any future abuse and respond to the possible effects or risks associated with the experience of sexual abuse. Protective decisions may involve recommending placement outside of the child's home environment, interdiction of contact with specified individuals, including the alleged abuser, involvement in therapeutic interventions, or surveillance and control over the child's involvement with peers or movement in his/her surrounding community.

With the understanding that child sexual abuse is a child protection concern as well as a criminal act, “most [Canadian child protection] jurisdictions now have specific protocols in place for contacting and working with the police if investigations involve allegations of ... sexual abuse” (Swift, 2011: 43). These protocols establish reciprocal reporting and joint investigation procedures that are designed to enhance the prospect of confirming or refuting allegations of child sexual abuse and ensuring the protection of child victims. An example of such a protocol is Quebec's *Entente multisectorielle relative aux enfants victimes d'abus sexuels, de mauvais traitements physiques ou d'une absence de soins menaçant leur santé physique* (2001)<sup>17</sup>, which

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<sup>17</sup> The *Entente* refers to situations not only of child sexual abuse but also of physical abuse or medical neglect. The *Entente*, however, outlines differences with respect to the treatment of each of these situations. Specifically, whereas every instance of child sexual abuse brought to the attention of either the police or child protection must be reported to the other agency partners, in situations of physical abuse or medical neglect it is up to the discretion of the

came into force in 2002. The *Entente* sets out the roles and responsibilities of each authorized partner (including the police, the justice system and CPS) involved in investigating and intervening in situations of suspected child sexual abuse. As with similar protocols in place across the country, the *Entente* was written with the goals of guaranteeing full and timely sharing of information between the police and CPS and ensuring consistent and thorough handling of all cases of child sexual abuse coming to the attention of either authority. Despite ongoing partnerships between law enforcement and CPS agencies, the fact of differing mandates means that reliance on police involvement to ensure the protection of child victims is rare. Given that the joint mandate of the police and justice system is to investigate and prosecute crimes, their contribution to protecting children from sexual abuse is limited to the punishment of perpetrators through custodial or non-custodial sentencing. In other words, should the combined efforts of the police and justice system result in the conviction of a sexual offender, sentencing may contribute to the protection of the child simply through the removal of the sexual offender from the child's immediate environment. For that to happen the case must first be brought to court and a conviction must be won.

Lamentably, research confirms that sexual violence goes significantly underreported to the police (Benoit et al. 2015; Brennan & Taylor-Butts 2008; Conroy & Cotter, 2017) and when reported, few investigations lead to criminal conviction (Rotenberg, 2017). The infrequency with which the police and the justice system combined are able to effectively contribute to the protection of child and youth victims of sexual violence. Means that the official burden of responsibility for protection thus falls to CPS.

### ***Responsibility (Failure) to protect***

As previously stated, the recognition of parents or caregivers as carrying the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of their children is deeply entrenched in the legislation and practice of CPS. Indeed, CPS is mandated to intervene only once parents or

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professional involved as to whether the situation must be reported to the partners. This variation in treatment reflects an understanding that child sexual abuse, in contrast to physical abuse or medical neglect, is always a crime and never a result of accident, lack of knowledge or marginalized circumstances.

caregivers are suspected as unwilling or unable to assure their children's safety from abuse or neglect. But, parental responsibility to protect does not disappear once CPS social workers become involved. Rather, parents' capacities (or failures) to protect are regularly made the object of CPS scrutiny and intervention.

Earlier in this chapter, I brought attention to the inclusion of the notion of *failure to protect* in the definition of child sexual abuse found in Quebec's CPS legislation. Here, I want to elaborate on how interventions are operationalized and potentially experienced once concerns around parents' alleged failure to protect become the focus of CPS involvement in situations of child abuse or neglect, and most particularly, child sexual abuse. The current presence of failure to protect in CPS legislation is reflective of strongly held beliefs around parental responsibility and makes explicit the expectation that even a non-offending parent – one who did not perpetrate an abuse – should be able to recognise risks to a child and to act so as to either prevent abuse or bring an end to the circumstances of risk (Krane, Strega & Carlton, 2013). Thus, in situations of child sexual abuse, a CPS determination of risk may result not only from the substantiation of the sexually abusive acts of an alleged offender but also from observations of the presumed failures of the non-offending parent – usually the mother – to protect the child when s/he is thought to have known of the sexual abuse or to have had reasonable cause to suspect it.

Before moving forward, I believe it important to point out that despite the pervasiveness of gender neutral language in official documentation as well as much of the academic literature dealing with CPS, CPS tends to produce gendered practices wherein scrutiny and intervention efforts are chiefly concentrated on mothers rather than fathers even in those situations in which the father has been identified as the principal contributor to the situation of risk to the child (Coohey & Zhang, 2006; Risley-Curtiss & Heffernan 2003; Scourfield 2003; Strega, Fleet, Brown, Dominelli, Callahan & Walmsley, 2008). Findings from the CIS - 2008 (Trocmé et al., 2010) are supportive of this observation. Asked to specify the sex of the primary caregiver for each substantiated investigation with which they were involved in 2008, the over 1,800 CPS social workers participating in the study identified females as the primary caregiver in 91 percent of the cases. Representing an overwhelming majority, biological mothers were identified as the

primary caregiver in 86 percent of the cases substantiated for abuse or neglect. Although data on the sex of the caregiver according to the specific circumstances under which the case was substantiated for abuse or neglect was not collected in the 2008 study, according to the CIS-2003 (Trocmé et al., 2005), in almost half of the cases substantiated for sexual abuse children were residing with two parental figures. This data combined with the fact that stepfathers and fathers were identified as the perpetrators of sexual abuse in a minority of cases (13 percent and 9 percent respectively), is suggestive of a tendency in CPS practice to focus on mothers despite the potential availability of fathers or father figures.

A number of feminist authors have noted that the inclination within CPS interventions to concentrate on mothers is reflective of a dominant conceptualisation of motherhood that assumes maternal omniscience, self-sacrifice and steadfast devotion (Carlton & Krane, 2013a; Davies & Krane, 1997; Johnson & Sullivan, 2008; Krane, 2003; Krane & Davies, 2000). It has been argued that the prevailing ideology of motherhood in North American societies today is that of “intensive motherhood” (Arendell, 2000; Rippeyoung, 2013). A term initially proposed by Hays (1996), intensive motherhood refers to a pattern of parenting wherein the central focus is firmly placed on anticipating and attending to children’s every need. Any potential need or desire of the mother must be put aside or made secondary to those of the child. Left out of such a view of motherhood is any considered understanding of the emotional and material consequences and labour associated with parenting. Also left out is attention to the influences on parenting of the complex circumstances of individual mothers’ lives. According to this ideology of motherhood, and as put by Krane and Davies (2000: 39) “normal mothers cope” regardless of circumstance – and they protect their children.

In situations of child sexual abuse brought to the attention of CPS, a non-offending mother may well be viewed as having already failed in her individual responsibility to predict and prevent risk to her child. By concentrating efforts on mothers, the emphasis is shifted from the actions of the alleged (predominantly male) offender to inadequacies and “in/actions of women as mothers” (Krane, 2003: 70). Thus, what a non-offending mother does – or how she acts – after the learning of the sexual abuse of her child is frequently made the focus of CPS

intervention. Her presumed maternal responsibility to protect does not disappear, if anything it intensifies. Given the paramountcy of child safety in CPS legislation and practice combined with the fact that the removal of a child from his/her family environment remains an intervention of last resort, CPS professionals tend to rely heavily on non-offending mothers in their efforts to ensure children are protected from further harm. In her case study of the protection processes undertaken in situations of child sexual abuse in a CPS agency in Ontario, Krane (2003) observed that the CPS mandate to protect was often shifted from individual social workers to non-offending mothers. This shift was seen in practices wherein CPS social workers encouraged mothers to express their belief and support of their sexually abused child; to take measures to restrict contact between the child and his/her alleged abuser; and to engage in any other measure deemed appropriate to address any physical and/or emotional harm resulting from the sexual abuse. Krane (2003) posited that placing expectations on non-offending mothers to take on the daily tasks of protection effectively serves to transform them into “mother protectors.” She further observed that this transfer of the responsibility to protect tended to be done with little regard for non-offending mothers’ respective social contexts or circumstances. The underlying assumption appeared to be that women as mothers are (and should be) willing and able to make choices and to take actions appropriate to the best interests and wellbeing of their children.

In a 2013 publication coauthored with Julia Krane, we suggested that the challenge facing CPS social workers is “to recognize that non-offending mothers may need time and support in order to come to terms with their child’s disclosure while simultaneously understanding that the child’s safety is likely best achieved through their non-offending mothers’ ability to be strong and supportive, knowing full well that the last resort is to separate the child from his/her family” (Carlton & Krane, 2013a: 35). With reference to existing – principally feminist – literature on non-offending mothers’ experiences of and responses to learning of their children’s sexual abuse, we noted that non-offending mothers experience a range of emotions, reactions and insecurities. Indeed, it is now widely understood that the sexual abuse of a child is more than likely to produce significant stress and disruption as well as intense emotional distress for non-offending mothers. It is equally well-documented that non-offending mothers often experience material

consequences in the aftermath of their child's disclosures potentially, consequences which may include "relationship losses, reduced income, increased dependence on government programs, employment disruption, and change of residence" (Massat and Lundy 1998: 378). These consequences are particularly significant given the general observation that families coming to the attention of CPS are liable to already be living in precarious circumstances (Trocmé et al., 2005, 2010).

CPS workers may very well have an understanding of and empathy for non-offending mothers' difficult circumstances and the emotional and material fallout associated with children's disclosures. Nevertheless, if they are to uphold CPS principles that favour family autonomy, least intrusion and stability in children's care, these social workers have little other recourse than focus their assessments and interventions on mothers' respective capacities to ensure the safety of their children (Carlton & Krane, 2013a).

But what happens when the child in question is a sexually abused teenage girl? How might these girls be implicated in the responsibility for protection from maltreatment? Whereas a number of feminist authors have brought attention to the consideration of maternal failure to protect as a circumstance of risk to a child as well as the associated CPS practices with non-offending mothers, left out has been a consideration of how the inclusion of the notion of failure to protect in CPS legislation and practice might influence interventions with sexually abused teenage girls. Later, I will suggest that CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls is shaped by expectations of self-protection and the corollary concerns around girls' potential failure to self-protect. My argument is that CPS practices with teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse involve a transfer of responsibility for protection from further risk from individual CPS social workers to the sexually abused teenage girls. Situated at the cusp of adulthood, these girls are assumed to be capable of acting with autonomy, yet are frequently identified as failing. Essentially, I will suggest that common understandings of autonomy and risk in the context of CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls serve to contribute to these girls' continued scrutiny, surveillance and regulation.

## Chapter 3: CHILD PROTECTION IN CANADA'S WELFARE STATE

*Who can hope to be safe? Who sufficiently cautious? Guard himself as he may, every moment's an ambush.*

— Horace<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Excerpt from *Ode XIII – To a tree*, translated from the original Latin by Lord Lytton (1870). *The Odes and Epodes of Horace*.

## **Chapter 3: CHILD PROTECTION IN CANADA'S WELFARE STATE**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The concept of the *welfare state* refers to a form of government whereby the state participates in protecting and promoting the health and social and economic wellbeing of its citizens through a system of policies, programs and benefits. Welfare states, such as our Canadian welfare state, deal with an array of citizen needs and issues including but not limited to poverty, homelessness, unemployment, immigration, aging, illness, workplace injury, disability, and the needs of specific populations including children, women, veterans, indigenous and LGBTQ populations, etc.. The protection of children from situations of abuse or neglect represents but one area of concern addressed by the welfare state.

In this chapter, I further my discussion on CPS by addressing its embeddedness within the welfare state. While CPS in Canada functions autonomously as a discrete area of services within the basket of social programs available to children and families, its legislation, policies and practices are influenced by the larger context of the welfare state. Thus, gaining insight into the organisation of Canada's welfare state as well as the socio-political ideologies informing its present operations contributes to a better understanding of CPS and its relationship with children and families. The chapter begins with a brief discussion on how welfare states participate in protecting and promoting the social and economic wellbeing of its citizens. In the final sections of this chapter I describe the current functioning of Canada's welfare state as shaped by neoliberal attitudes and risk-thinking ideology – wherein individuals are expected to assume personal responsibility for managing risk and assuring their own welfare. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how contemporary trends toward neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies within Canada's welfare state influence the day-to-day functioning of CPS.

### **3.2 Welfare state participation in citizen protection and wellbeing**

Approaches to welfare provision adopted by welfare states across the globe are neither universal nor static. Decisions surrounding how welfare states protect and promote the welfare of their citizens “are made according to a country's own traditions, values and preferences, and within its

political institutions. Of course, constraints come from the specific economic and social challenges it faces as well as its financial situation” (Jenson, 2004a: v). As such, how welfare states contribute to the wellbeing of citizens is determined not merely by a set of beliefs or interests of a particular period, political party or government but also by the prevailing socio-political ideologies and the economic and social conditions of the time and place.

Scholars interested in approaches to welfare provision tend to consider the welfare state to be one of a number of interrelated sources of welfare. Rather than referring simply to a welfare state, such scholars may invoke the concept of welfare regime (Esping-Anderson, 1990, 2002) or the more recent concept of welfare or social architecture (Jenson, 2004a; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003). For example, Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) adopted the concept of a welfare diamond,<sup>19</sup> theorizing that the welfare architecture of a nation is composed of four sources of welfare: the “state, market, voluntary sector and family” (80). Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) added that a nation’s welfare architecture is reflective of “decisions about ‘how to produce welfare’ in any country, that is, whether via purchased welfare (markets), via the reciprocity of kin (families), via collective support in communities (voluntary sector), or via collective and public solidarity, that is state provision” (80). Jenson (2004a: 1) explained:

For the majority of people, by far their major source of welfare is *market* income, earned themselves or by someone in their family, such as a spouse or a parent. But we also gain part of our welfare from the non-marketized benefits and services provided within the *family*, such as parental child care, housework and care for elderly relatives. Access to welfare also comes from *states*, via public services such as child care, health care or other services for which we are not required to pay full market prices, as well as by income transfers. The fourth source is the *community*, whose volunteers and non-market exchanges generate welfare by providing a range of services and supports, such as child care, food banks, recreation and leisure.

Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) further noted that the “responsibility mix” – the identification of the role and boundaries of the welfare state and the expected contributions and rights of the other three sides of the welfare diamond – comprises the “scaffolding” upon which a welfare architecture rests.

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<sup>19</sup> Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) acknowledged that the concept of the *welfare diamond* originated in Evers, Adelbert, Pilj, Marja and Ungerson, Clare. (1994). *Payments for Care*. Aldershot, UK: Avebury.

### **3.3 Evolving from universal to neoliberal**

The welfare state in Canada began to be formalized as a coherent set of social policies, programs on the heels of the Great Depression and WWII. The 1940s ushered in a period of popular approval for increased and active government intervention in the domestic economy as well as the welfare of Canadian citizens (Battle & Torjman, 2001; Finkel, 2006; Johnson, McBride & Smith, 1994). No one – neither individual citizens nor private markets – could tolerate returning to Depression-like conditions as the Second World War came to an end. Intersecting with popular opinion, and fear, was the influence of the theories of British economist John Maynard Keynes (Finkel, 2006). In essence, Keynes' rejected the view that markets were self-correcting and able to adjust to economic crises or fluctuations on their own. Instead, he posited that intervention through a system of government programs, benefits and insurances was “necessary to smooth out the booms and busts that characterized the capitalist economic cycle” (Finkel, 2006: 128). The emerging belief in Canada at the time was that private markets could not on their own respond to the economic and social risks of unemployment, low wages, illness, disability or old age (Battle & Torjman, 2001). Neither was it expected that families or community institutions (i.e. church and charities) could offer adequate support to individuals or families in need (Battle & Torjman, 2001).

Canadian social policy around the middle of the twentieth century focused on assuring universal citizen access to certain key areas of welfare and bolstering post-war economy “by regularly putting cash into the hands of consumers” through targeted benefits or allowances (Battle & Torjman, 2001: 17). Markets and families were still responsible for producing and distributing welfare; however, the welfare state was responsible for filling in the gaps through the implementation of an extensive *safety net* of social programs, policies, benefits and insurances (Jenson, 2004a; Battle & Torjman, 2001). Governing in this manner pooled collective responsibility and provided individual reimbursement for “the tribulations or risks of the industrial economy” (Ilcan, 2009: 210). A primary objective was for the welfare state to use its powers to shift risk from citizens to the state. Instead of blaming citizens or leaving them alone

to manage their misfortunes, the intent was to cushion them from the hardships of poverty, unemployment, illness, disability, or aging.

Although a Keynesian vision of the welfare state influenced the progression of social policy and programming well into the 1970s, a fully-fledged universalist welfare state was never fully realised in this country (Battle & Torjman, 2001; Finkel, 2006). Instead a “grudging attitude” towards social spending persisted and later grew alongside mounting government debt, and, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, increasing unemployment (Battle & Torjman, 2001: 18). Critics of the Keynesian approach to the welfare state claimed that government overspending on social policies and programs brought about not only significant national debt but also a passive, dependent citizenry.

As the notion of a universal welfare state went into decline, neoliberal attitudes toward governance intensified (Brodie, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Ilcan, 2009; Peck, 2001). Neoliberal ideology proposes a very different relationship between the welfare state and a nation’s citizenry than does a universalist perspective. Instead of the welfare state taking on a significant share of responsibility for the management and eradication of risks associated with everyday life, neoliberal attitudes suggest that individual citizens are expected to overcome such risks on their own in order to participate as active citizens capable of engaging in the market economy. Ilcan (2009) observed a “responsibilizing ethos” within neoliberal modes of governing. She observed that with this ethos in place, new kinds of autonomous citizens are formed and individual responsibility is expected and activated by “numerous governments, organizations, and programs that aim to make certain groups more responsible for transforming their conduct” (Ilcan, 2009: 220-221). Thinking back to Jenson and St. Martin’s (2003) notion of the “responsibility mix” wherein varying degrees of responsibility are assumed by each of the four points of the welfare architectural diamond, the rise of a neoliberal “responsibilizing ethos” has produced a shift in the balance of responsibilities between the welfare state and private citizens. As the welfare state shrinks its responsibility for the collective welfare of Canadian citizens, a concomitant increase in the responsibility of citizens for their individual welfare is observable.

### **3.3.1 New social risks**

A consideration of the “market” as one side of a welfare diamond allows for a deeper appreciation of how an increase in personal responsibility for managing the risks associated with everyday life plays out in the lives of individual citizens. To elaborate on this terrain, I turn to the scholarship dealing with the evolution, composition and globalization of present-day labour markets. These scholars have brought attention to “new social risks” as well as opportunities that have arisen as a result of labour market restructuring (Bonoli, 2005; Jenson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009; Jenson & Saint Martin, 2003, 2006; Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

Recent shifts in population, family structures, and employment trends have inspired contemporary reformations of Westernized market economies. For decades now, reliance on the male-breadwinner capable of financially providing for his entire family through full-time, lifelong, steady employment has lost sway as the dominant employment model. Correspondingly, the stable nuclear family with a stay-at-home wife responsible for the care and upbringing of children as well as the care of other family members including the elderly or unwell has become more of an exception than the rule. In terms of employment, the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society signalled a number of transformations that wrought important consequences for workers and their families, including: 1) women’s massive entry into paid employment; 2) an increase in the elderly population bringing about an greater strain on the welfare state and the care-giving activities of families; 3) labour market changes informed by a growth in the fields of technology and communications and a weakening of the industrial sector; and 4) an expansion of private sector services (Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Taylor-Gooby (2004: 2-3), amongst others, has argued that people now face a whole new set of social risks in the course of their lives “as a result of the economic and social changes associated with the transition to a post-industrial society.”

While old social risks associated with unemployment, illness, disability and old age persist, new social risks – or income and service gaps – have emerged as a result of the establishment of post-industrial economies and alongside welfare state reforms that emphasize individual responsibility to manage current and future needs (Bonoli, 2005; Jenson & Saint

Martin, 2006; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Many people are able to engage in contemporary labour markets in such a way as to successfully cope with new social risks, but certain groups of people, such as younger people, families with small children and working women, are more vulnerable (Bonoli, 2005). Jenson (2004b) added newcomers to Canada, visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples to those groups of people most likely to experience the detrimental effects of new social risks. And, Taylor-Gooby (2004) explained that new social risks tend to affect younger people as they make efforts to enter and establish a foothold in the labour market while often, at the same time, taking on care responsibilities associated with building a family. He further observed that new social risks pose significantly more problems for those people lacking access to adequate education and/or training or the support of either their families or the welfare state.

Education has “long been acknowledged as one of the foundations of a successful modern economy” and more recently has been proposed as a principle “route to security” from the damaging effects of new social risks (Jenson & Saint Martin, 2006: 435-436). With this understanding, successful engagement with the labour market rests, in part, on individual “capacity to confront challenges and adapt, via lifelong learning to acquire new skills or update old ones” (Jenson & Saint Martin, 2006: 435). Walkerdine (2003: 240), in her discussion on young women’s entry into the labour market in Britain, identified education as necessary to ensuring future life chances in what she referred to as “the new economy:”

Jobs for life are being replaced by a constantly changing array of jobs, small businesses and employment contracts. In such an economy, it is the flexible and autonomous subject who is demanded to be able to cope with constant change in work, income and lifestyle and with constant insecurity. It is the flexible and autonomous subject who negotiates, chooses, succeeds in the array of education and retraining forms that form the new ‘lifelong learning’ and the ‘multiple career trajectories’ that have replaced the linear hierarchies of the education system of the past and the jobs for life of the old economy.

In post-industrial labour markets where skills and knowledge are valued, education and training programs have a considerable impact on individuals’ prospective life chances.

Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) further claimed that education has become a virtual requirement of financial autonomy for youth. Support for this statement can be found in Canadian and OECD measurements that associate a lack of education or even diminished

education with increased risks of unemployment as well as underemployment. These measurements show that, in Canada as in other post-industrial or advanced economies, graduating from high school no longer offers a certain route to a guaranteed job and leaving high school early drastically curtails opportunities to acquire any kind of gainful employment, particularly full-time positions (OECD, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2012)<sup>20</sup>. This is an observation to which I will return in Chapter 8 as I discuss participants' expanded understandings of risk as being inclusive of anxieties surrounding sexually abused teenage girls' future life outcomes. I will show that aspirations for sexually abused teenage girls' autonomy are tied up with expectations of academic achievement.

### **3.3.2 Rise and influence of neoliberalism in Canada's welfare state:**

A number of scholars have made attempts at defining neoliberalism. For example, in his historical review of neoliberalism, Harvey (2005: 2) referred to it as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade." Looking at how social policy has developed within welfare states shaped by neoliberal ways of thinking, Peck (2001) observed that despite variances in terms of the administration of public policies, the influence of neoliberal ways of thinking is revealed in the similarity of policy objectives including,

purge the system of obstacles to the functioning of 'free markets'; restrain public expenditure and any form of collective initiative; celebrate the virtues of individualism, competitiveness, and economic self-sufficiency; abolish or weaken social transfer programs while actively fostering the 'inclusion' of the poor and marginalized into the labor market, on the market's terms (445).

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<sup>20</sup> In Canada, even during the global economic downturn in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, education could be seen as a protective factor against unemployment:

between 2008 and 2009, the decline in the number of employed individuals [across] Canada ... mostly reflected net employment losses among those with less than high school graduation. During this period, the number of individuals without high school graduation who held a job decreased by 10.2% .... Those with high school graduation or some (non-completed) postsecondary education as their highest level of education were also negatively affected as their net employment fell by 3.6%. By contrast, those with postsecondary education (trades, college, CÉGEP or university certificate below a bachelor's degree; a bachelor's degree or beyond) experienced more stable employment levels (Statistics Canada, 2012: 6).

Peck (2001: 445) added, “it is as if all that is required for the optimization of economic efficiency and individual freedom is for the overbearing ‘nanny’ state to get out of the way.” In other words, Ilcan (2009) noted that with an emphasis on individual economic engagement and labour market involvement, neoliberalism endorses an approach that absolves the welfare state of responsibility for the distribution of society’s resources and demands citizens to demonstrate autonomy, resilience, self-discipline and entrepreneurial spirit.

Recent years have witnessed a progressive strengthening of neoliberal attitudes in Canada’s socio-political climate (Brodie, 2007; Ilcan, 2009; McBride & McNutt, 2007). Citing as examples the restructuring of the Unemployment Insurance program (UI) to what is now known as Employment Insurance and the replacement of the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), Swift and Callahan (2009: 84) commented that over the last couple of decades federal social policy reforms have been aimed at curtailing or eliminating “programs designed to assist people with the normal contingencies of living ... so that people will ‘help themselves’.” According to Swift (2011: 41), “neo-liberal economic policies currently entrenched in the political system at both federal and provincial levels focus on reducing the cost and scope of the welfare state while encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own fate.” What remains is a residual social safety-net wherein assistance from the welfare state is provided primarily to those citizens who have failed the neoliberal project of individual responsibility by being unable to help themselves.

While the welfare state, as one contributor within the responsibility mix of the welfare diamond, shares some accountability for managing new social risks, the primary obligation falls to individuals and families. Instead of providing universal programs or benefits to fill in “income and service gaps,” new social risk policies tend to target particular – often traditionally excluded – populations; focus on mobilising a greater proportion of the population into the labour market; and, forge links with economic policy aimed at increasing market potentials in a competitive global economy (Bonoli, 2005; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). The role of the welfare state then becomes one of facilitating and encouraging a paid work force through policies aimed at regulating the conduct of citizens. The role of the individual is to combat new social risks by engaging with the

labour market and, if necessary, using existing welfare state programs and policies to support his/her entry or re-entry into the labour market. Individual inability to participate in the labour market means failing to cope successfully with new social risks and is likely to have “substantial implications for poverty, inequality, and future life chances” (Taylor-Gooby, 2004: 8). Inability to participate in the labour market may also provoke increased, albeit residual, involvement of the welfare state in the lives of failing citizens.

The retreat of Canada's welfare state from sharing collective responsibility for the good of all citizens has not translated into a reduced role of the welfare state in the lives of all citizens. With a shift towards neoliberal thinking have come new ways of understanding welfare state involvement, with minimal welfare state involvement being attributed to seemingly normally functioning citizens and intensive welfare state involvement being attributed to those deemed unfit to the task of protecting and promoting their own welfare (Rose, 1996). Those individuals and families who have the financial, educational, employment and “moral means” to behave as active citizens are “included” in the neoliberal project; they have the liberty to engage successfully with free local and global markets (Rose, 1996). Moral, according to Rose (1996: 340), refers to the “heterogeneous array of ‘civilized’ images and devices for lifestyle promotion. In rearing children, in schooling, in training and employment, in ceaseless consumption, the included must calculate their actions in terms of a kind of ‘investment’ in themselves, their families, and ... their own particular communities.” The welfare state is far less likely to become directly involved in the daily lives of the “included.” Rather its involvement is distant in that it revolves around facilitating market enterprise and capitalist growth within a global economy. On the other hand, for the “excluded,” welfare state involvement is close up and personal and tends to be characterized by strategies of surveillance, regulation or control. The excluded refers to those citizens who are marginalized “by virtue of their incapacity to manage themselves” or their affiliation with some type of “anti-community” or uncivilized way of being; their “morality, lifestyle or comportment is considered a threat or a reproach to public contentment and political order” (Rose, 1996: 340). In other words, they are viewed as being a risk to both themselves and their surrounding communities and thus are targeted for intensive welfare state intervention.

### **3.3.3 Rise and influence of risk-thinking and risk-regulation in Canada's welfare state:**

Risks appear to abound in everyday life. It is virtually impossible in today's western societies to turn on a television, open a newspaper, surf the net or listen to the radio without being reminded of some potential danger lurking around the next corner. Arguably, an awareness of dangers is not new; but the current proliferation of particular discourses of risk is relatively recent. Coinciding with the rise and influence of neoliberal ideology, discourses of risk emerged in the latter part of the 20th century and have since taken up residence in popular discourse as well as in the governing structures, policies and administration of Canada's welfare state.

Contemporary discourses of risk owe a significant debt to the work of theorists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. Both writers ascribed to the notion of a *risk society*, a term coined by Beck. Beck (1992) explained that a risk society, rather than concentrating on the distribution of 'goods' or wealth, distributes or attempts to mitigate the 'bads' or risks associated with global economics or environmental threats. Observing that a concern for the future infiltrates and shapes current experience and action, Beck (1992) suggested that "we become active today in order to prevent, alleviate or take precautions against the problems and crises of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow" (34). In a similar vein, Giddens (1999) posited that "the idea of risk is bound up with the aspiration to control and particularly with the idea of controlling the future" (3). Accordingly, managing risk is understood as a central feature of the risk society.

Giddens (1999) suggested that the origins of a risk society are attributable to two important transformations: the end of nature and the end of tradition. By the end of nature, he meant that there are few if any elements of the natural world that are unaffected by human existence. Thus, rather than worrying about what nature might do to humankind, at some point during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humans become intensely preoccupied with what we had done to nature. The end of tradition was signified by a decreasing reliance on fate and a growing emphasis on independent planning for the future. Beck referred to this process as one of *individualization* (1992). Both theorists saw the rise of a risk society as corresponding to a lessening of traditional supports (i.e. family, church) as well as a lessening of structural

constraints (i.e. traditional gender roles) for individuals. As a result, individuals in a risk society are invested with greater responsibility and accountability and are required to be active in authoring their respective lives. No longer can individuals fall back on fate to explain the outcomes of their actions or inactions. Nor can they claim that tradition dictated their choices with respect to issues such as marriage, child-bearing or child rearing. As pointed out by Lupton (2006: 19), in a risk society, “people are now held responsible for outcomes in their lives: whether or not, for example, their marriage or career succeeds.” But what happens when individuals are unequipped or unwilling to engage in the individual project of managing risk?

Here, a governmentality perspective<sup>21</sup> on risk becomes particularly salient. A governmentality approach to understanding risk considers the complex ways in which risk becomes an organizing principle of government within contemporary welfare states influenced by neoliberal ideology. As noted by Lupton (2006: 13-14), “a crucial aspect of risk, from the governmentality perspective, is that it is a major apparatus through which individuals in a society are encouraged to engage in self-regulation.” No longer is the welfare state responsible for alleviating risks through the redistribution of wealth; rather, neoliberal attitudes towards governing expect individuals to succeed – or fail – in the face of particular risks by virtue of their own capacities and choices. Correspondingly, alongside the welfare state’s withdrawal from public protection from social and economic risks or insecurities has been a concerted political effort to manage and control risk and risky individuals (Peck, 2003; Pollack, 2010; Rose, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2006; Webb, 2006). As explained by Webb (2006: 49), with the dominant

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<sup>21</sup> The notion of governmentality owes its origin to the work of Foucault and has been taken up by scholars – such as Mitchell Dean, Nicolas Rose and Pat O’Malley – theorizing on the workings of various forms of government. Simply, governmentality refers to the art of governing. A governmentality perspective sees the pursuit of certain political or ideological ends as being achieved not through “excessive government,” or by the welfare state “governing too much,” but rather through a set of strategies, technologies and programs which are ostensibly distant from the direct rule of government (Rose, O’Malley & Valverde, 2006: 84). “Instead of seeing any single body – such as the state – as responsible for managing the conduct of citizens, this perspective recognizes that a whole variety of authorities govern in different sites, in relation to different objectives” (Rose, O’Malley & Valverde, 2006: 85). A governmentality perspective refers not only to the organization and management of political structures or sites of authority (i.e. the welfare state and its various policies and programs), but also to “the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed” (Foucault, 1994: 341 as cited in Davies & Bansel, 2007: 248). Governing thus involves the structuring of individual action and choice, “in part, through the introduction/imposition of new discourses – new mentalities – through which subjects will take themselves up as the newly appropriate and appropriated subjects of the new social order” (Davies & Bansel, 2007: 248).

influence of neoliberal ideology, “not only do advanced liberal democracies construct new forms of freedom, security and autonomy for individuals but [they] also deploy complex means of regulation, authoritarianism, exclusion and normalisation of social life.” With reference to this latter political process, Rose (2000: 332) claimed that “risk thinking” has become central to the governance of those individuals and groups excluded – seemingly by their own failings – from successful neoliberal citizenship:

Outside the circuits of inclusion – in ‘marginalized’ spaces, in the decaying council estate, in the chaotic lone parent family, in the shop doorways of inner city streets – exists an array of micro-circuits, micro-cultures of non-citizens, failed citizens, anti-citizens, comprised of those who are unable or unwilling to enterprise their lives or manage their own risk, incapable of exercising responsible self-government, either attached to no moral community or to a community of anti-morality. It is in relation to these zones of exclusion that the new strategies of risk management are directed (Rose, 2000: 331).

In this sense, the neoliberal project does not entail the withdrawal of government intrusion from the lives of *all* citizens. Instead, many marginalized or disenfranchised citizens, families or groups experience an intensification of welfare state intervention based on designations of being at risk or risky. Welfare state intervention thus becomes focused on surveillance and regulation. Such modes of government are evident in a number of policy arenas including immigration and refugee strategies, correctional or justice systems, mental health services as well as the protection of children from child abuse and neglect.

### **3.4 Influence of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies in CPS**

As presented in the preceding chapter, risk and the management of risk have been defining features of Canadian CPS for well over 25 years. While the safety of children has always been at the heart of CPS involvement with families, the attitudes and practices associated with assuring that safety have been seen to shift in accordance with the socio-political climate of the time and place. Embedded within the Canadian welfare state, today’s CPS legislation, policies and practices reflect the influence of prevailing neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies.

Returning to the notion of a welfare diamond (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003), the responsibility for the protection and promotion of children’s wellbeing is shared amongst all four

components of Canada's welfare architecture: the state, the free market, the voluntary sector and individual citizens. But how responsibility is apportioned varies according to prevailing socio-political ideology. Certainly, parents carry the greatest burden of responsibility to assure the wellbeing of their children and they have the right to do so without the unwarranted intrusion of the state. While the welfare state shares some responsibility for children's wellbeing, today its involvement is largely distant through the provision of certain health and educational services as well as family benefits. Ultimately, parents are expected to provide for their children's basic needs through income garnered by participating in the free market and by adopting behaviours deemed appropriate to assuring children's care and education. Sometimes, when parents struggle in their responsibilities, they may turn to and receive support from the voluntary sector (in the form of non-governmental programs for example). But, in those instances in which parents' struggle is too difficult and they are unable to provide basic care to their children or to protect them from any form risk, the welfare state in the form of CPS is mandated to step in.

As agents of the welfare state, CPS professionals are tasked with assessing, identifying and managing risk. CPS clients – parents or, to be more precise, usually mothers – are the subject of assessments and interventions aimed at monitoring, mediating and/or altering behaviours and circumstances deemed to be risky to children. As noted earlier, only those parents deemed to have failed in their responsibilities to provide children safe, secure environments necessary for them to develop into healthy, capable, autonomous adults come to the attention of CPS authorities. Neoliberal risk thinking wherein individuals are construed as responsible for managing risk, suggests that once a child comes to the attention of CPS, both CPS social workers as well as parent(s) share responsibility for assuring the child's ongoing and future safety. The brunt of that responsibility is borne by parents – usually mothers. While children remain at the heart of CPS interventions, their individual responsibilities with respect to managing risk to themselves tend to hinge on external perceptions of their capacities. This is a point I will explore in Chapters 6 and 7 as I consider how CPS professionals and sexually abused teenage girls understand and negotiate girls' involvement in their own protection from risk.

Previously, in a publication co-authored with Julia Krane, we explored how CPS practice has been transformed in a neoliberal climate preoccupied with risk (Carlton & Krane, 2013b). In the following paragraphs, I draw heavily from this publication in which we argued that present-day CPS practice “assumes that parents are what Lupton (2013) and Kemshall (2006, 2010) might call rational actors: capable of weighing and avoiding risks and able to take in information relevant to risk and act in acceptable or expected ways” (Carlton & Krane, 2013b: 94). The concept of the rational actor is firmly situated in neoliberal ideology: rational actors are envisioned as “free actors who are constrained only by their ignorance about the threat to which they may be exposed or their lack of self-efficacy in feeling able to do something about a risk” (Lupton 2013: 32). With appropriate intervention a rational actor is considered able to take matters into their own hands to resolve a situation of risk. Doing otherwise provides evidence that they are “irrational actors and thus vulnerable to blame and likely to be subjected to regulatory interventions” (Carlton & Krane, 2013b: 95). Swift and Callahan (2009) observed this assumption of individual capacity and appropriate intervention combining to resolve risk playing out in typical CPS practices with parents. These authors explained that assessments of risk in CPS virtually always focus on the individual; as such, protective interventions aimed at risk reduction tend to centre on educating individual parents about what is needed in order for their children to be safe. Parents are thus charged “with the responsibility to help themselves through solutions that continually monitor their efforts and extend social control over them” (Swift & Callahan, 2009: 222). “In other words, armed with the necessary information about the circumstances that gave rise to risk and the appropriate responses to resolve it, the parent, as a rational actor, is assumed to be in a position to make the right choice to protect her/his child” (Carlton & Krane, 2013b: 95).

Julia Krane and I noted that clients of CPS, “as rational actors, are judged against particular and predetermined norms and ideologies of parenting and protection; they are made responsible for their decision making around risk and are rewarded for protection choices that are socially sanctioned as correct” (95). Expectations of maternal omniscience, self-sacrifice and steadfast devotion that I spoke of in Chapter 2 perfectly illustrate the norms against which

mothers are likely to be measured in CPS. Parental actions tend to be scrutinized with little consideration of the context within which parents negotiate their responses to their children's safety – what is of relevance to CPS are parents' choices and actions that might either contribute to or mitigate a situation of risk to a child. The obstacles or potentially difficult circumstances faced by parents come to matter only insofar as they can be used as evidence of a parent's capacity, or lack of capacity, to surmount adversity in the best interests of their child. As mentioned earlier in citing Krane and Davies (2000), normal parents (mothers) are expected to cope regardless of circumstance. Here the notion of failure to protect which was introduced in the previous chapter becomes particularly salient as those parents who make flawed or risky choices are all too likely to be viewed as having failed to protect and are thus subjected to further protective involvement, scrutiny and regulation. The degree of CPS intervention, however, often relies on individual compliance to a particular CPS plan aimed at managing risk. Lupton (2013) conceptualized compliance as the acceptance and internalization of the objectives of organizational authorities. In the context of CPS, compliance “means demonstrating a capacity to immediately take on the expectation to protect one's child from risk – with little if any room for ambivalence or confusion and uncertainty – at all costs and irrespective of the social and emotional context of such protection” (Carlton & Krane, 2013b: 95). Noncompliance can result in intensified interventions or even the eventual removal of a child from his or her home environment. With the child's safety paramount, there is no room for tolerance of risk.

Critiques of the notion of the rational actor can provide some insight into the potential consequences and limitations of CPS practices influenced by neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies wherein parents tend to be construed as rational actors. As Julia Krane and I commented, “the concept of the rational actor has been criticized for its deceptively narrow understanding of individual choice and action; its conception appears devoid of context, power and opportunity in individuals' experiences and negotiations of risk (Kemshall 2006, 2010; Lupton 2013)” (95-96). Arguing that choices to address risk are not necessarily free, Kemshall (2010) suggested that individual decision making and actions related to risk are governed by the influence by a range of factors including prevailing discourses and ideology as well as

institutional strategies and practices. “Choices, even to act more safely, can be heavily constrained... [and are] embedded in place, time and network” (Kemshall 2010: 1249). These kinds of critiques have led to the development of the concept of a social actor for whom there is no linear relationship between knowing about risk and freely choosing to act in a risk taking or a risk reducing manner. Treating individuals as social actors thus involves recognising their decisions and actions as

contingent on the social and personal constraints and circumstances of his/her particular situation, social locations and time. Gender, age, race, ethnicity, or sexual identity as well as the effects of linguistic constraints, geographic isolation, citizenship status, colonization, cultural or community loyalties and poverty, for example, can neither be elided nor reduced to a series of risk factors (Carlton & Krane, 2013b, 96).

This view of individuals as social actors suggests that understandings of risk, risk decision-making as well as experiences of risk regulating interventions are neither universal nor unencumbered by context. Rather, these aspects of individuals' lives are likely to have important and varied influences on their respective understandings of risk, risk decision-making and their experience of risk regulating interventions. Julia Krane and I suggested that this observation is particularly relevant to the field of child protection given the well-known facts that there is an overrepresentation of visible minorities and First Nations peoples amongst CPS clientele and families involved with CPS are likely to experience multiple social problems including unemployment, poverty, substance misuse, mental health issues and/or domestic violence (Sedlak, McPherson and Das, 2010; Trocmé et al., 2005; Trocmé et al., 2010).

Another important aspect of the concept of the social actor is that rather than being a passive recipient of risk, a social actor is understood as actively involved in his/her interpretations and experiences of as well as responses to risk. As noted by Kemshall (2010: 1250), recognising individuals as social actors means understanding that their choices and actions in relation to risk “are the product of context and social interactions.” While policy-oriented or official discourses of risk may view certain choices or actions of social actors as maladaptive or irrational, close attention to how risk is understood and acted upon by individual social actors may “show them as expert risk-managers and survivors” of their particular

circumstances (Kemshall, 2010: 1250-1251). In CPS involvement with families due to circumstances of risk to a child, the active involvement of individual family members is likely to be strictly judged against CPS understandings of risk and expectations of compliance to pre-determined risk-management strategies. Given the influence of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies on CPS practice, a rational actor capable of adapting to CPS expectations of risk-management regardless of individual circumstance and interpretation remains the ideal CPS client; whereas a social actor, whose active involvement may or may not align with CPS risk-management strategies might well be deemed as risky to the safety of a child.

Viewed as social actors, teenage girls' interpretations of risk and their associated choices and actions can easily be understood as being tied up with their respective experiences and circumstances as well as their individual social locations. But how much freedom is there to treat teenage girls as social actors within the context of CPS involvement in the aftermath of sexual abuse? In chapters 6, 7, and 8 I contend that the combined influences of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies on CPS legislation, policy and practices serve to create an atmosphere wherein there is only limited leniency for girls' active involvement in risk. In accordance with the current practices of Canada's welfare state, sexually abused teenage girls are viewed as a particular – at-risk – population requiring intensive state intervention in the form of CPS involvement. While this observation is not at all remarkable and one would be hard-pressed to argue otherwise, I will argue that neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies have come to influence how these girls are construed and treated within the context of CPS whose mandate is to assure their safety from further risk. In chapter 7, I will explore how sexually abused teenage girls' understandings and negotiations of risk are measured according to expectations for them to behave as rational actors – able to identify risk, to make “correct” choices, and to act in ways that align with the understandings of risk and risk-management deemed appropriate by CPS professionals. As I will suggest, those girls acting outside of such expectations are very likely to be perceived as irrational and non-compliant; they are likely to be viewed as putting themselves at-risk and thus requiring heightened surveillance and regulation.

## Chapter 4: TEENAGE GIRLS: AT-RISK OR POWERFUL? TO BE PROTECTED OR CELEBRATED?

*What a cunning mixture of sentiment, pity, tenderness, irony surrounds adolescence, what knowing watchfulness! Young birds on their first flight are hardly so hovered around.*

— George Bernanos<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Translated from the French original – *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1936) or *Diary of a country priest* (1937)

## **Chapter 4: TEENAGE GIRLS: AT-RISK OR POWERFUL? TO BE PROTECTED OR CELEBRATED?**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Historically, teenage girls were relatively absent from academic research. Largely subsumed within gender-neutral categories of “youth” or “adolescence” or the age-less category of “woman,” girls and girlhood received little attention in the range of scholarship dealing with human development, youth culture, women’s issues or feminism (Harris, 2004a; Kearney, 2009). Over the last few decades, however, attention to girls has followed a rapidly escalating trajectory. Kearney (2009) noted, however, that this attention to teenage girls, which has contributed to the development of scholarship on girlhood as a unique category of experience distinct from both childhood and womanhood, has not always been positive. As will be explored in detail in this chapter, conflicting visions of girlhood as both risky and full of power and promise pervade contemporary discourses of female adolescence and tend to inspire impulses to either scrutinize or celebrate teenage girls.

Even a quick glance at today’s headlines can give the impression that girls are doing just great. Widespread are messages lauding girls’ strengths, educational successes, capacities to engage in political and social movements, and freedom to be, do and have whatever they choose. To this end, McCall (2015: 88) observed that “today’s girls have become spectacles of modern progress and the representation of social desires for success.” Alongside such messages of girl power, however, are equally familiar messages of girls’ risk and crisis. Warnings abound with respect to the potential dangers associated with growing up as a girl in today’s world. Yielding over 38 million results, a cursory Google search using ‘teenage’ + ‘girls’ + ‘risk’ revealed a host of worries for teenage girls as well as a wealth of websites, programs and books providing tips and resources aimed at helping them (and their parents) navigate and survive the hazards of female adolescence. Typically spotlighted is girls’ assumed susceptibility to a diversity of adverse experiences ranging from waning self-esteem or confidence to depression and suicidal thinking to promiscuity, early pregnancy, STDs and sexual victimization.

Evident not only in public discourses but also in professional and academic domains, visions of girls as being at risk and risky coexist alongside expectations for them to develop into autonomous citizens capable of individual choice and action. In this chapter, I trace the emergence of these two discourses in academic literature revolving around the subject of teenage girls. Drawing extensively from the scholarly discipline of Girls' Studies, the majority of this chapter is taken up with exploring the influence of these competing discourses on understandings of teenage girlhood in contemporary Western societies. Recognising that these discourses may exert self-regulatory pressures on girls while also rousing heightened adult surveillance and regulation of girls' behaviours and failures as well as their successes, I demonstrate a convergence between contemporary discourses of girlhood, neoliberal attitudes toward risk and individualisation and post-feminist constructions of power and success as being accessible to any girl regardless of her circumstances or experience. Concluding the chapter, I introduce the notion of the *future girl* (Harris, 2004b), who is celebrated for her capacities to prevail in a new social order shaped by neo-liberal expectations of autonomy and productive citizenry but who simultaneously provokes anxieties over her potential failures. This discussion provides insights into the context within which the accounts of the teenage girls and workers participating in this study can be fully appreciated as well as an important foundation from which to begin to grasp more fully how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

## **4.2 Female Adolescence**

Carol Gilligan has largely been considered a foremother of psychological theorizing on female development (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). Prompted by an awareness that “theories of psychological development—the theories of Freud and Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg—were all based on the assumption that man was the measure of all things human” (2004: 132), Gilligan set out to articulate “a clearer representation of women’s development” (1993 [1982]: 3) and “to restore in part the missing text” (1993[1982]: 156) of women’s experience as they transition through life. According to her relational theory of female development, women define

themselves in relation to others and girls' development occurs through their connections with others. Gilligan and her colleagues postulated that the transition into womanhood is not easy for girls: "women's psychological development within patriarchal societies and male-voiced cultures [is] inherently traumatic" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992: 216). Brown and Gilligan (1992: 217) observed that in adolescence, girls who spoke "with clarity and strength" during childhood feel pressure to "dismiss their experience," "modulate their voices" and "take themselves out of relationships with themselves and with women" (216). But, healthy female development, according to Gilligan's theory, requires that adolescent girls contest "what has been accepted as the canonical story of human development: the story which takes separation for granted, ... the story which rejects the possibility of honest or genuine relationship" (Gilligan, 1991: 25).

Like Gilligan, Angela McRobbie forged the way for concerted academic attention to the lives of girls and women (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). McRobbie (2000) championed the relevance of exploring what it means to be a girl, or young woman, within particular contexts at particular moments in time. Underlying her work was a conviction that "gender structures young people's experiences" (Kearney, 2007: 126). McRobbie (2000) attested that girls in any modern era have been bombarded by cultural discourses of femininity through their experiences of both the media and institutional structures such as school, family, or government services. Arguing that girls are not passive in their reception of cultural texts of femininity, McRobbie demonstrated that some girls assert their autonomy through their decisions to be or act differently than what is prescribed for them. As such, she saw that girls' choices and actions might elicit public and/or professional response depending on their degree of conformity to or defiance against the discourses of appropriate femininity of the time.

Both Gilligan and McRobbie initiated academic attention to the particularities of female adolescence and what it means to grow up as a girl. Owing a huge debt to their initial efforts, scholarship on the subject of girls has since exploded. Over the past couple of decades, this explosion has been marked by the two seemingly competing discourses associated with female adolescence mentioned above: risk and autonomy, or 'girl power.'

## **4.2 Girls At-Risk and Girl Power**

On first glance, discourses of girls at-risk and girl power appear to be “opposing, competing, and contradictory” (Gonick, 2006: 2). Whereas one attests to girls’ agency, autonomy, choice and power, the other implies girls’ passivity and powerlessness in the face of ubiquitous danger. A different picture of the relationship between these two discourses materialises, however, once the temporal and socio-political context within which they have proliferated is taken into consideration. Gonick (2006), in her investigation into how these two coexisting discourses organize meanings of girls and girlhood, argued that both serve to position girls in varying ways in relation to welfare state policies and practices informed by neoliberalism. In the preceding chapter, I introduced neoliberalism as an ideology that has exerted significant influence on Canada’s present welfare state. In continuing my discussion on discourses of girl power and girls at-risk, I suggest that both discourses reinforce neoliberal ideology in ways that influence not only how girls’ view themselves, experience their lives and imagine their futures but also how the adults around them interpret and intervene with respect to their choices, behaviours, attitudes and circumstances. As proposed by Gonick (2006: 2), girl power and girls at-risk discourses

participate in the production of the neoliberal girl subject with the former representing the idealized form of the self-determining individual and the latter personifying an anxiety about those who are unsuccessful in producing themselves in this way. Both participate in processes of individualization that ... direct attention from structural explanations for inequality toward explanations of personal circumstances and personality traits.

As a starting point for reflecting on how notions of girl power and girls at-risk have come to influence teenage girls’ lives, I begin by delineating the emergence of these two discourses.

### **4.3.1 Ophelia**

*Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle.*

— Mary Pipher (1994: 19)

Girls’ Studies scholars tend to attribute the origin of the understanding of teenage girls as being at risk to the Gilligan and her colleagues whose research and theorizing brought attention to gendered differences in adolescent development (Aapola et al., 2005; Baumgardner & Richards, 2010; Gonick, 2006; Marshall, 2007). These scholars acknowledged the “good news” evident in

Gilligan's work by referring specifically to her important insights into the psychology, development and relationships of adolescent girls (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010:176). At the same time, however, they have also expressed concern over the overwhelming public reactions to the seeming "bad news" of girls' development. The flurry of attention to the risks associated with girlhood that seemingly flowed from Gilligan's theories and research led to a significant shift in thinking about girls: "within the study of psychology, girls went from being invisible to being vulnerable" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010: 177).

Numerous studies of girls' vulnerability followed in the wake of Gilligan's psychological theory of female adolescence that drew attention to the risks inherent in growing up as a girl. Predominant among these studies was the *American Association of University Women's* (1992) report on girls in American schools. Synthesizing "all the available research on the subject of girls in school" (i) at the time, the authors noted a significant gender inequity in the treatment of boys and girls in the American education system. They argued that by "shortchanging" girls, American education contributed to a decline in girls' self-esteem and academic performance as they progressed through school. Gonick (2006: 14) noted that since its publication, the *AAUW* report has been frequently cited as evidence of girls' vulnerability and was "very influential in setting feminist research agendas in the field of education in the United States." With the wide distribution of the *AAUW* report, girls came to be seen as disadvantaged in comparison with boys not only academically but also psychologically.

Sparked by growing attention to girls and their vulnerabilities in a society that privileged boys and men, a popular psychological literature surfaced in the 1990s which reinforced a belief in the riskiness of adolescence for girls. This literature is perhaps best exemplified by Pipher's (1994) exploration of female adolescence in which she invoked the image of Shakespeare's Ophelia as illustrative of North American teenage girls who, like Ophelia, "are in danger of drowning" (73). She described girls as growing up in a "girl-poisoning culture ... a dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture" (12). Based on anecdotal evidence drawn from her clinical practice, Pipher (1994: 27) noted that girls struggled with a multitude of intense pressures including "more divorced families, chemical addictions, casual sex and violence

against women.” She also expressed concern over the effects on girls of a media that overtly sexualized and objectified the young female form and linked such media portrayals of girls with increased rates of physical and sexual victimization. Pipher (1994: 27) argued that with escalating pressures and violence in their lives, girls were at an ever-increasing risk of developing “eating disorders, alcohol problems, posttraumatic stress reactions to sexual or physical assaults, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), self-inflicted injuries and strange phobias” (27).

The moral panic that accompanied Pipher’s (1994) message about the dangers of female adolescence spawned what Gonick (2006) referred to as an “Ophelia movement” wherein research and commentary on girls’ vulnerability proliferated. Some studies, such as Orenstein’s (1994) exploration of teenage girls’ relationships with school, family, teenage boys and themselves, exposed girls’ flagging self-esteem, diminished academic performance and decreased confidence in comparison to boys. Meanwhile, other studies drew attention to links between girls’ risk and their exposure to dominant images of beauty and female sexuality. For example, Brumberg’s (1997) study of girls’ diaries drew attention to the association between girls’ weakening self-esteem and their exposure to a proliferation of images of unattainable physical beauty. Brumberg (1997) also furthered a concern for teenage girls’ heightened risk of sexual assault. She claimed that despite their “desire for sexual expression,” girls living at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were unable to escape the “prospect of sexual danger” (142-143). The three texts mentioned here are by no means exclusive of the scholarship and popular literature attending to the risky nature of girlhood in the 1990s. These texts, however, are indicative of the emergence of a psychological view that a crisis in self-esteem is an unavoidable consequence of a “girl-destroying” culture (Pipher, 1994: 44) that denies teenage girls expression of their authentic selves. From such a perspective, the opportunity for girls to pursue and act out their individual power and autonomy is overshadowed by the assumed oppressive constraints of a dominant, sexist, mainstream culture. This Ophelia-like image of female adolescence produces an understanding of teenage girls as passive victims.

Rather than abating in the years since the 1990s, notions of girls being at risk of a range of gendered dangers have transformed into an enduring theme in scholarship on the subject of girls. For example, the 2007 release of the *American Psychological Association* (APA) task force's report on the sexualization of girls brought attention to the implications for girls' health and well-being of growing up in a media-saturated and sexualized world. Through an examination of existing psychological theory, research and clinical reflections addressing the sexualisation of girls, the task force concluded that, in general, North American girls are adversely influenced by their exposure – and the exposure of others – to an abundance of messages reinforcing the objectification and sexualisation of women and girls. The researchers observed that messages emanate from “virtually every media form ..., television, music videos, music lyrics, movies, magazines, sports media, video games, the Internet, and advertising” (1) as well as from parents, peers and schools. The task force claimed that it is through these avenues that girls learn that their worth relies on their sexual appeal, attractiveness or behaviour and that they are passive objects of another's gaze and/or use rather than individuals with the capacity for independent sexual desire, action and decision making. Summarizing research on the negative consequences for girls, the task force noted that girls exposed to sexual images “are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction, depression, and lower self-esteem” as well as shame and diminished cognitive ability (regarding their bodies, appearance, abilities and relationships)(35). According to the task force, “this cognitive diminishment, as well as the belief that physical appearance rather than academic or extracurricular achievement is the best path to power and acceptance, may influence girls' achievement levels and opportunities later in life” (35). Added to these consequences were concerns around girls' healthy sexual development and interpersonal relationships with both male and female peers. While offering an important review of empirical and theoretical scholarship on the subject of sexualization as well as significant insights into particular aspects of girls' lives, the APA task force's 2007 report fortified a discourse of girls being at risk.

The at-risk girl rests in opposition to the successful girl, who is identified by Harris (2004b) as the “can-do girl” who is celebrated for her optimism, versatility, self-creativity and

success-oriented behaviours. At-risk girls, on the other hand, evoke concern due to their individual weaknesses as well as the dangers of their surrounding environments. As put by Gonick (2006: 15), “fragile and vulnerable, Ophelia is shadow twin to the idealized empowered girl ... she is at risk of failing to produce the required attributes of the neo-liberal feminine subject.” A discourse of girls’ risk refers not just to girls’ gendered positioning within patriarchal societies, as seen in Pipher’s (1994) Ophelia, but to a range of contextual factors that have the potential to negatively impact girls’ current experiences and future life chances. As suggested by Harris (2004b: 25), at-risk girls

are those who are seen to be vulnerable by their circumstances – living in poverty, in unstable homes, in communities known for violence, drugs, crime, and so on .... The problems of the at-risk are often seen as endemic to the communities they come from, and individual families and cultural groupings are held to blame for the lack of success of their youth.

Seemingly lacking any degree of power and autonomy to alter their situations, at-risk girls display the adverse emotional, psychological, physical and relational effects of their circumstances. Such effects are interpreted as barriers to achieving the successes of the ideal can-do girl (Marshall, 2007). Harris (2004b: 26) explained that “young women who are deemed to be at-risk are cut off from the imagined majority of successful girls, and their problems tend to become the ways in which they are universally defined.” She further clarified that girls categorized as at-risk “are constructed as likely failures” (26). Ever present in such discourses of risk are concerns for girls’ futures and their individual paths to success or failure.

#### **4.3.2 Grrrlpower**

*I love to see a young girl go out and grab the world by the lapels. Life’s a bitch.*

*You’ve got to go out and kick ass.*

— Maya Angelou

Today, *girl power* barely warrants definition given the frequency with which it has been invoked to encourage and describe the actions, motivations, and voices of girls and young women over the past couple of decades. A testament to how thoroughly it has infiltrated the English language, the *Oxford English Dictionary* added a definition of girl power in its 2001 edition: “power exercised by girls; *spec.* a self-reliant attitude among girls and young women manifested in

ambition, assertiveness, and individualism.” The concept of girl power has contributed to the image of young women as “independent, successful, and self-inventing” (Harris, 2004b: 16). Despite its widespread use, girl power may not be so easily captured in a singular, static definition. Aapola and her colleagues (2005: 19) referred to girl power as a “complex, contradictory discourse.” Associating girl power “with a new take-charge dynamism,” the authors claimed that “this discourse re-writes the passivity, voicelessness, vulnerability and sweet naturedness” linked to traditional, White, Western middle-class images of girlhood (19). They elaborated that girl power shifts according to its context and the purpose for which it is articulated. As such, it has been taken up by some as a celebration of feminist success and the expanded possibilities for girls while at the same time critiqued by others “for the way in which it is formulated around an individualism fraught with neoliberal ideals” (19).

An example of the shifting of girl power is evident in the ever-contested understandings of girls' sexuality. Aapola et al. (2005: 133) commented that

On the one hand, traditional discourses of female chastity and sexual vulnerability, even danger, are still very powerful in discussions of young women's sexuality, but on the other, there are also new and conflicting discourses in circulation. These new discourses emphasize the centrality and positivity of sexuality and the range of possible ways in which sexuality might be expressed for both (young) women and men.

Since the 1960s, feminists have argued that women have the right to control issues relating to their bodies and sex, including contraception, abortion, pregnancy and childbirth as well as engaging in heterosexual or non-heterosexual relationships (Aapola et al., 2005). Despite important gains for women's sexual freedom, it was only later that female adolescent sexuality was taken up by feminist scholars and activists. Seemingly revolutionary was the publication of Fine's (1988) “*Sexuality, schooling, and adolescent females: The missing discourse of desire*,” which signalled opportunities to view female adolescent sexuality as more than simply dangerous. At the time, Fine (1988) suggested that teenage girls and young women had been taught by adults around them that sex was dangerous. She argued that, reflective of prevailing messages of risk, female adolescent sexuality was typically associated with girls' passivity, victimization, immorality and objectification. Suppressed were discourses of sexual pleasure and

desire. She claimed that girls had too long been denied opportunities to develop healthy, coherent and autonomous sexual identities through which they could negotiate and author their sexual lives. To counter this denial, Fine (1988: 46) called for more comprehensive and positive sex education programs in schools so as to “enable females to feel they are sexual agents, entitled and therefore responsible, rather than at the constant and terrifying mercy of a young man’s pressure to ‘give in’ or of a parent’s demands to ‘save yourself’.” Fine’s (1988) contention that positive sexual experience is available to teenage girls and young women has been important to integrating a discourse of girl power in the realm of sexuality. Lamb (2010: 296), culling together messages from contemporary theorists and researchers on the topic of female adolescent sexuality, found the emergence of a picture of “a sexuality in which girls learn to be subjects, not objects, to recognize feelings of desire, and to experience pleasure while living in a culture that acknowledges their entitlements and offers them protection from economic, social, and personal harm.” In other words, a contemporary discourse of girls’ sexuality involves girls’ agency and choice, recognises their sexual desire and pleasure, and stands in opposition to a discourse of girls’ vulnerability, victimization, immorality and risk. Lamb (2010), however, suggested that such a vision of girls’ healthy and positive sexuality is problematic on a number of levels. She explained that, divorced from the variable contexts and social locations within which girls live out their sexuality, a discourse of “desire” is idealistic, unrealistic and simplistic. According to such a discourse, responsibility for sexual health and pleasure lies with girls who may experience various challenges to choosing and performing their sexual desires – safely.

Furthering a discussion on girls’ sexuality, Harris (2005: 40) observed that a discourse of desire that is “disconnected from reproduction ... serves the interests of the new flexible labour market.” She explained that a discourse of desire operates as regulatory in that girls’ empowered sexuality includes particular expectations of their behaviours. Specifically, a teenage girls’ sexuality is understood to be distinct from pregnancy and young motherhood. Childless young women are deemed far more able to succeed in today’s labour market through the pursuit of education and employment than those who get pregnant during adolescence. Harris (2004b: 23) referred to “delayed motherhood” as an intrinsic element of girls’ success: “the achievement of

labor market accomplishments and a glamorous consumer lifestyle are premised on the idea of an unencumbered individual who can devote herself to full-time paid work.” Teenage motherhood thus becomes indicative of failure. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) commented similarly:

the regulation of feminine sexuality for middle-class girls has to be understood as part of a wider regulation of their achievement and academic success. Nothing is allowed to obstruct the academic path – certainly not motherhood, which is seen as the ultimate failure (194).

As failures of both a discourse of desire as well as discourse of girl power, “young mothers have been subjected to a set of problem discourses that tend to define them either in terms of disturbed development or even opportunistic welfare dependency: having children just in order to claim social benefits” (Aapola et al., 2005: 102-103). While young motherhood may not carry quite the burden of moral judgment as it was awarded in the past, young mothers’ ability to provide economically and emotionally for their children continues to be open to suspicion and scrutiny (Aapola et al., 2005).

Harris (2004b) amongst others (i.e. Taft, 2004; McRobbie, 2000) found in the various and shifting discourses of girl power evidence of “civic and corporate encroachment” on a female youth politics (148). In other words, just as girls were making their voices heard, their message of girl power became a subject of interest to a labour market economy shaped by neoliberal concerns. According to this viewpoint, girls’ early exclamations of power were divested of feminist and political meaning and rearticulated in terms of their individual capacities to succeed in education and employment and to participate in a consumer culture. Harris (2004b) argued that girl power’s image of the successful and assertive girl in control of her own destiny has been sold to girls as the ideal “can-do” girl and, in turn, girls declare their achievement of this ideal by graduating from higher education, getting a job – or, better yet, committing to a project of lifelong learning and building a career – and maximizing their performance in a free market. In this way, teenage girls are viewed as able to develop the educational and employment competencies deemed necessary for full economic participation in contemporary labour markets

(Aapola et al., 2005; Baker, 2010; Harris, 2004b; Ringrose, 2007). This kind of girl power constructs teenage girls as wanting and capable of having it all.

### **4.3.3 Girls Gone Wild**

*People have this ideology from all this media attention on teenage girls that they should be afraid of how “unpredictable” and “wild” we are. And it affects my life because the choices I make will be backfired with a “you’re just a teenage girl, you don’t know what you want.” Every statement I make or opinion I give is not valid because I am a teenage girl. And turning 18 as a girl is not the same as a boy turning 18; they still see me as this ticking bomb.*

— Hanouf<sup>23</sup>

The can-do, powerful girl is not to be mistaken for the risk taking girl who is “disinhibited in her actions” and engages in criminal behaviour, casual sex, alcohol consumption and/or recreational drug use (Harris, 2004b: 29). Nor is she to be mistaken for the teen mother who participated in but failed at the reigning discourse of desire. While teenage girls might be encouraged to be confident and assertive and to know that they can be and have it all, they are also cautioned not take it too far: “Girlpower is intended to provide young women with the tools for mainstream success, and those who stray from this path are constituted as delinquent risk takers” they are the girls who represent “girl power out of control” (Harris, 2004b: 29). From such a perspective, the excessively risk taking girl, the mean girl or the violent girl is seen as a threat to the social order and “must be monitored not simply for self-destructive behaviours, but for potential to harm others” (Harris, 2004b: 29). What emerges in what I refer to as a discourse of ‘girls gone wild’ is a distinction between seemingly appropriate and inappropriate – or in accordance with neoliberal terminology, productive and unproductive – risk taking for girls.

Giddens (1999: 4), in reference to a risk society, suggested that in a socio-economic terrain of uncertainty where there is limited opportunity to rely on “taken-for-granted ways of doing things,” taking risks becomes essential to individual progress. Here the value of risk taking resides in its potential outcome:

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<sup>23</sup> Hanouf’s comment appears in response to an online article, *Guest post: Shaming and taming teenage girls*, written by Chloe and published on November 14, 2011. The article and Hanouf’s comment were found on the website, *Feministing*: <http://feministing.com/2011/11/14/guest-post-shaming-and-taming-teenage-girls/>.

Essentially, 'risk' always has a negative connotation, since it refers to the chance of avoiding an unwanted outcome. But it can quite often be seen in a positive light, in terms of the taking of bold initiatives in the face of a problematic future. Successful risk-takers, whether in exploration, in business or in mountaineering, are widely admired" (3-4).

According to such a perspective, risk taking offers opportunities for both success and failure depending on the choices, actions and skills of the individual. Shifting from a neoliberal perspective of risk taking to a developmental view of risk taking in adolescence, a similar link between behaviour and outcome appears. Risk taking in adolescence is likely to be promoted when it offers prospective positive outcomes in sport, school, relationships and/or work. In contrast and as evidenced by the explosion of attention to mean, violent and anti-social teenage girls, however, when risk taking exceeds the bounds of accepted behaviours and jeopardises participation in family, relationships, school, work, or any other public domain it is likely to prompt criticism and constraint.

Over recent years, girls' engagement in risk taking behaviour has triggered significant public as well as scholarly attention. In terms of academic literature, much consideration has been given to understanding how and why girls' risk taking has appeared to escalate. For example, Abbot-Chapman, Denhom and Wyld (2008), in their exploration of generational patterns of adolescent risk taking, noted that whereas risk taking was once seen to be virtually exclusive to and acceptable for boys or young men, contemporary girls – in Western societies – “are expected, even encouraged, by parents, teachers and the media to be just as risk taking and self-confident as boys” (132). Sweeting and West (2003: 391), in their examination of “changes in gender patterning of young people's leisure, use of public space and risk taking” over the course of the 1990s, suggested that teenage girls and young women have moved from primarily inhabiting the invisible, feminine, domestic spaces of their homes or bedrooms to public areas previously reserved for teenage boys and young men. The argument put forth by both Abbot-Chapman and her colleagues (2008) as well as Sweeting and West (2003) is that in particular cultures or historical periods where girls are more sequestered, their opportunities for risky pursuits are bounded by adult surveillance. Accordingly, “in societies and times where girls and young women ‘go out’ more to socialize with peers in public as well as private places, where

they drive cars and mix with peers more than they do with family, their opportunity for risky and even antisocial activity is increased (Abbot-Chapman et al., 2008: 134).

Caution, however, should perhaps be taken when considering the narrowing of gendered differences in adolescent risk taking. For example, Sweeting and West (2003: 408) noted that, with respect to risk taking behaviours, “the fact is that gender-based opportunities and expectations still prevail.” Brown (2005: 67), in her review of literature on girlhood and violence, observed that

studies of girls' social geographies have highlighted teenage girls' ambiguous social position when spending time in public spaces. Given that the outside environment is conventionally viewed as the rightful domain of young men, girls have been conceptualised as not only being in ‘the wrong place’ but the ‘wrong gender’ when inhabiting public spaces.

According to this view, instead of providing evidence of a move towards gender equality, the risk taking of teenage girls appears to have become an area of public contest within which girls' activities continue to be measured and judged according to still-gendered standards of acceptable feminine behaviour.

Closely associated with constructions of the excessively risk taking or delinquent girl are constructions of mean and violent girls. The mean girl is often constructed as a representation of expected female adolescent identity, competing for popularity and social status (Wiseman, 2002). A discourse of girls' meanness uncovers risks to girls' well-being that are closer to home. These risks emanate from a social world constructed by girls themselves. Commenting on the public construction of a mean girl crisis, Gonick (2004: 396-397) observed that

While the level of consternation over the ‘mean girl’ and the tone in the media coverage often works to suggest a new and emerging phenomenon, ‘experts’ whose opinions are solicited for these stories hasten to remind us that nastiness, viciousness, and back-stabbing have been integral to girls' friendships throughout previous generations. Cultural constraints on girls' expressions of conflict and aggression are said to leave them few of the physical outlets accessible to boys. Instead, girls use exclusion, rumours, name-calling, and manipulation. Interestingly, it is the hormone-laden emotion of adolescence that is assumed to produce both the male and female behaviors, but here boys' strategies are seen as healthy and ‘normal’ while girls' are not only a poor substitute, but also pathological.

Understanding girls' meanness as unhealthy but expected brings about important contradictions and problems with respect to prevailing understandings of girls and girlhood. As argued by Ringrose (2006) girls' meanness is measured not only against boys' methods of peer interaction and problem solving but also against the caring, nurturing and relationship-oriented aspects of acceptable femininity. In both comparisons, girls' meanness is portrayed as lacking and wrong; it is interpreted as a demonstration of girls' repressed anger/aggression, pathological, and "other than feminine" (Ringrose, 2006: 407). Ringrose (2006: 407) further suggested that a "universalization and normalization of girls meanness elides complex differences among girls and vastly different familial, community and educational contexts under which femininity, aggression and violence are to be constituted and regulated." While all girls might be thought to have the potential to be mean, typically, the mean girl is portrayed as white and middle class and requiring of saving in order to achieve a contemporary but still appropriately feminine womanhood.

In contrast to public concerns around the allegedly natural meanness of girls, a different sort of unease and fascination arises with respect to girls' use of violence. Ringrose (2006: 418) explained that shock and outrage tend to ensue when girls' "overt aggression disrupts the normative nice-mean continuum of the feminine." With specific reference to the case of Reena Virk – a 14 year old South Asian girl who was beaten and murdered by a group of seven white girls and one boy in a suburb of Victoria, British Columbia, in 1997 – Ringrose (2006: 418) noted that incidents of girl enacted violence provoke intense concern for the "dramatic transgression of the boundaries of a normative femininity from meanness into violence." The media's later repeated reminders of the lower socio-economic status of the only girl charged with murder in the case reveal an important message about the segregation of girls' different expressions of aggression (Ringrose, 2006). Ringrose (2006: 418) concluded with the observation that specifically classed and raced assumptions slip into media depictions of girls' behaviours with the result that "those girls who transgress dominant models of white, middle-class femininity – whose behavior can be equated with masculinity – ... are [placed] at the centre of increased scrutiny as objects of failed femininity" (Ringrose, 2006: 418).

Suggesting that public perception has a powerful reach with respect to identifying particular girls as problematic and structuring the ensuing responses, Chesney-Lind and Jones (2010: 1) remarked on the punitive consequences of a “twenty-first century crackdown” on violent girls – consequences that are likely to “be felt most by girls who live in heavily policed urban neighborhoods and attend troubled inner-city schools.” Here a distinction between types of girlhood aggression or violence emerges as relevant both to public perception and efforts at controlling girls’ risky and aggressive behaviours. Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004: 50) in tracing the “shifting imagery” of the “bad girl” in media representations of girl meanness and aggression from the 1990s to the early years of the 2000s observed that such imagery reveals “something about social power and especially about the intersection of gender-, race-, and class-based power.” Rather than detecting a singular representation of the “bad girl,” Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) identified variations in conceptualizations of girls’ badness. Specifically, they contrasted the violent, drug-using, gang-involved girl usually associated with visible minority and lower socio-economically positioned girls against the mean girl who tends to be portrayed as white, middle-class and suburban. These authors pointed out that whereas girls’ violence appears to occur in public spaces against a range of victims – including youth as well as adults, and strangers as well as people known to the perpetrators – girls’ meanness is seen to manifest in bullying behaviours or “relational aggression” occurring primarily in schools against female peers. Both constructions diverge from traditional and desired notions of femininity and both inspire public anxiety and concern for girls’ futures but the former tends to evoke far more drastic and intrusive interventions. With this understanding, race and class become important factors organizing how girls’ violence is understood and managed. According to Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004), whereas mean, middle-class, white girls are likely to receive support and services through the private sector, violent, working-class girls of colour tend to be dealt with through the criminal justice system.

Emerging out of the proliferation of discourses of girls’ riskiness and violence are complex understandings and expectations of present-day girlhood. Excessively risk taking and mean or violent girls seriously undermine traditional stereotypical images of femininity wherein

girls are constructed as caring, relationship-oriented, mostly passive and domestic. These girls also seriously undermine their own possibility of attaining can-do girl status by curtailing their chances to participate freely and benefit from school, work, family, and the market. In contrast to the passive victims evoked in the image of Ophelia, mean, violent and wild girls are perceived as active in their own self-destruction. As put by Harris (2004b: 30),

It is this idea of willfulness and agency that makes an attribution of self-selected failure straightforward. Young women are imagined as having a range of good choices before them, and therefore those who choose poorly have no one to blame but themselves. The structural conditions that in fact limit their choices are generally only taken into account to demonstrate how families and communities model inappropriate lifestyles to their youth. Their so-called failure seems not only inevitable, but freely chosen and therefore warranting little sympathy.

What their behaviour does appear to warrant is scrutiny and regulation. As I will discuss later, such scrutiny and regulation of girls' choices and behaviours is part of everyday life for those girls coming to the attention of CPS due to concerns around sexual abuse.

#### **4.3.4 Making Can-do Girls**

*I made him just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.*  
— John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Book III, lines 98-99)

In the preceding sections, I have brought attention to discourses of power and risk – including both *at-risk* and *risky* – that currently surround, describe, and inform contemporary girls and girlhood in Western societies. These discourses have been presented as emerging within a neoliberal climate which reifies notions of autonomous and self-determining citizens. As posited by Gonick (2006), discourses of power and risk work together to regulate girls towards creating their own successes and taking personal responsibility for their failures. With seeming ubiquitous opportunity there for the *taking*, it is assumed that girls should choose and strive to have it all. In a large part thanks to the efforts of feminist action, girls are now constructed as able and free to choose. And, in a neoliberal context, choice is exactly what is expected of them. But, as put by McRobbie (2004: 261), “choice is surely ... a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices. By these means new lines

and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility, and those who fail miserably.” In this way, the ideal can-do girl is positioned not only as accessible – given girls’ power, confidence, flexibility, freedom and commitment to work on herself – but as the only positive option. Harris (2004b: 36) proposed that this dominant image of achievable success is sustained by the “fiction” that the large majority of girls do make it and only a small minority fail. Challenging this fiction, however, Harris (2004b: 36) commented that reality is not so simple:

there are many young women who are not succeeding, both those who are structurally disadvantaged by poverty and racism, as well as those who are far more privileged and yet cannot cope with the enormous pressure on them to achieve. Both groups are monitored closely, with the latter more likely to be therapized and managed back toward the path of success, while the former are blamed and split off as a small minority destined to fail in any case.

In contrast to the can-do girl who is sufficient to stand on her own, at-risk and risky girls perform evidence of their insufficiency through their failings, delinquencies and weaknesses. These are the girls who represent problems to the smooth running of present-day welfare states. While identification of potential risks to girls’ opportunities to develop into productive, autonomous, neoliberal subjects might be seen as beneficial for girls, such identification also invites increased “surveillance and intervention” (Harris, 2004b: 25). With the understanding that contained even within conceptualizations of the at-risk girl or the risky girl is “an implicit ideal of a good future” (Harris, 2004b: 26), the hope is that with enough adult effort, support and discipline at least some of these at-risk and risky girls might be saved and steered toward the path of success emulated in visions of girl power. Once again, this is a theme to which I will return in chapters 7 and 8 where I will discuss how aspirations for girls’ autonomy (and eventual success) come to influence CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls’ risk.

Woven throughout discourses of risk and power are notions of girls’ futures. Who girls are, their strengths as well as the risks they face and participate in now are understood not only as important for the present but also for the women they will become. This recognition exposes an understanding of girlhood as a period of transition from dependent child to responsible, autonomous adult. In this way, girls’ vulnerabilities and risk taking can be concerning not only

for their immediate potentially destructive effects, but their longer term implications for girls' capacities to develop into healthy and productive young women. Theorizing on the subject of youth in general, Kelly (2000, 2003, 2006) identified within youth-at-risk discourses an interweaving of neoliberal ideology with developmental psychology. Accordingly, youth is denoted as a period of "becoming," located between childhood and adulthood (Kelly, 2006: 26). Whereas childhood is associated with emotional and economic dependence, immaturity and ties to parents, adulthood is framed in terms of maturity, emotional and economic autonomy and ties to a partner and children (Kelly, 2006). Kelly saw that notions of risk relate to anxieties surrounding youths' potential failures to achieve "certain *preferred* or *ideal* adult futures" which are defined according to prevailing understandings of what skills, attitudes, behaviours and relationships are necessary to succeed in contemporary societies (Kelly, 2006: 25). For Kelly (2006: 18), "the discourses that construct Youth at-risk reveal the truths about whom we should, as adults, become."

In chapters 6, 7 and 8, I will explore how discourses of risk and power emerged in the accounts of both the sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals who participated in my research. As will be seen, a preoccupation with girls' future prospects as productive young women was common throughout participant accounts. How might these sexually abused teenage girls, survive as independent young women – economically, emotionally, and relationally – beyond the scrutiny, surveillance and control of CPS? What choices and actions should they take in order to confront and navigate the apparent risks in their lives so as to attain an ideal autonomous can-do girl status?

#### **4.4 Being a Future Girl – Becoming a Neoliberal Subject ...**

*Human capital* – having a highly-educated labour force that possesses the knowledge and skills needed for innovation and productivity growth and that is flexible and adaptable in the face of ongoing change – is the cornerstone of success for societies living and working in today's knowledge based, globalized environment. Given this context, Canada's long-term economic and social potential depends in good measure on how

successfully youth navigate school and work transitions (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002: foreword).<sup>24</sup>

This reference to “human capital” reveals a strong neoliberal influence given the emphasis on individual capacities as pivotal to the proper functioning of a contemporary, globalized market economy. While the excerpt positions youth in general as crucial to the nation’s future prospects, my concern is with the particular positioning of girls. In this section, I explore how girls, within current Western contexts, are variably constructed and located in relation to a prototypical *future girl* who looks remarkably like the ideal neoliberal subject. Specifically, given the prevailing stresses on education and employment evident in notions of “human capital,” I will consider how girls participate in education, aspire towards a particular future and enter the labour force. Recognizing that girls tend to be celebrated for their successes but quickly attributed blame, scrutinized and regulated for their failures, this section gives attention to how some girls fall short of the future girl image. This discussion provides a backdrop for understanding how risk and autonomy are understood and negotiated by sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS as well as those professionals involved in their protection.

#### **4.4.1 Future Girls**

Harris (2004b) opened her book – from which the title of this section is borrowed – with the contention that in contemporary Western societies, “young women are being constructed as a vanguard of new subjectivity” (1). She speculated that with the passage into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is uniquely young women who have come to represent the “possibilities and anxieties” of today’s social order or welfare states. More precisely, she posited that the future girl has come to embody the figure best able to manage in a contemporary neoliberal socio-economic climate. Like the can-do girl introduced above, Harris’ (2004b: 1) future girl is distinguished by her confidence, determination and desire “to take charge of her life, seize chances, and achieve her goals.” She is positioned as the ideal neoliberal subject who is adept at flourishing in today’s risk society, an

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<sup>24</sup> The quotation is taken from a Statistics Canada snapshot of Canadian youth between the ages of 18-22 “in terms of both their educational participation and attainment and their labour market participation as of December 1999” (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002: 15).

era “characterized by dislocation, flux, and globalization” (Harris, 2004b: 2). The future girl is flexible in making choices and negotiating shifting socio-economic terrains. In assuming responsibility for her life, she is perceived as capable of individual success through her educational and employment achievements and her consequent lack of excessive reliance on the welfare state. Over two decades ago, McRobbie (2000: 200-201) observed that, having “replaced youth as a metaphor for social change,” “young women are now recognized as one of the stakes upon which the future depends.” Analogous to Harris’ (2004b) future girl, McRobbie’s (2007: 721) “top girl” was identified as a subject “truly worthy of investment.” As “the girl who has benefited from the equal opportunities now available to her, [the top girl] can be mobilised as the embodiment of the values of the new meritocracy” (721-722). In other words, the top girl can be displayed and promoted as the image to which all citizens should aspire. According to McRobbie (2007), in personifying the neoliberal values of individualism, flexibility and self-making, top girls are constructed as fully capable of achieving success on their own merit. They are the perceived winners in today’s neoliberal social order.

The construction of future girls, or top girls, demands that girls take on the project of productive self-creation or to engage in what Beck (1992, 2007) and others have referred to as a process of *individualization*. Rather than a celebration of individual capacities and interests, individualization is defined by Beck (2007: 682) as “institutionalized.” In other words, individualization is inextricably bound up with “modern institutions,” including the welfare state as it is influenced by neoliberal ideology (681). Beck (2007: 681) explained that “individualization is misunderstood if it is seen as a process which derives from a conscious choice or preference on the part of the individual. The crucial idea is this, individualization really is imposed on the individual by modern institutions.” With a neoliberal emphasis on the individual, collective sharing of responsibilities or risks is minimized. Instead, individual circumstances, achievements, failures, and risks are deemed the responsibility of each individual. The “opportunities and risks of making decisions” (Beck, 2007: 685) have been shifted to the individual, thus leaving open the potential for both winning and losing, celebration and blame. Discourses of girl power, discussed above, suggest that girls now face a vast array choices and

opportunities; however, making the *right* choices becomes compulsory in a socio-political context influenced by neoliberal ideology. As stated by Harris (2004b: 2) neoliberal “logic” compels individuals to manage their own futures with little dependence on the welfare state: “direct intervention and guidance by institutions have been replaced by self-governance; power has devolved onto individuals to regulate themselves through the right choices.” This does not mean, however, that girls have been left to their own devices, without scrutiny and regulation.

While acknowledging the “celebratory nature” of contemporary attention to and construction of girls and girlhood, Harris (2004b) noted the coinciding processes of control and regulation. “In holding [girls] up as the exemplars of new possibility, we also actively construct them to perform this role” (Harris, 2004b: 1). But as illustrated in my review of scholarship on discourses of girls’ risk and power, expectations of girls’ success exist alongside persistent understandings of girls being at risk. So what happens when girls’ risks interrupt their ability to perform as a future girl? What happens to those girls who display diminished self-esteem, or who get pregnant or drop out of school or run away from their families? Such girls are likely to be identified as failing the neoliberal project of self-management and thus exposed to intensive involvement of welfare state. As observed by scholars such as Harris and McRobbie, whereas future or top girls embody the promise of a neoliberal social order, at-risk girls exemplify social anxieties about the future and are thus made the focus of public scrutiny and regulation.

#### **4.4.2 Future Girls, Girl Power and Postfeminism**

In witnessing confident, voluble young women in the ... classroom, or else in leisure, or simply on the streets, the very idea of sexual inequality seems to disappear into thin air. The assumption of equality is dangerously easy (McRobbie, 2000: 200).

The positioning of girls or young women as the purveyors of neoliberal triumph hinges on prevailing beliefs surrounding their supposed heightened educational achievements, free opportunities to engage with the market – as both workers and consumers – and seemingly postfeminist empowerment. As put by Renold and Ringrose (2012: 47), “in the new millennium we have been faced with an onslaught of discourses about ‘girl power’ and the increasingly commonsense ‘presumption’ of gendered equality in education, work, and sexual politics.”

Future girls, according to Harris (2004b: 8), are “imagined as benefiting from feminist achievements and ideology ... that favor their success.”

Along with changes to education and employment have come reforms to legislation and a shift in attitudes regarding relationships, marriage and divorce, reproduction and sexuality, harassment and sexual assault, and many other dimensions of what had previously been seen as the realm of the personal. Feminism has often been described as a program for change to allow women freedom of choice regarding their bodies, work, family, and relationships – and personal, autonomous responsibility for these choices. These changes have enabled the current generation of young women to see themselves, and to be seen, as enjoying new freedoms and opportunities. They are far more at liberty to make choices and pursue lifestyles independently of their families, the state, and men in general.

Sceptical of the seeming ease of access to success accorded to girls in discourses of girl power, some feminist scholars have brought attention to the emergence of a “postfeminist sensibility” (Gill, 2007) comparable to neoliberal messages of individualization, choice and self-scrutiny.

A postfeminist sensibility views feminist ideas in a somewhat ambivalent manner. In other words, a postfeminist sensibility treats feminism simultaneously as common sense – gender equality has been fought for, encouraged, and largely won – and as overly political and no longer necessary (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006). McRobbie (2004: 255) explained that “post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed.” As evidence of feminism “taken into account,” she referred to the widespread celebration of girls’ success across a range of institutional settings now open to gender equality. McRobbie (2007: 718) observed, however, a “post-feminist guise of equality” that shields a subtle renewal of “[institutionalised] gender inequity and the re-stabilisation of gender hierarchy by means of a generational specific address which interpellates young women as subjects of capacity.”

McRobbie (2004, 2007) noted the postfeminist assumption of achieved gender equality to be tied up with expectations of individualization. She observed that “female achievement is predicated not on feminism, but on female individualism, on success which seems to be based on the invitation to young women by various governments that they might now consider themselves

free to compete in education and in work as privileged subjects of the new meritocracy” (2004: 258). Postfeminist discourses depict girls’ autonomy as both individually obtainable and essential to the social and economic order. In evidence here is the dovetailing of an optimistic postfeminist vision with a neoliberal celebration and promotion of freedom and choice. The postfeminist perspective that patriarchal structures have been dismantled, thus making feminism as a collective political movement “a spent force” (McRobbie, 2004: 255), closely aligns with neoliberal views on the destabilization of tradition, rigid social norms and predictability associated with the rise of a risk society – or the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999). In terms of both postfeminism and neoliberal ideology, girls can be seen as “dis-embedded” from fixed gender roles, expectations and opportunities (McRobbie, 2004). Today, girls are thought to face an explosion of opportunities resulting from their assumed freedom from structural constraints as well as a proliferation of choices in education and employment. Girls are thus set up as ideal subjects ready to take full advantage of a post-industrial market economy by “making individual choices and pursuing non-stereotypical life trajectories” (Harris, 2004b: 44). In the words of Gill and Scharff (2011: 7), “it is clear that the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism.”

With the proliferation of postfeminist messages of girl power and reiterations of an explosion of opportunities for girls in education and employment, it may be difficult to overestimate the extent to which notions of choice, agency and autonomy have come to shape conceptualizations of girls and girlhood. “Characterised by neo-liberal individualisation, personal choice, and the belief that structural inequities are personal problems, ... post-feminism ... constructs power and success as readily available to any girl – regardless of her circumstances or background – as long as she believes in herself and tries hard (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011: 550). But feminist scholars, deeply suspicious of assumptions of gender equality and girls’ empowerment, have argued that not all girls *can-do* the successes commonly expected of them. These scholars have sought to disrupt popular discourses of girl power by bringing attention to the array of complex circumstances which girls navigate as they pursue (or not) education and

plan (or not) their future employment and family lives (Aapola, et al., 2005; Archer, Halsall & Hollingworth; 2007; Baker, 2008, 2010; Gill, 2007; Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Harris, 2004b; Lucey, Melody & Walkerdine, 2003; McRobbie, 2004, 2009; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011; Walkerdine, 2003; Walkerdine et al., 2001). According to Baker (2008: 59), “the overarching message of neo-liberalism is that success and failure are determined by personal skills and shortcomings.” Some girls will indeed fail to achieve the promise of girl power but with the prominence of neoliberal and postfeminist discourses their failures are likely to be narrowly interpreted as their own (or in some instances, their parents’ – as seen in my earlier discussion of CPS evaluations of parental/maternal failure to protect). In other words, when girls succeed they are thought to do so as a result of their own self-making, unobstructed by their gender or other intersecting identities. Girls’ failures are equally evacuated of any influence of externally imposed disadvantage based on inequality – “if a girl fails, she has only herself – and not the system – to blame” (Pomerantz & Raby, 2011: 550). The potential negative consequences of still unequal social relations and structures on girls’ life chances are thus concealed by tenacious claims of girls’ success and ubiquitous choice. As observed by Taft (2004: 73) “the use of Girl Power to signify girls’ equality (or dominance) in the world, not only [makes] gender oppression invisible but also [hides] the social forces of racism, classism, and homophobia” (73). Noting that feminism has historically taken account of intersecting relations of oppression, Taft (2004: 72-73) insisted that “girls cannot be discussed as a racially neutral, classless group; to do so is to normalize White, middle-class heterosexual girls.” Taft (2004) proposed that left out of postfeminist versions of girl power that tell girls that they can be, do or have whatever they desire are “the ways that ... gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized identities may give girls privileges or pose challenges” (73). While encouraging girls to believe in themselves and be powerful might be construed as positive, according Taft (2004), the dearth of attention to social inequalities places responsibility for girls’ achievements as well as their failures too securely on the shoulders of individual girls.

Arguments that the stage has been set for girls – the obstacles removed and a host of potential positive gains or outcomes available – suggest that for success, all that is needed is a

motivated, confident future girl ready to take on the world. My review of feminist commentary on postfeminist/neoliberal discourses of girlhood revealed, however, a number of intersecting concerns missing from such straightforward understandings of girls' access to success: 1) the obligatory nature of girls' adaptable, self-creation, 2) the failure of some girls to attain the educational, employment or consumer success, 3) the increased potential for girls' scrutiny and regulation that accompanies the expectation of future or top girl attainment, and 4) the implications on girls' opportunities to achieve success of social inequalities, based on race, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, etc.. In Chapters 7 and 8, I return to these missing concerns as I offer evidence of the influence of postfeminist/neoliberal discourses of girl power on how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse. As I will elaborate, a common theme in participant accounts was the expectation for girls to recognise their responsibility to take on the neoliberal project of self-sufficiency and to engage in activities associated with assuring their future life chances, such as going to school. My worries, which I will discuss in more detail later, reside not with the optimistic message of potential success for sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS but rather with my observation of this message being understood as universally available to all girls regardless of their varied and complex, difficult, traumatic experiences and circumstances. What happens when sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS fail to accept their responsibility to take on the role of future goal? What happens when their complex, difficult and/or traumatic life circumstance get in the way of their efforts to perform as a future girl?

To provide a more detailed backdrop to my consideration of the influence of neoliberal/postfeminist discourses of girlhood on how risk and autonomy are understood and negotiated in the context of CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls, the following sections examine the specific expectations of girls' excellence in education and employment.

### ***Girl power – A promise of diminishing returns?***

Public messages reinforcing the notion that girls nowadays can be, do or have anything they want have found fertile ground in discourses of girls' academic success. Ringrose (2007) observed that public and academic attention to gender disparities in educational achievements has contributed to the perpetuation of a postfeminist/neoliberal discourse of successful girls. According to Ringrose (2007: 480), the persistent juxtaposing of girls' academic success against boys' underachievement has served to construe gender as a stand-alone variable in determining success and to "radically decontextualize experiences of schooling and achievement and equality issues from economic and cultural factors." In other words, obscured in the binary positioning of successful girls versus failing boys "is how issues of equality for boys and girls in school are much wider than gendered achievement, and how achievement is related to issues of class, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship and space/location of schools, as well as to gender" (Ringrose, 2007: 473). Challenging the notion that girls today are untethered from gendered or other constraints in their individual academic efforts, Ringrose (2007) proposed that girls' respective contexts, experiences and circumstances influence not only their academic engagement but also their successes and failures.

A number of researchers have opposed portrayals of gender as the sole determining factor of young people's educational achievement. These researchers have suggested instead that intersecting with gender to influence girls' academic achievement are other facets of girls' identities and social locations including but not limited to class (Lucey et al., 2003; Walkerdine et al., 2001), ethnicity and faith (Bradford & Hey, 2007), cultural minority status (Finnie, Childs & Wismer, 2011; Looker & Thiesson, 2008; Mendelson, 2006), parental education (Finnie & Mueller, 2008), and femininity and sexuality (Archer et al., 2007). As a general message, such research shows social location as well as internalised perceptions of the constraints and opportunities associated with social location to bump up against neoliberal claims of unlimited opportunity and choice. The seductive power of neoliberal messages of boundless opportunity being available to those who work hard and are adaptable to change are thus mediated both by

social location and by individual understandings of what is really available within the limits of social location and circumstance.

In considering the educational achievements and aspirations of sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS, it is impossible to ignore the complicated and intersecting influences not only of their classed and gendered identities but also of their particular circumstances, including the implication of CPS in their lives. As I will present in Chapter 8, the teenage girls and CPS professionals interviewed for my study were acutely aware of constraints and challenges to girls' education. I observed alongside such awareness, however, the persistence of messages of girls' academic power. Participants repeatedly voiced the message that girls could be, do and have whatever they wanted ... as long as they went to school, worked hard and were adaptable in the face of ongoing life changes and challenges.

Harris (2004b: 51) observed that while there continue to be significant disparities in terms of girls' educational achievements based largely on social inequalities, it is no longer just the "privileged minority who make up the huge numbers of young women in senior secondary and tertiary education." Expressing little surprise that girls from all sectors of society are now engaged in further education, she explained, "after all, in the current climate, they have little choice" (51). But, as pointed out by Baker (2010: 3), the pervasive postfeminist/neoliberal injunction that girls can be, do and have anything they want "is inattentive to what happens beyond apparent female educational success." Public exhortations of girls' sustained success as they transition into young womanhood do little to expose the opportunities and challenges they may encounter in their efforts to enter a labour market influenced by global economic trends as well as structural inequalities based on gender, race, class, ability and the like.

A number of Girls' Studies scholars have made attempts to identify how young women have come to be viewed as the prime beneficiaries of today's economy (Aapola et al., 2005; Baker, 2008, 2010; McRobbie, 2011). These scholars have identified a number of interlocking influences. Firstly, given girls' apparent superior educational performance in comparison with boys, girls are considered ideally equipped to compete in a labour market that requires workers to have skills, training and/or education. Secondly, a prevailing postfeminist celebration of the

triumphs of earlier feminist movements contributes to optimistic views of young women's increased access to a range of employment options, including those that were once thought to be the preserve of men. Young women are now seen as unconstrained by the gender-based occupational barriers that limited their foremothers. In fact, as noted in Chapter 3, this apparent escalation of occupational opportunities for women and the resultant steady influx of female workers – or the “feminization of labour” (McRobbie, 2011) – is understood as having been an important factor informing the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economic order evident across the contemporary Western world. A third factor contributing to the positioning of young women as the potential winners in today's economy is a reconfiguration of labour patterns. As observed by Aapola et al. (2005), the decades' long decline in manual, unskilled or low skilled jobs has been interpreted as a significant concern for young men, especially working class young men, but less so for young women. With the contraction of the industrial sector has been a concomitant growth of other sectors of the labour market including consumer-based (i.e. retail, food, beverage, entertainment, etc.) and service (i.e. public and private social, health and education services) industries (McDowell, 2012; McRobbie, 2011). Women workers, especially young women, tend to populate these industries in greater numbers than men thus enhancing the view that the “feminization of labour” is essential to the healthy functioning of today's economy (Harris, 2004b; McRobbie, 2011; McDowell, 2012). Adding further weight to young women's perceived success in the new economy are the neoliberal/postfeminist claims of girls' autonomy, choice, flexibility and self-inventiveness, discussed above. These characteristics are interpreted as ideal possessions of a worker capable of surviving in today's shifting and at times unstable labour market where a steady, forever job rarely exists.

Unchallenged, this portrait of girls and young women might look positive. But, in the words of Baker (2008: 55) this “celebratory focus on young women often presupposes a white, heterosexual, middle class, academically capable and childless demographic.” Accordingly, the success promised by dominant declarations of girl power may well mean something very different for girls and young women whose social locations and circumstances place them at a distance from the can-do girl prototype. McDowell (2012: 587), in her discussion on the

disconnections between assumptions of economic growth and opportunity and the employment experiences of young people in Britain, argued that counter to neoliberal assertions of individualization and individual choice, “structural constraints continue to exert an unequal impact on young people’s lives. Class, gender, embodiment and sexuality continue to affect labour market opportunities.” In a similar vein, Harris (2004b: 60) noted that while a small minority are able realise occupational success, the “vast majority of young women struggle to find personally meaningful and financially sustaining work in the new economy.” Certainly, some young women do find employment success. Many are able to insert themselves into the labour market with the understanding that they are taking their first steps towards building their CVs and developing career potential. But, just as girls’ access to educational success is not experienced equally, neither is young women’s participation in the labour market.

Data produced by Statistics Canada provides evidence that gender continues to impact women’s employment with the majority of women employed in traditionally female-dominated industries such as social services, health and care-giving, education, and sales and services (Moyser, 2017). Women tend to be overrepresented in the service industry and non-standard or precarious jobs – i.e. low-paid, without benefits, part-time and/or temporary (Moyser, 2017; Jenson, 2004a; Roy, 2006). Women far more frequently than men cite the negative impact of balancing work and family on their employment opportunities and note child care or elder care responsibilities as precipitating factors for their involuntarily participation in part-time or shift work (Jenson, 2004a; Roy, 2006; Vosko, Zukewich & Cranford, 2003). Additionally, income disparities persist (Williams, 2010). Statistics Canada reported that, in 2015, women earned an average of \$26.11 per hour and while men earned an average of \$29.86, corresponding to a gender wage ratio of 0.87 (Moyser, 2017). This modest snapshot of women and men’s workforce participation in Canada shows that despite advances in terms of women’s participation in the workforce, gender persists as a structuring force. Women’s current employment and income trends in Canada are but one indication of the inaccuracy of mythologised messages of girl power wherein girls are told that self-investment in their futures will allow them to reap the benefits of equal opportunity and unrestricted access to the market economy.

Further destabilizing such messages are statistics suggesting that educational attainment is not enough to guarantee a rewarding integration into the workforce. For example, evidence collected through Canadian as well as internationally-based research has shown that while post-secondary education or specialized training (i.e. training or apprenticeship for particular trades) does increase employment opportunities, it does not assure full-time or long-term employment (OECD, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2012). Between 2008 and 2011, the number of people in Canada with a bachelor's degree or higher grew by 10.7%, but the employment rate for this group decreased by 1.3 percentage points (from 75.0% to 73.7%) (Statistics Canada, 2012). With respect to gender, Pekkarinen (2012: 33) observed that despite girls' amplified academic achievement, "the level of total benefits of education are [sic] probably still higher for men." So, while education matters, it does not complete a portrait of opportunity or success for young women as they try to make their way in contemporary labour markets. McRobbie (2011) posited that alongside education, social location shapes how a young woman might be perceived in her efforts to engage in the workforce. She acknowledged that "female graduates are now socially more diverse than before" but added that certain "mechanisms (such as those of social capital) [remain in place] which advantage those from wealthy or securely middle-class families." (McRobbie, 2011: 72-73). In other words, who you know, where you come from, what you look like, how you dress, how you express yourself (i.e. vocabulary, accent, grammatical constructions) still appear to carry influence for young women seeking jobs and opportunity.

Young women with limited or no education are at an even greater disadvantage than those with education or specialized training in terms of their integration into the labour market. Based on a review of Canadian 2006 census data, a gender gap in earnings was evident between young men and young women regardless of their education levels and type of occupation; however, the gap was widest for young people without a high school degree (Statistics Canada, 2008). For this group, young women earned only 67 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts and were overrepresented in low-paying occupations as well as service sector jobs (Harris, 2004b) that are often part-time, temporary, and are made up of flexible hours or shift work (Vosko et al., 2003). For young women, part-time work is a particularly salient feature of

their employment experience (Harris, 2004b; McDowell, 2012). While some young women choose part-time work in order to subsidize post-secondary education, those who leave school early often have little choice but to take on poorly paid, part-time work with little job security. McDowell (2012) noted a lack of or limited education to be only one of a number of intersecting factors influencing young women's chances of being hired. With competition high for jobs in sales and service, employers can choose from a large and diverse pool of workers. Young women are thus vulnerable to being "constructed as appropriate or inappropriate employees, depending on their embodied social characteristics, including their looks, their accent, their posture, as well as their gender and class position" (574). Looking and playing the part of an appropriate employee for a particular position matters. In this way, the neoliberal project of individualization involves not only a commitment to education, but also an investment in self-creation according to a particular image – usually a white, middle-class, heterosexual, and, often for young women, attractive image.

The picture of limited and competitive occupational opportunity for less well educated young women presented here is very significant for sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS. As will be seen in the description of my research sample in Chapter 5, all of the sexually abused teenage girls participating in my research struggled with education and most of them self-identified as coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Indeed, their struggles and circumstances were not atypical of CPS populations in general. According to the *CIS – 2008* (Trocmé et al., 2010), 23 percent of all children and youth substantiated for any form of maltreatment experienced academic difficulties. Additionally, a significant proportion of these children and youth came from families whose primary source of income came from social assistance (33 percent) or from part-time work, multiple jobs or seasonal employment (10 percent). An additional two percent of families had no reliable source of income. Of the 51% of families whose identified source of income came from full-time employment, no detail was provided as to the annual income. Nevertheless, even without data on the actual income of families coming to the attention of CPS, these data suggest that many of the children and youth

seen by CPS authorities in Canada are located at points of disadvantage due to their families' socio-economic income status.

Adding to the portrait of youth involved with CPS is empirical research providing insights into the experiences of youth as they approach the age of 18 years and transition out of the CPS system and into adulthood. Leaving the system – or “aging out of care” – means that CPS involved youth can no longer receive direct services from CPS. Kovarikova's (2017: 4) synthesis of data drawn from “academic and ‘grey literature’ (media stories or articles written by professionals in the field)” showed “compromised life outcomes for youth who age out of care compared to peers who were not involved in care.” She elaborated that typical outcomes for these youth include: “low academic achievement; unemployment or underemployment; homelessness and housing insecurity; criminal justice system involvement; early parenthood; poor physical and mental health; and loneliness” (4). Similarly, Tweedle's (2007: 16) review of Canadian, American and international research dealing with youth aging out of CPS showed “a consistently disturbing pattern of poor outcomes.” Kovarikova (2017) suggested there to be a number of reasons contributing to this dismal picture for youth aging out of care that are distinct from any notion of youth's individual failures. She theorised the following CPS policy concerns: insufficient resources; implementation of programs focus on “fixing youth” instead of “fixing the system (including independent living programs);” initiatives that treat youth as a homogenous group thus glossing over inequalities based on sex, age, race, cultural background, geography, CPS placement history, school enrolment, etc.; CPS concentration on efficiency over effectiveness; and lack of concerted attention to understanding the complex factors contributing to poor outcomes for youth as the age out of the system. Tweedle (2007: 16) acknowledged that despite what is known about poor outcomes for youth aging out of CPS, the expectation persists for these youth to be able “to fend for themselves when they reach eighteen.” Tweedle's observation is one to which I will return in Chapter 8. I will show that messages of expected independence and self-sufficiency deeply influenced participants' understandings of girls' risk and autonomy in a manner that mimicked pervasive messages of girl power wherein girls –

regardless of their circumstances or structural constraints – “are ... expected/demanded to be fully self-actualized neo-liberal subjects” (Gonick, Reynold, Ringrose & Weems, 2009: 2).

In sum, present-day postfeminist/neoliberal discourses of girl power propose that *future girl* status of success and promise is universally accessible to *all* girls regardless of structural inequality or complex life circumstances. Some girls, however, do not exhibit signs of success. For example, it is well known that some girls do not excel at school and some of them do not even finish. And, as they transition to adulthood, some young women have difficulty securing financial independence and participating as both workers and consumers in today's market economy. In a climate where choice, flexibility, and hard work are promoted as essential methods through which to attain success, failures appear to be far too easily attributed to individual bad choices or deficiencies. So, how do sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals negotiate girls' risk and autonomy against this backdrop wherein self-determination and individual effort are espoused as the primary means through which to assure future independence? In chapter 8, I address this question in discussing participants' common recognition that while some sexually abused teenage involved with CPS appear willing and able to take on such effort, others do not. I will show that such girls – seemingly failing in their performance of the neoliberal/postfeminist future girl project – are identified as being at-risk or risky in their choices and behaviours are thus subject to ever more intensive surveillance and regulation by CPS.

## Chapter 5: METHODOLOGY

*You guys are seriously missing out unless you all start listening to girls.*

— Kathleen Hanna (lead singer, *Bikini Kill*)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Hanna fronted the feminist punk rock band Bikini Kill. She and her band have been credited with having contributed to the rise of the Riot Grrrl movement wherein young women were encouraged and empowered to embrace self-expression (often angrily), through music and online zines, and to stand up against everyday patriarchy and gendered violence and oppression (Driscoll, 1999; Gonick, 2006; Harris, 2004b).

This quotation is taken from an interview conducted by Mike D of the US hip-hop group, the *Beastie Boys*, and published in the second issue of *Grand Royal* which was written and produced by the band during the mid-nineties.

## Chapter 5: METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Introduction: Choosing a Qualitative Method

My dissertation is based on a qualitative method of inquiry. With the understanding that the method of inquiry should be determined by the phenomena under study, Polkinghorne (2005: 138) explained, “qualitative methods are specifically constructed to take account of the particular characteristics of human experience and to facilitate the investigation of experience.” Creswell (2013) proposed a number of considerations to be taken into account when deciding upon a qualitative method, three of which were particularly relevant to my choice. Firstly, qualitative research involves investigating a specified population through listening for “silenced voices” (48). Creswell explained that “we conduct qualitative research when we want to *empower individuals* to share their stories, to hear their voices” (48). Secondly, he noted that a qualitative method is particularly suited to achieving a “*complex*, detailed understanding of the issue [under investigation]. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature” (48). And finally, Creswell suggested that qualitative research benefits gaining an understanding of the contexts within which research participants negotiate a problem or issue. He insisted, “we cannot always separate what people say from the place where they say it” (48). With these considerations in mind, my research study *fits* – to borrow Creswell’s language – a qualitative method of inquiry. The particular population under study was sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS. At the outset, I sought only girls’ voices; however, as the study progressed it became apparent that to more fully understand their experiences, expanding the participant population to include CPS professionals was essential. While I would hesitate to identify the voices of my participants as *silenced*, their relative absence in contemporary scholarship addressing the intersecting subjects of child sexual abuse, CPS and female adolescence indicated the appropriateness of adopting a qualitative method that placed their articulations at the heart of the study. Achieving complex, detailed and rich understandings of participants’ perceptions and experiences demanded giving attention to the particular setting – CPS – within which my question was embedded and the research

participants were situated. How participants understood and negotiated risk and autonomy was understood as inextricably tied to this context of social work practice wherein day-to-day interventions are driven by concerns for children's safety and wellbeing.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed discussion on the study's qualitative method. I present the girl-centred interpretive framework and explain how a case study approach inspired the design of my study. Moving to the particulars of my research, the rest of this chapter is devoted to describing my study's research sites and participants; the processes of data collection and analysis; and the ethical considerations.

## **5.2 What is qualitative research?**

Experts in the field of research methodology generally agree that no singular definition exists for qualitative research. As Padgett (1998: 1) put it, there is “no one size fits all’ qualitative method to make the definitional task easier.” She suggested instead that qualitative research “embraces a wide diversity of techniques and approaches ... [that] coexist as a loosely connected family” (xii). In a similar vein, Saldaña (2011: 3) referred to qualitative research as an “umbrella term” for an “eclectic set of approaches and methods.” Still, despite the seeming lack of a distinct definition as well as the plural and varied nature of its methods, scholars consistently recognise a number of core characteristics as common to qualitative research. To elaborate,

**1) Qualitative researchers principally collect data in the field.** Qualitative research is neither conducted in a lab nor in a contrived or artificial environment (Creswell, 2013). To this end, Patton (2015: 141), noted that

Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to affect, control, or manipulate what is unfolding naturally. Observations take place in real-world settings, and people are interviewed with open-ended questions in places and under conditions that are comfortable for and familiar to them.

In other words, qualitative research demands minimal investigator manipulation and requires that “qualitative researchers go to the people; they do not extricate people from their everyday worlds” (Rossman and Rallis, 2003:9). The majority of my research interviews took place either

in participants' homes or at different sites – offices or placement settings – within the CPS agency with which my participants were involved. Exceptionally, and at their respective requests, I met with one participant in an office at the university and another at a local recreation centre. I found that the opportunity to meet with participants in settings within which they experienced the phenomenon under study often sparked conversations relevant to my research question.

**2)** The qualitative researcher is deeply integrated in every aspect of a research study from its initial inception to the redaction of the final product. As the “key instrument” of data collection, “qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, and interviewing participants. They may use an instrument, but it is one designed by the researcher using open-ended questions” (Creswell, 2013: 45). In my study, I alone gathered and analysed my research data. I did not make use of any instruments or questionnaires created by other researchers but instead developed semi-structured interview guides for interviewing my participants.

As the key instrument of data collection, a qualitative researcher “must be a sensitive instrument of observation” (Padgett, 1998: 3). Specifically, s/he “attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local participants from the inside through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of suspending or bracketing preconceptions about the topics under discussion” (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014: 9). With considerable past social work experience, I found that such a method does not stray far from basic social work skills in which active listening, respect, empathy and critical reflection are oft emphasized as crucial to good practice. I believe that my experience as a social worker was a benefit to the processes of data collection and analysis; however, my proximity to the subject matter under study also demanded a certain degree of vigilance with respect to examining any preconceptions or assumptions.

**3)** Creswell (2013) acknowledged that qualitative researchers typically gather data from multiple sources: interviews, observations, and/or documents. I reviewed CPS legislation and organizational documents and I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants. I did not engage in participant observation; however, I took field notes so as to capture the

essence of my observations when meeting with participants in their homes or in different sites within the CPS agency, sites within which negotiations of risk and autonomy took place.

4) Qualitative research relies almost exclusively on textual or visual rather than numeric data (Maxwell, 2013). As elaborated by Saldaña (2011: 3-4), the information collected in qualitative research “is primarily (but not exclusively) nonquantitative in character, consisting of textual materials such as interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and documents, and/or visual materials such as artefacts, photographs, video recordings and Internet sites.” Alongside legislative and organizational documentation, my field notes and transcripts of interviews with the sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals participating in my study comprised the research data to be analysed and interpreted.

5) “Qualitative research methods are inherently inductive,” meaning that rather than testing pre-existing theories, qualitative researchers seek to discover or unearth usually unanticipated themes (Padgett, 1998: 2). The goals of qualitative research are not to test, prove or disprove a hypothesis; instead, the goals are to cultivate detailed understandings of individuals’ perceptions and/or experiences of particular phenomena (Maxwell, 2013). As such, qualitative research is understood as something of an organic process through which research findings mature from the researcher’s interaction with collected data. In other words, with the goal of discovering how individuals experience and/or perceive certain phenomena, qualitative research involves building understandings inductively – from the “bottom-up” – through interacting with, organizing and revisiting the data until a comprehensive set of themes emerge (Creswell, 2013).

Maxwell (2013), amongst others, suggested that conducting qualitative research demands a researcher’s openness and flexibility. Looking back, I realise I approached my research with certain suspicions regarding how risk and autonomy were understood and negotiated in the context of CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls. Thanks to my years of practice in the area of child sexual abuse, I had some preconceived notions of what I might hear in my participants’ accounts. Still, in keeping with the inductive nature of qualitative research, I initiated my study by making genuine efforts to listen for the unexpected. Ultimately, the themes that emerged through the process of my research were unanticipated and – in my opinion – far

more interesting and relevant to my participants as well as to CPS practice than were my preconceptions. In reflecting on this process, it seems my research experience mirrored Patton's (2015: 68) claim that the "value" of qualitative research "is to expect the unexpected, look for it, and see where it leads you."

6) Coinciding with the flexibility integral to qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013), is the emergent character of qualitative research designs. Creswell (2013) described the qualitative research process as emergent in that qualitative researchers are at liberty – or perhaps more appropriately, encouraged – to alter the design of their study in response to discoveries made or unforeseen events or challenges faced over the course of the research. He noted that "the [interview] questions may change, the forms of data collection may be altered, and the individuals studied and the sites visited may be modified during the process of conducting the study" (Creswell, 2013: 47). During the process of my research, I altered a number of aspects of my study in response not only to the accounts of my early participants but also to complications confronted in the field relative to conducting interviews with a population conceived of as vulnerable. In a later section in this chapter, I will discuss the challenges associated with conducting research with young people involved with CPS. For now, it is simply worth noting that rather than considering such challenges as having limited my research, I found the design that emerged over the months (years) of data collection ultimately served to benefit the overall study.

7) According to Miles et al. (2014:9) the main task of qualitative research is "to describe the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations." Maxwell (2013: 30) claimed this focus on "meaning" moves beyond description and is fundamental to the "interpretive" orientation of qualitative research. He further noted that how participants make sense of events and behaviours "and how their understanding influences their behaviour" are of central interest to the qualitative researcher (Maxwell, 2013: 30).

Creswell (2013) clarified that throughout the process of a study qualitative researchers maintain their focus on learning the meanings participants hold about a particular problem, issue,

or phenomena and not the meanings that they – or other scholars – bring to the research. He added that concentrating on participant meanings demands acknowledging multiple and diverse perspectives on a particular topic. Recognising that no singular “meaning” can exist for all participants, Creswell (2013: 47) suggested that although commonalities may emerge in participant accounts, the themes elaborated in a qualitative report “should reflect multiple perspectives of the participants in the study.”

Through the process of interacting with participants, transcribing interviews, and revisiting and analysing the written data, my goal was to gain a deep understanding of how participants made sense of or perceived the concepts of risk and autonomy within the context of CPS. As well, I hoped to gain insight into how these understandings influenced their day-to-day negotiations of risk and autonomy. I will discuss the common themes that emerged in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. In keeping with Creswell’s (2013) observation, I will show that participants’ “meanings, beliefs and so on” were diverse, multiple and influenced by their varied and intersecting contexts and identities.

**8)** Qualitative research seeks to uncover “holistic” accounts and/or meanings, thus enabling the researcher “to delve into complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted nature of human phenomena.” Morrow (2007: 211).

While CPS legislation provides definitions of risk and autonomy in a precise manner, I entered my study with the suspicion that neither concept was thought of or experienced simply or in the same way by those involved with CPS. I thus set out on my research with the objective of drawing out participants’ respective accounts of their perceptions, behaviours, and choices so as to generate complex, detailed and holistic understandings of risk and autonomy as understood and negotiated in the context of CPS involvement in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

**9)** Fundamental to qualitative research is the reflexivity – the ongoing practice of self-examination – of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Padgett, 1998; Patton, 2015). Rather than a passive, distant observer and recorder of data, the qualitative researcher is to be actively and deeply embedded in every aspect of the research process. Creswell (2013) suggested that qualitative researchers constantly take into account how their particular views and backgrounds

(i.e. identities, social locations, past work and personal experiences, etc.) might inform the development of their study and their interpretation of the data. In other words, as summed up by Rossman and Rallis (2003: 10),

From early curiosity all the way to writing the final report, the researcher's personal biography is the lens through which [s/he] sees the world. Gender, race and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, politics and beliefs all affect any research project. Qualitative researchers recognize the importance of reflecting on who they are and how this affects their research.

As the “key instrument” in my study, I was actively involved in the processes of participant engagement and data collection and analysis. This meant being prepared to examine (and re-examine) my possible biases as well as the influences of my background and the multiple identities I brought to the research process. For example, while my experience as a social worker may have informed my research question, given me insider knowledge of the context of my study and inspired confidence in my abilities to engage participants in conversation, I had to be cautious and attentive regarding the influences of my individual experiences, identities and views on every aspect of the research process.

Closely linked to the reflexivity of the researcher is the interpretive nature of qualitative research. Typically, qualitative research is used to explore participants' accounts, emotions and thoughts or interpretations relative to the experience or phenomenon under study. But interpretation does not stop with hearing how participants' articulate and understand a particular subject. Rather, qualitative researchers too are deeply involved in interpretation. As Denzin and Lincoln (2013: 7) noted, qualitative researchers attempt to “make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” With the understanding that qualitative data cannot stand on their own as representative of the particular reality, phenomenon or experience under study, qualitative researchers are required to interpret the data in order to unearth deep, rich and detailed descriptions and/or understandings of the research subject matter. Patton (2015: 53) likened this process of interpretation to qualitative analysis: “qualitative analysis involves interpreting interviews, observations, and documents – the data of qualitative inquiry – to find substantively meaningful patterns and themes.” Adding nuance to the

interpretive practice of the qualitative researcher, Miles et al. (2014: 9) noted that “many interpretations of [the research data] are available” but certain of them may be more compelling to the researcher for “theoretical reasons or on the grounds of credibility or trustworthiness.” Here the researcher’s position – whether personal, theoretical, professional, or political – shapes his/her interpretation of the data. In my study, my professional experiences as a social worker influenced how I interpreted both girls’ and CPS professionals’ accounts of CPS involvement. But, my theoretical focus on better understanding how contemporary notions of girlhood have infiltrated CPS practice with sexually abused teenage girls also influenced how I interpreted participants’ descriptions of negotiating concerns for risk and aspirations for autonomy.

### **5.3 Research Design**

The research design is the comprehensive “how” of carrying out an inquiry; it is the way(s) in which the research idea or question is transformed into a strategy that can then be set in motion by the researcher (Cheek, 2008). From a study’s inception to the final written report, the research design functions “to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible” (De Vaus, 2001: 9). A research design, however, is not merely a step-by-step list of tasks; “rather the term refers to and encompasses decisions about how the research itself is conceptualized, the subsequent conduct of a specific research project and ultimately the type of contribution the research is intended to make to the development of knowledge in a particular area” (Cheek, 2008: 761). As such, there must be a credible fit between the question(s) being asked by the researcher and the design of a study. In other words, the researcher must be aware of what information is needed to best answer the question(s) and knowledgeable of the most effective strategies through which to obtain it.

Maintaining congruence throughout a research study requires giving consideration to the *theoretical*, *methodological* as well as *ethical* components of its design and to how each component interacts with and informs the others (Cheek, 2008). With this understanding in mind, the rest of this chapter is devoted to giving close attention to each of these components of my study as well as their intersections with one another. As I move into this detailed discussion, I am

reminded of Padgett's (1998:28) reflection that "the word *design* sounds almost too orderly for the sometimes messy process that unfolds in qualitative research." Given the *flexibility* and *recursiveness* in designing such studies, qualitative researchers rarely engage in a linear process; their process rather "zigs and zags depending on where the data lead" (Padgett, 1998: 30). As I will articulate in more detail below, elements of the research design with which I set out into the field altered over the course of my data collection and analysis.

### **5.3.1 Girl-centred interpretive framework**

The *theoretical* component of a research design equates to what Creswell (2013) identifies as the "interpretive lens" or what Denzin and Lincoln (2013) identify as the "interpretive paradigm" used by the researcher. Simply, it refers to the theoretical understandings, assumptions, frameworks or traditions – i.e. Marxist, feminist, social justice, post-colonial, Queer, anti-racist, etc. – that serve to shape and influence the research design (Cheek, 2008). A *girl-centred interpretive framework* was adopted as the theoretical component of my research design. In the ensuing paragraphs, I call attention to the features that distinguish a girl-centred interpretive framework as a distinct critical theoretical lens through which to study the details of girls' lives.

Central to a girl-centred interpretive framework and in keeping with the principle focus of Girls' Studies, the academic discipline within which it is embedded, is maintaining a concentration "on issues about girls, for girls and by girls" (Reid-Walsh & Bratt, 2011: 9). Respecting this concentration in conducting girl-centred research is rather less straightforward, however, than it might appear – it means more than simply naming girls or phenomena particular to girls as the subject matter under study.

In response to observations that despite a contemporary fascination with girls in public as well as academic discourses, there remain significant gaps in the research methods informing such discourses, a number of Girls' Studies scholars<sup>26</sup> have sought to elaborate a girl-centred interpretive framework and to "[deepen] an understanding of what it means to do girlhood

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz, 2009; Gonick and Gannon, 2014; Hussein et al., 2006; Kearney, 2009; and, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2009; 2013.

research” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2009: 214). These scholars responded most specifically to concerns for the limited attention given to the complexity of girls’ lives and to the lack of inclusion of girls within research agendas and frameworks. For example, Hussein et al. (2006: 61), in considering how to conduct research with girls on the subject of violence in their lives, suggested that while “there is knowledge available *about* girls and *on* girls,” much of it perpetuates narrowed and homogenizing conceptualizations that are bereft of girls’ input. According to these authors, largely missing in frameworks for research on girls and girlhood have been 1) deep and thorough examinations of the circumstances of girls’ lives and their influence on girls’ identities, experiences, choices and behaviours and 2) “opportunities for girls to be a part of the production of knowledge regarding their own lives” (60). With these observations in mind, Hussein et al. (2006) advocated for a girl-centred interpretive framework that would enable the production of knowledge that is “responsive and meaningful to the complex, multiple, and differentiated experiences of girls” (63) and “shaped by the experiences, perspectives and conceptions of girls” (66).

Other Girls’ Studies scholars noted that the research traditions established within those scholarly domains from which Girls’ Studies emerged – in particular, youth studies and women’s or feminist studies – long tended to marginalise girls and their perspectives or experiences. Pulling girls and girlhood out from the margins of both research traditions but most especially feminist research is a conspicuous and defining element of a girl-centred interpretive framework. Still, a girl-centred interpretive framework remains closely tied with feminist research traditions particularly those associated with third wave feminist scholarship. While it is impossible to speak of a *singular* feminist research tradition, the multiple feminist frameworks for conducting research tend to share a few common features, including, (1) a consciousness of the complexity, difference and diversity of women’s experiences, (2) concerns for issues of power, (3) overt attention to the values and/or politics informing research, and (4) commitment to reflexivity and critical reflection (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Gringeri, Wahab &

Anderson-Nathe, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2008; Morawski, 2001)<sup>27</sup>. As I will show in the ensuing paragraphs, these features echo in a girl-centred interpretive framework.

As noted, a girl-centred interpretive framework has been especially influenced by (and has arguably developed alongside) third wave feminist scholarship. Succinctly, this scholarship challenged researchers to expose and denounce simplistic, homogenized and often marginalizing categories of identity and experience and to pursue, instead, inquiries that “engage with the complexity of ‘real life’ difference and inequalities” (Archer, 2004: 470). Just as feminist researchers influenced by third wave feminist perspectives might seek to confront essential or universalized/universalizing notions of *woman* and *gender*, researchers adopting a girl-centred interpretive framework similarly seek to confront essential or universalized/universalizing notions of *girl* and *girlhood*.

Bringing attention to the intersections of age, gender and generation (amongst other facets of identity) allows for and encourages researchers to challenge and deconstruct simplistic and generalised understandings of girls as simply women-in-the-making and girlhood as a temporary period of maturation within women’s life cycle. As put by Gonick and Gannon (2014:1), “girlhood studies,” or girl-centred research involves exploring

what we mean by girls and how the concepts of girls and girlhood signify in broader society. That is, it does not take as natural the common sense understandings of biological difference, nor does it take at face value a developmental psychology perspective of girlhood as a life phase. Rather, girlhood studies often problematizes what girlhood might mean and who might count as a girl.

Gonick and Gannon (2014: 2) further explained “girlhood” “as a cultural, historical and social phenomenon that is shaped by social policies and institutions.” And, Kearney (2009: 19) suggested that adopting a girl-centred interpretive framework involves recognising girlhood “as a fluid discursive construct which female youth variously negotiate alongside a range of other social produced subjectivities, rather than as a fixed identity that is biologically determined.” She clarified that researchers ought to approach their inquiries with the understanding that “there are many ways to be a girl, and these forms depend on not only the material bodies performing

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix B for my detailed discussion on these shared elements of feminist research traditions.

girlhood, but also the specific social and historical contexts in which those bodies are located” (19). Certainly, in my own research, attending to the specific context of CPS as well as the broad discursive context of girlhood was essential to understanding sexually abused teenage girls participation in their individual girlhoods as well as their negotiation of risk and autonomy.

Harris (2004b: 191), in her exploration of contemporary girlhood, noted that any research focusing “on an age- and gender-based category as its subject of inquiry immediately runs into the problem of implying a natural, fixed state of being for that category.” The danger, according to Harris (2004b: 191), is that the “diversity and fluidity” inherent within the category of girl might too easily be “flattened out by an assumption of shared basic characteristics.” To Harris (2004b: 192) the danger extends beyond simply rendering diversity and fluidity invisible; it includes as well, the threat of producing and perpetuating particular versions of girlhood as “normal, universal, and equally available to all.” She explained her concern as follows

Although there is a tremendous fluidity in the application of the title “girl,” normative ideas about appropriate female adolescence that serve a wider social purpose have been simultaneously imposed on young women in an homogenizing fashion. Characteristics of specific groups of girls have often become definitive of the assumed qualities and experiences of all young women. The unseen markers of privilege have frequently come into play in girls’ studies, such that the girlhoods of white, middle-class young women have been generalized out into assumptions about all girlhoods. Consequently, the young women who have usually been tested against this measure, being the underresourced and those most prone to regulation, have been found wanting (192).

Harris’ (2004b) claimed that girl-centred inquiry must attend to power and privilege in order to produce research that is reflective of and valuable to the real lives of girls. Keeping Harris’ guidance in mind, my own pursuit of research with girls already marginalized and “prone to regulation” simply by virtue of their involvement with CPS required that I not only pay attention to the diversity and fluidity evident in their respective identities and experiences, but also that I remain vigilant to my own preconceived notions of girls and girlhood as well as to the perpetuation and consequences of shared, fixed notions of girlhood in the context of CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2009: 215) argued for explicitly foregrounding “power and age dynamics as well as the intersectionality of race, class, ethnicity, and gender and sexuality” in the

substantive focus of inquiry as well as with respect to the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Correspondingly, Girls' Studies researchers have sought to identify methods through which to acknowledge as well as confront imbalances of power in their efforts to form collaborative connections with girl participants. As Driscoll (2008: 26) noted, "Girl studies as a scholarly field is conducted by people who are not or are no longer girls in the usual sense." Age (and the power associated with years of experience) thus, becomes a relevant category to consider when negotiating status and authority in the researcher/researched relationship. This negotiation is considered essential to developing the trust deemed crucial to opening space for girls' voices.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2009) claimed the notion of "girls' voices" to be critical to the pursuit of girl-centred inquiry. They noted, however, that efforts to give volume to girls voices are fraught "in relation to ethical issues, levels of participation, tokenism, privileging/romancing the voices of participants, putting our own interpretation on the words of participants, and so on" (221). Unsurprisingly, such issues become even more contested and significant when inviting the participation of minors or girls' deemed vulnerable due to their context or experience. Here the researcher enters an uncertain terrain where s/he is asked to minimise the distance and power imbalance between her/him and the participant while simultaneously being responsible for assuring a safe and ethical research environment. To this end, Hussein et al. (2006: 66) insisted that girl-centred research "must be carried out with great sensitivity, responsiveness, and responsibility" and that "as researchers we must always question and reflect upon our motivations and actions." Commenting specifically on disclosure, these authors suggested that "in providing meaningful opportunities for girls to share their stories, we must be mindful of the fact that we may be opening up possibilities of misappropriation of voice and experiences and we may contribute to further pain" (66-67). Hussein et al. (2006) proposed nourishing girls' agency within the research process as a useful method through which to safely encourage and support girls' articulations. In reflecting on their own field work with girls, Currie et al. (2009) similarly explored the complexities (and importance) associated with acting as the researcher-adult who asks the questions while at the same time treating girls as the experts on their own

lives. They noted that the research interview is not a “chat between friends” and suggested that it is the researcher’s responsibility to ensure girls are aware that “the tape recorder is always on” (62). The suggestion is that simply speaking with transparency regarding the purpose and process of an interview is seen as respectful of girls’ autonomy and as helpful in reminding girls that they have the power to choose how and what to share with the researcher. In a later section of this chapter, I will return to the guidance offered by Hussein et al. (2006) and Currie et al. (2009) as I present my use of in-depth interviewing with study participants.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2009: 215) asserted the importance of pursuing explicitly “girl-centred research that assumes a political stance of defending and promoting the rights of girls” (215). In this sense, girl-centred inquiry is understood as having value beyond the production of research. Kearney (2009: 21) offered the reminder that “Girls’ Studies scholars must keep in mind that our work has significant political effects both within and outside the academy.” She elaborated that

At the heart of our scholarship is a demographic group that has been consistently marginalized, trivialized, and exploited throughout the ages. Girls today may have more agency than those of previous generations, but even the most privileged contemporary female youth remain disenfranchised because of their age. As minors, they are barred from many of the activities and social institutions that might expand their power and improve their lives. For many girls, such disempowerment is exponentially multiplied as a result of their race, ethnicity, class, ability, sexuality, religion, and /or nationality. Indeed, compound disenfranchisement is the norm for most female youth today, though such identities and the social experiences associated with them are the least represented in popular discourse” (21).

Rather than creating research that usurps girls’ voices and speaks for them, researchers adopting a girl-centred interpretive framework are called upon to act as girls’ allies (to borrow Kearney’s (2009) language) in acting to improve their lives. In my efforts to amplify girls’ voices and listen for issues identified as important to their day-to-day experience, my aim is to gain insight into how they understand and negotiate risk and autonomy in the context of their involvement with CPS and to use this insight to identify potential avenues through which to enhance practice.

### **5.3.2 Methodological approach: Case study**

The *methodological* component refers to the qualitative approach or strategy of inquiry deemed most appropriate for the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2013: 29) defined the strategy of inquiry as “a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their [interpretive] paradigm to the empirical world.” Although far from an exhaustive list, these strategies include case study, phenomenological and ethnomethodological approaches, grounded theory, and narrative approaches. Whatever the strategy chosen, the methodological component of the design also includes refining the details of the study’s process by answering questions such as: Where will the research be situated? Who are the research participants? How will they be selected? Which sources of data will be investigated and why? What techniques (i.e. interview) will be used? And, how will the data be analysed?

I chose to adopt a case study approach as the methodological component of my research design. In his efforts to bring some clarity to the term “case study,” Gerring (2004: 342) “regretfully” observed it to be “a definitional morass.” He, amongst others (Bergin & White, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Hammersley & Gomm, 2000; Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2014; Ragin, 1992; Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2011; Yazan, 2015) commented that despite its popularity as an approach to research, there remains a lack of consensus with respect to what constitutes a case study as well as to how this approach to research ought to be implemented. Nonetheless, Simons’ (2009) review of definitions proposed by foundational writers on case study revealed a few common elements. Her definition represents an attempt at bringing together these elements:

Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action (2009: 21).

In general, a case study comprises a detailed, in-depth study of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life contexts (Stake, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). It involves inviting and exploring the perspectives of those involved with the phenomenon under study (Stake, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). With a focus on generating holistic and complex understandings,

case studies share with other forms of qualitative research a concentration on searching for meaning (Merriam, 2009). And, finally, case studies have been identified as best suited to research that poses “how” or “why” questions (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014) and that aims to develop knowledge useful to the enhancement of policies or professional practices associated with the phenomenon under study (Lee, Mishna and Brennenstuhl, 2010; Simons, 2009).

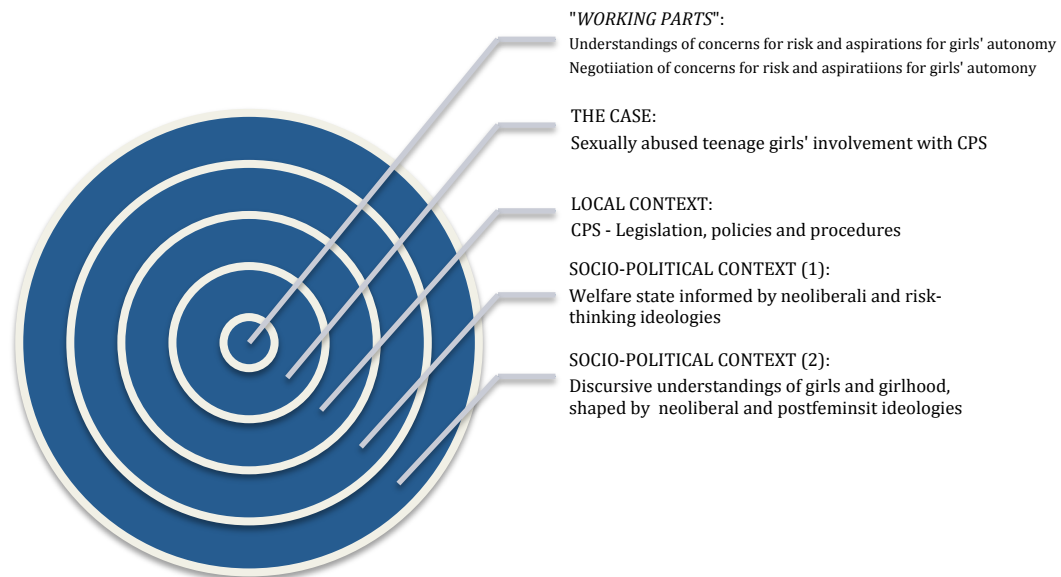
Oft identified as the common defining feature of case study research is its concentration on a singular specific “case” as the object of study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). According to researchers in this field, cases can appear as bounded or unbounded systems (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Creswell (2013: 98) claimed that a case – whether it be a concrete entity, such as an individual, a group or an organisation or something less concrete, such as a decision process, relationship, or project – ought to be “bounded or described within certain parameters, such as a specific place and time.” For the case study researcher, determining “what is and what is not ‘the case’” (Stake, 2000: 23) is a vital element of the research design. Recognising that determining “the case” can be challenging to case study researchers, Merriam (2009: 41) advised plainly,

If the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case. One technique for assessing the boundedness of the topic is to ask how finite the data collection would be, that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite time for observations. If there is no end, actually or theoretically, to the number of people who could be interviewed or to observations that could be conducted, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to qualify as a case.

Indeed, defining the boundaries of the case is important to limiting data collection (Yin, 2014); however, it is equally if not more essential to recognising that of primary interest to the researcher is what happens within those boundaries (Stake, 2000). Stake (1995: 236) identified the case as “an integrated system” with both boundaries and internal “working parts.” For Stake (1995) attention to these working parts is crucial to any case study. He encouraged researchers to pay close attention to the workings of both the expected and unexpected parts of the case. The dynamism in Stake’s (1995) consideration of the case’s working parts suits my exploration of how concerns for risk and aspirations for girls’ autonomy are understood and negotiated within the bounds of sexually abused teenage girls’ involvement with CPS.

Routinely mentioned in definitions of case studies is the dual expectation that such research explicitly attends to and is conducted within a “real-life” context. For example, Creswell (2013: 98) explained that case study research involves studying “current, real-life cases that are in progress” so that “accurate information is not lost by time.” And, Yin (2014: 16) defined case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.” Yin’s definition reveals an important acknowledgement that the case – whatever it may be – cannot be studied in a vacuum and the search for meaning cannot proceed without giving close attention to the inextricability of case and context. Stake (1995) similarly characterised case studies as *holistic* in that such research necessarily involves considering the interrelationship between the phenomenon under study and its contexts. He elaborated that to fully grasp the intricacies of the phenomenon, close attention must be given “to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts” (2005: 444). My own concentration on sexually abused teenage girls’ involvement with CPS (the “case”) provides an example of the inextricability of context. My search for what was happening within the boundaries of the case – specifically how concerns for risk and aspirations for girls’ autonomy are understood and negotiated – could not be pursued without giving close attention to the context of CPS and its nuanced influence on understanding and experience. In keeping with Stake’s (2005) reference to attending to the multiple contexts within which a case is embedded, my attention was drawn not only to the context of CPS – itself a complex context shaped by legislation, policy and prevailing ideologies (see Chapter 2) – but also the larger context of Canada’s welfare state within which CPS is embedded (see Chapter 2) as well as the discursive context of present-day understandings of girls and girlhood (see Chapter 3).

**FIGURE 1: THE CASE AND ITS CONTEXT**



### **Data collection**

Data collection in case study research tends to employ multiple methods and to involve the consideration of multiple sources of information (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Hyett et al. 2014; Gilgun, 1994; Merriam, 2009; Meyer, 2001; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2005; Yin, 2014). In her discussion on the practice of case study research, Simons (2009: 33) elaborated on the particular use of interviewing, observation and document analysis as methods appropriate to facilitating “in-depth analysis and understanding.” Noting, however, that case study methods of data collection need not be limited to these three, Simons (2009: 34) listed numerous other qualitative and quantitative methods as potentially useful to case study research including, “critical incidents, open letters, discourse analysis, narratives, video analysis, photographs, log entries, artefacts” as well as “small-scale surveys, patterns of examination results, questionnaires, descriptive statistics, content analysis.”

Yin (2014: 17) highlighted the reliance on “multiple sources evidence” in case study research as necessary for illustrating the convergence of data “in a triangulating fashion.” He, amongst others, reported on the importance of checking and rechecking the consistency and validity of research findings through using multiple data collection methods and seeking data

from multiple sources of information. Similarly, Simons (2009: 130) observed that both methodological triangulation – “exploring significant similarities between methods” – and data triangulation – “using different data sources to gain understanding of the issues” – are common to case study research and offer the opportunity for adding richness to the description of the case as well as validation of findings. In general, triangulation allows the qualitative researcher to develop a comprehensive picture of the object of study and to note points of both convergence and divergence within the collected data (Maxwell, 2013; Padgett, 1998). Adding to the discussion on triangulation in case study research, Simons (2009: 131) argued for acknowledging divergences within collected data not as an invalidation of a study’s findings but rather as an opportunity to see “from different angles,” “to pursue interpretations further,” and to “deepen understanding” all so as to portray a detailed, nuanced, complex and “valid” picture of the phenomenon under study. Simply, drawing data from multiple sources using multiple methods enhances opportunities for case study researchers “to capture the case under study in its complexity and entirety” (Yazan, 2015: 142).

Also common in case study research is the recommendation that researchers account for their methodological choices in a detailed and explicit manner (Yin (2014). Cautioning case study researchers to explicitly account for the choices made throughout the design and conduct of their study, Meyer (2001) claimed that without such detailed accounting, a study’s methods could well be criticised for their lack of rigour thus open to invalidation. Recognising decisions around method as being pragmatically driven and thus non-arbitrary, Simons (2009: 34) advised case study researchers to “select methods for the potential to inform [their] research questions and not because they may be the most frequently used methods in case study or [the research has] a predilection, say, for interviewing or observing.” She further suggested,

In order to check that you are choosing the most appropriate methods, ask yourself the following questions: Will these methods give me the data I need to answer my research questions? What other methods might offer a different take on the issues? What combination of methods might strengthen the validity of the study? (34).

Taking the above advice, in the following, I elaborate on the details relating to my process of data collection and my selection of *in-depth interviewing* and *document review* as research

methods appropriate to my research question. Specifically, I present where (*research sites*), with whom and what (*research sample*), and how (*source of data*) I gathered my research data.

### **A. Research sites**

An early choice in the process of developing my research design was determining the research sites within which to pursue my study. The choice of a research site is crucial to the research design and “usually reflects a balance of research interests and availability.” (Padgett, 1998: 50). As noted by Padgett (1998) a research site ought to “fit the study” (51); it ought to be congruent with the research purpose and offer the researcher the best possible opportunity to answer the research question. While in some research any number of sites might be suitable to the purpose and question, in other research, the study is necessarily “site-specific” (Padgett, 1998). I found the latter to be relevant for case study research wherein context is understood as inextricable from the phenomenon under study.

The principal site for my study was a local CPS agency mandated to provide services to the Anglophone and Jewish populations of Montreal. The secondary research site was a local pediatric hospital centre designated by the province to respond to situations of sexual abuse involving children and youth. Both sites offered access to sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS agencies; however, only the site identified as the principal location for my study offered me access to CPS professionals with knowledge and experience of the identified case.

Padgett (1998) observed that the selection of a research site or sites may be associated with a researcher’s familiarity with a particular location, organization, neighbourhood etc. but indicated that site selection ought to proceed centrally from the study’s purposes and questions. Both research sites were well known to me prior to the start of my research. As a social work practitioner, I began my career as a CPS social worker at the local CPS agency identified as my principal research site. After practising there for almost three years, I left to assume a position with the social work department at the pediatric hospital identified as my secondary research site, where I worked for almost 10 years before leaving to pursue my doctorate. While my familiarity with both institutions did not assure my access to them as research sites, my past work experiences provided me with insider knowledge with respect not only to recognising their

suitability for my study but also to knowing who to approach and what procedures to undertake in order to secure their participation.

### ***B. Research sample***

There are important “sampling choices to make regarding people to interview and observe, events to observe, group interviews to conduct, relevant documents to search and the amount of time to spend on site” (Simons, 2009: 34). My choice to collect research data through *in-depth interviewing* and *document review* strategies (see discussion below) meant that sampling involved determining who should be interviewed as well as what documents should be reviewed in order to best explore how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls’ autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

Sampling in case study research is commonly prescribed as purposeful, “that is, it includes the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study” (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010: 837). Patton (2015: 598-599) noted that, typically, qualitative research studies rely on relatively small samples of “information-rich cases” that are carefully selected for their “specific purpose.” With respect to the size of a purposefully selected sample, Patton (2015: 696) claimed there to be no rules: “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources.” In essence, purposeful sampling obliges the qualitative researcher – including the qualitative case study researcher – to deliberately select a research sample best able to provide information relevant to the study’s goals and research question(s) while at the same time taking into account the constraints and opportunities of the chosen research settings. Responding to this latter consideration, Maxwell (2013: 99) commented that often, “selection decisions require considerable knowledge of the setting of the study.” He claimed that’s such knowledge can be useful in terms of identifying who or what to include in the research sample as well as with in terms of recognising feasibility of access, developing positive research relationships with study participants (and gatekeepers – see discussion below), and ethics.

Alongside purposeful sampling, theoretical sampling is oft mentioned in discussions of sampling in qualitative case study research (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010; Merriam, 2009;

Simons, 2009; Yazan, 2015). In fact, theoretical sampling has been explained as a particular form of purposeful sampling that takes place once the initial – but not complete – sampling selection has already been done and as data collection is ongoing (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009). Referring to theoretical sampling as an “evolving process guided by the emerging theory,” Merriam (2009: 80) noted that data analysis “occurs simultaneously with identifying the sample and collecting the data.” She clarified that the researcher employing a theoretical sampling strategy “begins with an initial sample chosen for its obvious relevance to the research problem. The data lead the investigator to the next document to be read, the next person to be interviewed, and so on” (79-80). Simons (2009: 34) further explained that data collection in case study research tends to begin with the purposeful selection of a sample but, at a later stage, theoretical sampling may be introduced so as “to gather further data related to a developing theory of the case.”

My sampling strategy was principally purposeful. I sought to construct a sample of participants who had both knowledge and experience of my identified case – sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS. I also sought to construct a sample of documents that could contribute to an in-depth exploration of the case and its CPS context. Details on my sample are offered next.

#### RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS:

Sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS and CPS professionals with direct practice experience with sexually abused teenage girls were identified as the two primary groups from which I could select individual research participants having particular knowledge of the case under study. At the outset of my research study I had intended only to conduct research interviews with sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS. Once I was in the process of collecting data, however, I realised that the inclusion of CPS professionals would be necessary to providing depth and comprehensibility to my exploration. More precisely, I realised that as individuals responsible for putting into action the CPS mandate of protecting children and youth from risk, CPS professionals had knowledge and experience essential to contributing to an in-depth and nuanced understanding of sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS.

In accordance with sampling strategies in qualitative case study research, I set out to select a relatively small sample of individuals purposefully chosen for their knowledge and experience of the case (sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS). I began the process of identifying and recruiting research participants by securing the support and collaboration of key professionals at both identified research sites. After first speaking directly with decision-making personnel with knowledge of the conduct and ethics relating to undertaking research studies within each of the identified sites, I followed up by sending introduction letters to key professionals at both sites who I believed could support my recruitment efforts. The majority of these key professionals occupied posts in management teams. These letters briefly outlined the details and goals of my study; detailed the characteristics of the sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals I hoped to recruit for participation; and laid out what participation in my study would entail (see *Appendix C*). Next, I visited different groups of professionals at each research site to fully describe and answer questions about my research study, research goals, and criteria for identifying potential participants. These meetings were essential to exploring recruitment possibilities as well as challenges within each research site.

I shared with professionals at both research sites a list of criteria to be taken into consideration in the identification of specific teenage girls to invite as potential research participants in my study. My aim was to include teenage girls, between the ages of 15-19 years, who had experienced CPS involvement following disclosures of sexual abuse. And, potential participants were to meet the following criteria:

- The sexual abuse must have been disclosed to a CPS professional during the participant's teenage years, broadly defined as being between the ages 12 to 17 years.
- A CPS social worker must have found sufficient evidence to believe that the disclosed sexual abuse occurred.
- The sexual abuse must have occurred during adolescence, which, for the purposes of my study, was broadly defined as being between the ages of 12 and 17 years.
- Teenage girls' experiences were *not* limited to intra or extra-familial sexual abuse.
- Participation did *not* require that the sexual abuse be the primary reason for child protection involvement. For example, teenage girls involved with CPS because of "*serious behavioural disturbance*" (*YPA, article 38(f)*), who had made confirmed disclosures of sexual abuse could also be considered for participation in the study.

- Finally, eligibility for participation was not associated with where a teenage girl was living at the time of her participation. For example, teenage girls residing in foster homes, group homes or residential units were not excluded from consideration for participation in my study.

Throughout this recruitment phase of my study, I liaised regularly with the previously identified key professionals within each organization. These key professionals provided invaluable assistance with respect to sifting through official recording systems; identifying teenage girls as prospective participants; and, facilitating my contact with these girls' respective social workers at one or the other research site. Once a teenage girl had been identified as meeting the criteria for participation in my study, I communicated directly with her assigned social worker to further explore the possibility of the girls' participation and discuss the next steps. Given the confidential nature of the potential participants' involvement with either research site, I could not contact the girls until both they and, for those girls under the age of 18, their respective parent(s) or legal tutor(s) agreed to be contacted. For this reason, the first contact had to be made by the girls' respective social workers. Once a social worker agreed to contact the potential participant and her parent or legal guardian, I provided her/him with the appropriate "*Oral Scripts*" (see *Appendix D*) to guide them through their discussions with girls and their parent(s) or legal tutor(s). Only once the teenage girl and her parent/legal tutor provided verbal assent and consent respectively did I contact her and her parent/legal tutor separately to explain the objectives of the study, the expectations of participation, the types of questions that would be asked, the methods of ensuring confidentiality, and the process of consenting to participate. My first contacts were always over the telephone; however, issues of consent and assent were discussed at the start of the first interview. Assent forms were signed with the teenage girls during the first interview. Consent forms were signed with parents/legal tutors prior to the start of any interview (see discussion on ethical considerations below).

The second group of participants – CPS professionals with direct practice experience with sexually abused teenage girls – was drawn from the principal research site only. Again, I turned to key professionals in the CPS agency for their assistance in identifying potential participants. Specifically, I sought to collect a sample of CPS professionals with at least 2 years

of practice experience in the field of CPS who had experience working with sexually abused teenage girls. To recruit CPS professionals to participate in my study I engaged in a process of snowball sampling, a method that involves the identification of an initial subject or subjects who are invited to identify other potential research participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2004). As put by Patton (2015: 669), the researcher can “build the sample as [s/he] interview[s] by asking each interviewee for suggestions about people who have a similar or different perspective.” These individuals “may themselves open possibilities for an expanding web of contact and inquiry” (Atkinson & Flint, 2004: 1044).

Although I initially hoped to interview 10-15 sexually abused teenage girls (and/or young women), as the study progressed, certain recruitment challenges (to be discussed below) dictated a smaller sample size. Eventually, seven (7) sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS and nine (9) CPS professionals participated in research interviews. (See *Tables 5.1* and *5.2* and *Appendix E* in which I provide brief portraits of the teenage girls who participated in my study).

**Table 5.1 – Selected characteristics of research participants (sexually abused teenage girls)**

Teenage girl	Age (at time of interview)	CPS risk ( <i>Article 38</i> )	Length of CPS involvement	Sexual abuse experience	Education / Employment	Place of residence
<b>Dora</b>	16	Sexual abuse	1+ years	Abused by grandfather (6-9 yrs) “Gang rape” and sexual exploitation (14-15 yrs)	Alternative high school	Biological family’s home
<b>Danielle</b>	17	Neglect & Serious behavioural disturbance	Ongoing since preschool age	Abused by grandfather (early teenage yrs)	Alternative high school	Home of mother and step-father
<b>Kelly</b>	18	Sexual abuse – file closed	N/A	Abused by step-father between the ages of 6-17 yrs	Adult education program	Biological family’s home
<b>Frost</b>	15	Physical abuse	On and off since the age of 8 years	Abused by biological father (early teenage yrs)	High school	Foster home
<b>Nicole</b>	17	Serious behavioural disturbance	Ongoing since preschool age	Abused by paternal grandfather (4-7 yrs), ex-boyfriend (16 yrs). Kidnapped and forced into prostitution (17 yrs)	Individual learning program (reception centre)	Locked unit (reception centre)
<b>Sanni</b>	18	Physical	On and off since the age	Abused by biological	Dropped out of CEGEP –	CPS subsidised apartment

		abuse	of 10 years	father (13-17 yrs)	working full time	
<b>Molly</b>	18	Neglect*	Ongoing since preschool age	Abused by boyfriend's father (16 yrs)	Adult education program	Group home for young mothers

\* Molly was involved with CPS before turning 18 due to concerns for neglect and serious behavior disturbance; however, at the time of my interview with her, she was involved with CPS as a parent. Molly's 1-year-old daughter had been determined by CPS to be at risk for neglect.

**Table 5.2 – Selected characteristics of research participants (CPS professionals)**

CPS PROFESSIONAL*	POINT OF SERVICE – PROFESSIONAL TITLE <sup>28</sup>	YEARS OF CPS EXPERIENCE	EDUCATION	GENDER	AGE
<b>Corrine</b>	Qualification des jeunes – CPS child care worker	25 years	Bachelors in psycho-éducation	Female	46
<b>Evelyn</b>	EO – CPS social worker	3 years	MSW	Female	31
<b>Élise</b>	EO – CPS social worker	4 years	Bachelors in Criminology, Certificate in Social Work	Female	35
<b>Ai-Lin</b>	AM – CPS social worker	6 years	BSW, MSW (ongoing)	Female	35
<b>Andrew</b>	AM – CPS social worker	27 years	MSW	Male	57
<b>Alberto</b>	AM – CPS social worker	13 years	BSW	Male	50
<b>Manon</b>	Qualification des jeunes – CPS Manager	24 years	BSW, Management certificate (ongoing)	Female	48
<b>Meghan</b>	EO – CPS manager	22 years	MSW	Female	45

<sup>28</sup> **Point of service** refers to the particular department within the CPS agency. Professionals within each department are responsible for carrying out specific functions associated with the CPS mandate. In Quebec, departments associated with the legal CPS mandate include: **RTS** – Réception et Traitement des signalements, **EO** – Évaluation Orientation, **AM** – Application des mesures and **Révision/Review**. CPS professionals in **RTS** are responsible for receiving reports of suspected maltreatment, determining whether there is enough information indicating risk to a child to warrant an investigation, and then assigning a degree of urgency to those situations to be investigated. CPS professionals in **EO** receive reports retained for investigation from RTS. Their role is twofold. Firstly, these professionals are responsible for conducting investigations of risk to a child, assessing the situation, determining whether the child is at risk, and classifying the risk according to the definitions of maltreatment outlined in the YPA. Secondly, they are responsible for orienting the situation by identifying the measures necessary for the resolution of the situation of risk to the child. The child's situation is then transferred to CPS professional in **AM**. These professionals are responsible for putting into action the measures identified by the CPS professional in **EO**. They are also responsible for monitoring the child and his/her family's compliance to the measures and for adjusting those measures should the situation require it. Finally, after a period of time predetermined in the initial Orientation plan, the situation comes under the review of a CPS professional working in the role of reviewer. The case is not transferred to the reviewer. The reviewer assesses the evolution of the child's situation within the context of CPS and is responsible for recommending any modification deemed necessary to contributing to the resolution of the situation of risk.

Other departments within CPS are not directly attached to the legal mandate of CPS but rather are responsible for providing specific services to the child and his/her family. **PQJ** (Programme Qualification des Jeunes – Youth Qualification Program) is one such department. The principle objective of this department is to provide support to CPS involved youth as they transition out of CPS care and into adulthood.

<b>Michael</b>	AM – CPS manager	15 years	Master's in Counseling Psychology	Male	40
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\* Professionals' names correspond with their title: *C* – child care worker, *E* – Evaluation/Orientation social worker, *A* – Application des Mesures social worker, *M* – Manager

### DOCUMENT SELECTION

Alongside collecting data from interviews with research participants, I collected data through reviewing official CPS documentation as well as the CPS case files of select research participants. The case files of select participants were accessed only once I received written consent from the respective research participants and, when appropriate due to age of the research participant, their parents/legal tutors. Before consulting the case files of any of the research participants, I also sought the verbal consent of the CPS social worker responsible for providing protective services to the identified teenage girl. Official CPS documents were easily accessible online through public CPS and provincial websites. Given that these documents are a matter of public record, I did not need the consent of the CPS agency in order to access them.

### List of documents reviewed during the course of data collection and analysis:

DOCUMENTATION TITLE	PUBLICATION YEAR	DOCUMENTATION TYPE
Youth Protection Act	2007	Legislation
Manuel de référence sur la protection de la jeunesse ( <i>Youth Protection reference manual</i> )	2010	Procedural manual
Policy and Procedures for Permanency Planning for BYFC Children	2009	Policy, procedural manual
Le programme Qualification des jeunes ( <i>Youth Qualification Program</i> )	No date	Pamphlet
Projet d'intervention intensive en vue de préparer le passage à la vie autonome et d'assurer la qualification des jeunes des centres jeunesse du Québec. <i>Rapport final d'évaluation.</i>	2007	Program evaluation – Produced by Martin Goyette et al.
Regulation respecting the conditions of placement in an intensive supervision unit	2007	Legislation (Regulation of article 11.1.1 of the <i>YPA</i> )

### **C. Source of Data**

As previously identified, my research data was drawn from the research methods of in-depth interviewing and document review.

### IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING:

The pursuit of in-depth interviewing as my primary method of data collection was inspired by my adoption of both a girl-centred interpretive framework and a case study approach as the respective theoretical and methodological components of my research design. At the opening of this chapter, I cited Kathleen Hanna, the lead singer of the feminist punk band Bikini Kill, as declaring: *You guys are seriously missing out unless you all start listening to girls*. Her words struck an important note for me as I set out on my research. I knew that I would be missing out if I did not place girls' perspectives and experiences at the heart of my study. So, not to miss out and, instead, to more fully appreciate the details of sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS meant privileging girls' voices alongside those of the CPS professionals charged with protecting them from risk. I believed that listening closely to my research participants was essential to achieving in-depth, nuanced and complex understandings of how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

According to Patton (2015: 935), "qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful and knowable and can be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind." As Patton (2015: 935) explained,

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe .... The fact of the matter is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective.

Not all research interviews look the same. As Mann (2016) noted, researchers make decisions as to the type of research interview to pursue based on what information they are seeking to elicit from participants as well as the desired character of the research relationship. Acknowledging a wide range of interview types, Mann (2016) suggested that research interviews can largely be grouped according to their degree of formality, directedness, structure and conversational quality. In pursuing in-depth interviews – wherein the "aim is to elicit a full picture of the participant's perspective on the research focus" (Mann, 2016: 100) – I made use of a semi-

structured interview guides (see *Appendix F*) in order to draw out information specific to my research interests while making efforts to develop more informal relationships with research participants by using a conversational style. My hope was that my research interviews would be understood, particularly by the teenage girls participating in my study, as distinct from social work interviews conducted in the context of CPS to which I presumed they were accustomed.

Mann (2016) proposed that successful qualitative interviewing can be boiled down to three primary elements: establishing rapport, eliciting information and listening. With respect to the first of these elements, Simons (2009) drew attention to the notion of conversation in qualitative interviewing. While acknowledging the commonly evoked analogy of the research interview as conversation (Berg, 2004; Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2011) to be less than perfect, Simons (2009: 44) claimed the “intention” underlying the analogy as important to strive for. She emphasized a conversational style as useful to establishing “a more equitable relationship between interviewer and interviewee” and to creating opportunities “for active dialogue, co-constructed meaning and collaborative learning” (44).

This discussion on the use of a conversational style in interviewing brings me back to my earlier consideration of the importance of as well as the challenges to giving space and attention to girls’ voices in research conducted according to a girl-centred interpretive framework. Currie et al.’s (2009) comment that a research interview is not “a chat between friends” is an important reminder that for the most part the process of interviewing is one way – the researcher arrives to the interview with knowledge of the purpose of the study, is in control of asking questions which are often pre-determined (to a certain extent), and is the person doing the listening whereas the research participant is asked to provide knowledge through answering questions and to disclose often intensely personal information (Simons, 2009). This apparent imbalance between the researcher and his/her research participants was particularly relevant to my process of interviewing the sexually abused teenage girls who agreed to participate in my study.

Given the context of CPS authority in these girls’ lives, I imagined the issue of power would be an important area of negotiation. To this end, the guidance offered by Hussein et al. (2006) and Currie et al. (2009) – to nourish girls’ agency and to speak with transparency about

the purpose and process of the interviews – seemed particularly relevant. Given my past social work experiences intervening with sexually abused teenage girls who often expressed feelings of disempowerment in conversations with professionals, I did not expect it to be easy to establish “equitable,” or close to equitable relationships with this research sample. Before turning on the recorder, I outlined the purpose and proposed process of the interviews. I assured girls of confidentiality and reminded them of their freedom to choose what – if anything – they wanted to share with me. I reminded them that I was meeting them as researcher and not as a CPS social worker, or social worker of any kind. I sought to emphasize that I really wanted to listen and learn from them – I was not there to judge or to evaluate their safety. Complicating this message, however, was my obligation as both a citizen and a professional to inform CPS should a participant divulge any information pertaining to her imminent risk<sup>29</sup>. Discussing this obligation before officially starting the interview was essential in terms of both informing girls of the limits of my promise of confidentiality and encouraging girls take only the risks of self-disclosure they were comfortable taking. Finally, I expressed my appreciation of each teenage girl participating in my study as an expert of her own experience. While Hussein et al. (2006) and Currie et al.’s (2009) guidance was valuable to my attempts at establishing equitable research relationships, it became evident that equally important to creating equitable relationships was giving space to girls’ questioning of *me*. So, I offered opportunities to each participant to ask questions about my research and me. Some of the girls expressed little interest in knowing anything more about either. Others expressed curiosity. Engaging in this process provoked further reflection. Attempting to reframe the interview as inclusive of a two-way process by opening myself up to be questioned meant being aware of my limits as well as the risks and potential benefits of self-disclosure – How much should I disclose? When? For what purpose? Now that I’ve disclosed, what next? My reflections on using self-disclosure to encourage participants’ agency, to use Hussein et al.’s (2006) terminology, and reduce power imbalances are not uncommon to qualitative researchers pursuing interviewing as a method of data collection. Simons (2009)

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<sup>29</sup> *Article 39* of the *YPA* stipulates that any citizen who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is at risk of abuse or neglect has a responsibility to bring the situation to the attention of CPS. This obligation to report carries even greater weight for professionals (other than lawyers) involved with children.

advised that in deciding how to use self-disclosure during the interview process, it is important to keep in mind the degree of trust established between the researcher and the interviewee, the comfort level and expertise of the researcher, and the sensitivity of the topic under discussion.

Finally, active listening proved to be a powerful tool not only for gathering data but also for maintaining rapport throughout the interview process. Mann (2016: 116) claimed listening to be “the most important aspect of the interview.” He cautioned that a research participant will know whether a researcher is really listening and added that the researcher’s focus and attentiveness will have a significant effect on the depth and detail s/he provides. As pointed out by Simons (2009: 47), listening does not mean allowing the “interviewee to dominate the interview entirely and take you off track from gaining relevant data for your research.” Simon’s (2009) comment speaks to the active aspect of active listening – it is up to the research to be alert to “when to listen and when to question.” I found my use of an in-depth, semi-structured manner of interviewing allowed me to develop equilibrium between guiding the path of the interview being flexible in giving space for discussion on unexpected themes.

The research interviews were conducted between fall 2010 and winter 2012. In order to give time to developing rapport and to elicit detailed data, my aim was to meet with each teenage girl participating in my study for two interviews (of about 2 hours each). Eventually, I was able to meet with 5 girls twice and 2 girls only once. In both these latter situations, the girls’ circumstances interrupted their availability to participate in a further interview. I lost touch with one participant (*Danielle*) after she became pregnant and left her family home to move in with her boyfriend and his family. Her CPS social worker was unable to provide me with her new coordinates. The other participant (*Molly*) informed me that she had time only for one interview with me as she was too busy looking after her daughter, going to school, and following through with *everything that [she had] to do* according to her CPS social worker. During the interviews, I concentrated on drawing out details in girls’ accounts of being involved with CPS in the aftermath of sexual abuse and of being involved with CPS as a teenage girl. I actively listened for and encouraged discussion on girls’ understandings of and negotiation of concerns for risk and aspirations for autonomy.

During the same time frame, I conducted one interview with each of 9 CPS professionals. Each interview was about 2 hours in duration. During the interviews, I invited participants to discuss their understandings of the CPS mandate both in general and with specific reference to situations involving sexually abused teenage girls. In order to delve deeply into participants' understandings of their roles, responsibilities and practices in situations of sexual abuse involving teenage girls, I invited participants to elaborate on their involvement with specific cases, specific girls. As I did with the sexually abused teenage girls participating in my study, I listened for and encouraged discussion on girls' understandings of and negotiation of concerns for risk and aspirations for autonomy.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

DOCUMENTATION REVIEW:

Patton (2010: 834) observed, "organizations of all kinds produce mountains of records, both public and private, on paper, digitally, and online." This is certainly true of CPS. Simons (2009) proposed that a review of official documents in case study research contributes to developing a comprehensive portrait of the context of the study (and the case). As discussed in Chapter 2, CPS legislation as well as written policies and procedures serve to guide the practices of individual CPS professionals as they intervene in families' lives to assure children's safety from abuse and neglect. Reviewing CPS legislation – the *YPA* – as well as policies aimed at guiding practice with youth was thus essential to developing a more in-depth understanding of the context within which CPS professionals intervene with sexually abused teenage girls. I was particularly attentive to how notions of risk and autonomy were treated in CPS legislation, policies and procedures relative to youth in general and sexually abused teenage girls in particular.

My review of official documents began prior to entering the field to conduct research interviews. My choice of official documentation to review was initially guided by my previous social work experience in CPS. Thus, I reacquainted myself with the *YPA* as well as the *Manuel de référence sur la protection de la jeunesse (Manuel de référence)* (2010) before interviewing the CPS professionals participating in my study. My review of official documents continued through the process of collecting and analysing the data, however, as I sought out and reviewed

documents that were mentioned during the research interviews or that related to specific programs discussed by research participants.

Patton (2015: 835), claiming “client files” to be a “rich source of case data,” suggested that such documents “may reveal things that have taken place before the study began .... They can reveal aspirations, arrangement, tensions, relationships, and decisions that might not be otherwise known” to the researcher. In the context of CPS, case files are legal, confidential documents within which individual CPS professionals document observations, evaluations, decisions, recommendations and intervention plans relating to the child or youth in question. Case files may also include specialised reports written by other professionals involved with the child (i.e. psychiatric, psychological or educational evaluations) as well as communications with any individual having knowledge of or a relationship with the child. I reviewed participants’ case files in order to 1) add depth to my portrait of participants’ experiences leading up to and during CPS involvement and 2) to explore CPS professionals’ perceptions, assessments and decisions relating to the particular participants. Throughout my review of participants’ case files, I sought to gain deeper insight into CPS professionals’ understandings and negotiation of concerns for risk and aspirations for girls’ autonomy.

### ***Data analysis***

Similar to data analysis in qualitative research in general, data analysis in case study research is likened to the process of “making sense” of collected data (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009). How to actually go about making sense of study data and with what degree of structure varies by author (Yazan, 2015). Yin (2014) suggested that the validity and reliability of the researcher’s eventual findings can be enhanced by adopting a highly structured process of data analysis wherein each step from examining, categorizing, tabulating to testing data is clearly laid out. Stake (1995), sitting at the other end of the spectrum, suggested data analysis ought to draw from the researcher’s intuition and impression rather than be guided by a structured protocol. Despite proposing two strategies for analysing data – categorical aggregation (collecting data into categories or themes with the aim of identifying emergent meanings) and direct interpretation

(drawing meaning from a single case without looking for multiple or repeated instances) – Stake (1995) concluded that there is no right way to conduct case study analysis. He recommended simply that each researcher, “through experience and reflection, ...find the forms of analysis that work for him or her” (1995: 77).

Most helpful for me were the descriptions of data analysis in case study research offered by Merriam (2009) and Simons (2009). Both authors gave attention to the utility of organising the often vast amounts of data collected as well as the interpretive aspects of making sense of the data. Merriam (2009: 175-176) explained that

making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning. Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation. These meanings or understandings or insights constitute the findings of the study.

Similarly, Simons (2009: 117) identified data analysis as “those procedures – like coding, categorizing, concept mapping, theme generation – which enable you to organize and make sense of the data in order to produce findings and an overall understanding (or theory) of the case.” She added interpretation as an important element of case study research that emphasizes the involvement of the researcher in deriving “understanding and insight ... from a more holistic, intuitive grasp of the data and the insights they reveal.” Interpretation is “a highly skilled cognitive and intuitive process” that demands “total immersion in the data” (Simons, 2009: 117). Stating that interpretation and analysis are not discrete processes, Simons (2009: 118) suggested that each process “may be present to different degrees at different stages” throughout the study.

Starting analysis early is a recommendation commonly provided to qualitative and case study researchers (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Padgett, 1998; Patton, 2015; Simons, 2009). Merriam (2009: 165) referred to data collection and analysis as simultaneous activities:

Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to the refinement or reformulation of questions, and so on. It is an interactive

process throughout that allows the investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings.

Patton (2015: 1137) noted that the “fluid and emergent nature” of qualitative research blurs the distinction between data collection and analysis. He explained, “in the course of fieldwork, ideas about directions for analysis will occur. Patterns take shape. Signals start to emerge” (1137-1138).

My experience of data analysis was both overwhelming and extended over time. Heeding the advice offered in literature on qualitative and case study research, I began my analysis concurrent with my data collection. For example, I reviewed and re-reviewed CPS legislation so as to identify notions of risk and autonomy in the *YPA* that would be particularly relevant to day-to-day practice in CPS. I repeated this same review process with the *Manuel de référence*. Integrating my analysis of both documents into my interviews with all participants offered me the opportunity delve deeply into participants’ understandings of legislated and procedural interpretations of risk and autonomy and their impact on their experiences of CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls. Following each interview, I listened to the recording so as to plan for the next interview, in the case of the teenage girls participating in my study, or to determine my interest in conducting a further interview with the participating CPS professionals. This process reflected the concurrent nature of data collection and analysis mentioned by the authors cited above.

I did not transcribe my interviews until I had completed them all. While overwhelming, immersing myself in the transcriptions proved beneficial to reducing and organising the data. Keeping my mind my research question, I followed traditional processes of coding and categorizing the data according to themes. These themes included both some that were preconceived or that aligned with the contexts within which the case under study was embedded and which were elaborated in my review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature as well as other themes that emerged in the language of the participants. Certainly, throughout this process, I read for language associated with the concepts of risk and autonomy.

A further element of particular importance to data analysis in case study is case study's close association with theory (Bergen & While, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). I found Merriam's (2009) guidance in this regard particularly useful to developing my research design and engaging in data analysis. Merriam (2009) began by noting that the inductive impetus of qualitative – and case study – research to build theory or to develop conceptual understandings of the phenomenon under study often confuses researchers into believing that theory has no place in qualitative research. Rather than no place, Merriam (2009) claimed theory to be present in all qualitative studies from beginning to end. She elaborated that the theoretical framework of a study is necessary to identifying the focus of the study, generating the data collection and analysis techniques, and interpreting the findings. Firstly, establishing the theoretical framework involves producing a review of relevant literature wherein the researcher interacts (“[carries] on a dialogue”) with empirical and theoretical literature so as to provide context and depth to the focus of the study (Merriam, 2009: 71). This introduction of the theoretical framework prior to the collection of data provides an important point of departure for analysis. As put by Merriam (2009: 70), “the sense we make of the data we collect is ... influenced by the theoretical framework. That is, our analysis and interpretation—our study's findings—will reflect the constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place.” According to Yin (2014), introducing theory prior to data collection allows case study researchers to draw links between the findings of their studies and other relevant theoretical frameworks and research.

In my own study, the development of a theoretical framework was not a discrete, one-time process; rather, it involved moving back and forth amongst various elements of my research study. With some prior knowledge of the legal, practice as well as theoretical contexts of CPS, I arrived at my study with a somewhat preconceived idea as to the focus and direction I wanted to take. However, delving into the literature as well as taking my first steps into data collection urged me to deepen my consideration of the theoretical framework – or I prefer to use the word context – of my study. In seeking to explore how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse, I was

curious about how the concepts of risk and autonomy, as they were elaborated within the legislative, practice and theoretical contexts of CPS, emerged in participants' understandings and experiences. As I moved forward, however, I realised that my study would benefit from a more comprehensive theoretical scaffolding, to borrow Merriam's (2009) language. Left out had been a consideration of the *constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories* associated with contemporary girlhood. Eventually, my data analysis involved being attentive to the intersections between concepts defined within seemingly distinct theoretical frameworks (CPS and contemporary girlhood) as well as the potential influences of current conceptualisations of girls and girlhood on how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

### **5.3.3 Ethical Considerations**

My study received ethical approval from the McGill University's REB III in December 2009. The approval certificate was renewed in December 2010 and again in December 2011. As required by each research site, the study underwent subsequent ethical reviews. Approval from the local CPS agency was received in June 2010. Approval from the paediatric hospital was a two-step process culminating in final approval being granted in September 2010. But, the ethical component of the research design goes "beyond simply meeting the requirements of an ethics review board" (Cheek, 2008: 763). For example, given qualitative research's concentration on human subjects, ethical consideration must also be given to issues of confidentiality, informed consent and/or assent, and the possible risks and benefits of participation in the study.

#### ***Confidentiality***

Every effort was made to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Interviews took place in a neutral and private setting selected by each participant. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. All participants' identifying information was removed from transcripts and any review of organisational documents specific to given participants. The participating agencies were not and will not be named in any research documentation or ensuing

publications. All print copies of interview transcripts as well as any copies or handwritten notes from organisational documents specific to given participants were stored in a locked filing cabinet and all electronic versions were stored on a password protected computer. Access to the data files was limited to my doctoral supervisor and me. Digital recordings of interviews were destroyed once analysis of the data was completed. Electronic and print versions of interview transcripts and photocopies or handwritten notes of organisational documents specific to given participants will be destroyed within seven years from the conclusion of the study, as per the measures agreed upon in the ethics review process.

### ***Informed Assent/Consent***

As described above, the CPS professionals agreeing to take part in recruiting teenage girls to be interviewed for my study initiated the first contact with prospective participants. Pursuing the participation of teenage girls in this way aimed to ensure confidentiality and was the first step towards providing information relating to the purpose and method of the study. Only the names and contact information of the teenage girls and their parents/legal tutors expressing interest in knowing more about or participating in the study were forwarded to me. I contacted the potential participants and their parents/legal tutors by telephone in order to provide them information relating to the purpose of the study and the kinds of questions to be explored during the interview. I let them know that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. I also assured the teenage girls and their parents/legal tutors that whether they chose to participate or not would have absolutely no effect on the services received from the CPS agency, the pediatric hospital or any other social service agency with which they were involved. Additionally, I explained that should any participant feel in any way uncomfortable during the process of the interview, she had the right to stop or postpone the interview or even to withdraw from the study at any time. No participant chose to withdraw from the study.

My discussions with CPS professionals prior to their agreement to participate in my study followed a similar process. Once a CPS professional was referred to me as a potential participant, I contact her/him by telephone. I explained the purpose of the study, the types of

questions that would be asked and offered the opportunity to ask me questions relating to participation in a research interview. I also clarified that the content of the interviews would be confidential and that participation in (or withdrawal from) the study would have no impact on their professional position or relationships.

There was no deception involved in my study. All participants were made aware of the objectives of the research study and advised of the types of questions to be explored prior to their participation in the research interviews.

Prior to proceeding with an interview, participants were asked to sign a written assent or consent form (depending on the age of the participant) indicating that they were satisfactorily informed about the study and were in agreement to participate. As some participants of the study were under the age of 18 years, their parents/legal tutors were asked to sign a written consent form indicating that they were also satisfactorily informed about the study and were in agreement with their teenage daughters' participation<sup>30</sup>. Each participant and parent/legal tutor of a participant received a copy of his/her signed assent or consent form. As per the measures agreed upon in the ethics review process, original documents will be destroyed along with all other identifying documentation seven years following the conclusion of the study. See Appendix G.

### ***Risk and Benefits***

I hoped that participating in my research interviews might provide sexually abused teenage girls an opportunity to benefit from exploring their respective experiences of CPS involvement away from the organizational structures and mandates shaping their relationships with CPS professionals. In my past experience working with sexually abused teenage girls, I found they often appreciated talking about their experiences of CPS involvement. Nevertheless, I also

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<sup>30</sup> Article 21 of the Quebec Civil Code outlines the legislated provisions for giving consent to participate in research. At the time during which I gained ethics approval to conduct my research study, these provisions included the requirement that consent for the participation of a minor (under the age of 18) may be given by the "person having parental authority or the tutor." The minor, him or herself, was not authorized to give consent on his/her own. In 2013, article 21 was amended to acknowledge the potential capacity of a minor aged 14 and over to autonomously consent to participate in research. Thus, according to current legislation "A minor 14 years of age or over, however, may give consent alone if, in the opinion of the competent research ethics committee, the research involves only minimal risk and the circumstances justify it."

considered the possibility that the interview process might spark unanticipated emotions or memories. I encouraged all participants to inform me should they experience any emotional distress during or following the interview. I let each girl know that in such instances, I could make any or all of the following options available to her: (1) she could choose to take a break from the interview; (2) she could terminate the interview and reschedule; or (3) she could withdraw from the study without consequence. I informed each participant that, with her consent and collaboration, I could offer a referral to an appropriate counselling resource. In a further effort to ensure girls' well-being, I placed a routine follow-up telephone call to each participant after the completion of each interview.

I approached interviewing CPS professionals in a similar manner. As with the teenage girls participating in my study, I hoped that the research interviews might offer CPS professionals opportunities to critically reflect on their professional practices with sexually abused teenage girls beyond the gaze of the CPS structures and expectations. At the same time, I was also aware that the interview process might elicit unanticipated responses. As with the teenage girls, I encouraged CPS professionals to let me know should they experience discomfort or emotional distress during or following my interviews with them. I also informed each of them that we could end the interview and reschedule at any time or, if they preferred, they could withdraw from the study altogether – in which case, I would erase any recorded data.

As previously stated, I set out on my research convinced of the importance of producing knowledge that is not only responsive and meaningful to the complex, multiple, and diverse lives of girls but also shaped by girls' own perspectives, experiences, and observations. But, as pointed out by Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2009: 221) in their discussion on conducting girl-centred research, the inclusion of girls is often fraught “in relation to ethical issues, levels of participation, tokenism, privileging/romancing the voices of participants, putting our own interpretation on the words of participants, and so on.” As I discovered in my attempts to recruit sexually abused teenage girls to participate in my research, such issues may become even more pronounced when inviting the participation of girls who have already been identified as

vulnerable due to their individual contexts or experiences. Specifically, I found girls' access to participation was complicated or even obstructed by CPS social workers' concerns for risk.

Given that I was starting from a girl-centred perspective, I imagined the process of informed consent as one that prioritised girls' agency and respected their competency to make choices on their own behalf. Complications arose, however, in that even before engaging girls in conversations about my study and their participation, I had to gain the "consent" of their respective CPS social workers. Effectively acting as gatekeepers, CPS social workers were positioned to decide on girls' participation in my study based on their evaluations of the associated benefits or risks.

The following example, drawn from my field notes, is illustrative of the type of considerations of benefit and risk voiced by CPS social workers. The key professional at the CPS agency involved in sifting through the official recording system identified two sisters who had been sexually abused over a number of years by a male family member as prospective participants. Adhering to the recruitment process identified above, my first contact was with the CPS social worker responsible for managing the sisters' case. The CPS social worker expressed a great deal of reticence with respect to allowing me even bring broach the subject of participating in my research with the sisters. She explained her concerns as being twofold. Firstly, she was worried that participating in an interview might exacerbate the emotional fallout as well as the girls' apparent risky behaviours deemed to be secondary to their experiences of sexual abuse. Secondly, she expressed concern that my involvement would complicate her own involvement with the family, which she described as "resistant," thus potentially getting in the way of her efforts to ensure the sisters' safety. Finally, she refused my access to the sisters. This experience was not a singular event. On numerous occasions, I met with individual CPS social workers – the "gatekeepers" whose consent I required before exploring informed consent with the girls themselves – who were unprepared to accept girls' participation in my research.

Somewhat frustrated, I asked in my field notes "*What's happening!?*" In reflecting back, I can see the silencing effects of a logic risk. These girls were defined as being vulnerable and in need of adult protection and, as such, their behaviour and decision-making – including

participation in a research project aimed at giving them voice – was under surveillance and regulated by those charged with ensuring their safety. I wrote in my field notes, following my conversation with the CPS social worker mentioned above, *“If gaining girls’ participation is going to be so difficult, how are their voices going to be heard at all? How will their experiences come to influence social work practice if we – I – can’t hear from them?”* Girl-centred inquiry involves nourishing girls’ agency. But what happens when we are stymied in our efforts by gatekeepers – who certainly without malice want to keep girls’ safe – and what happens when efforts at girl-centred inquiry are confronted by the effects of understandings of risk that predetermine girls’ agency and access to autonomous choice?

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2009: 215) noted the relevance of pursuing “girl-centred research that assumes a political stance of defending and promoting the rights of girls.” My experience led me to wonder if I even the seemingly simple process of involving girls in research could be seen as a promotion of girls’ rights. In this sense, girl-centred inquiry could be understood as having value beyond the production of research. Kearney (2009: 21) offered the reminder that “Girls’ Studies scholars must keep in mind that our work has significant political effects both within and outside the academy.” She elaborated that

At the heart of our scholarship is a demographic group that has been consistently marginalized, trivialized, and exploited throughout the ages. Girls today may have more agency than those of previous generations, but even the most privileged contemporary female youth remain disenfranchised because of their age. As minors, they are barred from many of the activities and social institutions that might expand their power and improve their lives” (21).

The potential lack of girls’ representation in research concerns me. Understandings of girls – or certain groupings of girls – as being too at-risk or too risky to involve in the process of being heard in research studies may well serve to continue their silence and marginalisation. Indeed, seven sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS participated in my research, but I remain worried about those who were blocked from choosing to participate or not. What did I miss out on given the absence of the voices of girls deemed too vulnerable to participate?

## Chapter 6: SEXUALLY ABUSED TEENAGE GIRLS – A POPULATION AT RISK

*They're all worried about my own safety ... it's why I'm here.*

— Sanni

## **Chapter 6: SEXUALLY ABUSED TEENAGE GIRLS – A POPULATION AT RISK**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In earlier chapters, I laid out the backdrop against which I considered how my study participants' understood and negotiated concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse and in the context of CPS involvement. In this chapter and the following two, I discuss the findings of my study. I argue that preoccupations with identifying and avoiding risk as well as risk management through processes of responsabilisation and individualization common to these intersecting contexts are deeply influential to sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS.

In this chapter, I examine how a dominant understanding of risk as intolerable shapes sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS. I also bring attention to how an expanded vision of risk influenced by dominant discourses of girls and girlhood informs official CPS determinations of sexually abused teenage girls' need for protection. Consistent with the CPS mandate to ensure children's safety an understanding of risk as something to be avoided, removed or regulated was common throughout the interviews. Also common was participants' identification of sexually abused teenage girls as a vulnerable population requiring protection in the form of CPS involvement. Simultaneous with concerns for sexually abused teenage girls' vulnerability to the external threat of sexual abuse, however, were anxieties surrounding the risks these girls posed to themselves through their inappropriate and unsafe choices and actions. Surfacing in the interviews was a transformation of sexually abused teenage girls from being not merely vulnerable victims but also irresponsible risk-takers who regularly display an unwillingness or inability to self-protect.

In the opening section of this chapter, I draw from participant accounts to illustrate the influence of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies on the processes of risk assessment and identification in the context of CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls. Following is a discussion on the influence of discourses of risk and riskiness surrounding female adolescence that were presented in Chapter 4. In this section, I argue that determinations of sexually abused

teenage girls as being in need of protection are informed by an intensification of concern for sexually abused teenage girls that extends beyond legislated definitions of risk. More precisely, I suggest that such determinations of risk are influenced by coexisting discourses of teenage girls being at-risk to a host of perils associated with growing up girl in a world that still disadvantages women in comparison to men and of teenage girls as excessively risk-taking. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that sexually abused teenage girls' involvement in CPS comes to be driven not only by concerns for their risk of sexual abuse and but also by apprehensions surrounding the risks they pose to their own safety and development. Still intolerable, this transformed characterisation of sexually abused teenage girls' risk leads to a tendency to treat these girls as complicit in contributing to the circumstances of their own risk and ultimately responsible for the resolution of that risk.

## **6.2 Assessing and identifying risk**

Not surprising to me, a commitment to the paramountcy of child safety in CPS involvement with children and families was unchallenged throughout the research interviews. Referring to the purpose of CPS, Michael (AM manager) explained, *the job is really the safety, the safety of the kids*<sup>31</sup>. Speaking specifically about those children and youth coming to the attention of CPS because of concerns for sexual abuse, Elise (EO social worker) told me *we're very focused – our mandate is to protect them from the sexual abuse. It's to make sure the sexual abuse doesn't happen again*. Elise's comment makes clear her understanding that the application of the CPS mandate of protection in situations of sexual abuse involves ensuring children's safety from revictimization. Not only the CPS professionals but also the teenage girls participating in my study recognised children's safety as central to CPS practice. Nicole, whom I interviewed in the locked residential unit within which she was placed at the time, swept her arm wide to indicate CPS professionals in general while claiming *they're all worried about my own safety ... it's why I'm here*. Reminiscing about disclosing her abuse to a school counsellor and the ensuing involvement of CPS, Sanni commented:

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<sup>31</sup> All direct quotations drawn from the interviews and my field notes appear in italics.

*In my head it was all set. I know I'm going to foster care and I know I'm never going to get out of there. So I just accepted it .... In my head it was just obvious – that's how the DYP<sup>32</sup> works. Well, in my head. Because like obviously I can't go back home. It's dangerous there for them [CPS professionals]. Things were happening ... physical violence, sexual abuse ... I don't see why they would send us back home.*

Both Nicole and Sanni demonstrated an understanding of CPS intervention as being guided by CPS professionals' responsibility to keep them safe.

Equally unchallenged, yet expected, in the interviews was the view that the primary CPS functions revolve around ensuring child safety. As I will show, however, participants' descriptions of the purpose and practice of CPS functions associated with assessing and identifying a child's need for protection also revealed the influence of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies. Participants spoke in a general sense about the CPS processes of assessing and identifying risk of all forms of maltreatment recognised in legislation including sexual abuse. With children's safety as the primary objective, a corresponding focus on quickly detecting risk to a child – through the collection and evaluation of forensic evidence – has taken a stronghold on day-to-day practice. Legislation stipulates that CPS involvement begins and proceeds from investigations of risk. Article 32 of the *YPA* confers to CPS professionals the responsibility “(a) to receive reports regarding children, analyze them briefly and decide whether they must be evaluated further; (b) to assess a child's situation and living conditions and decide whether the child's security or development is in danger<sup>33</sup>” (*YPA*, article 32). In other words, once a report (or, in the language of Quebec's CPS, a *signalement*) about the potential endangerment of a child is received and deemed in need of investigation, it is assigned to a CPS professional for evaluation. As Elise (EO social worker) explained, *The first piece is to do an evaluation, to declare security and development compromised or not*. Highlighting the paramountcy of child safety in the process of evaluation, Ai-Lin (AM social worker) told me, *When the signalement comes out, the first thing we have to evaluate is if it is safe for them to stay in the same*

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<sup>32</sup> *DYP* refers to the Director of Youth Protection. In Quebec, the Director of Youth Protection is responsible for overseeing the application of the Youth Protection Act (*YPA*). Individual CPS professionals are delegated responsibility by the Director of Youth Protection to put the *YPA* into action by pursuing the protective functions laid out in the law.

<sup>33</sup> The term “security and development” is employed throughout the *YPA* and the *Manuel de référence* in reference to a child's safety.

*environment*. It is not enough to simply identify the existence of risk. CPS professionals are called on to quickly ascertain the nature and extent of risk to a child and to detect and react swiftly to imminent threat. Research has shown that in most situations in which a child's security or development is deemed compromised, the degree of risk is classified as less than urgent and the CPS professional is allowed time (albeit a very limited amount of time) to develop and put into action a protection plan (Trocmé et al., 2010). However, in those situations deemed most risky to children, CPS professionals are required to take "immediate protective measures to ensure the security of the child" (*YPA*, article 46)<sup>34</sup>. As suggested by Ai-Lin above, in the process of assessing risks, CPS professionals must remain vigilant for a heightened degree of risk that would indicate the need to enact immediate protective measures such as removing the child from his/her home. Although assessments of risk are emphasised during the formal evaluation phase of CPS involvement, CPS professionals are expected to be vigilant for and prepared to assess and react to imminent risk at any point while the child's case is open with CPS (*Manuel de référence*, 441). In fact, assessments of and decision-making around risk (whether that risk is deemed imminent or less so) to a child's safety are expected to be ongoing.

Both Quebec's *YPA* and the *Manuel de référence* (2010) provide CPS professionals some legislative and procedural guidance with respect to what is entailed in conducting assessments of risk to children. These documents indicate CPS professionals' responsibility to verify the information reported in the report; collect and analyse any additional pertinent information; and decide whether the child is indeed at risk for maltreatment. In general, the CPS professionals interviewed described evaluations of risk as being a rather hurried process of information gathering and analysis. As one social worker noted, the goal of a first contact with a family is *to get as much information as possible* (Elise, EO social worker). While CPS professionals may well have access to a wealth of information about a child and his/her circumstances the *Manuel de référence* (2010: 474) steers CPS professionals to collect and analyse only the information pertinent and necessary to establishing firstly whether or not the allegations of risk in the

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<sup>34</sup> According to article 46 of the *YPA*, any number of urgent measures can be put in place to ensure a child's safety, including, in the most extreme circumstances, the removal of the child from her/his home environment.

signalement are founded and secondly whether or not the security or development of the child is compromised. Consistent with a forensic approach to investigating risk, which I mentioned in Chapter 2 as typifying current CPS practices in Canada, collected information about family members' circumstances and functioning is translated as evidence. Alongside repeated comments demonstrating their awareness of expectations surrounding the collection and treatment of information pertinent to assessing risk, CPS professionals interviewed also expressed some discomfort with respect to the strict concentration on finding proof of risk.

More precisely, participants demonstrated struggling with privileging concerns for risk over responding to the child and his/her families' needs. The CPS professionals illustrated their day-to-day practices as typifying a child protection orientation to responding to child abuse and neglect in that they described their interventions as concentrating on the detection and/or prediction of risk to a child rather than on the identification of areas of need. Conscious of this mandated focus on risk, the CPS professionals in my study acknowledged – often with discomfort – the correspondingly secondary or invisible status of supportive services. For example, Manon (PQJ Manager) worried about a practice concentration on risk ... *you know, is it helpful? Is it not? It's always to assess risk versus supporting them [children], and giving clinical intervention*. While she, amongst other CPS professionals, aspired to work in ways that provided support to families, the ever-present emphasis on identifying and managing risk remained at the forefront of her practice. Manon's query is suggestive of the dilemma of offering support versus assessing and reacting to risk experienced by CPS workers. This dilemma, to which I will return shortly below, was first introduced in Chapter 2 in my discussion on social workers' experiences of practice in the field of CPS.

Also evident in CPS professionals' conversations about their practice of assessing risk was a concentration on identifying lists of individual risk factors associated with the person and the person's immediate physical environment. Meghan (EO Manager) explained that, in pursuing evaluations of children's situations, CPS professionals are required to look for and assess particular *risk factors*. Specific to evaluations of sexual abuse she noted:

*We look at their behaviour, their history, what else has happened in their life. We look at things in their home environment. Um, you know, we get lots of cases with men parading through the picture [meaning men coming in and out of the mother's life], and could that have been a risk factor?*

Social context and its various and complex effects on family life were either left out of CPS professionals' discussions around what is included in their assessments of risk or translated as evidence of risk. This observation coincides with analyses of risk assessment in the context of CPS offered by a number of child protection scholars. In Chapter 2, I drew attention to this scholarship and noted the common critique that CPS evaluations tend to involve a narrowing of scope to forensic investigation and a consequent reduction of complex family circumstances to a list of decontextualized risk factors (Krane & Davies, 2000; Munro, 2005; Parton, 2008; Swift, 2011; Swift and Callahan, 2009). Within the mandated context of CPS wherein child safety takes precedence, there appears to be little space for CPS professionals to seek out and develop deep understandings of families' circumstances and behaviours within their respective social contexts. Rather CPS professionals are responsible for seeking, enumerating, analysing and documenting the varied factors that could be interpreted as contributing to a situation of risk to a child. Instead of exploring and understanding detailed "whys," CPS professionals are required to produce lists of "whats" in order to classify family situations for the purpose of judging the nature and extent of risk to a child. As Elise (EO worker) explained, *we need facts in Youth Protection. Like to stay involved, you need facts*. As such, context and the ever-shifting nature of people's lives tend to be swept aside or glossed over, while specific details are identified, classified and documented as *facts* or evidence of risk.

The CPS professionals interviewed in my study were aware of the host of social issues and conditions impacting the families with whom they intervene on a regular basis; however, CPS's contemporary concentration on risk appeared to dilute such awareness when it came to conducting and documenting assessments of risk. Throughout the interviews, CPS professionals brought attention to the varied social problems facing their clients. Poverty, unemployment, lack of education, substance use, citizenship insecurity, mental health problems, and intimate partner violence amongst other issues were frequently mentioned by CPS professionals as complicating

not only the day-to-day lives of their clients, but also CPS professionals' interventions and families' ability to comply with protection plans. Andrew (AM social worker) simply noted, *we work with a lot of marginalized, disenfranchised people*. He further explained, *there's no getting away from it that there is a big poverty factor in social work ... in Youth Protection. I don't have many clients from "—" [a neighbourhood in the city perceived of as wealthy]*. Such observations are supported by empirical evidence. For example, as noted in Chapter 2, Canadian incidence studies on reported abuse and neglect (Trocmé et al., 2005; Trocmé et al., 2010) repeatedly identify multiple social problems, including those mentioned by the CPS professionals, as figuring prominently in the lives of CPS clients. Despite CPS professionals' recognition of their clients' marginalization and complex circumstances, a perusal of the case files of the girls participating in my study revealed that in the process of documenting risk, there was little integration of CPS professionals' sensitivity to these issues. Instead, congruent with the observations of scholars cited in Chapter 2, the complexities, social locations and social problems experienced by families tended to be reduced to a series of risk factors. Lost in their written reports was the sensitivity that I heard as CPS professionals spoke about their clients and their varied and challenging circumstances.

To elaborate on this observation, I turn to the case files of Molly and Sanni. Molly was identified as being at risk due to acting out behaviours that were deemed beyond the control of her mother. In the CPS reports, Molly's CPS social worker noted that Molly's mother was a single mother of four children (the oldest being Molly and the youngest being 12 years her junior); had not completed high-school; had difficulty finding (and maintaining) a job; had a history of conjugal violence; had difficulties with drug and alcohol consumption; and suffered from bouts of anxiety and depression. The social worker wrote that Molly's mother had *gone through personal struggles and becomes overwhelmed by Molly's behaviors .... [She] struggles with maintaining her stability and dealing with issues of self-esteem, relationship difficulties and with saying no to past relationships which have led to conjugal and couple violence. [She] is an excellent worker at her job, but unfortunately ... was laid off*. The social worker also noted that Molly's mother acknowledged that when she *is coping with all the demands of her family's life*,

*her work and personal issues, it becomes more difficult to respond consistently to Molly's needs.* Here, the social worker displayed a sensitivity to the difficult circumstances impacting Molly's mother's life and her capacity to provide her daughter a stable, risk-free environment; however, in the context of her eventual determination of risk, this sensitivity was usurped by the requirement of identifying and responding to Molly's need for protection. For example, three lines later in the same report, the CPS social worker stated that to ensure her daughter's safety, Molly's mother *needs to maintain her strength not to turn to drugs and alcohol. She needs to address her pain that at times lets her have past boyfriends in the home, whereby the situation becomes one of crisis, threats and potentially out of control.* The CPS social worker concluded that Molly's mother's inability to follow through with these expectations contributed to Molly's situation of risk.

Sanni was identified as being at risk for psychological maltreatment due to being exposed to conjugal violence and conflict between her parents – even following their separation. She was secondarily identified as being at risk for neglect due to the mental health concerns of both parents, her mother's intellectual deficiency and intermittent homelessness, her father's substance abuse. And, finally, Sanni was identified as being at risk for physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her father. According to the CPS reports, members of the family were experiencing a number of problems including alcohol abuse, conjugal violence, inadequate and insecure housing, mental health troubles and linguistic limitations as well as intellectual deficiency on the part of Sanni's mother and a possible heart condition on the part of Sanni's father. While each of these issues was listed in the reports as contributing to Sanni being at risk and in need of protection, none were elaborated upon in terms of how they came about; how they were negotiated or experienced by the involved family members; or, how they impacted the family's overall functioning within the specific context of their social environment. An exception to this absence of exploration was a surface mention of Sanni's father's claim that *the reason for his drinking was that he had lost his older sister and her four children in the civil war in Sri Lanka a year prior.* This was the only point in the reports that the father's cultural background was referenced. In fact, virtually no mention was made regarding Sanni or her family members'

racial or cultural identification, citizenship status, connection to cultural or familial communities, their neighbourhood environment, or their financial/employment situation – all aspects of the Sanni's life that would undoubtedly have a significant impact on her and her family members' experiences of and capacities to negotiate seemingly risky circumstances. Added to the documentation of the social problems, the CPS social worker noted the various actions required of the parents in order to prove their capacity to provide a secure environment for Sanni. These actions included that the mother seek out community resources to assist her with respect to *securing a permanent residence and addressing her personal needs* and that the father participate in a *substance abuse treatment and seek treatment for men with problems of conjugal violence*. The family was also recommended to participate in a family assessment and follow up with the ensuing recommendations. The social worker noted in the report that neither parent proved able to fulfil these recommended actions but provided little insight into the parents' efforts or the potential obstacles or complications associated with completing these actions. The social worker, however, did report that while the father did go to see a psychologist (accompanied by the social worker) given his *very limited English he was not able to understand lots of the terms used during the assessment*. It was noted that a translator would be required to aid in the process of the father's assessment but that at the point at which the report was written none had yet been identified. Rather than providing a detailed portrayal of the family's reality, social context and challenges associated with accessing recommended resources, the report provided a seemingly surface depiction of risk factors – a depiction that exemplified the type of assessment and documentation of risk expected within a CPS context. The final review report concluded that Sanni (and her younger sister) continued to be at risk and in need of protection given that:

*The parents, especially the father, has been given chances to correct the situation, however, he is still in denial of all the problems and refused to take steps to address the issues. The mother is not in a position to protect her children; furthermore, she is lacking the understanding of the situation and blames the children for the problems. Both children are not properly taken care of by their parents and given the chronicity of the problem; it does not appear that the situation will be corrected in a timely fashion.*

Evident here is an infiltration of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies in CPS practice (and documentation), wherein individuals are expected to succeed – or fail – in the face of particular

risks by virtue of their own capacities and choices. Little, if any, space is available for critically considering the varied social disadvantages (or privileges) impacting a family's experiences and capacities. The CPS social worker's conclusion glosses over the family's complex circumstances and places an emphasis on the responsibility of Sanni's mother and father to assume ownership for the family's various problems and to take action to correct the situation of risk experienced by their two daughters. Certainly parents such as Sanni's or Molly's cannot be freed from all responsibility for their problems; however, as is evident in the reports considered here, individualising the social issues faced by the family can have the effect of assigning blame and responsibility to individuals for risks that they did not create and/or cannot address on their own.

Over the course of involvement, CPS professionals construct official understandings of risk based on the information gathered during initial as well as ongoing investigations and in accordance with definitions of maltreatment outlined in CPS legislation. As discussed in Chapter 2, CPS legislation and procedures demand frank classifications of risk in order to justify CPS involvement and to inform ensuing interventions. These classifications provide the basis through which particular situations as well as individuals can be identified as at-risk and/or risky and in need of intensive state intervention. While CPS professionals are required to classify cases according to one principal form of maltreatment, in certain cases they are also encouraged to identify secondary forms of maltreatment to which a child may be at risk. The teenage girls involved in my study were virtually all identified as being at risk for several forms of abuse or neglect, including serious behavioural disturbances (article 38(f)), sexual abuse (article 38(d)), physical abuse (article 38(e)), psychological maltreatment (article 38 (c)), neglect (article 38 (b)), running away (article 38.1(a)) and school absenteeism (article 38.1(b)) (see Table 4.1 and *Appendix A*). Despite having all experienced sexual abuse during their adolescent years, in only one (Kelly) of their seven cases was sexual abuse identified as the primary source for CPS concern and in only three cases was sexual abuse formally mentioned as a category of risk.

While categories of maltreatment, presented in legislation and reiterated in CPS case files such as those of Molly and Sanni, suggest the possibility of slotting multifaceted experiences into neat determinations of risk, the interviews revealed more complex understandings of risk.

Participants' conversations about concerns for children or youths' safety revealed expanded and multifaceted notions of risk, notions that were seen to significantly impact CPS professionals' interventions and decision-making as well as teenage girls' experiences of CPS. I will return to this subject later in this chapter as well as in the next. For now, I want to note that even though sexual abuse was rarely identified as the official reason for CPS involvement, it was equally rarely ignored as a potential risk facing teenage girls involved with CPS. For example, Meghan (EO Manager) commented, *you know, there's nobody that's been identified as sexually abused but you walk into a girl's group home and eighty per cent of them talk about being victims*. Sexual abuse was often foregrounded in CPS professionals' concerns for girls. In the sections that follow, I will elaborate on how such foregrounding of concern for sexual abuse emerged in participants' discussions of protective interventions and the management of risk.

### **6.3 Girls at-risk and risky girls**

In Chapter 3, I introduced the pervasiveness of discourses of risk circulating around notions of girls and girlhood. Not only are both public and academic conversations around girls in recent years preoccupied with girls' vulnerability to a range of potential perils associated with their youth and gender but such conversations have also increasingly brought attention to girls' excessively risky behaviours. These discourses permeate the day-to-day environment of CPS. Alongside attention to legislated versions of risk were considerations of girls' vulnerability during female adolescence as well as the dangers associated with girls' risky or risk-taking behaviours. These understandings of girls' vulnerability and risk were seen to influence and amplify concerns for sexually abused teenage girls and to shape decisions relating to their need for formal protection. While participants were explicit in discussing official CPS classifications of risk associated with child maltreatment, notions of girls being at risk simply by virtue of their age and gender or risky in terms of their behaviours went largely uninterrogated. This lack of conscious reflection was significant given the pervasiveness of such thinking around risk and girlhood as well its apparent influence on participants' actions, decisions and experiences related to CPS involvement.

In the following sections, I bring attention to participants' common mention of female adolescence as a period of risk and vulnerability for girls as well as their concerns around girls' risk taking. As will be seen, and not unexpectedly given the wealth of available knowledge detailing the potential detrimental effects of child sexual abuse, anxieties around girls' vulnerabilities and seemingly risky choices and behaviours were seen to escalate in the aftermath of sexual abuse disclosures. Notably, these perceptions around girls and risk were evident in the accounts of the CPS professionals and the girls I interviewed. Finally, I comment on a tendency for CPS assessments to include an identification of girls as both vulnerable victims and responsible for contributing to their circumstances of risk.

### **6.3.1 Ophelia or Girl-gone-wild?**

As already discussed in Chapter 4, discourses surrounding girls and girlhood today regularly portray girls “as either bad or needing rescue” (Rentschler and Mitchell, 2014: 2). Girls are alternately cast in the image of Ophelia, drowning in a “girl-poisoning culture” (Pipher, 1994: 12) and at risk for any number of dangers associated with female adolescence, or in the image of the girl gone wild who displays unacceptable riskiness by behaving badly, drinking, taking drugs, getting into trouble with the law and performing an overt, unfeminine sexuality. Rather than abating with public attention to the strength and potential of girls, a conviction in the hazardous plight and risky terrain of female adolescence remains unwavering in public as well as professional perceptions of girlhood. With persistent concerns for the risks deemed to be inherent to teenage girlhood and contemporary anxieties associated with girls' risky, mean or aggressive behaviours, girls are constructed as being in trouble. Thus, fuel is added to efforts to support, monitor and, ultimately, in more extreme situations, regulate or control the choices and behaviours of girls. CPS has not escaped the influence of these discourses. Indeed, I argue that notions of girls as being naturally vulnerable and as increasingly wild, risky, and even violent have insinuated themselves into CPS understandings of risk with the effect that assessments of teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse have come to include attention not only to girls'

risk of sexual victimisation but also to the vulnerability inherent in girls' passage through female adolescence as well as girls' participation in unacceptable riskiness.

Of particular note in the accounts of the participants in my study was the common view of teenage girls as being victims of a sexualised and still patriarchal culture. For example, Michael (AM manager) spoke of being worried for all girls regardless of their involvement with child protection:

*There are always risks. I guess on the extreme end or the milder end. I think on the milder end there's self-esteem, um, so much focus on looking good, you know? The pressure to have to look good, the pressure to have to fit in, um, woman's rules today – like it's not just today, it's been for a long time I think. But whatever, women as sexual objects, women as, but then even on the more extreme, women are vulnerable to prostitution, to being abused...to trafficking. And now, definitely a risk of gangs, gangs for girls now, which I don't think ten, twenty years ago girls were getting involved in gangs, but now...*

In this instance, Michael suggested that girls' risk is situated in and shaped by their surrounding societal context. Girls are thus constructed as passive objects within a climate of sexual inequality; they are pressured, vulnerable, abused and at-risk due in a large part to their gender. While Michael brought attention to a range of risks facing teenage girls he highlighted concerns relating to girls' sexual objectification and victimization (*prostitution, being abused and trafficking*). Andrew (AM social worker) too spoke of his anxieties for girls' potential to be sexually exploited:

*I worry about the girls ... certainly my latest worry is ... a couple of girls in residential ... like Nicole, ... She'll AWOL and this last time that she went AWOL she ended up ... she didn't have a place to stay. I've always been worried about her being abducted and turned into a sex slave. She's really good looking. Incredibly naïve. And has been revictimised just so many times, it just breaks my heart.*

Andrew construed girls as passive victims, vulnerable to the sexist and violent actions (abduction and *turned into a sex slave*) of others (predominantly men). Certainly, in Nicole's case, Andrew's fear came to fruition; however, left out of his reflections was any consideration of the complex and intersecting circumstances that might have contributed to Nicole's sexual risk and eventual victimisation or of the possibility that her risk of victimisation could be anything other than inevitable. Instead, Andrew drew attention to Nicole's appearance – *she's really good*

*looking* – and her naiveté as contributing to her situation of risk. In this way, Andrew locates Nicole's risk in her. Perhaps if she were less good-looking and less naïve, she wouldn't have been victimized?

The CPS professionals were not alone in expressing their expectations and anxiety around girls' gendered vulnerability. The girls repeatedly alluded to the ever-present threat of sexual victimisation for girls. Sanni explained that from her early years, her mother's warnings had taught her to adopt a sense of herself as being at risk because of her gender. She acknowledged having learnt of the dangers (*rape*) associated with being out and about in public places – as a girl:

*She's scared about rape, violence and all of that. I remember her when I was young, "be careful. You're going to get raped." .... My friend used to tell me, used to tell me her mom would also tell her "you can't go out, you're going to get raped!" I was like, okay!*

Dora also spoke of having received and accepted a dominant message of sexual risk for girls. Interestingly, Dora's comments reveal that public spaces – wherein sexual danger is misconstrued as being heightened for girls – include the public space of social media:

*Well this guy comes up in a car. And he stops. And he looks at me. And I'm like okay ... and I keep on walking. He starts honking and I just kept on walking. That happens a lot – men stopping their cars in front of me.... I have a lot of friends who are girls who are pretty.*

[And that happens to them too?]

*Yeah, but I take it more personal when it happens to me because I've seen so many movies where they abduct people and I get scared okay. I watch a lot of movies like that! Oh G-d, all the stories you hear of women getting kidnapped because of being on Facebook. Facebook is really bad. I believe it's bad. People know too much about you. People can hack into your account, change things, find out things. It's ridiculous. Same as MySpace and Twitter.*

Dora's comments reveal her internalisation of a pervasive portrayal of girls and women as victims. She understood herself and her friends as vulnerable to sexual oppression in the form of abduction thanks to the simple fact of being girls. Like Andrew, Dora suggested girls' appearance (*pretty*) as contributing to risk. Alongside recognising external threats, Dora notes risk to be situated in the girls themselves.

More than unfortunately, for all of the girls in my study, sexual risk was not simply a distant threat sensationalized in the media or feared by their mothers; rather, it was very real. To this end the girls spoke not only about the events that had been brought to the attention of CPS authorities but also about routine occurrences of sexual intimidation or threat in public places, instances that would be considered outside the purview of CPS. For example, Danielle identified taking the metro as a risky endeavour for girls:

*One time someone creepy, he saw that I had a patch, so he comes in the metro and he's like, "oh, how long have you been quitting for?" I'm like, "what?" "The patch." "Oh, it's birth control." And then that was the worst thing to say to a creep. The worst thing! He was just so creepy and he kissed my neck and I was just ... such a creeper!! And then he left the metro and I was like, "oh my G-d!!" And I was calling my friend and "I'm going to puke, I'm going to puke. I feel so ..." Oh, crazy things have happened with me in the metro with guys. Like one time this guy – he was across from me and there were two girls sitting on the double seat next to him but they weren't paying attention and he had his hat turned so that he could see in the reflection of the door windows and he was watching me through the reflection. And he was wearing shorts and his penis was hanging and he was ejaculating on the seat!*

Danielle's experiences provide examples of the sexual objectification, sexual harassment and sexual abuse of teenage girls in public spaces. Danielle had no voice and no power in these interactions. In the first instance, he *kissed her neck and then got off the metro* thus bringing an end to the event but leaving Danielle with the fallout. Her recourse was to turn to a friend – *I'm going to puke, I'm going to puke, I feel ...* Danielle's voice trailed away before she could identify her feelings. In the second instance, Danielle recognised herself as the object of the man's sexual gaze and gratification. Even with the distance of an aisle and in a public space where she was not alone, Danielle was aware of having been engaged in a sexual act against her will. Once again, Danielle was silenced and reduced to a sexual object.

As did Dora above, Nicole commented on the virtual public spaces of the Internet and social media as risky terrain for girls to navigate.

*Now it turns out that all the guys who used to pick on me in elementary school, now see me on my Facebook, five years later. It's like "who's she? Are you Nicole from elementary school?" Yeah. "Cool wanna come jam?" No. "Why not?" You picked on me. You hated me. Why should I? One of them was there, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Do you want to get together?" I was like "it depends. Do you want to fuck me?" "Yeah." I'm like "no!"*

While Nicole did not reference a particular danger, she revealed a self-awareness of being treated as a sexual object of a male gaze. In contrast to Danielle's experiences, Nicole was amply able to assert her voice in the virtual space of Facebook. With a vehement *no*, Nicole refused to be passive in the face of sexual objectification.

Taken together, these accounts reveal sexually abused teenage girls as conscious of and attentive to the looming threat of sexual objectification, harassment, and assault. Certainly, as the girls in my study were aware, such concern is all too often based on good reason. For these girls, the flood of public and private messages teaching and warning them of their gender inherent vulnerability was undoubtedly confirmed by their own experiences of sexual abuse. Reflecting on her active participation in daily life as a teenage girl in the aftermath of sexual abuse and exploitation, Dora confessed to her feelings of vulnerability: *I just don't feel safe really.*

Competing with concerns for girls' gender-based vulnerability were concerns relating to sexually abused teenage girls' risky behaviours. In Chapter 4, I brought attention to a contemporary preoccupation with girls' risk-taking behaviours. While perhaps expected in Western societies, adolescent girls' risk-taking behaviours also tend to be scrutinized for their potential to go too far and to jeopardise their healthy participation in family, relationships, school, work, or any other public domain. The participants in my study reiterated both of these impressions of girls' risk-taking behaviours. Teenage girls' experimentation was expected while, at the same time, worried about and often made the object of CPS assessments of risk.

The CPS professionals interviewed tended to recognise adolescence as a period of exploration during which teenagers, regardless of their gender, tend to take risks. Evelyn, for example, spoke of having conversations with parents and other responsible adults during which she made efforts to reduce anxieties around teenagers' choices and actions by normalising certain risk-taking behaviours. In the next three excerpts, Evelyn gave me examples of what she tells parents to assuage their concerns:

*You never did drugs? You never tried alcohol in your lifetime? And you never told your parents to fuck off? Honestly! .... What teenager has not tried pot at least once? Am I supposed to place her in a group home, to banish her for this? No! She and I have had extensive discussions about not doing this or this, but unfortunately it is part of the*

*exploration of becoming a teenager. But now, at school with all this acting out behaviour ... let's have discussions around the normal life of a teenager.* (Evelyn, EO social worker)

*You've been an adolescent. Like whoever says they have never been drunk once... you are a liar. You are a liar! I did! I got drunk! I might not have tried the drugs, but anyone at some day will do this because it is part of the adolescence: to skip school; have a drink at a party or whatever. This has to be expected.* (Evelyn, EO social worker)

*We all did stuff! And all the parents keep forgetting. We had people who actually made a complaint against me because I did not want to place their 17 year old teenage boy who was going to CÉGEP<sup>35</sup>... because he was smoking a joint once in a blue moon, and going to parties on the weekend, and I was like "You know what? Smoking pot... check, acting out and telling you you're an ass hole, that's another check my dear!"* (Evelyn, EO social worker)

Despite acknowledging adolescent risk-taking as *expected*, Evelyn was quick to recognise that teenagers' opportunities to engage in such activities might be compromised by the involvement of CPS. To elaborate, in speaking about the particular situation of a teenage girl under protection due to sexual abuse, Evelyn noted:

*But she does not have a normal life. She is trying to be a regular teenager, but there is always something that is catching up with her about the victimization, such as going back to court. So if we did not have that, she could go on being just being a teenager, I find, and do the stupid things she might do unfortunately.... One afternoon skipping school and getting beers...* (Evelyn, EO worker)

Here, Evelyn referred to certain demands of CPS involvement in the aftermath of sexual abuse, such as having to go to court, as being disruptive to the *normal life* of a teenager. Rather than identifying *skipping school* or *getting beers* as inevitably risky and requiring of protective intervention, Evelyn saw such behaviours as natural to teenage experimentation and regretted CPS's restrictions on this girl's opportunities to *go on just being a teenager*. Similar to Evelyn, Molly stressed that CPS interfered with girls' opportunities to have a normal teenage life especially when protective interventions included being placed in out-of-home care such as a foster home or residential unit. Having been moved from different CPS residential settings from

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<sup>35</sup> CÉGEP stands for *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*. In English, the equivalent would be a vocational college. Publically funded, CÉGEPs are Quebec based post-secondary academic institutions. Attending CÉGEP is often Quebec high school graduates' first step toward university education.

the time she was 9 years old and throughout her teen years, Molly reflected on that experience in terms of her daily life:

*Living in a group home ... like ... you have to be home at certain times and when friends wanted to hang out with me, it's like I couldn't! And I couldn't tell them why, you know?*

*Well you're on a routine. Everything is the same, the same stuff, different day. You get up. You're downstairs by 8am, you have breakfast, get ready for school, go to school, come home, do homework, have supper, do your chores, then it's homework time again. You watch a bit of TV and you have to be in bed by 9pm. It's not normal. Like other kids ... because that was at the age when you're going to movies and hanging out on the weekends and doing fun things, whereas for me every day was the same thing.*

Molly has a fantasy of what *normal* teen life might look like. Distinct from her own experience of imposed *routine*, she imagines teenage life as involving being out in the public world with friends and having *fun*. The picture she paints of her experience is one of constraint and predictability. From their very different social locations as teen in care and CPS social worker, both Molly and Evelyn spoke of CPS as a potential obstacle to expected teenage risk-taking. Other participants brought attention to the possibility for heightened concern when risk-taking behaviours were witnessed within the context of CPS.

In talking about their daily lives, the girls interviewed in my study spoke openly about engaging in numerous activities and making choices that could be interpreted either as expected teenage experimentation or as risky. Specifically, the girls mentioned testing adult authority, smoking cigarettes, drinking, taking drugs (including *pot*, *weed*, *coke*, *ecstasy*, *speed*, *hash*, *acid*), going to bars or *going clubbing* (underage), partying with friends, engaging in sexual relations, *meeting random guys* through Facebook, getting into physical fights, and being part of a gang or interacting with known gang members. While the girls tended to depict these behaviours as everyday teenage conduct, they also recognised being open to the scrutiny and judgment of others, and most especially the CPS professionals involved in their care. Sanni recognised that, given her age, it was not unusual to experiment, *I know that, but there's so many people around who are like, "NO. NO. NO. That's bad. NO. NO. NO."* Such awareness provoked girls' vigilance with respect to what information they would choose to share with CPS professionals. Such vigilance was indicative of the girls' consciousness of the potential for their

behaviours to be assessed by CPS professionals as bad or risky. Sanni, for example, expressed a great deal of concern about how she might be perceived by the CPS professionals involved in her case should they become aware of her activities. She explained, *I don't want to have a bad name and there's already stuff that I do that people wouldn't accept ... I do drink and I do smoke sometimes:*

*I wouldn't want to tell my workers that I smoke pot because Corrine (PQJ professional) would just keep repeating to people "oh, she's a good girl. She never did anything before!?" She used to say that about me. Like, I don't know, I remember she said something and I was like, "oh, that's your image of me?! Okay." [What is her image of you?] That I don't do anything like ... well now she knows that I do drink a bit ... I wasn't, I did have a couple of drinks before I was 18 but I was never like the party hard person, like the "whoooooaa, I'm gonna get drunk tonight!!" So, but I don't know what her image of me is ... I don't know, but she thinks I'm a good girl ... [me – And what's that?] A good girl is somebody who does nothing. Innocent. No drinking. No smoking. No nothing! No messing around with guys. I'm still a good girl! But I don't see what ... I'm still good ... I don't know. In my head, I can still smoke or drink or be with a guy and still be good but I know others don't think that way. "Oh she's drinking, she's smoking, oh my G-d, she's a slut." In my head, I'm still good. I'm not a bad girl. Like what's a bad girl anyways? Okay. I feel like if I would tell Corrine (PQJ child care worker), she would just think ... that's what I'm scared of ... that I'm corrupted but I'm still me. Because I know she's met other kids too and I'm quite sure they smoke and all that too because I've kind of seen it too. So, I don't think that she would think that bad of me but she would think that I'm corrupted. I've been corrupted. So that's something ... like I've lost my innocence and I don't like that. And Ai-Lin (AM social worker) would just be like "What!?" She would just think that I'm bad. That's what I'm scared of. Well, not bad but really corrupted. I think her view would be more strict than Corrine's.*

Sanni presents a dichotomous understanding of *good* versus *bad* behaviours for teenage girls. A *good girl* is *somebody who does nothing* while a *bad girl* is one who *smokes drugs, drinks* and acts as a *slut*. If all girls pass their teen years at one of the two extremes – as Sanni suggested and as she seems to believe the CPS professionals suspect – there is little room for them to do all the tricky things it takes to grow up.

In the above excerpt, Sanni displayed a variance in perception between the different CPS professionals involved in her situation. While Sanni may have recognised a difference in the two professionals' respective understandings of adolescent behaviours, she may also have been referring to her awareness that Ai-Lin, as her Application des Mesures social worker, was the person responsible for making decisions relating to Sanni's degree of risk as well as to the

intervention plan to be implemented. Understanding that Ai-Lin's impression of her behaviours as *bad* or risky could influence the protection plan (including placement options) would undoubtedly have had an effect on Sanni's willingness to divulge detailed information relating to certain of her choices or behaviours. Frost similarly recognised that having knowledge about certain of her behaviours would influence her CPS social worker's perception of and involvement with her:

*Like they want to know why me and Suzanne [older sister] were fighting or how we can help it or how I'm doing in school and how I can I help that. It's like, yeah, you want to know these things but you're just going to go and like report this to every other social worker. And, it's just like everything ... like they just want to know everything and then they nag you on every little thing. [What do you mean?] Well, like, things at school. Like if I was to skip, they'd go crazy and say "oh, if you do that again, this and this and that." And, or if like I get a ... or I'm failing or something. I don't know. I really don't like it.*

As seen in Sanni and Frost's comments, while CPS interventions arise from straightforward determinations of risk based on legislated definitions of maltreatment, ongoing interventions may well come to include attention to girls' daily functioning and behaviours that may be deemed risky or problematic. In other words, in a mandated environment driven by concerns for risk, girls' risk-taking – even risk-taking that is expected given their age (i.e. skipping school) – is likely to be scrutinized and oftentimes curtailed. Additionally, Frost and Sanni's consciousness of CPS professionals' scrutiny of their behaviours leads both to censor their conversations about their day-to-day behaviours.

While there is little question that some risk-taking in adolescence is to be expected in Western contexts, some risk-taking does go too far and may well warrant the intervention of CPS authorities. Indeed, three of the girls interviewed in my study were officially involved with CPS due in part to concerns relating to their too-far risk-taking. As stipulated in the *YPA*, a child can be determined to be at risk for *serious behavioural disturbance* (article 38(f)), which is a maltreatment type that

refers to a situation in which a child behaves in such a way as to repeatedly or seriously undermine the child's or others' physical or psychological integrity, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation or, if the child is 14 or over, the child objects to such steps (*YPA*, article 38(f)).

Danielle, for example, was determined to be at risk primarily due to negligence (article 38(b)), but her CPS social worker identified serious behavioural disturbance as a secondary area of concern. The following excerpt, drawn from a report in Danielle's CPS file sums up her CPS social worker's concerns:

*[Danielle] is dealing with feelings of being abandoned by her mother and has issues in relationship to past abuses. She reports that she does [not] feel cared about by either parent. She admits that she does not trust adults and in place turns to her peer group for guidance and support. Unfortunately her decision to turn to her peers can be problematic as she is easily influenced by others. At times Danielle can be extremely defiant and has great difficulties accepting limits, resulting in her acting her anger out towards others or tuning it inwards towards herself. Danielle is open about her sexuality and reports that she is bisexual. She has readily shared this information with this delegate, residential workers, and youth at school and in the group. At times she lacks boundaries about the expression of her sexuality and needs continued support to express it in an appropriate manner. Danielle's escalating behaviours, psychological issues, and inappropriate sexual activities require a highly supervised and structured environment to ensure her ongoing safety and age appropriate development.*

According to the case file, Danielle's mother had long struggled unsuccessfully to manage her drug and alcohol addiction and, at the time of the report, was living with a seemingly *abusive and controlling partner*. Danielle's mother had not finished high school, was unemployed and was receiving welfare. Danielle's father, while deemed as potentially better able to provide a secure environment to his daughter, refused to work with CPS and expressed that his daughter's behaviours and needs were beyond his capacity to manage. The CPS determination of neglect was based on an assessment of both parents' lack of willingness or ability to assure Danielle's wellbeing or safety. The determination of Danielle being at risk for serious behavioural disturbance included an identification of Danielle's risky behaviours and her parents' inability or unwillingness to manage Danielle. Deemed to be without a stable home environment from which to set out into the public world and already identified as vulnerable – the CPS worker described her as a *small child looking for safety, structure and routine*. Danielle was also viewed as having gone too far in her risk-taking behaviours. Her CPS social worker determined her behaviours and choices as exceeding the threshold of acceptable risk-taking and ultimately recommended that she be removed from her home environment with the goal of protecting her from the risks she posed to herself through her acting out behaviours.

### 6.3.2 Vulnerable and risky in the aftermath of sexual abuse

While a public as well as professional concern for teenage girls in general remains pervasive, that concern naturally escalates in situations of sexual abuse. In Chapter 2, I noted that child sexual abuse is associated with an increased risk of an array of emotional, psychological, behavioural and relational consequences for individual victims, consequences that may exert their influence well into adulthood. The participants in my study seemed knowledgeable of these potential consequences of sexual abuse for teenage girls. Evident in the interviews was a hypervigilance to escalating risks in teenage girls' behaviours, emotions, choices, and sexual relationships in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

CPS professionals spoke with significant intensity and emotion about the devastating effects of sexual abuse on teenage girls. Emphasizing an inevitable vulnerability caused by the experience of sexual abuse, the CPS professionals variously referred to sexually abused teenage girls as *babies*, *victims*, *lost*, *broken*, and *in pain*. Without completely dismissing the possibility of coping – or *learning to live with it* – Andrew (AM social worker) explained that sexually abused teenage girls can never fully recover. According to his view, these girls will spend the rest of their lives vulnerable to the secondary effects of sexual abuse:

*Working with sexually abused girls is different in terms of the internal distress that's happening, the internal damage, and trying to help. I think when I first started I used to think that people could heal from everything. But, now I'm much more along the lines of 'you're going to learn to live with it.' You're never really going to get over it, but you're going to learn to live with it. It's never going to be all better. You're always going to be ... there are certain triggers or whatever and I don't care how much cognitive therapy you've had, it doesn't matter, it's visceral*

Andrew went on to tell me that this awareness provokes increased vigilance on his part:

*When you're with them [sexually abused teenage girls] ... I think you also need to know that there's an awful lot that goes along with that. I don't know. I'm always checking fingers, hands, wrists ... I'm always looking for cutting, and scratching, and carving. Suicide is ... you better have that on your radar for all adolescents and I would put a little star for sexually abused girls*

Without denying the potential for any adolescent to self-harm – *you better have that on your radar for all adolescents* – Andrew associated self-harming behaviours with sexual abuse. Thus his concern, and in consequence his surveillance, is intensified in situations of sexual abuse.

Similar to Andrew, Evelyn worried about the long-term effects of sexual abuse on teenage girls' self-esteem as well as their abilities to stand up for themselves:

*What I worry about the most for teenage girls ... Um, that this has affected their self-worth forever and what they deserve in life because I see a lot – on the other side of the fence, I see these moms who are – like clients, not because of sexual abuse, but clients for whatever reason, and you get into it with them and you find out about their history as sexual abuse victims, and you find out how much, you know, this has affected their choice in partners, this has affected what they have allowed people to do to them, to their bodies, to their career choices... You know, you could – I can see the abuse in the mothers that I work with. (Evelyn EO social worker)*

Expressing an awareness of the long-term (*forever*) effects of sexual abuse, Evelyn explained to me her concerns for sexually abused teenage girls to develop diminished self-worth by projecting into the future and extrapolating from the experiences of mothers she has worked with as CPS clients. She explained that *these moms* were sexually abused during their youth and are still suffering the effects as adults. In particular, she spoke of the negative effects the experience of sexual abuse has wrought on women's *choices of partners, what they have allowed people to do to them and their bodies, and their career choices*. Later in our interview, Evelyn described being particularly concerned about sexually abused teenage girls' relationships with individuals – particularly men – who are likely to take advantage of their vulnerable state. She explained that teenage girls' experiences of sexual abuse heighten their vulnerability not only to the emotional fallout that could lead to a range of self-harming behaviours but also to being drawn into relationships that could exacerbate the emotional damage caused by sexual abuse or expose them to further risks (e.g. *gangs, drugs, violence*). As will be elaborated in the next chapter, this understanding of heightened risk opens sexually abused teenage girls up to greater surveillance as well as protective interventions focused educating them about healthy relationships.

Concurrent with a discourse of girls' increased risk in the aftermath of sexual abuse was a discourse of intensified riskiness. The interviews revealed a common association between sexual

abuse and teenage girls' engagement in risky actions and choices. A number of CPS professionals regarded acting out behaviours that precipitated the involvement of CPS in teenage girls' lives as evidence of sexual abuse.

*I brought up the sexual abuse. She was acting out pretty much left and right, you know and I suggested to her that a lot of those behaviours that we were really, really busy addressing with her stemmed from that. That – it was in the file that her father had sexually abused her, so... (Manon, PQJ manager)*

*This kid, we can find an excuse for her behaviours because she was sexually abused. (Alberto, AM social worker)*

*But the behaviour they are displaying now comes from what happened five years ago [sexual abuse] certainly puts them at risk. (Meghan, EO manager)*

In a similar manner, CPS professionals also spoke of teenage girls' risky behaviour as stemming from their experiences of sexual abuse.

*A lot of the adolescents in care, girls, that are coming in are acting out because they were victims. (Meghan, EO manager)*

*Unfortunately, sexual abuse comes with a lot of risk-factor behaviours. Such as sexual – well, promiscuity, drug use, um, mental health issues, depression. The list can go on and on (Evelyn, EO social worker)*

*I worry about some behaviours that she has since the abuse – for example, the promiscuity that she has, having different boyfriends (Alberto, AM social worker)*

*At school she was violent with people. She got into, but it was only recently that she got into this. Like before the holidays she got drunk with some friends, she came back late, and then she went back to her previous school where she was, and she knew there was the potential for her to see her offender. There was a girl there, and they started fighting... these types of things worry me. (Elise, EO social worker)*

*Her sexualized acting out and poor peer relationships are all characteristics of early childhood abuse. The trauma of the abuse of her step grandfather remains central to Nicole's difficulties. (excerpt from Nicole's CPS file)*

*There was one case that went to jail that really ... She came into the system, she was abused by her father. Sexually abused. They still had visits at the group home though. They were supervised. But there was this anger within her and man, she didn't become a victim she became the other. So she went to jail for that. She was a recruiter for prostitution. She got involved with a guy who was a recruiter and then she started getting some of our kids. (Manon, PQJ manager)*

These excerpts show CPS professionals to be knowledgeable of the possible fallout experienced by teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Particularly common to CPS professionals'

expressed understanding of the range of potential consequences was their concern for teenage girls' risky, acting out behaviours. The CPS professionals demonstrated apprehensions not only for the risk of sexual abuse or revictimization but also for risky, acting out behaviours thought to arise from the experience of sexual abuse. In this way, not only is sexual abuse treated as a risk to be avoided, so too are the detrimental effects – specifically the risky behaviours – of its experience. Regardless of whether sexual abuse is understood as the root of risky behaviours, the behaviours themselves often tend to be identified as the focus of protective interventions. As I will argue in the following chapter, tolerance for sexually abused teenage girls' risky behaviours is extremely low in the context of CPS involvement and as such protective interventions tend to focus on scrutinizing, regulating and controlling individual girls.

### ***Responsible – but failing – to self-protect***

In Chapter 2, I introduced the notion of *failure to protect* as it appears in the context of CPS legislation, policy and practice in situations of child sexual abuse. With reference to feminist scholarship on the subject, I drew attention to how the presence of *failure to protect* in CPS legislation and policy leads to CPS practices that shift responsibility for protection from CPS social workers to non-offending parents – usually mothers (Krane 2003). This shift of responsibility results in CPS assessments that focus on the willingness and capacities of non-offending mothers to recognise risks to a child and to act so as to either prevent abuse or bring an end to the circumstances of risk (Krane, Strega & Carlton, 2013). In this way, determinations of risk in situations of child sexual abuse come to be based not only on the substantiation of the sexually abusive acts of an alleged offender but also on observations of the presumed failures of the non-offending mother to protect the child. Attention to parental capacities and failures to protect was certainly evident in the interviews; however, I also observed that considerable attention was given to the capacities and failures of sexually abused teenage girls to recognise and respond to the risks in their lives. Concurrent with a common discourse of sexually abused teenage girls' vulnerability to external threats of abuse was a competing discourse associated with concerns for girls' contributions to their own situation of risk, or with their failures to

protect. With heightened concern for sexually abused teenage girls' potential to engage in risky behaviours, self-protection (or failure to self-protect) was associated not only with their ability to recognise and avoid the risks of revictimization but also their ability to choose and act within expected and safe bounds. In the following paragraphs, I reveal a tendency for CPS determinations of risk to include attention to not only on the risk of sexual abuse and but also the risks posed by individual girls to themselves.

Meghan (EO manager) expressed frustration regarding a situation in which a teenage girl's experience of sexual abuse was overshadowed by concerns for the risks she posed to herself through displaying acting out behaviours:

*I guess it didn't sit, it really didn't sit well with me that, in the end, it's almost as though this girl, who clearly was a victim, in the end, there was no acknowledgment of that ... The focus was put on her rather than, you know, where it should have been ... Again, so this will be a kid in our system who never would be acknowledged as a victim because, you know, she's an "F" [serious behavioural disturbance] not a "D," [sexual abuse] ... her behaviour is what kept her in protection.*

Meghan worried that with the CPS focus being *put on her* and her behaviours and by identifying her as an "F," the teenage girl's sexual victimization would be glossed over and the responsibility for her circumstances would be located in her rather than the abusive actions of her perpetrator. With risk located in the sexually abused teenage girl and her failure to appropriately manage her risky behaviours, her riskiness was individualised and understood as evidence of the need for a continued CPS presence in her life. Meghan doubted that the focus of CPS attention was placed *where it should have been*. She later clarified that she saw the girl's behaviours as resulting from her experience of sexual abuse – *we shouldn't be putting it [responsibility] on her, we should help her*. This shift of CPS attention from the vulnerability of a sexually abused girl to the threat of her excessive risk-taking was not at all uncommon in the interviews.

A shift in focus onto the teenage girl during assessments of risk was accompanied by shift in expectations of responsibility. Corrine (PQJ child care worker), in speaking about the situations of a number of different sexually abused teenage girls, tended to place fault for escalating behavioural risks – whether consciously or not – with the individual girls and their bad

choices. She described one sexually abused teenage girl as *putting herself at risk by going to shelters and roaming the streets* and described another girl as follows:

*She's one who goes off with guys and has unprotected sex and gets into bad relationships. Even though now I'm starting to see that, like her boyfriend – she's not with him anymore. He screamed at her and she left him, which is good. But I'm scared that she will get herself, not ... she's very streetwise though, she won't be into prostitution or anything like that but ... I don't know. I see her as very vulnerable even though she plays the tough girl. And there's so many things that she hasn't dealt with and I don't know if she's going to.* (Corrine, PQJ child care worker)

For Corrine, this girl's choices and actions (*to go off with guys, have unprotected sex*) contributed to her being at risk to a host of dangers including sexual revictimization, bad relationships, or even worse (*prostitution*). Elise (EO social worker) similarly described the situation of a teenage girl (Annie) who she had evaluated for sexual abuse. Elise determined the allegations of sexual abuse to be founded but reported that Annie was not currently at risk of sexual abuse given that the police were involved and the perpetrator no longer had contact. Elise, however, did identify Annie as being at risk due to her behaviours:

*Annie was already on the path to doing drugs, being promiscuous, and unfortunately ... I think she was on a self-destructive path and she told me that she had a time where she was cutting herself, and she told me she was thinking about doing it again. And she told me she wanted to do drugs, and even though she knows that it is bad.*

According to Elise, Annie knew her choices to be *bad*, but for reasons, which were unexplored by Elise, Annie continued to place herself at-risk – to pursue a *self-destructive path* – through her choices and actions. An excerpt drawn from a report in Molly's CPS file written by her CPS social worker provides a similar understanding of Molly's impulsive acts as contributing to her situation of risk:

*Molly is most safe when she can remain in the structure of the group home, follow the rules and expectations of her school and respect her mother's authority. Molly is aware that she tries to listen, but she then becomes anxious and her moods swing. She acts quickly, without thinking things through and she becomes entangled in negative interactions with peers and at times with her family.*

Within the boundaries of CPS structures and regulations, Molly is viewed as *safe*. But beyond those boundaries, where Molly attempts but fails to respect CPS expectations surrounding her

choices and actions, her safety is understood as jeopardised. A review of Nicole's file provides a comparable picture of a sexually abused teenage girl placing herself at risk.

Nicole has a long history of involvement with CPS relating to concerns for negligence as well as sexual abuse (paternal step-grandfather between the ages of 4-10 years). She was in and out of foster homes, and later group homes, from the age of two until her adolescence. I met Nicole when she was 17 years old. Over the year prior to me meeting Nicole and reviewing her CPS file, she had spent the majority of her time living in CPS group homes or residential units. She had also run away from those CPS placement resources 9 times. Nicole's file contained the reports of 3 different CPS professionals who had been involved with Nicole over the 3 years prior to my interview with her. Reading her file provided little doubt as to the perception of her having developed risky and irresponsible behaviours as a result of her experiences of neglect and sexual abuse:

*She has internalised this victimization and is now actively victimizing herself.*

*She is constantly creating crisis after crisis in order to not feel any of the pain she carries from her past abuses. (Nicole's case file)*

Repeated throughout her file were the CPS professionals' preoccupations with her placing herself at risk by running away from the secure environment of CPS and the watchful eye of CPS professionals. :

*Nicole has a lengthy history of impulsive behaviours which leads to her AWOL'ing. When Nicole AWOLs she places herself at great risk.*

*Nicole has run away several times from her family home and group homes, used substances, engaged in sexual relations that put her at risk, and presented with suicidal ideation and auto-mutilation gestures.*

*Nicole is clearly putting herself at ever-increasing risk during her many runaways.*

*While she says that some of the runaways were planned most appear to occur almost compulsively, and she does not seem to have very much control over this problem.*

*Nicole was picked up from AWOL where she placed herself at serious risk, she got into a situation where she was abducted and held for prostitution.*

Evident in Nicole's file was a thoughtful understanding of the likely reasons for Nicole's behaviours. Nevertheless, the language used in her CPS file locates the source of her current risk

as being herself. Through running away, engaging in irresponsible behaviours, and being unable to identify circumstances of potential danger, Nicole is characterised as responsible for perpetuating her situation of risk.

In each of these situations described above, while sexual abuse might have constituted a reason for CPS involvement, the sexually abused girls' seeming lack of willingness or ability to protect themselves in the face of risk were highlighted as the primary CPS concern.

The sexually abused girls interviewed were well aware that the CPS professionals involved in their protection were concerned about the risk they posed to themselves through their impulsive, self-destructive, risky behaviours. The girls listed a number of different reasons for which they believed CPS professionals to be concerned about them including, disrespectful behaviour towards family members or CPS staff; associations with certain individuals or groups of individuals (i.e. gangs); running away; self-harming behaviours; drug and/or alcohol use; sexual relationships; and skipping school. Nicole, for example was acutely aware of the CPS professionals concerns:

*They're worried about my own safety. They're worried about me AWOLing and ending up dead.*

*They think I'm dangerous. My friends ... they just see gang affiliated or they assume gang affiliated. Because not everybody I chill with is gang affiliated. They're either gang affiliated or complete druggies and that's just because I get along with them; like, I don't choose, "oh yeah, I'm just going to get along with the druggies." Like if they have no criminal record then like okay I get along with them. I know one kid who's a complete druggie but he does not act like a druggie. He does not look like a druggie – he goes to school every day ... does what he has to do.*

Despite being aware of CPS concerns for her safety as well as her ability to self-protect through associating with an appropriate peer group, Nicole showed a capacity to distinguish levels of risk and determine what risk is acceptable to her. She gets along with *druggies* but chooses to spend time with those who don't have a *criminal record* or who are able to do what they have to do, such as go to school.

Frost's description of her involvement with CPS provides a further example of how sexually abused girls come to understand their behaviours or, more precisely, their potential

failures to behave appropriately as being the focus of CPS scrutiny. To elaborate, CPS had been involved with Frost and her older sister, Suzanne, when the two girls were quite young due to concerns for negligence, the reasons for CPS involvement at the time of my interviews with Frost related to her having been sexually and physically abused by her father during her early adolescence. Frost's father had sexually abused Suzanne over a long period of time and had only initiated sexual contact with Frost once Suzanne moved out to be with her boyfriend. When I met Frost she had been living with a foster family for almost a year. While confirming that CPS became involved with her because of her father's sexual and physical abuse, she insisted that CPS professionals seemed more concerned with her behaviours than anything else. She expressed feeling under constant scrutiny:

*Like they want to know why me and Suzanne [older sister] were fighting or how we can help it or how I'm doing in school and how I can I help that. It's like, yeah, you want to know these things but you're just going to go and like report this to every other social worker. And, it's just like everything ... like they just want to know everything and then they nag you on every little thing.*

[What do you mean?]

*Well, like, things at school. Like if I was to skip, they'd go crazy and say "oh, if you do that again, this and this and that." And, or if like I get a ... or I'm failing or something. I don't know. I really don't like it.*

*They want me to be friends with people who don't do drugs, who play sports and everything. I don't know. I feel like they make me live their life. They won't let me live my life. I don't know .... But, yeah they say "be friends with these people, not these people." But if I want to be friends with these people, then I'll be friends with them. I'll learn for myself that I shouldn't have been friends with them. Don't tell me what to do. I used to hang out with a gang ... they didn't like that.*

*They don't let me sleep over at my sister's because they don't like her boyfriend and stuff and they don't think it's a safe place, like safe environment for me. They think he does drugs and stuff ...*

Frost's reflections revealed her sense of being under constant scrutiny by CPS – *they want to know everything*. She understood her choices and actions as being measured against a CPS standard of what is appropriate. In this way, she recognised that failing to behave in certain ways could provoke the negative regard of CPS professionals. She identified school and relationships as areas of particular concern for CPS. Frost was conscious of CPS expectations with respect to

appropriate (people *who play sports*) versus inappropriate (people who *do drugs* or are in *gangs*) friendship choices; however, asserting her voice, Frost insisted that she would choose her own friends and could learn for herself with whom she should or shouldn't be friends. But she recognised there to be little space in the context of CPS involvement for her to explore her friendship interests without scrutiny. Ultimately, Frost perceived the CPS professionals' surveillance as confirmation that her choices and behaviours were not to be trusted:

*It's like they want to know every bad thing. Like they don't care about the good things. They want to know the bad things and work with the bad things.*

*They just don't understand the pain that the kids go through. They think like we're the bad ones. I don't understand how to explain it. They just think that we're ... I don't know how to explain it ... I really don't know ... but like they put everything on us. They don't realise how bad that is and it's really hard for us. Like they don't know what it's like ... I can't talk for everyone, but they don't seem to understand how it feels for kids to be first of all abused in their homes and then taken away from their parents when they thought it was like, where the kid thought that's the right thing. Putting them in a home, not working out there and then putting them in another home and another home and another home. Changing schools all the time. They don't understand how hard that is.*

Frost interpreted CPS scrutiny as focusing only on the *bad things* and as provoking characterisations of her as *bad*. Frost perceived CPS professionals as not caring to know *about the good things* and not *understanding what it's like* or *how it feels for kids to be first abused and then taken away*. Frost later told me that she would rather not talk with her CPS social worker about her life, claiming that she would prefer that her CPS social worker *just make sure I'm okay, ask me how my day was and that's it. She doesn't need all the details*. Without engaging in conversations, I wonder how either Frost or her CPS social worker might be able to gain an understanding of one another. There is potential for a lot to be lost in the unspoken.

Whereas Frost was left with the feeling that her CPS social workers *don't seem to understand*, the CPS professionals interviewed often expressed their sensitivity to the experiences of sexually abused teenage girls. They also seemed sensitive to sexually abused girls' capacity for introspection regarding their CPS determinations of risk. Alberto explained that some sexually abused teenage girls have insight into their behaviours and are able themselves to identify sexual abuse as having triggered their risky or acting out behaviours. He described the situation of Karen who had been sexually abused by her uncle. Given that her

uncle had committed suicide a couple of years prior to her telling anyone about the sexual abuse, she was not deemed to be at risk for sexual abuse. Karen, however, had already been identified by CPS as being at risk due to her acting out behaviours. Alberto remarked that Karen's disclosure was accompanied with her realisation that her acting out behaviours were a consequence of her experience of sexual abuse: *She told me ... "Yeah. This happened, remember? That's why I was acting out. That's why I wasn't too focused. That's why I was smoking marijuana on a daily basis."* Alberto expressed disappointment in having not known of the sexual abuse earlier in his involvement:

*I think we could have acted ... and now I had an explanation for Karen's behaviours. For her disrespect, for her big mouth, big shot, smoking marijuana, missing school, okay ... I'm worried that we could have helped her not to go through that rollercoaster of missing school, drinking in parks, you know, and becoming even a bit promiscuous. Again, another child, fifteen, having different boyfriends!*

Alberto added that perhaps, had he been able to intervene earlier by teaching her *to like herself first, enjoy herself first*, she would not have *gone down that path of destruction*. Here, Alberto offers a reasonable interpretation of Karen's behaviours – they are problematic and principally a result of her experience of sexual abuse. His reasoning is straightforward but leaves unexplored the possibility that certain of Karen's behaviours could be associated with expected teenage risk-taking or resulting from a number of interrelated factors. Her experience of sexual abuse provides an uncomplicated explanation for her behaviour but, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the resolution of her riskiness is likely still to fall to her.

Corrine told me, *I find that we have to help them deal with it [sexual abuse] because then sometimes they go on to making choices like having multiple boyfriends and going into prostitution or going into drugs and alcohol*. And Michael wondered about his involvement with a sexually abused teenage girl whose baby died:

*She's screwed up. Into drugs, had a boyfriend, got pregnant, and the baby died, which, um, was questionable, like in terms of if there was neglect involved, or...*

Michael wondered if CPS had become *involved earlier, maybe a year, maybe we could have helped her more*. These CPS professionals spoke with some disillusionment about their interventions with those sexually abused teenage girls identified as risky. They worried that they had missed out on opportunities to support sexually abused teenage girls through the aftermath of sexual abuse and to thus avoid girls' development of risky and irresponsible behaviours. Notwithstanding the disillusionment expressed by CPS professionals and regardless of the

reasons underlying sexually abused teenage girls' risky behaviours, plainly evident in the interviews was a lack of tolerance for girls' riskiness which aligned perfectly with the paramountcy of child safety in CPS legislation, policy and practice. Without ignoring sexually abused teenage girls vulnerability, CPS professionals consistently emphasized girls' risky and irresponsible choices and actions as evidence of the risk they posed to themselves.

In the next chapter, I argue that this expanded view of sexually abused teenage girls' risk wherein they are construed as complicit in contributing to the circumstances of their own risk leads to protective practices that place significant emphasis on implicating girls in the resolution of their risk. As I will show, mirroring the individualization intrinsic to neoliberal ideology (Beck, 1992; 2007), the responsibility (and corresponding risk of failing) to manage risk is downloaded from CPS professionals to sexually abused teenage girls regardless of these girls' difficult or disadvantaged circumstances or experiences.

## Chapter 7: SELF-PROTECTION OR FAILURE TO PROTECT

*If she's not going to protect herself, then how are we going to protect her?*

— Evelyn (EO social worker)

## **Chapter 7: SELF-PROTECTION OR FAILURE TO PROTECT**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapter, I showed that sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS is shaped by an expanded vision of risk that encompasses concerns surrounding not only girls' risk of revictimization but also the risks they pose to themselves through their participation in excessively risky choices and actions. In this chapter, I explore how neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies combine with such an expanded vision of sexually abused teenage girls' risk to inform protective practices that place emphasis on girls' individual capacities (and failures) to assure their own protection – from outside forces as well as themselves. Simultaneous with an appreciation of sexually abused teenage girls' vulnerability and consequent need for adult/professional empathy, care and protection, the interviews revealed a competing view of sexually abused teenage girls as autonomous almost-adults, responsible for identifying and managing the risks in their lives. I will argue that this latter view contributes to the common treatment of sexually abused teenage girls as rational actors capable of appropriately managing risk if provided the information and guidance needed to identify and avoid dangerous circumstances. In this way, sexually abused teenage girls are positioned to be either celebrated for demonstrating rational action in the face of risk or blamed when their risks persist. As I will illustrate, those sexually abused teenage girls deemed unable to appropriately manage risk are identified as failing to self-protect and thus made susceptible to intensified CPS interventions.

In the opening section of this chapter, I draw from participant accounts to illustrate the influence of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies on general CPS practices associated with children and youth's protection from risk. In the subsequent sections, I discuss CPS practices specific to protecting sexually abused teenage girls and explore how such practices serve to implicate these girls in their own protection through processes of individualization. I conclude the chapter by discussing participants' accounts of sexually abused teenage girls' contributions to CPS decision-making about their own situations. Emergent in these accounts is a tension between respecting sexually abused teenage girls as social actors who may well have “expert”

insights into their circumstances of risk and treating them as failing rational actors struggling to manage their risky circumstances in a manner deemed appropriate by CPS standards.

## **7.2 Managing risk**

Consistent with neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies, the reasonable next step flowing from the identification of risk is the regulation of that risk. In terms of CPS, managing risk means adopting specific strategies aimed at eradicating or reducing the identified risk to a child and its effects. As laid out in legislation, once a CPS professional determines a child to be at risk and in need of protection according to a particular classification(s), the ensuing tasks are to “decide on the direction of the child” (*YPA*, article 32(c)), to enact protective measures, and to monitor the child and his/her family in their efforts to manage and reduce the situation of risk. The goal of such intervention, of course, remains that of ensuring the child’s safety. Thus, as is clarified in Quebec’s *YPA*, the chosen protective measures must be those deemed “most appropriate to putting an end to or preventing the recurrence of the situation in which the security or development of the child is in danger” (*YPA*, article 52). Any number and combination of measures can be put in place either through a voluntary agreement signed by the worker, the parent(s) and the child (if s/he is 14 years of age or older) or a court order<sup>36</sup>. As presented in the *Manuel de référence*, protective measures can include those aimed at making the parent(s) and child responsible to act to correct the situation of risk (for example, requiring that the parent(s) and/or child ensure that the child not come in contact with specified individual(s)); those directed at securing the aid of significant people in the family’s entourage and/or community resources; and those requiring the intervention of particular institutions (e.g. school, hospital, etc. ) or specialised professionals (e.g. physician, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.). Included in the list of possible protective measures is the entrustment of a child – temporarily or permanently – to either a person of significance in his/her life, a foster family, a residential unit or a hospital

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<sup>36</sup> Articles 54 (voluntary measures) and 91 (judicial measures) of the *YPA* offer workers non-exhaustive lists of those measures that may be written into a voluntary agreement or ordered by the court. See *Appendix H*.

centre; however, given the CPS principle of least intrusion, the removal of a child from his/her home environment is considered to be a measure of last resort (*YPA*, article 4).

The *Manuel de référence* provides more detailed guidance to CPS professionals involved in putting in place and monitoring protective measures. CPS professionals are authorised to pursue interventions according to three primary functions: aid, counsel and assistance; control; and, surveillance (540). In the *Manuel*, CPS professionals are reminded that achieving the changes necessary for correcting the situation of risk to the child relies principally on the motivation and capacity of the child and his/her parents to mobilise themselves (540). With reference to the *Cadre de référence pour l'étape application des mesures* (2007)<sup>37</sup>, the authors of the *Manuel* clarified their understanding of the function of aid, counsel and assistance:

Assistance includes all those clinical activities aimed at correcting the situation of risk through encouraging the child and his/her parents to integrate changes at the personal, family and social levels. Pursued in the context of authority, interventions should seek to mobilise the willingness and ability of the concerned parties to accept the help and support offered. Motivation to change is at the heart of intervention with parents. In order to have a positive impact on the resolution of the problems contributing to the situation of risk, interventions ought to be adapted to the concerned parties' degree of motivation. Most often, it is first necessary to build awareness about the problems contributing to the situation of risk and to stimulate a desire to change. Subsequently, it becomes important to offer support to the concerned parties in their efforts to change and to reinforce individual achievements. The most effective and enduring approach through which to assist families is that of empowerment. This approach encourages families to be directly involved in influencing the events and circumstances occurring in their environment, while simultaneously assuming responsibility for the protection of their children's security and development (my translation – ACJQ, 2007: 24 as cited in the *Manuel de référence*, 2007: 540)<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> I did not have direct access to this document given that it had been accessible only through the *Association des centres jeunesse du Québec* which was officially abolished with the launch of *Bill 10 – An Act to modify the organization and governance of the health and social services network, in particular by abolishing the regional agencies* – in Quebec's National Assembly in 2015.

<sup>38</sup> « L'aide regroupe l'ensemble des activités cliniques visant la modification de la situation de compromission par des changements chez l'enfant et ses parents, sur les plans personnel, familial et social. Par ces changements, effectués en contexte d'autorité, on s'efforce de mobiliser la volonté et la capacité des personnes concernées afin qu'elles acceptent l'aide et le soutien offerts. La motivation au changement est au coeur de l'intervention avec les parents. Les interventions doivent en effet s'ajuster aux étapes de motivation pour avoir un impact sur la résolution des problématiques traitées. Le plus souvent, il faut susciter la prise de conscience des problèmes ainsi que le désir de changer. Par la suite, il faudra soutenir les efforts de changement et aussi s'assurer de consolider les acquis. L'aide la plus efficace et la plus durable sera souvent celle qui passe par l'autonomisation (*empowerment*). Les familles peuvent ainsi exercer directement une influence sur les événements et les circonstances survenant dans leur

There is a clear recognition in the *Manuel*, however, that risk is not always resolved through interventions centring solely on providing aid, counsel and assistance. Rather, in those situations in which families demonstrate an unwillingness and/or inability to take charge of the situation of risk so as to assure their children's protection, the CPS professional is required to enact increasingly restrictive measures and exert control over one or more of the individuals involved (540). The goal of such measures is to curb the inappropriate behaviours of the child and/or his/her parents that are contributing to the situation of risk through imposing certain conditions and verifying the family's compliance to the steps laid out in the protection plan (540). Corresponding with an intensification of intervention, it is explained in the *Manuel* that in certain instances, there is a need for enacting interventions based on surveillance (541). According to the *Manuel*, surveillance consists of vigilantly monitoring respective families' functioning and compliance to the protective measures named in either the Voluntary Measures Agreement or the Court Order (through surprise visits to confirm the presence – or absence – of a particular individual in the home, for example) (541). Finally, CPS professionals are guided to develop intervention plans adapted to the specific difficulties observed in the child's situation:

The key to providing effective and efficient interventions is to adapt the interventions to the nature and the degree of difficulties encountered within the family situation. The function, duration and intensity of the interventions must be adapted to the family's difficulties in order to produce significant and lasting effects on the family situation (my translation – *Manuel de référence*, 2007: 541)<sup>39</sup>.

As I will elaborate below, CPS interventions with sexually abused teenage girls included aspects of all three primary functions outlined in the *Manuel*.

Reiterative of the guidance offered in legislation, as well as the *Manuel de référence*, the CPS professionals in my study explained that once the protective measures are decided upon and ready to be put into action, the CPS professional's role becomes that of implementing the measures and monitoring the motivation and capacities of the responsible parties (usually the

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environnement, tout en s'appropriant leurs responsabilités en matière de protection et de développement de leurs enfants » (ACJQ, 2007: 24 as cited in the *Manuel de référence*, 2007: 540).

<sup>39</sup> Une intervention adaptée à la nature et à l'ampleur des difficultés familiales demeure la clef d'une intervention efficace et efficiente. La fonction, la durée et l'intensité de l'intervention doivent être adaptées aux problèmes traités pour obtenir des effets significatifs et durables sur la situation familiale (*Manuel de référence*, 2007: 541).

parents as well as the child) to follow through. Michael (AM manager), Manon (PQJ manager) and Ai-Lin (AM social worker) each offered their respective understandings of the CPS professional's role during the CPS phase of *Application des mesures*:

*the AM mandate, is to follow the Application – applying the measures, so once the EO [Evaluation/Orientation] worker would have gotten voluntary measures or a Court order, it would be to put into place like what's in the Court order. And to see that the order is being respected, that would be in a pure form. And then – and as a more global, I guess, monitoring their safety. And then even beyond that, trying to reach clinical goals with them, or whatever – whatever was the problem, and whatever is felt is the greater problem that needs to be addressed to bring down the risk. (Michael, AM manager).*

*You're the one who's responsible then to put into practice – to put into place the measures that were either ordered by the Judge, or the measures that were negotiated in the voluntary measures. So, your job is to hold accountable all the parties because there are always different parties. [Such as?] Well, there's the parents...who have – especially where voluntary measures are concerned...they have a bigger ownership for certain things that they agreed placed their child at risk and certain measures and steps that need to be taken to remedy the situation, so the job – so you need to hold them accountable for their end, their share. The worker representing Youth Protection also has their ownership, which is to provide aid, counsel and assistance, to refer families to appropriate services where need be, whether it's in the Court order or in the voluntary measures. Adolescents as of the age of fourteen also have their share in the voluntary measures, and with Court orders as well. They'll be ordered to seek treatment for drug abuse, for example. Always given their consent, though. Because they can't be forced unless they consent. The Judge, once there is consent, can note it in the Court order, so yeah Application – so once a case is transferred to you from EO, then you're responsible basically to follow the Law, to follow the measures that were ordered, or the measures that were negotiated, and then to report on them, to review down the line at certain intervals (Manon, PQJ manager).*

*My job in a simple way is to follow the Court measures or the voluntary measures that has been signed with the family. To make sure that is carried out, or to provide assistance when there's difficulty to carry out those measures. And if, by carrying out the measures, I have to involve third parties, I have to liaise with third parties to make sure that everybody is doing what the measures ask them to do (Ai-Lin, AM worker).*

Evident in the CPS professionals' descriptions of their role was a risk-management approach to practice characteristic of contemporary neoliberal risk-thinking. In a simple way, the CPS professionals acknowledged being individually accountable for managing risk, through setting the stage for ameliorating the situation of risk (i.e., *to put into place the measures*), ensuring the measures are carried out (e.g. engaging the parent(s) and sometimes the child/youth, if aged 14

years or older – *adolescents as of the age of fourteen also have their share* – in acting out the protection plan), and monitoring the success or failure of the protection plan (e.g. monitoring the capacities, actions, and compliance of the parent(s) and child/youth). In line with neoliberal risk-thinking ideology, the professionals' descriptions of their practice revealed an understanding of parents and youth aged 14 and over as being rational actors (Kemshall 2006, 2010; Lupton, 2013) capable of sharing the responsibility of protection. In this way, parents and youth over the age of 14 were viewed as autonomous, self-directing citizens able to comprehend and accept responsibility for their respective situations of risk as well as the appropriate responses to resolve the risk. Implicit here is an underlying assumption that parents and youth over the age of 14 are willing and able to make the right choices and to take actions suitable to correcting the circumstances contributing to the endangerment of the child/youth. Doing otherwise could provide evidence that they are irrational actors and thus vulnerable to further blame and at greater likelihood of being subject to increasingly intrusive and regulatory interventions. Once again, as in the process of identifying risk, the emphasis was on the individualisation of risk as well as risk-reducing efforts.

Not surprisingly, the CPS professionals interviewed tended to express significant empathy for the children and families with whom they intervened as well as a seemingly corresponding desire to save children from risk. As exemplified in Alberto's comments below, the CPS professionals often characterized their role as one of benevolent educator and enforcer while they identified parents as both the targeted recipients of their interventions as well as potential collaborators in meeting the mutual goal of children's safety:

*I think sometimes, we workers, we think that we are Mother Theresas in jeans, we are saints, we are Saint-Francis all helping, you know? .... Someone told me the other day something very important – the worker told me, she said, “I am a worker with a little flashlight in a dark forest. So, I go in front and I tell the family to follow me, okay? And I’m showing them the road. During that time, I’m going to get that flashlight and I’m going to give to the parents – here’s the flashlight, instead of you following me, I’m going to follow you, okay? And that’s when the case will be closed because they have the flashlight”. And I have some clients that you have the flashlight and I’m saying “Let’s go people! Let’s move! It’s getting darker! I have to move. Time’s a ticking” [tapping watch]. And sometimes you carry a baby with you and a flashlight because you have a permanent plan for that baby because the parents are not coming. And the baby is*

*screaming. You cannot leave him in darkness. And for the family, that light is fading away, fading away, and you disappear in the darkness with the baby.* (Alberto, AM social worker)

Alberto's words reflect his heartfelt desire and intention to help and support families in their efforts to care for children. Equally evident, however, is the infiltration of risk-thinking ideology in everyday protection practice. Illustrative of this ideology, Alberto's depiction of CPS practice optimistically assumes parents as individually willing and able to follow the *road*, or protection plan, that will lead them to their ultimate goal of eradicating risk and ensuring children's safety. The CPS professional is initially positioned *in front*, as the expert who is familiar with the path and able to light the way towards good, safe parenting while the parents are identified as lost in some manner and in need of direction.

Through the process of intervention, the CPS professional accompanies the family while shifting his/her position to one of monitoring and regulating – *Let's go people! Let's move! It's getting darker!* – the family's progress and capacity to keep to the established path. Those parents proving able to assume responsibility and to traverse the road mapped out for them will succeed, grasp hold of the *flashlight*, and eventually reap the benefit of the withdrawal of CPS from their lives. As Alberto pointed out, however, there are those families who may waver or deviate from the path. He elaborated that such families are those most likely to receive increasingly intrusive and regulatory interventions. They may be re-oriented back on track and reminded that there is no time to waste when a child's safety is at risk – time's a ticking! Resonant of neoliberal risk-thinking's concentration on individual responsibility and self-governance, the failure of protective interventions is most likely to be attributed to the individual parent(s) rather than to the appropriateness of the intervention or to the family's specific social context and circumstances. Families may well meet with obstacles along the road to their children's protection; but, in day-to-day practice such obstacles are at risk of being considered to be of their own making or as merely bumps to be surmounted with individual effort. With cinematic effect, Alberto spoke of the ultimate consequence of a family's failure to adhere to the expectations of protection, or to manage risk, as being that of losing their child to the authority of

CPS. Alberto's comments referred solely to CPS's responsabilisation of parents of at-risk children; however, as I have already hinted at and intend to elaborate below, the participants in my study also spoke of the responsabilisation of sexually abused teenage girls in their individualized management of risk.

### **7.3 Establishing protection with sexually abused teenage girls**

Common throughout the participant accounts was an understanding that establishing protection in situations of sexual abuse involves three principal areas of intervention – areas that correspond with the functions outlined in the *Manuel de référence* (aid, counsel and assistance, control and surveillance). Assuring a sexually abused child's safety necessarily begins by removing the risk of revictimization by putting in place strategies through which to prohibit contact between the victimized child and the perpetrator. With an understanding that sexual abuse is associated with a range of psychological, emotional, relational and behavioural consequences, protection practices also include supporting the child in coping with the fallout of abuse. Such protection practice might entail transferring the responsibility to support the child to the child's non-offending parent(s) and/or taking steps to ensure the child's access to appropriate therapeutic resources. And finally, establishing protection regularly involves scrutinizing, regulating and controlling the risky choices and behaviours displayed by the abused child. This last area of protective practice is particularly characteristic of interventions with teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

#### **7.3.1 Removing the risk of revictimization**

As noted, once concerns for sexual abuse have been identified, an essential step in establishing the child or youth's safety involves prohibiting contact between the child and the abuser. Elise (EO social worker) reminded me that in situations of sexual abuse, *We're very focused. Our mandate is clear ... making sure that the sexual abuse doesn't happen again, to protect them from the perpetrator.* With some pride, she added, *we're getting better at pushing the hard line of no contact between perpetrators.* Indeed, CPS professionals commonly cited prohibition of

contact as a *concrete* protective measure applied with the goal of removing the risk of revictimization:

*Concrete measures. I'm thinking, "Uncle Joe can't come to the house", or something like that. That's, um, just implementing it as a measure. There's not much clinical to it, you know, just... "You better listen, or we're calling the police" (Michael, AM manager)*

*And so, this man, today, has no contact whatsoever with his children or with the family. But the mom still has contact with him because when she wants money, she calls him, and they meet somewhere in [the city]. (Alberto, AM social worker)*

Michael made clear the authority of CPS underlying expectations of prohibition of contact. Given the paramountcy of child safety, there is no option for the family but to respect the CPS measures. Alberto's comment was in reference to a situation in which the oldest of seven children in the family had been sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend, the father of the 4 youngest children. The mother, a refugee to Canada, was unemployed and, having only limited connection with family in her country of origin, found herself isolated in Montreal. Overshadowed by the priority of protecting her daughter from revictimization were the struggles she faced in suddenly having to be responsible for caring for her children all on her own. While Alberto was quite sensitive to the challenges facing this mother, his disapproval over her continued contact with the abuser was clear. He explained that she was *making progress* but had yet to demonstrate to him her capacity to assure the safety of her children.

This latter situation described by Alberto provides an example of Krane's (2003) observation of the transformation of mothers into "mother protectors" in the context of CPS involvement in situations of child sexual abuse. In Chapter 2, I presented Krane's (2003) study wherein she documented a shift of the protection mandate from CPS social workers to non-offending mothers of sexually abused children. Krane (2003) noted that this shift of responsibility carried with it assumptions of mothers as willing and able to make choices and take actions appropriate to the best interests and well-being of their children, regardless of their respective social contexts or circumstances. While such expectations were easily observable in CPS professionals' discussions of protection of sexually abused teenage girls, also observable were expectations that sexually abused teenage girls assume responsibility for their own

protection. A particular area of responsibility identified by the CPS professionals was the expectation that girls stay away from the perpetrator of sexual abuse. Still, despite Michael's suggestion above that an order of prohibition of contact is a rather uncomplicated and reasonable protective measure, CPS professionals repeatedly noted putting such a ban into action with teenage girls as being fraught with challenges:

*We ask for it in Court, right? I mean, if a sixteen year old, if she wants to go see her perpetrator, she'll do it. Regardless of a court order. Um, but we stick as much as we can to this notion of best practice and hope for the best. You try your best to keep the kid away from the perpetrator. You try the best to get the perpetrator out of the house but it doesn't always work like that. (Evelyn, EO social worker)*

*And the reality is that they're sixteen, and we have a no contact order, and they want contact, they're going to do it behind our back anyway, so... At least if we can be transparent and talk about how we're going to do this, and what our concerns are, put some parameters around it, yeah. (Meghan, EO manager)*

While acknowledging teenage girls' autonomous choice, CPS professionals questioned the safety of their choices to pursue contact with their abusers, *behind our back*. Discussing the situation of a 16 year old girl who had been sexually abused by a family friend, Evelyn explained, *she has both pieces to her* – a capacity to act autonomously and vulnerability. Despite the prohibition of contact, this girl continued to visit the man who had sexually abused her:

*She has a head on her shoulders, but that doesn't mean that she doesn't want to belong somewhere. You know, and that like – she makes stupid decisions for sure because with all this going on, she was back there all the time. She was lying about being there, um, which I think – it – this was the whole – this whole case ... But she put herself repeatedly in that situation, but so do a lot of sexual abuse victims. You know, it's – not every kid has – most kids or teens don't have the knowledge or the ability to say, "Oh, I'm going to avoid this situation", and "This is bad", no because physically, it probably feels good, and because there's some emotional need that's being met, even though it's completely inappropriate and if you could take a step back and see it clearly from an outside perspective, you would say, "Oh, well then, just don't put yourself in that situation", when it's not so straightforward. (Evelyn, EO social worker)*

Evelyn recognised the complex dynamic evident in the relationship between this girl and the perpetrator and displayed a sensitivity to the confusion experienced by the girl as she was being asked to understand her situation as risky and to accept responsibility for respecting CPS's prohibition of contact. Nevertheless, while appreciating that it was not *straightforward*, Evelyn

remained consistent in her conviction that the girl's choice to put herself in contact with the perpetrator was a *stupid* decision that left her open to revictimization and continued risk.

The teenage girls interviewed were well aware of the CPS imposed responsibility to avoid contact with their abusers. They were equally well aware of a range of difficulties associated with this specific responsibility to self-protect. Dora, for example, talked about her CPS social worker's expectation that she stay away from the young men who had gang-raped her and threatened her into prostitution. According to Dora, after having expressed to her CPS social worker her insecurity and fear and her doubts that she could assert herself in the face of her abusers, her CPS social worker advised *that when they [abusers] see you they need to go away. If they don't go away, you call the cops. And they have the DNA so they can find them and they'll put them in jail.* But, Dora doubted her capacity to control contact with her abusers. She explained to me that since being raped she did not feel safe anywhere and she was terrified the young men who had assaulted her would find her and exact their retribution for her having reported them to the police:

*I still don't feel safe really. I think that when they come out of jail soon – I just feel like they're going to come, they're going to come after me again. They [the police] tell me that never happens but I've seen the movie Human Trafficking. It is possible. It is.* (Dora)

Unfortunately, in making Dora responsible for self-protection, the CPS social worker, from Dora's perspective, was unable to hear her feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness. In a manner similar to Dora's experience of responsabilisation, Sanni spoke of being made responsible for managing her father's potentially abusive behaviour. In her case, rather than an absolute prohibition of contact, Sanni was given the choice as to whether she wanted to see her father. The expressed expectation, however, was that she not allow any inappropriate behaviour on her father's part:

*My worker was telling me if, okay, "if ever you see him again, what are you going to tell him?" And, I told her, no, I'm not going to talk about it because it would be just way too awkward. For me and for him. But then she said, "well, okay you have to let him know that it's never going to happen again." And then she gave me ways to sneak it in to let him know it's never going to happen.* (Sanni)

Paralleling Krane's (2003) observation that preserving a child's safety in situations of child sexual abuse was largely reliant on the availability and ability of non-offending mothers to carry out the work of a protection plan, the success of protective measures relating to prohibiting or managing contact between sexually abused teenage girls and identified perpetrators relied largely on the compliance and capacities of the girls themselves.

### **7.3.2 Recommendations for psychological follow-up**

CPS professionals made frequent mention of the trauma associated with sexual abuse as well as their hope that sexually abused teenage girls might eventually heal from the abuse and be able to go on to form healthy relationships with themselves and others. Therapy was often cited as important to girls' healing process and important to helping them manage the secondary risks associated with sexual abuse. Equally often, however, CPS professionals noted challenges to engaging sexually abused teenage girls in therapy. Alongside common complaints over a lack of resources, the CPS professionals spoke of their powerlessness to force these girls to seek and follow through with treatment:

*When they're sixteen, they don't see the need for help, and it's their choice. A six year old, you drive her to therapy, and she goes. If you have a teenage girl who's going to fight you on getting help, then what are you going to do? What kind of services are you going to give them? You're going to force them to sit in therapy? How's that going to – they aren't going to show up. Like it needs to be something that you're ready to do...which is unfortunate because then they spend these years putting themselves at risk, but... (Evelyn, EO social worker)*

*With the teens, you could kind of only recommend treatment. I am not the hugest pusher for forcing treatment. To me, therapy's only going to work if you want to be there. So, I'm a big fan of explaining and encouraging, and letting them know that it's always going to be there if they're not ready for it now. Because I – I hope. It's like letting go a little bit, and hoping that on their own at that point in their life – but I think a lot of kids don't deal with the sexual abuse until they're adults. If they ever do, and I don't know that they necessarily have the capacity, at this point, to deal with the trauma and to deal with getting over the trauma. (Evelyn, EO social worker)*

*Some of the cases, the girls are saying, "Listen, you know what? I've done this, I've talked about it. Now just go away because I want to go back to my normal life. I don't want any help. I don't want to be referred for treatment". You know? But in other cases, they're asking for help so they can talk to someone about this and it's really hard to refer them. So, it depends on the age. You know, I think with the older kids we will then say,*

*“Should you ever change your mind, here’s who you can call, here’s some numbers, um, I understand”. At the end of the day, you can’t force them ... I don’t know very many teenagers, “Like, yeah, I’m ready for therapy”, you know? (Meghan, EO manager)*

*A lot of those teenagers come into care and there are other issues, and on the one hand, there are other issues that we need to address, but the other side of it is that some of them just don’t want to deal with it. We have therapy available for them, right? We have psychologists. It’s free. It’s here. It’s therapeutic. We get – and we have the – the clinic at the Children’s but they have to be willing. (Manon, PQJ manager)*

*I find that we need to help them in the sense to either get therapy if they want to but I know that it’s really hard for them and maybe they’ll go see a therapist a couple of times and then drop out, but then later on they’ll go back and they’ll ... especially our girls. (Corrine, PQJ child care worker)*

*I can help those kids, but I cannot force them to do something that they do not want to do, and that is why I will never force them, because I am not in their shoes. (Elise, EO social worker)*

*She told me kind of quickly and I said, “Well Heather that’s an awful lot of things, maybe we should ...” She said “listen, I’ve had it with talking about this shit. I don’t want to talk about it and I don’t want to deal about it. Is that alright?” So, I told her, “listen, it’s fine. If you ever do, let me know.” So we never talked about it. (Andrew, AM social worker)*

Thematic throughout CPS professionals’ discussions of recommending therapy for teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse was a respect for their choice to participate or not: *it’s their choice; they have to be willing; you can’t force them*. In this instance, a recognition of girls’ autonomy earned through their age superseded CPS professionals’ recommendations. But why? And with what effect? Evelyn and Elise provided some insight in this regard:

*If you have a teenage girl who’s going to fight you on getting help, then what are you going to do? What kind of services are you going to give them? You’re going to force them to sit in therapy? How’s that going to – they aren’t going to show up. Like it needs to be something that you’re ready to do ...which is unfortunately because then they spend these years putting themselves at risk, but ... (Evelyn, EO social worker)*

Here Evelyn recognized girls’ refusal to participate in therapy as a risky endeavour but also accepted that she was powerless to force any girl to participate in *getting help*. She viewed girls’ refusal to receive help as evidence of putting themselves at risk. Without the healing effects of therapy, teenage girls were viewed as likely to persist in their engagement in risky behaviours associated with the aftermath of sexual abuse. As will be seen in the next section, managing such risky behaviours is a principle focus of CPS interventions. Elise voiced a similar perspective:

*Amelia [sexually abused teenage girl] was accepted to IVAC<sup>40</sup> and we were searching for a psychologist for her, and she was telling us that she was ok, so we waited. We were trusting what she was telling us until something happened. Not too major. But this is when we decided to... look for something else because she needs it. (Elise, EO social worker)*

The *something* that happened was that Amelia became violent at school with her teachers and classmates, had been caught getting drunk with friends, disrespected her curfew, and had put herself in a position where there was potential to be in contact with her abuser. There was no need for her CPS social worker to use her authority to urge her to participate in therapy, provided that Amelia presented as protected from revictimization and displayed no risk-taking or acting out behaviours. However, concerns for Amelia's risk had escalated due to her acting out and risky behaviour thus indicating the need to privilege her safety over respecting her autonomous choice. As put by Evelyn (EO social worker) and repeating the CPS credo of privileging child safety, *sometimes we give them the credit of being adults, and sometimes we don't. We do it when it's convenient ... and if they're not in danger.*

### **7.3.3 Scrutinizing, regulating and controlling risky behaviour**

Evelyn (EO social worker) noted simply to me that *safety isn't only about the sexual abuse*. Assuring the safety of sexually abused teenage girls was consistently linked to scrutinizing, regulating and controlling girls' risky choices and behaviours. A common thread weaving throughout the interviews with the CPS professionals was a view of sexually abused teenage girls being complicit in their own risk through their participation in risky, irresponsible and acting-out behaviours. Correspondingly, girls were regularly expected to take individual control of their behaviours so as to assure their safety and avoid more intensive CPS interventions. The sexually abused teenage girls interviewed in my study were well aware of their assumed

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<sup>40</sup> IVAC stands for *Indemnisation des victimes d'actes criminels* (<http://www.ivac.qc.ca/a-propos/Pages/plan-action-indemnisation-victimes.aspx>). IVAC is a provincially administered organization which carries the mandate of providing benefits to individuals who have been victims of criminal acts or who have acted to rescue a victim(s) of a criminal act. CPS social workers often turn to IVAC to obtain funding for counseling services for children who have been victimized by a criminal act, including sexual abuse. While funding can be provided through IVAC, it remains the responsibility of the CPS social worker, or the child and his/her family, to identify and secure the services of an accredited counselor.

accountability for their risky behaviours and equally well aware that being identified by CPS as risky and irresponsible would lead to increasingly intrusive and controlling interventions.

As explained by Manon (PQJ manager), a shift in concern from the sexual abuse to the risky behaviours of sexually abused teenage girls brings about a corresponding shift in CPS interventions:

*Girls are initially signalled, right... Youth Protection initially comes into their lives because of sexual abuse. Risk. And often by the time they come to need to be placed in residential care a lot of other issues have developed, such as acting out, running away, drug use, alcohol use, gang involvement. So – so – and I'm not going to generalise it because I don't think I've had enough specific dealings with sexual abuse to generalise, but for me, a lot of times, the interventions then around those youth – a lot of times, they become more focused on these new problems that have developed. (Manon, PQJ manager)*

The interviews revealed that focusing on *these new problems* translates into efforts to ensure sexually abused teenage girls' safety through raising awareness (*Manuel de référence*, 2007: 540) and educating them to be able to identify and avoid risky situations and closely monitoring their choices and behaviours. In this way, sexually abused teenage girls are cast as rational actors, free to make appropriate safe choices once they have the right information. For example, Corrine (PQJ child care worker) insisted that the experience of sexual abuse influences teenage girls' involvement in abusive or unhealthy romantic relationships. She remarked that teaching girls to respect themselves, to find and assert their voices, and to distinguish between good and bad relationship choices is essential to ensuring their immediate as well as longer-term safety:

*I show them how to respect themselves, how to say "NO." That's very important because part of being sexually abused is that you have to learn to say "NO" especially to people you love. And being able to not accept inappropriateness. Being able to respect yourself no matter what other people tell you or do to you or ... Choosing somebody that will make them feel happy and not sad, that they can count on and are not drug dealers or somebody with a gun. Somebody that will make them feel good about themselves. I remember M—[sexually abused teenage girl] talking about this guy who was telling her she was fat and she was this and she was that. And I'm like, "okay, so how does that make you feel?" So she says, "well, not good. Am I fat? Am I ...?" So I said, "why are you questioning what he thinks? How do you feel? Do you feel pretty? Do you feel fat?" So, "how does he make you feel when he says that?" So, when they say that, I say "why do you want to be with a person who makes you feel bad about who you are?" And I think that's a dangerous experience, being a woman and choosing bad relationships. (Corrine, PQJ child care worker)*

Flowing from expectations of sexually abused teenage girls to protect themselves by avoiding contact with the perpetrator of sexual abuse, Meghan (EO manager) spoke of educating girls about how to identify and respond to perpetrators' efforts to manipulate them into reinitiating contact. With reference to her supervision of a CPS social worker on her team, Meghan identified teaching sexually abused teenage girls to take responsibility for their own safety as an important element of CPS intervention:

*The father owned two restaurants, and it was going to be an issue because the girl worked in one of the two, and it was clear, we had a Court order, he wasn't to be going there to see her when she was there, um, but he started calling, and her kind of reaction to [her CPS social worker] was, "Well, what's the big deal? It's just the phone", you know, so I think the worker really – what we had talked about was her having a conversation with the girl about, you know – not risk factors, but – but grooming, what is he's saying... How could he be influencing, because in her mind, it was, you know, "It's okay. I could manage it" – "he's not" – "he's not", you know.... So the worker would sort of educate her.*

Here again, regarded as equipped with the necessary information about the circumstances that could give rise to risk and the appropriate ways to manage such circumstances, sexually abused teenage girls, as rational actors, are assumed able to make the right decisions in order to assure their own safety.

Some CPS professionals spoke of success stories wherein certain sexually abused girls were able to integrate messages of safety into their day-to-day actions, choices and relationships. Andrew, for example, talked to me about a *classic case* of a sexually abused girl who had a history of *getting herself into abusive relationships*:

*It finally sunk in ... She'd come to see ... single's good. "It's okay to see guys. I need my girlfriends, but I get into these relationships ..." And she'd get into these relationships ... because one of the things she's come to – and that's through all of the hours and hours of work and the back and forth – when she gets into a relationship, she changes a lot and she doesn't like how she changes. She becomes more submissive. She becomes, she feels less powerful or like she can do things on her own. And, she starts to put herself second. And then the other thing that she does is she puts too much, she invests way too much too quickly into relationships. And, she's really playing for real and a lot of times these guys are just fucking around. It's like a passing, casual thing and "you don't really mean as much to me as I seem to ...." Because she gets this whole relationship and it's this idea that "I'm going to have my family." And so it's all mixed up with her whole life. (Andrew, AM social worker)*

With an understanding of romantic relationships as risky terrain for sexually abused teenage girls, Andrew mentioned the *hours and hours of work and the back and forth* he put into educating this girl about the dangers associated with losing herself in relationships with guys. Exhibiting pride as well as significant warmth toward this girl, Andrew was pleased to acknowledge a positive evolution in her relationship choices. While her choice to remain single was interpreted as a positive evolution – *single's good* – left out of Andrew's view of this girl was a more detailed exploration of how her choices had been and might still be *mixed up in her whole life*. She exhibited compliance with the CPS social worker's message, but with what consequence?

Compliance emerged as an important element contributing to CPS professionals' interpretations of sexually abused girls' successes and failures in self-protection and their corresponding decisions about how to preserve girls' safety. Just above, I noted that Molly was viewed as safe when compliant with the regulations established by her CPS social worker. Evident in her CPS file, however, was Molly's struggle with compliance:

*Molly goes through times of compliance, and then she does behaviours that put her at risk or make her vulnerable to risk. Molly AWOLed from the ... back-up unit ... and was prepared to have an adult male store owner drive her back to [her group home]. Molly, with a lot of counselling from staff and the worker, and in much conversation with her mother, began to see that these choices put her at serious risk.*

In Chapter 3, I introduced Lupton's (2013) conceptualisation of compliance as the acceptance and internalization of the objectives of organizational authorities. I also noted that in the context of CPS involvement with families of children identified as at risk of maltreatment, noncompliance tends to result in intensified interventions including the possibility of removing the child from his or her home environment. In Molly's case, despite demonstrating progress in terms of being able to recognise her choices as risky to her safety, her continued struggle to fully internalise and adapt her behaviour to her CPS social worker's lessons of self-protection meant that she would remain in protective custody rather than returning to her home environment.

Sexually abused teenage girls' failures to integrate information about risk and self-protection and their noncompliance with the protective measures put in place by their respective

CPS social workers were regularly cited as reasons for pursuing increasingly intrusive interventions, including placement outside of their home environments:

*As a social worker, my part is always to work with the family. Well, but again, it depends. With sexual abuse, that's not always evident. I can think of one girl where some of the things I mentioned – where the interventions, like I said, were focused on acting out, running away, drug use – a lot of times the interventions can seem punitive. When a youth, fourteen years old, runs away, places herself at risk, you know, does not return to her group home at night, well, we will back them up. (Manon, PQJ manager)*

*I say, I say to C— [sexually abused teenage girl], I say, “Listen, if you don't follow your mom's curfews and behaviours, you're going to the hellhole, again, of a group home.” (Alberto, AM social worker)*

As noted above, guidance offered in the *Manuel de reference* makes clear that in those situations in which families demonstrate an unwillingness and/or inability to take charge of the situation of risk to a child, the CPS professional involved ought to enact increasingly restrictive measures. With the aim of controlling risky or irresponsible behaviours, recommendations of removal and placement of the child in a CPS resource typify the peak of such restrictive measures. Both Manon and Alberto indicated that in those situations in which sexually abused teenage girls continued to make flawed or inappropriate choices thus placing themselves at risk, placement in the protective custody of a CPS residential resource is the obvious next step. The following excerpt from Nicole's CPS file further illustrates CPS decision-making when risk is understood to reside in the sexually abused teenage girl and the dangers she poses to herself:

*The risks that Nicole is exposing herself to now outweigh any inherent risks of placement. Furthermore the undersigned is of the opinion that placement provided the only hope for Nicole to be contained in a safe environment. (Excerpt from Nicole's CPS file).*

In this case, despite the CPS social worker's recognition that placement itself carries with it *inherent risks (recruitment by gangs and contact with adolescent prostitutes* (excerpt from Nicole's CPS file)), ensuring Nicole's safety from herself was the paramount concern.

CPS professionals have recourse to a network of diverse placement settings<sup>41</sup> when deciding that a child or youth be placed outside of their home environment. This network

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<sup>41</sup> Each CPS agency is responsible for developing and maintaining a network of diverse placement settings. These settings include family-type placement settings (i.e. foster homes), community based group homes, and residential rehabilitation units (<http://www.batshaw.qc.ca/en/who-we-are/what-we-do>). In addition, a CPS social worker can

includes placement settings providing varying degrees of observation, regulation, and control with the most extreme being “intensive supervision units” (YPA) or, as the participants in my study referred to them, *locked units*, *closed units*, or *back up*. Andrew, speaking specifically of his involvement with Nicole and his concerns for her safety, told me he *would have liked to put her in a closed unit for 6 months a long time ago, before she got herself into trouble*. The trouble Andrew referred to was Nicole’s abduction and consequent entrapment into prostitution while AWOL (absent without leave) from her residential unit. Andrew explained his position,

*AWOLs – which is a huge problem now going on in Youth Protection. AWOLing, it’s ridiculous and nothing happens. There’s a place for closed units, believe me. I used ... they can be abused, they were abused, but there’s a place for them.*

*It’s a fine line because it’s a real impingement of freedom. At the same time if you look at the risk that’s going on, and what’s getting created it’s like, I don’t know, maybe we need them [closed units].*

Andrew was well aware of the potential for abusing the use of closed units as well as the restriction of liberty experienced by individual girls placed in these units, but, committed to the paramountcy of child safety, he debated whether protecting sexually abused teenage girls from *the risk that’s going on* ought to take precedence. In a manner similar to Evelyn’s comment cited in the title page to this chapter – *If she’s not going to protect herself, then how are we going to protect her?*, Andrew’s remarks revealed his sentiments of frustration and powerlessness with respect to the futility of his interventions aimed at protecting Nicole from her individual failures to identify and manage risk. Expressing his inability to do anything to change her situation, Andrew wondered about resorting to ultimate control of a *closed unit*. He concluded that for Nicole, *a closed unit is at least somewhere where she can’t run and put herself in harm’s way*. Nicole’s situation wherein an intensive supervision unit was used – on more than one occasion – as a means of containing her risky behaviour is illustrative of the challenges facing CPS agencies and social workers as they make efforts to protect youth, including sexually abused teenage girls, from the risks they seemingly pose to themselves. The irony of locking up Nicole in order to

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recommend the placement of a child or youth in an “intensive supervision unit” should that child or youth “show serious risk that the child represents a danger to himself or others” (*Regulation respecting the conditions of placement in an intensive supervision unit*, Québec, 2007).

protect her was not lost on Andrew. Still rather than concentrating on the desperation that may have precipitated her repeated AWOLs, Nicole was consistently identified as the problem to be managed. Evident in naming Nicole as the problem was a commonly witnessed congruence between CPS depictions of risk and assignments of blame or responsibility.

Andrew was not alone in his struggle between being sensitive to the effects of increasingly regulatory and controlling interventions for sexually abused teenage girls and his mandated responsibility to ensure their safety:

*They see this as a prison because we put a lot of structure on them. (Corrine, PQJ child care worker)*

*She's going to be 18 soon. The system for her represents not being able to go out, not being able to do what she wants to do. It doesn't feel like protection to her. (Corrine, PQJ child care worker)*

*They are protected according to the law when we place them but it doesn't ... it's just not a perfect solution. They're not happy if they're placed, and they're – they become estranged from their family, and ... it's blame, punishment. (Michael, AM manager)*

*So for her, she's caught in the middle of us trying to protect her ... trying to protect ... what we call protect her. Her parents, who have totally now rejected her, made her life miserable, and we haven't helped her, so she escalates in the foster home. Can't send her back home because nobody's even admitting to the sexual abuse, so how are they going to protect her, so we put her in a group home where she's still escalating (Michael, AM manager)*

Corrine, exhibiting sensitivity to sexually abused teenage girls' perspectives and experiences of protective measures, grappled with the limits of her role:

*I find that sometimes with these kids, we deal with the behaviours that are very, very obvious – that you can see – but there's something other than that. We deal with the acting out but we don't deal with what's inside, the hurt, the anger, the real pain that is there. And I think that's important to go beyond just the behaviour." ML 405-409*

*In the group homes it's really, really hard to go beyond the behaviour because ... hmmm ... I remember working at one group home and being told, "you talk too much to the kids. Why do you talk so much to the kids? It's behavioural." It's like, for them, it was as if I gave them too much attention in the room ... what do you call it? The room they're sent to when they're being punished – the quiet room ... Like if you go into the quiet room and you give them too much attention, maybe they'll keep doing things to get back in the quiet room so that they can keep getting your attention.*

The CPS professionals were not at all oblivious to tendency for CPS's narrow concentration on risk to limit the possibility of engaging sexually abused teenage girls in nuanced interventions aimed at better understanding and responding to these girls' needs, motivations and circumstances. Nevertheless, they were equally conscious of the primacy of their mandate to protect children from risk. Dora's account of her involvement revealed a similar understanding. While Dora was well aware of and even receptive to the protective mandate guiding CPS scrutiny, regulation and control of her choices and behaviours, she was critical of CPS professionals' lack of understanding of the consequences of such interventions for her.

Dora has a complicated history of sexual abuse, gang rape, forced prostitution, and rape. Between the ages of 6-9, Dora was sexually abused by her paternal grandfather. She was gang raped at the age of 14 and then forced into prostitution until she was 15 years old at which time the police became involved. And, her 29 year old boyfriend raped her just before her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. CPS was not involved in any of these incidents of sexual abuse or aggression; however, CPS authorities did become involved when Dora was 16 years old due to concerns surrounding her risky and acting-out behaviours.

*They [CPS] got involved months after everything with the police. I got into drugs and, well, things were going on and my mom didn't like my behaviour. My behaviour was bad. Not cleaning, disrespecting, never coming home or staying home. Room was always a mess. Just ... I was depressed. I wasn't happy.*

*That's when the social workers all came in. Because they [family] didn't know how to handle me anymore.*

Dora made no mention of her CPS social worker being concerned about her experiences of sexual abuse; however, she was intensely aware that her behaviours precipitated CPS involvement and drove the ensuing protective interventions:

*Her job was to take me away because I was disrespecting my family and because I was taking, I was intoxicating myself. To put it in their terms ... harming and intoxicating myself and I was putting my life in danger by hanging out with a 29 year old. That's how they put it when they could have just said that this was her boyfriend and she does drugs instead of just using that whole language.*

Dora was also conscious that scrutinizing, regulating and controlling her risky behaviours – *disrespecting, harming and intoxicating myself, putting myself in danger by hanging out with a 29 year old* – was the focus of CPS's ongoing protective interventions:

*They were trying to control my life which it was for the good but I didn't really notice it at the time. ... yeah, well, because I was doing drugs and they wanted me to stop doing drugs. I wasn't doing housework, they wanted me to do housework. They wanted me to stop my friends, I didn't want to stop seeing my friends. They set out rules. They kept me from going to school, they kept me from, they locked me up.*

At the outset of her involvement with Dora, the CPS social worker recommended that Dora remain in the care of her family while receiving regular support from a CPS educator. Her CPS educator together with her CPS social worker determined the *rules* she was to follow – *housework, stop seeing my friends and stop going to school*. Despite claimed the rules to be for the good, Dora experienced the CPS intervention as curtailing her freedom – *they were trying to control my life; they kept me locked up*. But, Dora exhibited signs of noncompliance with the protection plan:

*I don't know what happened one day ... I think I threw something one day and then my mom called the cops. And then the whole thing with the boyfriend and the drugs came back up. And the police took me and brought me to a cell, well not a cell but a detention place for like 7 hours. And then they transferred me to a type of group home, lock-up – I don't know what it was – for a day. And then I had to go to court the next day. And then when I went to court the next day, they said instead of going to that place again, if I would go to a monastery for a month. So I went to the monastery.*

Having been deemed by her CPS social worker as failing in her capacity to modify her risky choices and actions and with her parents' expressed concern that Dora's behaviours were beyond their ability to manage, the nature and degree of CPS interventions intensified. Dora was removed from her home and eventually placed in a monastery, a setting chosen by her parents and approved of by her CPS social worker as well as the judge presiding over the CPS protection hearing. Dora questioned the benefit of such intensified protective measures:

*I'm not home. I'm not watching TV, there's no TV, there's internet. There was nothing that I was used to there. And I wouldn't see my friends. I wouldn't wake up when I want, eat when I want, do what I want. All the things that I wanted were gone and I had to follow different rules.*

*They took away my freedom to protect me. Their way of protection. Which I understand they didn't understand. They thought that keeping me in and taking away my freedom would be the best thing, but it was one of the worst things. I'm telling you it's the worst thing to do when a girl got sexually abused! Do not take away her freedom! You take away her freedom, she's going to start living in that cage with all the problems that have happened. It's like they cage you up and in that cage everything, like rape or all that just comes out and you're living in that cage. You're breathing in that aroma of problems, you know? When you're more free, things tend to like get out more. I don't know if you understand? It's like a wind type of thing. Keeping somebody in causes more psychological problems than ever.*

According to Dora's account, while her immediate safety from her risky choices and actions might have been assured through strict rules of behaviour and then placement in the secure environment of the monastery, these protective interventions contributed to the exacerbation of her internal distress. Dora was treated narrowly as a failed rational actor requiring intensive scrutiny, regulation and control to ensure her safety from the risks she posed to herself. In a manner similar to that seen in Nicole's situation described above, with little opportunity to develop nuanced understandings of her experiences of sexual abuse and the varied emotional, relational and behavioural consequences, CPS identified Dora as the risk to be resolved. Both Nicole and Dora's experiences of CPS involvement reveal the influence of neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies on day-to-day CPS practice with sexually abused teenage girls. With a strict focus on risk and a corresponding expectation of individual responsibility for managing risk, there is limited space for CPS professionals to engage in interventions aimed at understanding and supporting sexually abused teenage girls in coping with the trauma associated with their histories of victimization. Averting risk remains the principle focus of intervention.

#### **7.3.4. Negotiating risk as rational, irrational or social actors**

To a large extent, the interviews revealed expectations of sexually abused teenage girls to perform as rational actors in the face of risk. Those sexually abused teenage girls identified by CPS as unwilling or unable to take charge of their own protection are commonly regarded as responsible for both the cause and resolution of their circumstances of risk. As a result, they are

regularly treated as irrational actors and subjected to ever more intensive CPS practices aimed at scrutinizing, regulating and controlling them as well as their choices and behaviours.

In Chapter 3, I introduced the notion of the social actor as contrasting with that of the rational actor. This notion of the social actor provides a complex portrait of how individuals understand, regulate and control circumstances of risk as well as how they receive risk-regulating interventions. A social actor and his/her negotiations of risk are understood as being deeply entangled in and informed by his/her history and social context (Kemshall, 2010). Distinct from official policies or practices that rely on strict definitions of risk and often prescribed ways of responding to risk, a consideration of individuals as social actors suggests that understandings and negotiations of risk are complex, diverse and situated in time and location.

In concluding this chapter, I suggest that aspirations for sexually abused teenage girls' autonomy in the context of CPS involvement were commonly constrained by requirements of girls' rational choice and action. Indeed participants spoke of efforts to engage in collaborative decision-making with respect to the identification and management of risk as being regularly confounded by determinations of individual sexually abused teenage girls as failed rational actors. At the same time, some participants spoke of taking risks in their management of risk. Both the CPS professionals and the sexually abused teenage girls interviewed described instances of negotiating risk in ways that stretched the limits of what might be deemed safe or acceptable within the context of CPS. These accounts provided insights into participants' respective performances and experiences as social rather than rational actors.

### ***Collaborative decision-making or continued scrutiny, regulation and control?***

Article 2.3 (b) of the *YPA* stipulates that any intervention “must, if the circumstances are appropriate, favour the means that allow the child and the child’s parents to take an active part in making decisions and choosing measures that concern them.” This stipulation receives further enhancement once the child in question reaches the age of 14 years because it is at that age that citizens are awarded certain rights of consent – or refusal to consent (*Civil Code of Québec*, 1991). As I observed in participant accounts, such legislated encouragements to involve youth

aged 14 years and over in CPS decision-making and planning combine with aspirations for teenage girls' autonomy to influence CPS professionals' efforts to work collaboratively with teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse.

Speaking in a general sense about her practice with youth, Manon (PQJ manager) told me *you have to remember that they have something to say and can influence things in their lives*. She added that working collaboratively with youth can be both rewarding and challenging:

*I love trying to come up with a way to influence them, to get them to create their own solutions with my help. It's the challenge I like. And I like that they're vocal, and sometimes they're vocal in the most inappropriate ways, but they're saying something to you, and I can work with that.*

Despite her positive outlook, Manon acknowledged that encouraging youth to speak up and be influential, is complicated by their implication in a context wherein scrutiny, regulation and control regularly take precedence over shared decision-making:

*Being in the Youth Protection network, they've had a lot of people make a lot of decisions for themselves. They haven't had a lot of room to make their own decisions. The kids – teenagers I work with in group homes ... the way programs are set up, there's not much room for teenagers to make their own decisions and to have a voice.*

Meghan (EO manager) explained her perspective on collaborative practices with sexually abused teenage girls: *I think we are trying to involve them in cases where we have the leeway of being able to do that a little bit more, to include the kids in their safety planning as much as possible*. Discussions about decision-making, however, revealed that efforts to work collaboratively were commonly mediated by CPS professionals' interpretations of right and wrong, of safe and risky. Having the *leeway* to include sexually abused teenage girls in the decision-making and operationalization of protective plans once again tended to hinge on external perceptions of girls' capacities to identify risk and adopt strategies of risk resolution:

*I cannot blame them for making that choice, but I think that it was not the right one.* (Elise, EO social worker)

*I tell them you have the right to disagree with me. I think for right now. And when you get to court you have the right to say what you want to say, but right now I do not think you are ready to make the right decision about you, and sometimes they want to go back home, and this is not safe.* (Elise, EO social worker)

*I think that we should give them choices. Definitely. Because they'll make their own decisions without telling us which might not be the good ones. If we don't give them choices, they're going to choose, maybe running away, maybe acting out, maybe ... I think that if we can give a kid choices it makes them feel empowered and that they have a say. So if you know you have no choice and this needs to happen, well .... You can't. You can't. At one point you need to be able to give them choices. And you can explain their choices but they need to learn how to make choices. Not only that, because if we don't give them choices they'll find their own choices that might not be possible, they might be negative and we don't want to go there. (Corrine, PQJ child care worker)*

Earlier I noted that CPS professionals receive guidance from the *Manuel de référence* to consider empowerment as *the most effective and enduring approach* through which to encourage children and families to be directly involved in managing risk. However, Corrine's comments suggest that aspirations for empowerment and autonomous choice can be constrained by expectations of rational action and continued concerns for the possibility of flawed decision-making. Corrine's deliberations on giving choices to youth in general reveal how *choice* can be transformed into an opportunity both to scrutinize a youth's capacities to choose correctly and to educate him/her through referencing *negative* choices. This process worries me in terms of the potential for sexually abused teenage girls' voices (their *say*) to be treated as evidence of girls' inability to conform to the risk averse expectations of CPS interventions and, as a result, silenced.

Evelyn (EO social worker) told me that involving sexually abused teenage girls in decision-making is *case specific* and *not so straightforward*. She elaborated that confounding efforts to involve these girls are their misdirected understandings of risk:

*Oftentimes, their opinion about what's keeping them safe and what isn't is very different than what the Law defines as risk. I think they deserve to be asked. And I think they are owed an explanation if the agency is making a decision that's not ... but it's complicated because they deserve to be included in the decision-making, but their decision-making ideas, or what they want, is often very different from our perspective. But it goes back to our job is to keep them safe. I mean, we keep them – we do our best to keep them safe from the sexual abuse, but we expose them to all other kinds of crap when we're doing that. And how do you find balance? We often don't. We don't. We harp – we focus on one – like why do we protect them from sexual abuse, and not from the rest of it because that's what our mandate is.*

With respect to *all the other kinds of crap* associated with keeping sexually abused teenage girls safe, Evelyn made specific reference to separating girls from their families and placing them in a CPS resource: *their decisions around going home or where they live, they'll be included in the*

*process, but it's often above their head. The final decision is often not what they want.* Evelyn's acknowledgement that the *final decision is often above their head* substantiates my suspicion that sexually abused teenage girls are excluded from decision-making when their responses to risk diverge from those sanctioned by CPS. Within the context of CPS, safety trumps collaboration. Girls' demonstrated internalization of official understandings of risk as well as their capacity to negotiate risk the right way thus become central to CPS professionals' determinations of the pertinence of girls' contributions to decision-making and protection planning on their own behalf. Left out of collaborative efforts circumscribed by official understandings of risk and risk management are opportunities to integrate girls' complex experiences and nuanced understandings of risk into decision-making and planning for their safety. This observation is intended neither to minimize the sensitivity I heard in Evelyn or other CPS professionals' comments nor to deny that CPS decision-making and planning can be appropriate to assuring girls' safety. My concern is that a reliance on strict understandings of *what the Law defines as risk* and the appropriate ways to assure safety, may have the consequence of confining sexually abused teenage girls within one of two opposing identities – successful and safe rational actor or failing and at-risk or risky irrational actor. In a practice context driven by concerns for risk, encouraging autonomy through collaboration is easy to do with those girls performing the first identity. Encouraging autonomy through collaboration is much harder to achieve and, indeed, likely to be discouraged with those girls displaying the latter irrational identity.

My review of Nicole's file illustrates this process of including or excluding sexually abused teenage girls from CPS decision-making and planning. Efforts had been made to include Nicole's perspectives and wishes in the process of choosing measures suited to her situation of risk. Clearly noted in the file was Nicole's desire *to return home to her mother*; her *feeling uncomfortable in group homes*; and, her wish of *not wanting to remain in placement*. She had purportedly identified her mother's home as *the safest place for her*. Giving weight to Nicole's perspectives and wishes, however, was overshadowed by her identification as an irrational actor. Corresponding with being viewed as posing a risk to herself, Nicole was portrayed as

untrustworthy and as lacking the capacities to recognise appropriate means through which to manage risk:

*Nicole has intellectual abilities in the low average range. Nicole is faced with interconnected issues of security and belonging, presenting post-traumatic stress symptoms. These symptoms are interfering with Nicole's ability to use her common sense and social judgment in interpreting and evaluating life situations, consequently affecting her consideration of appropriate ways of action. She feels lonely and isolated from family and peers. Her self-descriptions of being 'honest, loving, caring' are manifestations of Nicole's strong desire to experience success and improve her life.*

*Nicole describes having very little control in her own life and believes she is unable to make decisions pertaining to her person. She is unable to link how her own behaviours and attitudes effect her present situation and DYP involvement.*

It is certainly conceivable that Nicole's desire to return to her mother's home was incongruent with assuring her safety. But, there is also truth to Nicole's reported belief that, in the context of CPS involvement, she had *little control in her life*. In her own words, Nicole spoke of her lack of *say* regarding her life:

*I get pissed off but I sit there, "yeah, yeah, whatever. Go f— yourself. Do whatever you want!" Because if they're going to make my decisions then it's basically I have no say. You're running my life. Okay, whatever, do whatever the fuck you please, but don't expect me to follow it.*

Assuming she had no voice in decision-making and planning on her own behalf, Nicole saw her only recourse as being to disengage from participating in CPS planning. She found her own power through resisting CPS recommendation.

Comparable with Nicole's affirmation of having *no say*, a number of sexually abused teenage girls interviewed were conscious that their voices and choices were limited in the context of CPS involvement. Talking in a general manner about her involvement with CPS, Dora said simply, *I didn't have a say in anything*. She elaborated: *I was over 14, but whatever. I guess people don't go by the law. I don't know. I didn't get a say in anything*. Well aware that her age granted her certain rights in terms of participating in decisions concerning her protection, Dora recognised that as long as the CPS social worker was *always worried* about her there was little space for collaboration. In a similar manner, Sanni talked about being encouraged – sometimes –

to express what she wanted in terms of protective measures. But, she doubted whether her wishes would be taken into consideration:

*She's still the authority, right. I do understand that what I said didn't ... It didn't seem unreasonable what they were saying, Youth Protection, anyway. But, I mean, in my head, it was like stop acting. Come on, we know what's going to happen.*

*That's one part, about Ai-Lin and Corrine, that they think that they're always right and na, na, na. They always think that they're right. That's how I saw it. And that their advice is proper and like it's the good way, it's the way to go. And sometimes they forget that it's your choice. They forget to tell you "it's your choice. I'm just giving you advice here. I'm not ordering you what to do." In my head it was, well maybe it was because I was a lost case too, I didn't know what to do and I was just listening to what people were telling me. I was just doing it their way too.*

*One time I was thinking, why do they keep telling me that this is the right way to go? I remember complaining to my friends. I remember saying ... I don't remember, maybe it was about moving out. 'Cause I didn't want to go to an apartment. I didn't know what I wanted. I wanted to stay with my foster mother. I wanted my own apartment. I guess I didn't want to be helped. I didn't want someone to help me. I wanted to like, "I don't need help!" Maybe that's why. I remember complaining. I guess. No, but I like where I am. I'm happy I'm there. But I remember ... "I don't want to live there! I want to live ... Na, na, na." But I guess they were right? I don't know.*

While Sanni did not actually debate the suitability of the CPS professionals' interpretations of her circumstances of risk or choice of protective measures her protection, she regretted that her perspective – her voice – was left out of decision-making and was frustrated by the lack of transparency: *Okay, they did the right thing. They did the right ... I'm a little upset that they did it in a sneakish way, but they did the right thing.* Being implicated in and informed about CPS decisions and planning was important to both Dora and Sanni. Both girls' accounts led me to wonder about missed opportunities to treat sexually abused teenage girls as autonomous decision-makers with knowledge of and expertise with respect to their respective situations.

Kelly's situation differed from the other sexually abused teenage girls interviewed in that her CPS file was closed following an evaluation for sexual abuse. At 17 years old, Kelly disclosed having been sexually abused by her step-father from the age of 8 years to the day before her disclosure. Immediately upon learning of the sexual abuse, Kelly's mother responded

by taking *all the needed procedures to protect all her children*<sup>42</sup> (excerpt from CPS file). A review of the CPS file revealed a concentration on Kelly's mother's protective capacities. Apart from identifying her disclosure as having triggered the removal of her step-father from the family's home, no further mention was made with respect to Kelly's contributions or risks to her own protection. Recounting her experiences of the CPS evaluation, Kelly noted the CPS social worker's tendency to privilege her mother's perspectives and opinions:

*She was talking to my mom and not to me. I'd have a conversation with her and then she'd just turn to my mom. It's always that way. I don't know why. Normally I'd say what I think or whatever and then she'd kind of discuss a bit and then she'd turn to my mom and be like, "what do you think?" Well, normally my mom would ask me first so like even though she was asking her, she'd still turn to me and ask me what I think and if I like it or not and it's up to me, it's not really up to anyone else.*

*Just direct the questions to me and if I need help with them, let me ask my mom. Like if I don't understand or if it's too big of a decision for me then go to my mom. Like if I were younger then I guess my mom, go to my mom and decide this stuff but because I'm older and I understand it then include me. Because she does that for my younger brother. She'll talk to my mom about it and ask him a few questions and then turn to my mom. But that's normal because he's eight and he doesn't really understand.*

Despite trusting her own capacities to participate in decision-making regarding her risk and safety, Kelly understood her participation to be hindered by her CPS social worker's identification of her as vulnerable in the aftermath of the sexual abuse and as a child rather than an almost-adult:

*I'm guessing they're thinking that it's so much to handle so why give her more pressure ... I don't know. That's what I think. They're trying to almost limit the amount of pressure that's on me, so they're taking some off so that I don't have to make rash or huge decisions. But ... I mean ... sometimes it helps; sometimes it's like ... what's the word? ... Kind of babying. So, I don't have ... they kind of ... I get less experience with the communication with like with the big decisions. So, when it comes time for me to actually make a huge decision, I'm going to have issues with it. I'm going to be like, "where's my mom?"*

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<sup>42</sup> Kelly has a younger brother who was 8 years old at the time of Kelly's disclosure. While Kelly was deemed not to be at risk by CPS, her younger brother, who is the biological son of Kelly's step-father, was found to be in need of protection. While he denied having been sexually abused by his father, CPS claimed that he was at *serious risk of sexual abuse* (article 38(d.2), YPA) given his father's history of sexually abusing Kelly; that he was currently close to the age Kelly was at the time the sexual abuse began; and, that his father still had access to him through a family court order confirming his father's visitation rights.

A couple of months away from her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, Kelly knew she was on the cusp of adulthood and understood the upcoming expectations of autonomy associated with that stage of life. Contradicting policies of collaboration, Kelly was not fully integrated into CPS decision-making despite providing no indication of irrational understandings or choices relative to her situations of risk. Kelly's situation being different from the other teenage girls interviewed did not lessen CPS concerns relating to vulnerability or potential irrationality. The presence of a responsible mother protector (Krane, 2003); however, meant that there was no need for the CPS social worker to take a risk by involving Kelly in her own protection. She was already safe.

### ***Negotiating risk through taking risks***

Taking risks is not the usual domain of CPS professionals nor is it a domain typically open to teenage girls involved with CPS in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Evident throughout the interviews was a narrative of prudence characteristic of the neoliberal and risk thinking ideologies informing current CPS. Accountable to expectations of protection – or self-protection – participants described very few instances of engaging in alternative negotiations of risk within the context of CPS involvement. In fact, Andrew (AM social worker) was the only CPS professional who openly discussed intervening in a manner that corresponded more closely with treating sexually abused teenage girls as social rather than rational actors. Doing so was a conscious, albeit fraught, choice for Andrew.

Andrew expressed his disillusionment with current CPS practice and spoke at length about feeling censored in his interventions. Accountable not only to the mandate to protect but also to the completion of administrative tasks associated with documenting the steps taken to ensure the safety of each of the children on his caseload, Andrew spoke of feeling both constrained and monitored in his daily interventions:

*What's happened is there's more and more of an emphasis on the job for completing administrative tasks. So, ... there's a myriad of assessments that get done. There's constant assessments – and you're referring for assessments or you're assessing the situation. It's like everybody wants to do assessments and no one wants to do treatment. 'Cause treatment is messy is sort of the way I see it. So, you can be a very good worker if all your administrative work is up to date and you do lousy work with your clients.*

*You hear “is your [assessment] done?” Or “are your progress notes up to date?” Everyone’s worried about it ‘cause we’re getting audited on this shit all the time. Now they’re actually auditing this shit man! Our managers will audit your progress notes! They, this ... it’s all computer man. All your stuff, all your intervention plans that are overdue, all your intervention plans are tracked .... Oh, so if it’s all done, he’s doing good work, you know. And, not ... you never, you very rarely hear the phrase “in the best interests of the child” anymore.*

*A lot of the teenagers I’ve had have been mashed up in the system, so to speak. They’ve just been kind of processed. ‘Cause there is this element right now ... like I was showing you the assessment grids. Like I’ve been telling everybody, we’re working with people. This is not an assembly line. We’re not making like cars. We’re not making things. This is a person and you can’t just slot them in and do all these things in all of these time frames. You have to be able to adjust.*

Having worked in the field of CPS for over 25 years, Andrew bemoaned a seeming ever-diminishing emphasis on doing the *messy* work of direct intervention with children and families. Acutely aware of CPS professionals’ accountability to the legislative and procedural expectations associated with assessing, documenting, and managing risk, Andrew perceived such accountability as stymying opportunities to treat teenagers as *people* and to *adjust* day-to-day practice to respond to the variability, complexity and unpredictability of their lives – *we’re just total f—ing control freaks with kids*.

With respect to his practice with sexually abused teenage girls, Andrew portrayed his job as *tricky*. Caught between the mandate of protection and all that protection entails within the context of CPS and his own commitment to doing *messy* work, Andrew regularly struggled with how much risk to take. Elaborating on this struggle, Andrew talked about his interventions and decision-making with Nicole. Earlier, I cited Andrew’s deliberations over recommending placing Nicole in a *locked unit* as a means of ensuring her safety. How to protect Nicole at the same time as respecting the reality of her life was a significant preoccupation for Andrew:

*Now if she runs, she also goes home. She also now, just recently she’s been telling me that she feels very safe with [her mother’s boyfriend]. She’s run there, she’s been living there – not the last time because that was when she was abducted – but the previous maybe three, four AWOLs .... But, she goes home and she spends time there. And, I’ve really talked with her extensively about that and knowing she trusts him. I said “yeah but, Nicole, this happened.” I’m struggling with it a bit because it’s not often where there’ll kind of be three instances of starting off with fondling – it never went beyond that but*

*there was ... what's the word? ... not an escalation, but each one was a little more serious.*

*Oh I've got mixed feelings. Basically, she's going to stay in [the locked unit] for a little bit. I've got to go to court and get some stuff changed in her court order. I basically feel that the kid's going ... that's where she's going when she turns 18. That is exactly ... I know that's where she's going .... Nicole has nothing else in the world except for her mother and I know she goes there. So, I'm kind of along the lines of I don't want to put my head in the sand and they're not that well equipped ... I would much rather try to work with them now as opposed to try to work on independent living which I know is going to crash and burn with this kid and then she's just going to run there and then G-d knows what's going to happen. So, I would kind of want to figure how to do it and put in some safety plans so that she's not alone with her mother's boyfriend ... who abused her, or didn't. I don't know. She's 17. She's 17 and she's telling me clearly that she trusts him and she feels safe there.*

Having *mixed feelings*, Andrew struggled between adhering closely to practices of scrutiny, regulation and control informed by a strict understanding of risk or taking a risk with both Nicole and her family by supporting her desire to return home to her mother. He was well aware that he could not absolutely assure Nicole's safety in her mother's home. And, Andrew did not fully trust Nicole's abilities to identify or manage her circumstances of risk. He was unsure if she could protect herself outside of the supposedly secure walls of a CPS resource. At the same time, he doubted that Nicole was benefitting from the CPS imposed restrictions on her freedom. Repeating *she's 17, she's 17*, Andrew revealed a sense of pressure relating to her age and the imminence of adulthood. For him, taking a risk by sending her home might open opportunities to dive into the *messy work* of supporting Nicole in the complexity and specificity of her home context while planning for her safer (while perhaps not the safest) future.

Sexually abused teenage girls' descriptions of various aspects of their respective lives and relationships revealed them as actively involved in interpreting and negotiating risk. Away from CPS's watchful gaze and strict interpretations of appropriate risk management, girls regularly participated in potentially risky moments in ways that reflected situated knowledge and experience of their social, physical, and even emotional contexts. For example, Danielle talked to me about going out in her neighbourhood:

*I go to this one place where I know the DJ and one of the bouncers; I'm friends with one of the bouncers. So I get in. Which is cool. .... for me, I don't want to go somewhere*

*where like ... that's why those are the two places I go, because I know people that work there. Like the bouncer, the first time I met him, I got, and he knew people I knew because he used to work at the other bar I go to. So then I met him and I got super drunk trying to show off that I can drink more than my friend – and I did drink more than her, I did, I beat her! – but then I was really drunk and I was like, “okay S—, I need to go home. I just really need to leave.” I was like, I can't do this and if I keep drinking and I stay here, I'm going to get raped or something is going to happen. I need to leave. And the bouncer wouldn't let me leave until someone came to pick me up or he saw me get into a taxi.*

*The other place, I only go there on Saturdays because I know the bar manager and he lets me in because I know the bouncers and a lot of people. Like my two foster brothers they go there and they're super protective of me. So, like, I'm safe there because I know everyone. Everyone is from around here that goes there.*

Should Danielle's CPS social worker be made aware of Danielle's choices to go to bars and get drunk, it is quite likely that s/he would interpret such behaviour as risky and irresponsible and would make efforts to modify or restrict Danielle's choices and actions. I do not bring up Danielle's situation here as a means to evaluate whether such action would be appropriate or not or to evaluate whether Danielle is safe or at risk within the context of her choices. Rather, I bring it up in order to illustrate Danielle's management of risk as a social actor. With her situated knowledge of the bars as safe places populated by people she knows who are willing to look out for her wellbeing, Danielle perceived her choices and actions as safe. Her account also provides evidence of a gendered understanding of risk – *if I keep drinking and I stay here, I'm going to get raped or something is going to happen*. Danielle's integration of both her situated knowledge and an internalised individualisation of risk, wherein individual management of certain risks (i.e. gendered risks) is considered routine and expected, led her to develop and rely on strategies of self-protection grounded in her specific context – *I need to leave. And the bouncer wouldn't let me leave until someone came to pick me up or he saw me get into a taxi*. Perhaps somewhat contradictory, Danielle's voluntary participation in risk-taking activities coincided with her professions of self-protection.

Similar observations of sexually abused teenage girls' negotiations of risk were evident in as they talked about their drug use. Sanni, for example, expressed enjoying *smoking pot*:

*I don't have a dealer. I just ask my close, well my close friends. And I don't know how to roll it or anything so ... and I don't smoke alone either. And now I know I'm not going to*

*smoke with strangers. I'm only going to smoke with close friends. Because I get paranoid. And like you've noticed, I'm scared of what people might think about me so I don't know what I'd do when I'm high and I don't want to make myself look bad. (Sanni)*

Aware of both the pleasures and potential risks associated with taking drugs, Sanni insisted that she would only experiment with certain drugs and only within a secure environment – *I'm not going to smoke with strangers. I'm only going to smoke with close friends*. For Sanni taking drugs was a gratifying rather than risky experience. Still, she was aware that to enjoy *smoking pot* she needed to feel safe. As such, negotiating risk was less about abstinence (which Sanni believed was what the CPS professionals expected) and more about assuring self-protection by choosing to *smoke* only within the collective security of her peer group. Additionally, having identified buying drugs as a risky endeavour, Sanni refused to interact with a *dealer* and rather only accepted drugs from her *close friends*. Sanni, like Danielle above, demonstrated an internalised individualisation of risk-management while simultaneously freely engaging in potentially risky moments. Integrating her situated knowledge of her social environment, Sanni took responsibility for self-protection through circumscribing the limits of her risk-taking choices and behaviour.

Danielle and Sanni's descriptions of negotiating their own safety within potentially risky moments provide a view of sexually abused girls neither as passive recipients of risk nor merely as simply excessive risk-takers. Both instances provide insights into how sexually abused teenage girls actively negotiate risk through interweaving subjective understandings of their social, physical and emotional contexts with internalised expectations of self-protection. Oftentimes, sexually abused teenage girls' respective negotiations of risk occur out of the sight of the CPS professionals involved in their protection. Aware of CPS's limited threshold for acceptable risk-taking, the sexually abused teenage girls interviewed regularly expressed hiding certain of their choices or actions from CPS professionals:

*I wouldn't want to tell my workers that I smoke pot. (Sanni)*

*I didn't even dare to tell them. I didn't even try to. Because in my head they all have their own ways of thinking and it's like, like I know what's good and bad. Like I think I have an idea of what's good and bad. For them, in my head, all of this is bad. (Sanni)*

*I wasn't supposed to go there [sister's apartment]. I kept it a secret. I didn't want my social worker to know. (Frost)*

*I can't tell them I saw him [ex-boyfriend and father of her child] ... with social workers and the whole system, no matter how well you're doing, they'll always find a loop whole. They always do. (Molly)*

Conscious of their choices and actions being scrutinized by CPS professionals, the sexually abused girls spoke of withholding information as a means protecting themselves from the potentially negative interpretations and controlling interventions of CPS. Girls' reticence to share with CPS professionals their respective experiences of negotiating potentially risky moments or situations may well shield them from further scrutiny or regulation; however, an added consequence is CPS professionals' limited access to information that might contribute to more nuanced understandings of sexually abused teenage girls' respective circumstances and contexts as well as their interpretations and management of risk.

In this chapter, I have shown sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals' negotiations of risk to be shaped by neoliberal and risk-thinking ideologies. With the common identification of sexually abused teenage girls as both vulnerable and risky, management of risk in the context of CPS is largely taken up with the scrutiny of girls' willingness and capacity to self-protect and the regulation and control of girls' acting-out, risky and irresponsible choices and behaviours. While safety from risk is the paramount concern of CPS, the added dimension of sexually abused teenage girls' age and proximity to adulthood contributes to a shift in responsibility for protection from the CPS professionals to the sexually abused girls themselves. As such, girls are expected and encouraged to act as rational actors – freely willing and able to choose and act within the bounds of what is right and safe. Failures to live up to such expectations tend to lead to intensified CPS interventions that function to assure sexually abused teenage girls' safety but also serve to threaten girls' freedom, voice, and connectedness with family, friends and familiar environments. I have also shown that sexually abused teenage girls while participating in potentially risky moments beyond the gaze of CPS display an internalization of neoliberal individualization. Girls' accounts revealed that in recognising themselves as individually responsible for identifying and managing circumstances of risk, they

developed means of taking care of themselves adapted to their situated knowledge of their respective contexts. This internalised individualization reappears in the next chapter as I explore sexually abused teenage girls' capacities and challenges associated with performing as future girls.

In the next chapter, I examine participants' discussions of aspirations for sexually abused teenage girls' autonomy and concerns for their risks that extended beyond official CPS discourses. Emergent in the interviews was a postfeminist/neoliberal sensibility which contributed to anticipations for girls' to develop into autonomous citizens capable of social and economic achievement. I will argue that this sensibility fuels preoccupations for sexually abused teenage girls' potential to succeed or fail at the postfeminist/neoliberal project of becoming a fiscally and emotionally healthy woman capable of taking care of herself.

## Chapter 8: APPROACHING AUTONOMOUS WOMANHOOD

*It's not just about making sure they're not sexually abused again.*

— Meghan (EO manager)

## **Chapter 8: APPROACHING AUTONOMOUS WOMANHOOD**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I continue my examination of the intersecting influences of official CPS discourses and discourses of girlhood on how sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse. In the previous two chapters, I concentrated specifically on how these discourses emerged in the participants' experiences of mandated CPS functions associated with assessing, identifying and managing risk. I showed that corresponding with common identifications of sexually abused teenage girls as simultaneously vulnerable and culpable with respect to their circumstances of risk were expectations for these girls to take responsibility for self-protection through adopting CPS sanctioned strategies of resolving risk. In this chapter, I extend my discussion to include attention to how these same discourses appeared in participants' aspirations for and apprehensions surrounding sexually abused teenage girls' transitions to adulthood.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine the emergence of two opposing narratives relating to sexually abused teenage girls' transition to adulthood. Firstly, evident in the interviews, as well as CPS policy and programming concerning youth aging out of care, was a preoccupation with the poor life outcomes commonly attributed to CPS involved youth. I show how this narrative corresponds with a discourse of risk surrounding youth in general and sexually abused teenage girls in particular in the context of CPS involvement. Competing with this gloomy outlook, were participants' expressions of an optimistic confidence associated with presumptions of ubiquitous opportunity being available to teenage girls – including those teenage girls involved with CPS in the aftermath of sexual abuse. The rest of the chapter is taken up with examining how both narratives relating to sexually abused teenage girls' transition to adulthood intersect to contribute to girls' responsabilisation for their own future social and economic success – or failure. A heavy emphasis throughout the interviews was placed on sexually abused teenage girls' personal investments in education and developing healthy relationships. Girls' active participation in these investments, while ostensibly outside the mandated realm of CPS,

was treated as necessary to girls' self-protection from the risks of social exclusion due to deficits in their education, employability, and/or social interaction.

## **8.2 Risky transitions**

I interviewed Corrine (PQJ child care worker) early on in my data collection. Reflecting on the interview, I wrote the following in my field notes:

*I was so concentrated on listening for her thoughts about teenage girls and sexual abuse, I almost missed hearing her concerns and expectations for girls' lives post-CPS. Not surprisingly, Corrine talked about being worried about the fallout of sexual abuse for teenage girls – she seemed especially preoccupied by girls' promiscuity and loss of self-esteem. But, she spent a great deal more time talking about preparing girls for uncertain futures. Life skills. Finish school. Get a job. Manage your finances. Even cooking and cleaning! Although she was obviously sensitive to the trauma of sexual abuse, she highlighted girls' trauma, anger and damaged self-esteem as threats to girls' autonomy. Threats that could and should be overcome. She explained to me that these girls are going to be on their own when they leave CPS, so treating them as victims isn't helpful.*

In listening to Corrine and later upon reflecting on the interview, I was struck by her understanding of sexually abused teenage girls' transition to adulthood as a risky undertaking. Corrine conveyed an urgent concern for what might happen to these girls upon moving away from the watchful presence of CPS. Disputing strict classifications and treatment of sexually abused teenage girls as victims, Corrine stressed the importance of intervening with respect to preparing them to take charge of their lives. While the sexual abuse was not forgotten in Corrine's reflections, it was treated as both secondary and risky to girls' respective processes of assuming adult responsibilities. From Corrine's interview emerged an understanding of sexually abused teenage girls' autonomy as simultaneously necessary to their transition to adulthood and at risk. Unable to rely on girls' achievement of autonomy, Corrine's concern for girls' future selves increased. Corrine's apprehensions associated with sexually abused teenage girls' proximity to adulthood and their potential for poor outcomes were echoed throughout participant accounts as well as CPS policy and programming concerning youth transitions away from CPS involvement and toward independent living.

Before turning to the interview data, I want to draw attention to CPS policy and programming directed specifically at the transition out of care<sup>43</sup> of CPS involved youth. While not specifically directed to sexually abused teenage girls, participants regularly referenced such policy and programming in their discussions of CPS involvement with particular sexually abused teenage girls placed in a CPS residential resource. Additionally, earlier cited research as well as participant comments indicating sexual abuse as an all too common experience of teenage girls residing in CPS resources supported the relevance of reviewing such policy and programming. In Quebec, policy and programming for youth transitioning out of CPS care have undergone a number of changes over the past decade or more (Goyette et al., 2007). Precipitated by a growing understanding of the challenges facing all CPS involved youth, but especially those youth in CPS residential resources, CPS agencies across the province jointly proposed the integration of an intervention program (*Programme Qualification des jeunes (PQJ) – Youth Qualification program*) targeting youth between the ages of 16 and 18 (Goyette et al., 2007)<sup>44</sup>. The program is directed to CPS youth committed to developing skills related to independent living until they reached the age of 19. Two of the CPS professionals (Manon and Corrine) and two of the sexually abused teenage girls (Sanni and Danielle) participating in my study were directly involved with the *PQJ*. Molly had also received services through the *PQJ*; however, she was excluded from the program upon becoming pregnant.

Drawing on North American, Canadian and Quebec based research, the final evaluation report of the pilot project of the *PQJ* provided a portrait of CPS involved youth and the risks facing them as they transition out of CPS care and into adulthood. Analogous to my discussion in Chapter 4 on the “disturbing pattern of poor outcomes” (Tweedle, 2007: 16) facing youth as they

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<sup>43</sup> I use the phrase “out of care” in the same manner as it was used by research participants and in CPS documentation. The phrase refers to the transition of CPS involved youth out of the care of CPS residential resource and towards independent living. While participants were preoccupied by this specific transition, they expressed equivalent concerns for those sexually abused teenage girls living in their home environments whose transition to adulthood would coincide with the withdrawal of CPS surveillance and protection.

<sup>44</sup> The initial pilot project – *Projet d'intervention intensive en vue de préparer le passage à la vie autonome et d'assurer la qualification des jeunes des centres jeunesse du Québec* – took place from 2003 to 2005 in 4 CPS agencies in Quebec, including the agency that acted as my primary research site. The final evaluation of the project produced positive results which led to the gradual integration of the program into all CPS agencies across the province by 2007. At the time during which I collected my data, the youth qualification program (*PQJ*) was well established within the agency.

age out of CPS care, the authors of the report identified CPS involved youth as a population particularly vulnerable to a range of social problems including low academic achievement, relationship instability, homelessness, mental health difficulties, substance abuse, criminality and victimisation as well as being at significant risk of experiencing difficulties with respect to social insertion through accessing gainful employment (Goyette et al., 2007: 5-6). According to these authors, contributing to this set of risks are the various structural barriers confronted by CPS involved youth as well as the youths' individual psychosocial difficulties, and lack of preparation for autonomous adulthood coupled with the absence of a secure support system as they leave care (Goyette et al., 2007: 4). Summing up their concerns the authors claimed, "at the age of majority, it is not unusual for these youth to find themselves facing these challenges alone"<sup>45</sup> (my translation – Goyette et al., 2007: 4).

The CPS professionals interviewed regularly displayed both a knowledge of and vigilance for the potential risks facing CPS involved youth transitioning to adulthood that perfectly reflected the portrait of risk presented by Goyette and his colleagues (2007). Making little distinction between the situations of youth in general and sexually abused teenage girls in particular, participants named the imminence of adulthood as especially risky for CPS involved youth – all CPS involved youth and not only those youth residing in a CPS residential resource. Elaborating on their apprehensions, CPS professionals identified age, support systems, and time as intersecting areas of concern. Manon (PQJ manager) explained that involvement with CPS complicates normal adolescence as well as the expected processes of transitioning to adulthood:

*Well, in adolescence typically, in normal adolescence, you know, you're expected to go through individuating basically from your caretakers, and in the normal context, that's a very tough task to do because you're struggling between wanting to individuate and be independent, but still kind of needing your parents. So the teenagers we work with, I think, have an even harder time because then they're dealing with being placed. They're dealing with feeling like they're supposed to be independent and autonomous, and to individuate, and to not need adults, but they really, really still do and a lot*

With an understanding of *individuating* from one's caregivers or parents as being *tough*, even for those youth experiencing a *normal adolescence*, Manon identified CPS involvement (and *being*

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<sup>45</sup> « À la majorité, ces jeunes se retrouvent souvent seuls pour faire face à toutes ces difficultés » (Goyette, 2007: 4).

placed) as complicating the process. She observed that CPS involved youth internalise the same message that at a certain age they ought *to individuate and be independent and autonomous*, but added that for them it is an *even harder* process. Providing some detail to Manon's observation and with reference to Naomi, a 17 year old girl with a history of sexual abuse, Corrine (PQJ child care worker) expanded on how CPS involvement complicates the parallel processes of transitioning away from the security of CPS and becoming an autonomous adult:

*She wants people to take care of her but .... She went back to mom who's an alcoholic because she wants to have freedom. She's going to be 18 soon. The system for her represents not being able to go out, not being able to do what she wants to do. It doesn't feel like protection to her. I don't think she's bonded with a lot of people though. She's been in foster care before also. And when we don't have that first ... let's face it. If your parents cannot be there for you, like if they've abused you or they've hurt you physically or they've never been there because they're alcoholics or whatever and you've never met this person who will love you to death and will care for you at a younger age, I don't know if you're able later on to have confidence in people and to let people in.*

As did Manon, Corrine revealed a somewhat conflicted acknowledgement of CPS involvement as protective in its purpose yet hindering to CPS involved youths' readiness to manage the potential risks awaiting them as they leave the CPS system. Corrine explained that Naomi perceived CPS protection as getting in the way of her freedom *to do what she wants to do*. With that protection rapidly coming to an end, however, Corrine worried about the undermining influence of the persistent circumstances of risk that initially gave rise to CPS involvement in her life. Naomi was soon *going to be 18* and, thus, beyond the reach of CPS protection. At 18, she would be free to do as she pleases but she would do so within an unchanged context of risk. Added to Corrine's concerns was the absence of a supportive relationship in Naomi's life. While placing responsibility for that absence on Naomi's inattentive parents – her *alcoholic* mother in particular – she also identified Naomi's inability to bond with *a lot of people* during the course of CPS involvement as contributing to her increased risk as she ages out of CPS care:

*Her mom, who can be a very caring person also, I'm not saying that she's just an alcoholic, but when she's an alcoholic, she's an alcoholic and I don't think she's there for her kid. I think that this kid needs somebody there, but she's not open to opening up the door. I'm not even in her circle of network.*

Alongside Corrine's sensitivity to the reasons underlying Naomi's apparent difficulties in developing relationships – *let's face it. If your parents cannot be there for you, ... I don't know if you're able later on to have confidence in people and to let people in* – was her responsabilisation of Naomi. Naomi's reticence *to opening up the door* to a supportive relationship was interpreted as contributing to her lack of a support network.

In the above excerpts, both Corrine and Manon emphasized the importance of supportive relationships for CPS involved youth as they transition to adulthood. Corrine told me, Naomi *needs somebody there* and, Manon remarked that despite reaching the age of majority CPS involved youth still need the support of adults, *they really, really still do and a lot*. But, regardless of complicating factors, it remains the responsibility of the sexually abused teenage girls themselves to recognise their need for support and to make efforts to form relationships.

The concurrent understanding of youths' need for yet absence of a support network as they transition out of CPS care was common amongst the CPS professionals interviewed. Mirroring Goyette and his colleagues' (2007) observation that it is not unusual for CPS involved youth to find themselves alone as they age out of the CPS system, Corrine acknowledged there to be no guarantee for these youth to have access to a supportive environment: *they don't really have a stable network. These are kids who are most likely going to be on their own*. With an awareness of the circumstances of risk that would have contributed to CPS involvement in the first place, CPS professionals expressed trepidation for youths' escalating vulnerability associated with turning 18 and finding themselves out in the world *on their own*:

*I am not even sure they have family members or a good friend they could trust, and that is my worry for them, even when they are 18. That they do not have that support, or that they can't find it.* (Elise, EO social worker)

*But, I guess it becomes more acute when you're dealing with a 16 year old girl, like when a 16 year old girl or a 17 year old girl realises, "Shit. I'm going to be 18 in a year. My mom's dead. There's really no one else around in my extended [family]. No one's really come forward. I'm really on my own. I gotta get my act together and how do I do this?"* (Andrew, AM social worker)

Andrew's comment provides insight into the urgency felt by CPS professionals as youth near the age of 18, an urgency that Andrew imagined to be shared by the teenage girls. Speaking

specifically about the transition to adulthood of sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS, Andrew noted that exacerbating his concerns for the absence of a support network is a feeling of time running out. To elaborate, and with reference to Nicole, Andrew explained girls' vulnerability to be intensified by the imminent withdrawal of CPS involvement:

*We don't have another year. She's not organized enough to live on her own. She's got no independent living skills. She has no bank account. She can't manage money. She just ... there's nothing.*

Apprehensive of the impending future, Andrew expressed little hope for Nicole to succeed as an autonomous adult. With *no independent living skills*, Andrew had difficulty imagining how Nicole could assume responsibility for taking care of herself without the continued involvement of CPS professionals or without the security of a supportive and stable home environment, neither of which would be available to her once she turns 18. There is a despairing acceptance in Andrew's comment, *she's just ... there's nothing* and it's too late. Andrew is well aware of Nicole's vulnerability to succumbing to the poor life outcomes previously noted as being too often characteristic of the experiences of CPS involved youth as they reach adulthood.

Implicit in Andrew's comments is the requirement for all CPS involved youth nearing the age of majority to quickly, before turning 18, demonstrate the skills necessary for successful independence. While the interviews revealed a common understanding that both the circumstances of risk contributing to CPS involvement as well as CPS involvement itself can significantly and negatively impact the achievement of expected autonomous adulthood, with nowhere else to lay blame or to seek resolution for the risk of poor life outcomes, the youth themselves are set up to be responsible for assuring their own future success. As put by Meghan (EO manager), *They [CPS involved youth] are viewed more as adults. There's more expected of them*. Adding some detail to how this expectation plays out in CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls Manon (PQJ manager) commented,

*The sexual abuse is situated somewhere in there, but it's not necessarily the main context of the work that we do. .... You have to remember, the kids I worked with are mostly sixteen and up the intervention plans are really geared at how to help this person become independent and prepare to leave care at 18. And part of this, yes, has to do with making sure they don't continue, they don't develop some kind of pattern of becoming victims.*

Without denying that the experience of sexual abuse is *somewhere in there*, Manon made it clear that with the approach of adulthood the CPS intervention priority lies with helping girls – who she referred to as both *kids* and *person[s]*, thus glossing over gender as a factor influencing girls' experiences of achieving autonomous adulthood – *become independent and prepare to leave care at 18*. Manon did not elaborate on the place of sexual abuse in her interventions aimed at preparing girls in their transitions to adulthood aside from asserting her responsibility in *making sure* sexually abused teenage girls *don't continue* or *develop a pattern of becoming victims*. Manon's description shows an important shift in the focus of CPS concern from girls' vulnerability to sexual abuse to their vulnerability to the poor life outcomes associated with leaving the presumed security of CPS. In this way, once sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS reach a certain age, concerns for sexual abuse are likely to be overshadowed by concerns for the risks associated with girls' potential failures to attain autonomous adulthood. As previously discussed in this dissertation, sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS tend to be identified as passive victims vulnerable to external threats and/or as complicit in their own victimization through engaging in risky choices and actions. In either case, for sexually abused teenage girls to avoid the risks associated with aging out of CPS supervision and to successfully don the role of autonomous adult, the common view amongst CPS professionals is that they must be ready and able to shed any potential identification as victim or risky. Below, I will further elaborate on this observation as I explore how the responsibility for this transformation is shifted from CPS professionals like Manon to individual girls.

### **8.3 Aspirations for autonomy**

Seemingly in direct opposition to the discourse of risk associated with the transition to adulthood of CPS involved youth in general and sexually abused teenage girls in particular, the interviews revealed the influence of a coexisting postfeminist discourse of girls' ubiquitous power and potential. Scattered throughout participant accounts was an optimistic confidence in girls' access to whatever future they choose and strive towards.

In contrast to concerns for CPS involved youths' poor life outcomes, CPS professionals regularly spoke of conveying reassuring messages to sexually abused teenage girls about their futures. Alberto (AM social worker), for example, told me,

*They [sexually abused teenage girls] can become, you know... I'm not different. If I drive, if I want a car, they can own a car as well. There's no difference between Alberto and those girls. They can achieve whatever they want because we live in a country where they can be whatever they want to be.*

Alberto in his efforts to share an optimistic outlook with sexually abused teenage girls, cast girls' positive life outcomes as universally available. His message began as a straightforward one that can be summed up as "if I can do it, then so can you." Without dimming the hopefulness of his message, I worry that in proposing there to be *no difference between* himself and *those girls*, Alberto elides the distance between his successful self and the real life situations of the sexually abused teenage girls with whom he intervenes. By shielding differences based on age, gender, race, education, and employment status, and the like, Alberto limits his ability to incorporate deep and nuanced understandings of girls' complex experiences and circumstances into his interventions with girls as they transition into adulthood. Furthermore, Alberto's claim that *we live in a country where they can be whatever they want to be* portrays Canada as a land of equal opportunity where girls' opportunities are constrained only by their *want*. Left out of such a portrayal is the persistence of uneven distributions of power, wealth, resources or status in this country. Alberto's optimism leaves little space for a considered understanding of the challenges to sexually abused teenage girls' attainment of positive life outcomes posed by their respective circumstances and locations within uneven social relations. By emphasizing sexually abused teenage girls' choice or *want* as the means through which to achieve future success, Alberto risks setting girls up to be blamed when success is not achieved.

Like Alberto, Corrine talked about reassuring sexually abused teenage girls of the availability of positive life outcomes:

*They need to know that some people made it and that it [sexual abuse] did happen and it doesn't have to rule their life and it doesn't have to, it doesn't make them who they are or will be for the rest of their lives and they could use whatever happened to them to make them better.*

Without ignoring the sexual abuse – *it did happen* – Corrine offers sexually abused teenage girls an alternative story to that of vulnerability and victimization. The story she claimed *they need to know* is one of individual potential. In telling sexually abused teenage girls that *some people made it* and that sexual abuse *doesn't have to rule their life or make them who they are or will be for the rest of their lives*, Corrine delivers an optimistic message that they can do the same. Important to Corrine's story is personal effort. Corrine does not portray the achievement of individual potential as naturally occurring; rather, she links success to girls' ability to *use whatever happened to them*. Once again, while I appreciate Corrine's optimism, I am concerned by what is left out of her story. Specifically, I am concerned by the absence of attention to the impact of sexually abused teenage girls' diverse and often difficult experiences and circumstances on not only girls' ability to make themselves *better* but also on their belief in the image of achievable success portrayed in Corrine's story. What happens to those girls who don't believe the story, who don't try, and who don't make themselves *better*?

Intertwined in the interviews were messages of girls' universal access to future promise and an understanding that adult intervention could benefit those girls teetering on the brink of failing to grasp that promise. With a commitment to buttressing sexually abused teenage girls' capacities to be, do and have whatever they want, CPS professionals frequently mentioned empowerment as an important intervention tool for supporting girls' transition to adulthood:

*We have to empower them to feel that they're not at risk. We need to make them feel that they can do much better and that the world is their oyster and is just waiting for them. I always tell the girls that are having a hard time, "this is just a tiny parcel of your life. I've been to those places that you're feeling this big, but just remember that this is just a tiny part of your life and maybe you'll look at it afterwards and think 'oh my G-d!'." It [sexual abuse] doesn't have to be big and sometimes we make it bigger than it is.*  
(Corrine, PQJ child care worker)

Specifically referencing teenage girls' experiences of sexual abuse, Corrine spoke of empowering girls *to feel that they're not at risk* and *to feel that they can do much better* and encouraging them to recognise the period of sexual abuse and its aftermath as *just a tiny part* of their lives. According to Corrine's suggestion, with appropriate guidance, vulnerable teenage girls ought to be able to accept the eventual insignificance of sexual abuse to their positive life

outcomes. She presented empowerment as a means of leading these girls to *do better* by displaying an understanding that they are no longer at-risk and by overcoming the *hard time* of sexual abuse and its aftermath. For empowered girls, *the world is their oyster and is just waiting for them*. Corrine gave no consideration, however, to how the unlimited possibility promised to sexually abused teenage girls in this image might be both fictional and circumscribed by their often disadvantaged circumstances. In Chapters 2 and 3, I brought attention to contemporary research showing that opportunity is not in fact unlimited for youth – especially female youth – transitioning to adulthood and entering into the labour market. Such research provides grounds to argue that is unrealistic to imagine that the structural constraints and disadvantaged circumstances experienced by individual sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS will not exert an influence on their access to the promise of adult success, a success oft linked to participation in the labour market.

In contrast to Corrine, Andrew was explicit in identifying *a lot* of CPS clients as *marginalized, disenfranchised people*. For Andrew, empowering sexually abused teenage girls included supporting them to simultaneously shed their identities of vulnerability associated with being at risk of sexual abuse and escape the constraints of their disadvantaged circumstances:

*But you know the protective side ... there is a major part of this job which is, I think, empowering your clients, because we work with a lot of marginalized, disenfranchised people and so part of it is to help them regain their power. To empower them – “yes, you can have a life,” “yes, you can do what you want to do and this is how you do it.” And, umm, and so there’s a big empowerment part of working with all these girls, all our clients I find.* (Andrew, AM social worker)

He, like Corrine, named empowerment as being a *major part* of his job. Andrew emphasized his role of encouraging CPS clients in general and sexually abused teenage girls in particular to accept that they *can have a life*, and *can do what [they] want to do*. Despite his initial acknowledgement of marginalization and disenfranchisement, Andrew’s proposed practice of empowerment relies on a myth of individual effort being sufficient for success. Yet again, sexually abused teenage girls’ diverse experiences and circumstances that would surely influence their access to power go uninterrogated, thus placing these girls and their willingness and capacity to *regain their power* at the centre of CPS scrutiny and intervention. Mirrored in both

Andrew and Corrine's reflections is a neoliberal perspective wherein regardless of the external obstacles or risks encountered, each person is responsible for securing their own positive future as if it were purely the outcome of integrating messages of empowerment and individual effort.

With pride, a number of CPS professionals told me of their success stories. In each of the instances described, sexually abused teenage girls' self-determination, effort and internal strengths were celebrated:

*Empowering her, just making her strong. She had gone through some therapy, so she had been able at some point I think to – to figure things out for herself, to come out of this experience knowing that she is worthy of something. That she had a lot of good stuff about her. Very smart kid. Graduated high school .... Basically out of this victimisation, out of this experience. I would say she came out strong.* (Manon, PQJ manager)

*Amy is a little fighter! Whether you like it or not! .... I mean she pisses me off sometimes because she is all over the place and she gets easily frustrated. She gives me a lot of work! But when I listen to what she is capable of doing. I mean I have not been through a third of what she has gone through, and she still has the capacity of saying I am going to do this, and because nobody else is doing this for me, I am going to do it.* (Elise, EO social worker)

Here, both Manon and Elise talked about their work with different sexually abused teenage girls. Manon presented Julie who was sexually abused by her step-father. She was *close to being 18* and living in a CPS group home. Manon's portrait of Julie corresponds with that of a postfeminist/neoliberal future girl. No longer vulnerable, Julie emerged from her *victimisation* as a *strong* young woman with sense of self-worth who is also *smart* and educated. Manon stressed Julie's self-determination and individual capacities as having contributed to her ability to cast off the identification of victim. She did the work associated with *therapy* and graduating from *high school* and she seems able *to figure things out for herself*. Providing a similar understanding of the possibility of achieving success in the face of adversity, Elise introduced Amy a 15 year old girl who was sexually abused by her grand-mother's boyfriend. According to Elise, Amy displayed a lot of *acting out* at the time she was placed in a CPS foster home – *she was doing everything that you do not want to see her do, like for her age*. While Elise described the situation as somewhat fragile – *just a tiny incident messes things up* – she claimed that *Amy is doing good, considering*. To Elise, Amy's chances of success lay in herself. She was on her own,

with no family to offer her support and a difficult past of negligence and abuse. Different from Manon's description of Julie, Elise was not fully convinced of Amy's eventual success, but she was impressed by what she is *capable of doing* and by her determination: "*nobody else is doing this for me, I am going to do it.*" Elise concluded that *she is doing well. Not over the top, but she is doing well. And now, if she just keeps trying ...* Finally, Amy's effort is identified as the factor determining whether she will gain access to the promise and potential of the future girl or not.

Common to the CPS professionals' aspirations for the autonomy of sexually abused teenage girls was a corresponding watchfulness. Corrine's description of a success story provides some insight into CPS professionals' scrutiny of girls' efforts and capacities. Nina had been sexually abused by her step-father but was placed in a foster home due to concerns relating to her *serious behavioural disturbance*. Corrine met Nina when she was on the *cusp of adulthood*. Describing Nina as a *big, tall, lovely young woman. Very intelligent*, Corrine added:

*I think she has a good head on her shoulders.*

[What does that mean? How can you tell if someone has a good head on their shoulders?]

*When they're making the right choices. When they don't ... when their anger doesn't stop them from being a regular kid. When I feel that they have a good heart and they want to get out of their situation. Where they're not playing the victim and they're really ... going forwards and when I see them accomplishing things that they said they would. When they have bright sense of their future, where they want to be. It can be small or short term future, but it could be long term also. When they haven't stopped dreaming and don't talk about hurting themselves or killing themselves when they're 18. When they have hope and you can feel that they have hope because they have plans.*

In this instance, Nina's potential is measured against Corrine's expectations. The *right choices* are not determined by individual girls. Rather girls' choices are scrutinized according to what is considered to be *right* by CPS professionals. Corrine offers a portrait of the appropriate path to be taken by sexually abused teenage girls to achieve successful independence: control excessive *anger*; demonstrate a motivation to *get out of their situation* and to no longer play the *victim*; stop talking *about hurting themselves or killing themselves when they're 18*; follow through on promises by *accomplishing things they said they would*; and, maintain a positive outlook through displaying a *bright sense of their future* and persevering in their hopes, dreams and *plans*. With an emphasis on the future and with the immediate risk of victimization pushed to the side,

sexually abused teenage girls are scrutinized with respect to their demonstration of choices, actions and motivations deemed appropriate to assuring adult autonomy.

Revealed in the interviews with CPS professionals was the influence of a discourse of girl power wherein all girls regardless of their identity, experience or circumstance are positioned to benefit from the ubiquitous opportunity available to them upon becoming autonomous women. Buying into this notion, CPS professionals spoke of selling the message of *all* girls' promise and potential to the sexually abused teenage girls with whom they intervened and of pursuing interventions aimed at empowering girls to believe in themselves and to take on tasks associated with achieving autonomous womanhood. Still, CPS professionals remained wary of the possibility of girls' failures. Corrine's final words to me as we prepared to end the interview were, *I find that they either go one route or they go the other* – towards successful independence or towards *the other* risky route of poor life outcomes.

#### **8.4 Combatting new social risks**

Both the narrative of risk and that of potential associated with sexually abused teenage girls' transition to adulthood evident in the interviews contribute to a shift in focus of CPS intervention. Feeling the pressure of adult life being just around the corner, participants spoke of day-to-day CPS practice with sexually abused teenage girls as involving not only efforts to protect girls from the risk of sexual abuse but also the risk of poor life outcomes. Referring to CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls nearing adulthood, Meghan (EO manager) affirmed, *it's not just about making sure they're not sexually abused again*. With this expanded view of risk, CPS practice comes to include efforts at transforming sexually abused teenage girls from vulnerable victims or excessive risk-takers into successful neoliberal subjects.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, a key assumption embedded in neoliberal ideology is that achieving autonomous adulthood is dependent upon active participation in the market economy – both as an income earner and a consumer. This assumption trickled into participants' accounts as well as CPS programming for youth aging out of care, thus provoking a common commitment to investing in CPS involved youths' eventual integration into the market economy. Rather than a

gradual withdrawal of CPS intervention as youth approached adulthood, I saw an intensification of intervention centred on protecting youth from new social risks. In Chapter 3, I introduced new social risks as those risks people may face as they enter a labour market structured according to the economic and social demands of today's post-industrial society. Evident in participant accounts and CPS programming for CPS involved youth were concerns for risks associated with deficits in education, training or skills that could contribute to long-term unemployment or poor employment; inadequate social support or relations; and adolescent-parenthood.

As I noted above, the *Programme Qualification des jeunes (PQJ) – Youth Qualification program* has been integrated into CPS agencies across Quebec. The existence of this program provides a tangible example of the influence on CPS policy and practice of neoliberal expectations for individuals to act as productive citizens. The official goal of the program is:

to prevent the marginalization of young clients of CPS when they reach the age of majority and become ineligible to receive further services from CPS. The program aims to increase chances for these youth to progressively integrate themselves into a socially fulfilling life plan (my translation – Association des centres jeunesse du Québec, n.d.).<sup>46</sup>

*PQJ* services are constructed around equipping CPS involved youth with the skills, education and support necessary to attaining adult autonomy (Goyette et al., 2007). The overarching aim of the *PQJ* is to support CPS involved youth in becoming active and responsible citizens able to combat structural constraints and integrate themselves into the work force and society (Goyette et al., 2007). Important to the *PQJ* is treating CPS involved youth as autonomous partners in investing in their futures rather than passive receptacles of *correction* and *rehabilitation*:

Alongside interventions aimed at preparing the youth for integration into the labour force and society, are interventions aimed at addressing other objectives. These interventions have as their goal not merely the development of a new member of the work force but also the construction of an autonomous citizen.... Thus, within such interventions, practices centre less on youth remediation through correction and rehabilitation and more on enhancing youths' participative capacities.... [with] the objective being the development of youths' autonomy, responsabilisation as well as knowledge of community

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<sup>46</sup> « Le but du programme est de prévenir la marginalisation de jeunes clients des centres jeunesse au moment où ils atteignent leur majorité et que cesse leur prise en charge. Le programme vise donc à augmenter les chances que ces jeunes s'intègrent progressivement dans un projet de vie socialement épanouissant. » (Association des centres jeunesse du Québec, n.d.)

resources (my translation – Goyette et al., 2007: 8-9).<sup>47</sup>

Revealing the influence of neoliberal ideology, *PQJ* programming involves not only supporting youth in gaining work skills and training, pursuing education, and building support systems but also encouraging their self-sufficiency, responsabilisation and individualization. As such, CPS involved youth are compelled to invest in their positive future outcomes and made responsible for managing any risks to their eventual success. As attested by Goyette and his colleagues (2007), the *PQJ* is not intended to generate the final life outcomes for youth, but rather to help them forge their own respective paths as autonomous adults. In this way, and once again, CPS involved youth are viewed as rational actors who once armed with the appropriate tools, education, social supports and encouragement ought to be able to assume the neoliberal project of productive citizenry.

Corrine's account of her role as a *PQJ* child care worker matched descriptions laid out in CPS documentation:

*PQJ is directed towards older adolescents and what we do is, we get the kids at 16 or 17 sometimes nearer 18 and we try to get them, give them some knowledge of skills that they're going to use to be able to function in society and be productive or go to school or ... so we offer sometimes workshops on different things such as how to budget your money, help them in lifestyle and community services that are out there. We try to get them a network so when we do leave they'll have people around them to help them with different things. We try to see what their own network is, their own biological network is may it be friends, or aunts ... because in, these are kids who are most likely going to move out on their own.*

Reiterated by Corrine is the influence of neoliberal ideology already noted in *PQJ* documentation. With aspirations for youths' attainment of autonomy demonstrated through their eventual ability *to function in society and be productive*, *PQJ* interventions are future oriented and preparatory. The central messages in Corrine's description are that youth can function in society and they can be productive. To get their lives started, all they need are opportunities to

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<sup>47</sup> « Si tous intègrent des objectifs visant l'adaptation du jeune au marché du travail et à la société, quelques pratiques visent d'autres objectifs. Dans ces cas, il ne s'agit pas seulement de développer une force de travail mais de construire une personne autonome dans une perspective de citoyenneté, .... Dans ces contextes, les objectifs se centrent moins sur la correction, la réadaptation du jeune dans sa mission curative que sur son développement dans sa mission participative.... Pour quelques projets..., l'objectif était plutôt l'autonomie du jeune, sa responsabilisation et la connaissance des ressources communautaires » (Goyette et al., 2007 : 8).

develop skills, learn and create a support network. Still, I am concerned by the mythical nature of the optimistic vision informing programs such as the *PQJ*. Can such programming contribute to closing the gap between the marginalised spaces often occupied by CPS involved youth and those social spaces occupied by the white, middle class, academically capable, well supported, and non-CPS involved youth who might easily be identified as ideal neoliberal citizens-to-be? Perhaps. But with what effect for those youth who are regularly transferred responsibility for both their successes and failures in education, relationships and everyday life skills?

### *Investing in the future through education*

In the interviews, education was regularly promoted as the optimal means through which youth in general and sexually abused teenage girls in particular could succeed in life by protecting themselves from the risks of poor life outcomes. Ai-Lin (AM social worker) described education as important to creating opportunities for successful futures: *I see getting educated as opening opportunities for yourself in the future, I'm not saying that's the only way, but I think going to school does give you the extra benefits*. She added, *I have a hard time when kids are not going to school, and I know they have lots of potential. I really have a struggle with that. For me, going to school is not an option*. For Ai-Lin, education is a requirement for adult autonomy.

With more precision than Ai-Lin, Alberto (AM social worker) linked academic achievement with sexually abused teenage girls' ability to financially support themselves:

*I would like – see, I have – I have a couple of kids that I keep – I wouldn't say that I keep an eye, but I'm still in contact with them, and I would like them to become successful.*

[Which means?]

*Meaning at least finish high school. Okay? I told the girls, and I told all my kids that school is their way out of poverty. If we don't go to school, and we do everything, or even to go to adult school, the cycle of poverty will return, meaning with welfare. And welfare right now is \$550. \$550 cannot even rent an apartment. So, I really tell them that they need to finish school, and that's what I expect of them.*

For Alberto, education provides girls a route out of *poverty*. Apprehensive of the risk of poor life outcomes for those girls who are either unwilling or unable to *at least finish high school*, Alberto

equated education with creating opportunities for girls to later avoid having to rely on receiving *welfare* as a means of financial support.

Earlier I cited Alberto as telling me that anyone can *achieve whatever they want* so long as they believe in themselves and put in some effort. The message resurfaced in his discussion on the importance and accessibility of education:

*When I see my kids – today, I have a kid who is in the second year commerce at [a local university] – I have two kids going to [another local university], so when I have kids who have been in the system, and are going forward... Everybody can do it.... I really hope that those kids can move on with their life, and use the system. That's what I tell them. Use the system for their own advantage. Use me to find resources for them to be successful. And I tell them that I cannot – I'm not going to settle for less.*

[R – Meaning?]

*Meaning I'm not going to settle if they say to me, "Oh, I finished high school, and that's it." I ask them to become more, okay? I meet them and I remind all of them that, I say, "You have to do your dream. You want to become an educator? In five, ten years, we're going to have lots of space at [this CPS agency]. You guys can come and you're going to be working with kids that you can have an impact because you've been through it."*

I was struck by Alberto's intense desire for the sexually abused teenage girls – indeed, all youth – with whom he intervened to *be successful*. He repeatedly noted education, or more precisely higher education, as the principal path to security and success. In telling girls to *use the system* and *to use me* he was adamant about his investment in keeping girls on that path. For Alberto the right choice for a successful future is education and he is *not going to settle for less*. Believing in *all girls'* potential he will continue to ask them *to become more*.

Andrew (AM social worker) similarly underscored education as the route to future security and success:

*There's such a hype about school: if you want to succeed in life, you gotta go to school, you need to graduate. It's true. I mean, I don't know, like I'm one to talk, I've got a Master's degree .... I always remind kids that it can be a very circuitous route and you can get back to it [school].*

While recognising that the path may be *circuitous* and may be fraught with challenges, Andrew remarked on *always [reminding] kids* that education is a requirement of adult autonomy:

*There's a hype with school ... it goes back to these abused kids because one of the things with abused kids is they're plagued with feeling different but wanting to fit in with*

*everyone else. There's a huge drive with them. So, now they're in school and they're usually not doing well because you know, they've missed a couple of grades while they were being abused. So grade 3, grade 4 ... whatever ... a few grades are a wash and now all of a sudden, "I don't know why I can't do grade 8 math?!" But they missed the year when they were learning to multiply, you know. Ahhh ... so they themselves want to do well at school. And as the economic times have turned down, there's more and more "if you want to get anywhere, education is your route out." And there's a lot of films around that and to some point it's true, it is a way to raise yourself up. I mean a lot of the kids are coming from a lower class background and they want to do well at school.*

Andrew noted there to be tangible obstacles to sexually abused teenage girls' ability to live up to the expectation that *if you want to succeed in life, you gotta go to school*. He identified *missing a couple of grades while they were being abused* or girls' feelings of difference and of not fitting in in the aftermath of abuse as complicating girls' abilities to function academically. He observed however, that despite girls' experiences of such challenges, they typically internalised the *hype* associated with academic achievement – *There's a huge drive with them.... they themselves want to do well at school*. Attentive to the precarity of today's *economic times* as well as the *lower class background* of a lot of the kids involved with CPS, Andrew named education as the *route out*, the *way to raise yourself up*. Significantly, he saw girls as attentive to economic risks and as cognisant of their active participation in school being a protective factor against such risks. Andrew perceived sexually abused teenage girls as internalising the responsibility to self-protect from risks of poor life outcomes through pursuing education, regardless of any obstacle.

The sexually abused teenage girls' interviewed spoke of navigating a range of expectations, aspirations and challenges in relation to their academic engagement and achievements. Lending proof to Andrew's perception, they largely accepted the dominant message of education as *the route* to adult autonomy and security:

*A high school diploma. It makes a difference. You can't really get very many jobs without a high school diploma. (Danielle)*

*She's [Ai-Lin] told me why it's important and all. I know school's important. For sure. For later on. For ensuring a good job. To know things. To be educated you know. I know. I do. (Sanni)*

*Education's good. Like everyone wants education for everyone right. Become someone one day and all that. (Sanni)*

*School matters. To me it matters because that's what gets you places. You need to have an education to get further in life. I mean the further you go in education, the more you can do with your life, the more choices you have, the more opportunities. That's what I want Robin to grow up seeing – that she can do anything.* (Molly)

Both Danielle and Sanni referred to education as necessary to getting a job or to *ensuring a good job* once they reach adulthood. Seemingly having integrated an understanding of the limited availability of unskilled jobs, Danielle identified having a *high school diploma* as making a positive *difference* for her entry into the labour market. Sanni added that education is both a path to and an indicator of future success, of *[becoming] someone one day*. Molly extended the equation further. Asserting that *school matters*, Molly associated education with employment, *choices, opportunities* and *getting further in life*. She also suggested her academic achievement was important not only in terms of increasing her autonomy but also with respect to offering her daughter an accessible image of power and potential – *I want Robin to grow up seeing that she can do anything*. Molly displayed a commitment to the image of the future girl able to manage in a contemporary neoliberal climate thanks to her education and self-determination.

The sexually abused teenage girls' discussions of their day-to-day experiences of engaging in education revealed challenges that put to the test any notion of academic achievement being readily available to all girls and thus merely a matter of choice and effort:

*With schooling, I was in an English school, then I got transferred to a French school and then I went back to an English school and then I went to my alternative school.* (Dora)

*I've been to six high schools. Now I'm in grade 10, it's like a weird grade 9/10 because some things in grade 9 I'm not allowed to redo because I've already done them 2 years. I've failed twice already. So, in math, they can't put me in grade 9 math, so I have to do grade 10 but even at that, they're not doing grade 10 math. They're doing prep 11. So, it's like getting ready for grade 11, so it's really confusing.* (Danielle)

*I go to an adult education school, because I finished high school but I didn't pass my history or French which is ridiculous but ... and math. So, I'm doing French and history now, every Tuesday and Thursday and math I'm going to do next term.* (Kelly)

All three girls spoke of failing at school and having to repeat grades or subjects. Experiences of school disruption and interruption were remarkably common amongst all of the sexually abused teenage girls interviewed. Not one of them spoke of education as being an easy process. Instead, every one of them noted periods during which their school participation was either interrupted or

complicated by their experiences of abuse and/or neglect (including, but not exclusive to sexual abuse) and/or the aftermath of abuse, including the emotional and behavioural fallout of the abuse as well as the involvement of CPS. For example, Dora, Danielle and Frost explicitly spoke of missing weeks and even months of school due to changing CPS intervention plans driven by concerns for their safety which included removing them from their home (and consequently their school) environments. Sanni was the only girl interviewed who had completed high school. Ai-Lin (AM social worker) told me that Sanni had *excelled in high school*. After graduating, she enrolled in CÉGEP. She was expelled from the program during her second semester, however, as a result of apparently being unable to manage the workload or deadlines. Sanni explained that she began CÉGEP at the same time as disclosing her experiences of physical and sexual abuse. She said that with *everything* following from her disclosure – CPS, police, *moving out* – she was *too stressed* and *just couldn't do it [school] anymore*. In sum, all the sexually abused teenage girls' interviewed reported interruptions and disruptions to their participation in school as hindering their opportunities to satisfy expectations of academic achievement.

Of all the girls interviewed, Sanni appeared particularly preoccupied with education. Sanni's discussions about her experience of schooling as well as her understanding of what education represents to her provide insight into the influence of neoliberal expectations of academic achievement not only on her but also on CPS involvement.

Sanni talked about being inundated with messages identifying academic achievement as a necessary step towards attaining adult autonomy:

*School was always a thing. That was one ... I guess I could thank my dad for that because he was always like "go to school, go to school, go to school." And he would put me into tutoring when I was younger. And he was always like "school, school, school."*

*Like when I talk about it with my friends, it's like college, university, job. Yay!*

*School is for sure other people's idea of success. That's for sure. Other people, well people around me tend to be like "school, school, school." Like I have this one friend who's like, "are you going back to school next semester?" And I'm like, "yeah." And she's "I will make sure you do!"*

Like the other sexually abused teenage girls interviewed, Sanni understood education to be the expected route to *a job* and independence. Despite receiving the message of *school, school,*

*school* as essential to future *success* from various sources, Sanni told me she particularly disliked talking about school with *authority*. *It's the expectations. I don't know, I just don't like it:*

*Corrine or Ai-Lin. Like Corrine, she's close to me but she's still authority, right. ... like, when I was 17, she would always be like "school, work, la, la, la." Advise me about all that. And Ai-Lin, she's big on school. "You have to go to school. You have to go to school!" She's like that. She's big on school. Ai-Lin is big on advising. "Do this, do that." "Do it that way. Make sure you do it." .... Ai-Lin would just be like, "no, no, no, don't do it [i.e. drink, smoke]" Or like try to push me away from those things. She's more, her view is not narrow but, like school, work... It's this way or not. That's my opinion of her. Like school, you go to school. You go to work. Don't give up on school."*

Sanni was aware of the CPS professionals' expectations and scrutiny relating to her participation in *school* and *work*. She knew that the expectation to engage in education was accompanied by expectations to avoid behaviours that could jeopardise academic achievement such as drinking or smoking. Her hesitancy to pursue conversations about school with *authority* provides some insight into Sanni's understanding of *choice* in the context of CPS involvement:

*I guess sometimes they forget to tell you that it's your choice and I'm just giving advice here. It's your choice. 'Cause in my head, it was like, okay, I have to do it this way. It's the way to do it. I have to. I have to. I have to. So then in my head it was like I have to go to school. I have to ace it. But I wasn't able to ...*

Sanni believed that in the context of CPS involvement, her choices were limited, including those relating to education. Conscious of CPS professionals' expectations, she doubted the availability of her own choice and understood instead, *I have to do it this way ... I have to go to school.*

In seeming opposition to Sanni's view, Ai-Lin spoke of supporting Sanni's autonomy:

*But I did tell her, "you are at the age, you're fully responsible for what you decide to do, and whether you choose to go with the suggestion we take, that will be okay. If you choose not to, that will be okay as well. Even though I might not agree with your suggestion, I will try to support you whatever I can."*

Ai-Lin admitted to not always agreeing with Sanni's decisions but added that, given Sanni's age (18 years), she would respect her autonomous choices. Belying her assertion that whatever Sanni chose would be *okay*, Ai-Lin was unable to hide her expectations and instead imposed on Sanni an individualization of risk management. With the dual message – *you're fully responsible for what you decide to do ... even though I might not agree* – Ai-Lin simultaneously let Sanni know that the right choice for managing the risk of poor life outcomes would be to go back to school

and responsabilised her for the potential consequences of her flawed decision-making. In this way, without explicitly using her authority to regulate Sanni's choices or behaviours, Ai-Lin effectively transferred the responsibility for managing academic success (or failure) to Sanni.

Ai-Lin had *high expectations* for Sanni's academic performance. Nevertheless, Sanni's failure in CÉGEP provoked anxiety for Ai-Lin:

*Even though she said she still want to go back to school, I'm worried she get comfortable – when you get comfortable with a certain way of life, you might not be more motivated to make extra effort to change it. After she got kicked out [of CÉGEP], we suggested she maybe try something else. She was not willing to. “No, I'm just going to do a 9 to 5 job. Work in the food court.” That just might be it. I just feel she has more potential than that. For her, it's a loss. Had she not been through that [sexual abuse], she probably could have had a different life than this. I hope she would be able to go back to school, would be able to carry out what she had hoped because when I asked her, “What had you planned?” her dream was to go university... but it looks like now her present has drifted away from that. I would actually hope she would still stick to that and motivate herself to go towards that direction.*

Ai-Lin worried that this *might be it* for Sanni. She may never follow through with returning to school and may instead *get comfortable with a certain way of life*, a way of life that looks nothing like that of a future girl. Ai-Lin *hoped* Sanni *would be able to go back to school*, but worried she had *drifted away from that dream*. While Ai-Lin recognised Sanni's sexual abuse as having thwarted her *potential* and her pursuit of education, she identified *effort, motivation* and *willingness* as the principle missing, yet required, elements for Sanni's academic achievement.

Sanni admitted to me that she had not given up on returning to school: *Like I do want it, I want to go back to school but I'm lazy about it. But oh my gosh yes! For sure, for sure I want to go back.* Reflecting back, Sanni recognised that her life circumstances – the abuse, the ensuing CPS and police involvement, and placement in a foster home – had created significant obstacles for her to continue in school. She also recognised her immediate situation as complicating her return to school. At 18, she was no longer permitted to live with a foster family and as a result was living independently in an apartment partially subsidized by CPS. She explained that she would continue to receive subsidies through the *PQJ* until she turned 19 but, *only if [she] held up [her] end of the bargain* by accepting Corrine's assistance with respect to planning for her

future; either attending or making plans to return to school; and contributing to her costs of living through working full or part-time (depending on her educational status).

Comparing her situation with that of a friend who was not involved with CPS, Sanni revealed an awareness of the precarity of her immediate circumstances as well as a continued commitment to pursuing education:

*I have this one friend who took a semester off and after CÉGEP. She's going to take another semester, I mean a whole year off ... to travel! It's cool. But I don't see myself doing that. I don't know what I see myself doing. But I don't see myself taking a year off and traveling. I would love to! But, money. And I don't want to waste time neither. I don't want to waste time to finish school. I've already wasted time. And, I don't see myself taking full semesters either. And well money's a problem there too so I think I should take full semesters. I don't know whatever and, well money is a problem.*

Sanni's ruminations about school were not at all dissociated from her day-to-day circumstances. For Sanni, negotiating the risks associated with failing to live up to expectations of academic achievement was intertwined with her negotiation of the short and long-term financial risks associated with pursuing post-secondary education. Sanni was conscious of her disadvantaged status in comparison with her friend. For Sanni, pursuing higher education was a both a risky and a promising endeavour. Sanni saw the potential of a successful future promised in dominant understandings of educational achievement as being solely in her hands. Not returning to school would be an indicator of her personal failure as well as a potential loss of independence: *I understand why Ai-Lin worries about me. She doesn't want me to follow my parents' path. Like, she wants me to be independent. But ...pushing myself. Motivation. It's hard.* Feeling the pressure to return to school quickly – as CPS and the accompanying subsidies and support would soon be out of her life – Sanni repeated *I don't want to waste time*. Sanni knew that she would soon be on her own and that there was no time to waste with a lack of motivation. At the same time, Sanni recognised an immediate financial risk associated with returning to school. She worried not only about the immediate challenges of managing school while supporting herself, but also the risks associated with failing – again – academically.

Combined, the sexually abused teenage girls' illustrations of their experiences of engaging (and disengaging) with education contributed to a complicated portrait wherein

academic success is anything but easily attainable. At the same time, reflected in their attitudes towards school was an internalised individualization of managing the risks of poor life outcomes through purposefully engaging in education. To elaborate, the teenage girls' participating in my study regularly accepted (and made efforts to act according to) their individual responsibility to invest in their future autonomy by performing in school. They also regularly accepted academic failures as their own fault and their own responsibility to resolve.

### ***Maintaining supportive relationships***

Developing a support network was clearly identified in the *PQJ* documents as well as in participant accounts as a protective factor against the risks of poor life outcomes. With the goal of protecting sexually abused teenage girls from the risk of failing to achieve adult autonomy, CPS interventions have thus come to include the scrutiny and regulation of girls' relationships.

Revealed in the interviews was a consideration of *healthy*, stable relationships as an indicator of sexually abused teenage girls' immediate success as well as their positive potential as they transition to adulthood:

*She's definitely a success story. Well, in the sense that she's pursuing her own goals, seemingly having healthy relationships. Um, not seemingly – I don't want to say she's not affected – but not seemingly disturbed on a day-to-day basis by what happened [sexual abuse]. Seems to have worked through it to some extent.* (Michael, AM manager)

*She didn't do well in school but as I told the social worker, she did very well in socializing and maybe that doesn't seem important to you but it's important because now she has support around her and when she leaves she's not going to be by herself.* (Corrine, PQJ child care worker)

Neither Michael nor Corrine provided portraits of sexually abused girls' situations as being perfect. Both drew attention to circumstances likely to negatively influence girls' present and future lives. Michael noted the potentially ongoing impact of past experiences of sexual abuse and Corrine mentioned school deficits. Still, both identified these individual girls' capacities to have *healthy relationships* or to *socialize* and *have support* as a mark of *success* and, for Corrine, a reassurance that *when she leaves CPS, she's not going to be by herself*.

Sexually abused teenage girls' development of *healthy* relationships was celebrated in the interviews; however, as already discussed in Chapter 7, girls' associations with seemingly risky individuals (e.g. drug users, gang members) or participation in possibly harmful relationship dynamics (e.g. abusive or controlling romantic relationships) tended to provoke apprehension as well as scrutiny and regulation on the part of CPS professionals. With an understanding of the imminence of adulthood, however, girls were scrutinised not only with respect to their capacity to assure their immediate safety from the risks of certain relationships (usually through self-regulated interdictions of contact) but also their abilities to distinguish those relationships that might hinder or facilitate their trajectory toward positive life outcomes. Andrew (AM social worker) praised one of the sexually abused teenage girls with whom he was involved for demonstrating a capacity to identify and manage the risks of pursuing an unhealthy relationship:

*When I say that Heather is doing well, it's like she's made a couple of good interventions with other friends ... well, friends? Like kids she grew up through the system with who were friends but ... like this one I'm thinking about ... a horrible, horrible, horrible alcohol addiction. It's really bad. Like she's heading for jail and Heather managed to you know, "listen man, you've got to stop. You got this! But until you stop, I can't see you. We just cannot be friends because I cannot take what's going on. And I just can't have you coming to my house, just fucking drinking and destroying shit. You gotta make a ... you've got a serious problem." She was able to do this on her own and she's done that a couple of times. So, she's kind of managing fairly well. That's what I mean when I say doing well. She's able to not get totally get drawn into that world.*

At 18, Heather continued to be involved with CPS as she had committed to participating in the *PQJ* and was living independently in an apartment partially subsidized by CPS. Praising Heather's successful negotiation of a risky relationship, Andrew drew attention to her *friend* as a risky individual – *horrible alcohol addiction, she's heading for jail* – and the relationship as a threat to Heather *doing well*. Heather being *able to do this on her own* and *to not get totally drawn into that world* was an indication to Andrew that *she's managing fairly well*, she is able to identify and manage the threat of a risky relationship to her own positive trajectory.

Of particular significance in the interviews was a consideration of romantic relationships (with boys or men) as contraindicative to sexually abused teenage girls' achievement of power and potential. An excerpt from a CPS report in Molly's file that was written 2 years prior to my

interview with her, reveals a consideration of independence within relationships as an indicator of girls' autonomy: *Molly is not yet a mature adolescent. Her sense of her own feelings often depends on what she thinks her boyfriend wants.* In this instance, Molly was identified as not yet *mature* based on observations of her dependence on her boyfriend and his *wants*. Common amongst CPS professionals accounts was the view that dependence within romantic relationships is a threat to sexually abused teenage girls' attainment of autonomy:

*Sometimes I have to bring her to a reality that she doesn't need to have boyfriends to be empowered, to love herself. She has to love herself first, and the love will come after from people* (Alberto, AM social worker)

*I think she's doing really well for herself and in her life. Doing well ... when I last saw her, she was not in any relationship with a guy at all. She'd come to, she'd had it with guys. I told her "great, it's about time!"* (Andrew, AM social worker)

*She was on track – but she had a boyfriend. At a certain point, we were concerned that maybe she was too connected with this boyfriend, too involved, and that maybe he was too controlling. Um, and I think she broke up with him...if so, good for her!* (Michael, AM manager)

Instead of finding their source of power or wellbeing in a boyfriend or in a *relationship with a guy*, both Alberto and Andrew reported encouraging girls to find their power within themselves. Michael's comment adds a further dimension. Michael expressed concerns relating to the negative impacts of being *too connected*, *too involved* and potentially controlled within a relationship. Instead of single, powerful and *doing well for herself*, the sexually abused teenage girl referred to by Michael was seemingly powerless in her relationship. Celebrated, however, was the possibility that she had protected herself by breaking up with her boyfriend and thus, displayed some independence and power.

Sanni expressed an awareness of CPS professionals' fears and aspirations relating to her potential involvement in a romantic relationship. With the apparent intention of encouraging Sanni's investment in her own future, Corrine presented her with evidence of what happens when independence is not attained by bringing attention to her mother's disadvantaged situation: *she wanted to show me how "Sanni you've got to be independent and not follow your mom's path."* Sanni described her mother as follows:

*My mom's not independent at all. Apparently, she has a mental problem, which we don't know about and she's not working. She's on welfare. She's been on the street. She's been everywhere. She's with her boyfriend right now because she doesn't want to be on the streets, not because she likes him. She keeps complaining about the guy and everything.*

Glossing over the impact of the complexity of her mother's circumstances (mental health troubles, unemployment, homelessness) on her ability to alter her situation and internalising messages of individual responsibility and the availability of opportunity, Sanni talked about wishing her mother could take *our advice* (her and Corrine's):

*Like, get the fuck out of there. But then I can get it. Like she's not independent at all. I guess if I was in her shoes, and I wasn't independent at all and I didn't know how to take care of myself, I guess I could be stuck with a guy who was kind of able to take care of me. I remember Corrine telling me ... like if you're not independent, you're going to leach onto a guy and that's what you'll end up doing for the rest of your life. And then you become the little housewife that has to take care of the kids and can't do anything in real life. But, if you become independent you can become anything you want, you know.*

Sanni described being *not independent* as risking being *stuck with a guy* to take care of you. Revealing a dualistic view of romantic relationships, Sanni identifies relationships with guys as both resulting from a lack of independence and risky to girls or women's independence. A postfeminist/neoliberal sensibility is evident in Sanni's recollection. With independence privileged, doing *anything real in life* means doing it outside the apparent constraints of marriage and motherhood, both of which were understood by Sanni as risky to independent womanhood. As Sanni understood Corrine's message, the promise of becoming anything she wants is tied up with not [*leaching*] *onto a guy* and not pursuing a trajectory towards becoming a wife or mother. With aspirations for autonomy associated with becoming a productive citizen within the contemporary market economy, both marriage and motherhood are construed as antithetical to the future girl project of independence, power and potential. Additionally, according to a postfeminist sensibility, the stage has been set for girls like Sanni to grasp hold of and benefit from the promise of independent womanhood so long as they do not fall foul of relationships based on romantic love or maternity.

Simultaneous with talking about romantic relationships *with a guy* as threatening to girls and women's chances of attaining autonomous womanhood as it is construed within a

postfeminist/neoliberal sensibility, Sanni spoke about making tentative forays into dating, sex and romantic relationships. She talked specifically about spending time with a male friend, Theo. They would *meet up, you know to chill ... and smoke [pot]*. She added that the two *cuddle*, but anything more intimate than that became *weird* and *kept bringing back the image of [her] dad*. Sanni admitted that talking about being with Theo made her uncomfortable: *that's the kind of stuff that I don't really talk about*. Although her unresolved trauma and confusion relating to her experience of sexual abuse by her father contributed to her hesitancy to talk, so too did her fears of being judged as a *slut* or *not doing what a girl is supposed to do*:

*Okay, this guy [Theo], I think I like him but I don't know if I like him. Okay? Maybe it's attention, maybe I like his attention but not him. I don't know. Anyways, I always feel like if I go for the guy then I'll have a bad name, a bad reputation in the world... I've never told anyone, like not even Corrine knows.*

For Sanni, exploring desire and relationships is incredibly tricky terrain fraught with minefields of expectation. At the intersection of the emotional and relational effects of sexual abuse and internalised expectations of appropriate femininity as distinct from sexual desire and independence as a requirement of autonomous womanhood, Sanni's experiences of and reflections on romantic relationships were bound to be confusing and likely overwhelming. Effectively muted by the weight of her perceived failures to live up to expectations, Sanni was unable to reap any possible benefit from exploring her struggles with a supportive listener and CPS professionals were hindered from gaining deeper insights into Sanni's experiences and how best to support her.

Throughout the interviews and corresponding with the notion that girls ought to allow no impediment to their growing independence, access to education, and eventual integration into the labour market, early motherhood was commonly presented as a significant risk to sexually abused teenage girls' autonomy. Alberto (AM social worker), recognising the vulnerability of the sexually abused teenage girls on his caseload, encouraged them to see beyond the immediacy of their situation and to invest in their futures: *I need to expect them to become well. I told them, I said, "You cannot have a child, a child caring for another child*. For Alberto, not only was sexually abused teenage girls' ability to be autonomous and take care of themselves open to

suspicion and scrutiny, so too was their ability to provide for a child. Linking future autonomy with academic achievement, Alberto encouraged girls to invest in education rather than motherhood: *I tell them that they need to finish school. That's what I expect. Not having a child.*

Iterating similar apprehensions, Evelyn (EO social worker) talked about a sexually abused teenage girl with whom she was involved who had a child before turning 18:

*She also – like, she's not a – like behavioural kid – like she doesn't have these like really like out of control behaviours – she's got a head on her shoulders somehow in all of this, so she has a bit of a head on her shoulders. She wanted to finish school, but she got pregnant. She was really adamant that she was going to try to finish high school, and wanted to do it. She was going in the right direction. I just don't know that she had the skillset to stay in that direction. She knew like getting pregnant wasn't the best thing for her future. She wanted to finish. But she dropped out. I don't know what happened to her.*

Evident in Evelyn's reflections is an understanding that motherhood is an obstacle to teenage girls' capacities to devote themselves to the future girl project through pursuing education. Both Evelyn and the sexually abused teenage girl to whom she was referring recognised that *getting pregnant wasn't the best thing for her future*. Despite having a desire to finish school and making efforts to do so, she was deemed by Evelyn as lacking the necessary *skillset* to succeed. Without clarifying what she meant by skillset, Evelyn suggested that in this girl's case, motivation and effort were not enough. She dropped out of school. Encumbered with a child in her teenage years and without an education, it is not difficult to view her future as dim. The ubiquitous opportunity presumed available to teenage girls who demonstrate academic achievement is simply unavailable to an uneducated young mother.

Molly's situation provides an example of how pregnancy and young motherhood complicates aspirations for the autonomy of sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS and. Alongside concerns that pregnancy and young motherhood thwart girls' successful transitions to autonomous adulthood are requirements that these same girls display a capacity to provide emotionally and materially for their child. Corresponding with a shift in identity from teenage girl on the cusp of adulthood facing ubiquitous opportunity to young mother facing limited opportunity yet responsible for the care of a child, aspirations for autonomy are simultaneously reduced and heightened. Molly became pregnant when she was 17 years old and

living in a CPS group home. At the time, she was working toward independent living while receiving services from the PQJ. She was slated to move into a CPS subsidized apartment with two other CPS involved youth. The plan changed, however, once she announced her pregnancy:

*I was supposed to go into independent living, but months before I was supposed to move out, I found out that I was pregnant with her. So, I put that on hold because they told me I needed to make a choice, you know, if I was going to have an abortion or if I was going to keep her. So, I decided I was going to keep her, so they cancelled it [independent living]. I wasn't allowed to go live there pregnant. It's not for pregnant girls you know!*

Had Molly had an abortion, she would have continued to receive CPS support and services until the age of 19. As it was, CPS closed her file at Molly's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her choice to go ahead with the pregnancy meant that she would be on her own to provide for herself and her daughter. Confusing to me in this situation was that to combat the risks of poor life outcomes, Molly had been integrated into the PQJ; however, she was excluded from the program at the moment when she – and her daughter – might have benefitted from it the most.

As noted with respect to Alberto's comments above, pregnancy in adolescence risks provoking CPS apprehensions for and scrutiny of girls' efforts to achieve financial and social independence as an indication of their intersecting abilities to evade poor life outcomes and assure the wellbeing of their child. Molly believed that CPS professionals doubted her ability to care for a child: *They thought I was too young. And they wanted me to get an abortion.* Proven correct in her doubt, the *social worker [she] had before [she] turned 18, signalled Robin* shortly after her birth. Molly explained that CPS suspicions of her competence as a mother persisted:

*I don't know, well sometimes my social worker – well, not my social worker, Robin's social worker – she tends to make me feel like, because of my age, I don't know how to make decisions. And then she kind of does them for me and I don't like it.*

Representing an important change in perception, whereas Molly's age prior to becoming pregnant was associated with promise and potential, following her pregnancy, it was treated as a sign of her impaired autonomy and an indicator of her daughter's risk. With Robin determined to be at risk at least in part due to her mother's youth, CPS protective interventions centred on the scrutiny, regulation and control of Molly's capacities to attain adult (and maternal) autonomy. Molly demonstrated compliance with the CPS intervention plan:

*As long as I agreed with coming here, they were going to give her back. Just like that.... I wanted to do anything to get her back. So now I have to prove myself pretty much. By doing everything they tell me, by doing my therapy – I'm almost done that. I came here [group home for young mothers] like I said I would. I followed everything I had to do. And I was supposed to go to Path [life skills training]. Robin's going to daycare. I'm going to school. Her father's done school and now he's back around so it's like I'm not going to be doing every single thing on my own. So, they can see that I'm not going to be alone and they said that they're going to be around for another year and then after the year, during the year, towards the end of the year, they're going to assign me an educator that's going to help me work on future goals and then the case will be closed.*

Evident in the above excerpt is a correspondence between the list of expectations placed on Molly and the set of investments CPS involved youth in general and sexually abused teenage girls in particular are regularly encouraged to pursue in order to combat the risks of poor life outcomes. In Molly's situation, *following everything [she] had to do* to prove her maternal capacity involved, attending therapy, going to school, participating in life skills training, and developing a healthy support system. Molly showed motivation and effort in *doing everything* she was asked by her CPS social worker. Becoming an autonomous mother looks a lot like becoming an autonomous woman; however, the stakes are higher as failure could result in the loss of her child.

Claiming that her *life only started to get positive when Robin got here*, Molly was determined to ensure that her daughter *grow up differently* than she did, *properly* and *in a stable environment*. Embracing a postfeminist/neoliberal message of the accessibility of power and potential, and effectively dissociating her future potential from her past and present circumstances, Molly told me at the very end of our interview, *whatever happens now is what my life's going to be about. Not what happened then.*

Throughout this chapter, I have shown aspirations for sexually abused teenage girls' autonomy as principally oriented toward the future and influenced by competing discourses of risk and power. With the imminence of adulthood, participants' preoccupations with the risk of poor life outcomes commonly attributed to CPS involved youth coincided with an optimistic confidence in the ubiquity of opportunity for those sexually abused teenage girls devoted to investing in their transition to autonomous adulthood. This latter optimism reveals the influence

on sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS of a postfeminist/neoliberal sensibility wherein girls' power and promise are treated as universally available to all girls regardless of their circumstance yet dependent on individual displays of self-determination and hard work. I argue that preoccupations with the risk of poor life outcomes and expectations of girls' power and promise combine to influence CPS scrutiny and regulation of sexually abused teenage girls' willingness and capacity to invest in their future success and attainment of autonomy. In this way, sexually abused teenage girls are made responsible for self-protection from not only the immediate risks of revictimization and their own risky choices and behaviours but also new social risks associated with deficits in education, employability and social interactions.

In the previous chapter, I showed that the sexually abused teenage girls interviewed demonstrated an internalised individualization of the management of risk associated with their potential for victimization as well as certain possibly risky behaviours. An extension of sexually abused teenage girls' internalised individualization of risk-management was observed in girls' understanding of their future autonomy as obtainable and a result of their own self-determination. Thus, the expectation of self-investment in becoming a productive neoliberal citizen was not simply externally imposed on sexually abused teenage girls through their involvement with CPS, rather it was also taken up by girls themselves through a process of individualization. With a concentration on the individual, teenage girls' experiences of sexual abuse and its aftermath and their disadvantaged circumstances or social locations drift into the background. The focus of attention becomes girls' respective successes and failures to create themselves in the image of the postfeminist/neoliberal future girl full of promise and potential.

## Chapter 9: CONCLUSION

*It's easy to sometimes forget why we do the research we do and how it might contribute to positive social change.*

— Mary Celeste Kearney<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kearney, Mary Celeste (2009: 21)

## **Chapter 9: CONCLUSION:**

In pursuing this dissertation, I entered the previously unexamined terrain of teenage girls' intersecting experiences of CPS involvement in the aftermath of sexual abuse and female adolescence. With an understanding of the notions of risk and autonomy as central within this terrain, I set out to explore how teenage girls and CPS professionals understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations for girls' autonomy in the aftermath of sexual abuse. In adopting a case study approach to qualitative research, my aim was to produce theoretical rather than broadly generalizable conclusions. Drawing from my in-depth and contextualised exploration, my dissertation offers insights into how sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS is shaped by contemporary risk thinking and neoliberal ideologies as well as a postfeminist sensibility.

In the early chapters of this dissertation, I elaborated a portrait of the interrelated contexts within which my dissertation took place: CPS, and the larger context of Canada's welfare state within which CPS is embedded, as well as the discursive context of present-day understandings of girls and girlhood. This portrait provided more than merely a background against which to develop my analysis. Rather, it was an integral component of the analysis. To elaborate, my analysis treated participants' understandings and negotiations of risk and autonomy as situated within and profoundly influenced by these interrelating contexts as they are shaped by prevailing risk thinking and neoliberal ideologies and a postfeminist sensibility.

As I have made evident throughout this dissertation, a logic of risk pervades present-day CPS legislation, policy and practice. With the child or youth's safety paramount, any risk is considered intolerable. Charged with the mandate of protection, CPS professionals are required to undertake specific functions associated with assessing, identifying, and managing the circumstances of risk to a child. In fulfilling these functions, CPS professionals are guided by official definitions of risk laid out in article 38 of the *YPA* (see Appendix A). My examination revealed that sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS tends not to be driven solely by such discrete legislated definitions of risk or sexual abuse. I uncovered, instead, the influence of an expanded and multifaceted understanding of risk that encompasses concerns for sexually

abused teenage girls' vulnerabilities to revictimization; the possible emotional, relational and behavioural consequences of sexual abuse; their own risky choices and actions; and, poor life outcomes typically associated with CPS involved youth.

Three factors emerged as particularly striking with respect to this expanded and multifaceted understanding of risk. Firstly, beyond the official evaluations of risk – primarily conducted by EO social workers – CPS professionals regularly engage in ongoing assessments of risk in their day-to-day practices with sexually abused teenage girls. Accordingly, particular circumstances of risk are thus seen to shift into focus or fade to the background of CPS concern depending on evolutions in time, events or circumstance. For example, although sexually abused teenage girls' experiences of sexual abuse are treated as a constant feature in their overall portraits of risk, evolutions in their situations such as displays of risky behaviours, experiences of revictimization of any sort, or even the imminence of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays signal shifts in CPS concerns.

Secondly, prevalent in participant accounts was the influence of prevailing discourses of girls and girlhood on CPS determinations of sexually abused teenage girls being at risk and in need for protection. I witnessed an intensification of concern that extended beyond teenage girls' experiences of sexual abuse to apprehensions surrounding the host of perils associated with growing up girl in a still patriarchal climate as well as the negative effects of teenage girls' expected and/or excessive risk-taking. In this way, discourses of girls at-risk and girls as risky were seen to influence CPS determinations of risk.

Finally, coinciding with intensified concern was a common perception of sexually abused teenage girls as complicit in contributing to the circumstances of their own risk. Participants provided numerous examples wherein aspects of a girl's identity (e.g. gender, immaturity or naiveté, appearance) or demonstrations of risky choices or actions were identified as contributing to girls' respective situations of risk. Risk was thus located external to as well as within the sexually abused teenage girls themselves.

Taken together these three factors relating to an expanded and multifaceted understanding of risk lead to considerations of sexually abused teenage girls as simultaneously vulnerable to

victimization and responsible for having failed to protect themselves from risks posed by their own choices and behaviours. The notion of failure to protect is not new to the domain of CPS. Novel, however, is my observation of its implication for sexually abused teenage girls. In Chapter 2, I brought attention to the presence of *failure to protect* in CPS legislation, policy and practice in situations of sexual abuse. Highlighting the contributions of feminist scholarship on the subject, I noted that determinations of risk in situations of child sexual abuse are based not only on the substantiation of the sexually abusive acts of an alleged offender but also on observations of the presumed failures of the non-offending mother to protect the child (Krane, 2003; Krane, Strega & Carlton, 2013). At the conclusion of Chapter 2, I asked, what happens when the child in question is a sexually abused teenage girl? I argue that in ongoing CPS assessments of risk considerable attention is given to the sexually abused teenage girls' inadequacies and failures to self-protect. Concurrent with a common discourse of sexually abused teenage girls' vulnerability was a competing discourse associated with expectations of autonomy and responsibility for self-protection. With heightened concerns for sexually abused teenage girls' presence in perilous settings (including a wider society still tainted by unequal gender relations) and their potential to engage in risky behaviours, responsibility for self-protection was associated not only with their ability to recognise and avoid the risks of revictimization but also their ability to choose and act within expected and safe bounds. Sexually abused teenage girls' failures to successfully take on these intersecting responsibilities tend to result in CPS determinations of risk centering not only on the external threat of sexual abuse and but also on the identification of the individual girls being a threat to themselves.

In a general sense, CPS determinations of risk lead to the establishment of specific strategies aimed at eradicating or reducing the identified risk to a child and its effects. This process of risk-management is identified in CPS legislation and policy as an official responsibility of CPS professionals. With respect to sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS, however, my dissertation uncovered a transfer of responsibility for managing risk from CPS professionals to individual sexually abused teenage girls. Here, my dissertation builds from Krane's (2003) observation of CPS practices in situations of child sexual abuse that

regularly involved a shift in responsibility for assuming the tasks of protection from CPS professionals to non-offending mothers. Different from the non-offending mothers in Krane's (2003) study, I observed sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS to be viewed as vulnerable to risk – and thus the object of CPS intervention – yet simultaneously responsible for its regulation.

The underlying assumption appeared to be that sexually abused girls, largely by virtue of their age and proximity to adulthood, ought to be willing and able to make choices and take actions appropriate to their own wellbeing and safety in the face of risk. The process of transforming sexually abused teenage girls into self-protectors relies on an understanding of girls as rational actors. Provided with the appropriate guidance and information about risk, these girls are expected to be willing and able to choose and act within the bounds of what is deemed right and safe. Girls' failures to live up to such expectations tended to produce identifications of them as irrational actors and to trigger intensified CPS interventions centring on the regulation and control of girls and their behaviours. While the obvious goal of such interventions is the protection of sexually abused teenage girls deemed to be failing to self-protect, girls were inclined to experience these interventions as anything but protective. Girls spoke of CPS interventions as threatening to their freedom, voice, and connectedness with family, friends and familiar environments.

The transformation of sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS into self-protectors reveals the influence of neoliberal ideology. The successfully self-protecting sexually abused teenage girl looks remarkably like the ideal autonomous neoliberal subject who is adept at identifying and managing risk and prepared to perform as – or, in the case of sexually abused teenage girls, become – a productive citizen able to participate in the surrounding world without the need for intensive welfare state intervention.

Performing as a neoliberal subject, or a self-protecting sexually abused teenage girl, involves an individualization of risk-management. In Chapter 3, I cited Beck's (2007) reminder that individualization should not be mistaken as a process of engaging free and conscious choice or preference on the part of the individual. Individualization, according to Beck (2007) is

compulsory and involves exhortations for individual participation in managing our own biographies and risks according to institutional guidelines shaped by a neoliberal ideology. Individualization represents a downloading of responsibility for managing risk to individuals, thus opening up the possibility of winning and losing, celebration and blame.

The influence of risk-thinking and neoliberal ideologies as well as a postfeminist sensibility emerged with particular force in participants' understandings and negotiations of the risks and promises of sexually abused teenage girls' transition to autonomous womanhood. I found that aspirations for sexually abused teenage girls' attainment of adult autonomy were informed by two competing discourses associated with girls' risk and power: an ominous discourse drawing attention to sexually abused teenage girls' risk of suffering the poor life outcomes commonly attributed to CPS involved youth and an optimistic discourse of girls' power, promise and potential to access to the ubiquitous opportunity now available to all girls willing to stay focused and work hard. While seemingly opposing, both discourses contribute to sexually abused teenage girls' individualization of risk management in that attention is directed toward individual will, effort and capacity as explanatory of girls' achievement of the neoliberal/postfeminist future girl who is ideally positioned to succeed as a productive citizen. Left by the wayside is any thoughtful consideration of the influence of unequal, complex and difficult life circumstances on girls' successes or failures.

Corresponding with the increased attention to sexually abused teenage girls' transition to adulthood associated with their age, I noted a distinct fading away of concerns for the risk of sexual abuse. Surfacing instead was a focus on risks associated with deficits in education, training or skills that could contribute to long-term unemployment or poor employment, inadequate social support or relations, and adolescent-parenthood. Once again, sexually abused teenage girls were transferred the responsibility to self-protect, this time by investing in education, developing life skills and forming healthy support networks. Displaying an internalised individualization of risk-management girls understood their future autonomy as both obtainable and a result of their own self-determination.

## **9.1 Implications and recommendations**

I opened this final chapter to my dissertation with a reference from Mary Celeste Kearney, a prominent Girls' Studies scholar. Reflecting on the pursuit of research conducted within a girl-centred interpretive framework, she commented, "it's easy to sometimes forget why we do the research we do and how it might contribute to positive social change" (2009: 21). I set out on this dissertation with the goal of gaining insight into how teenage girls and CPS professionals navigate the often tricky terrain of female adolescence while at the same time managing CPS involvement in the aftermath of sexual abuse. Kearney's comment prompted me to return to the questions of why and how. Why was I interested in gaining this insight? And, how might it be useful to the lives of sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS?

This dissertation has as its foundation my past social work practice with sexually abused teenage girls. During my years of practice, I witnessed sexually abused teenage girls' efforts at traversing contemporary female adolescence within the various intersecting contexts of their lives, including the context of CPS. Their voices and experiences inspired me to want to listen deeply to girls so as to better understand how they participate in their individual girlhoods while at same time negotiating issues of risk and autonomy within the context of CPS involvement in the aftermath of sexual abuse. My aim was to produce insights useful to reflecting on what happens during sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS and exploring avenues for enhancing CPS practice.

In the following paragraphs, I highlight implications for CPS policy and practice arising from my analysis. Firstly, I discuss the implications associated with the notion of failure to protect as I witnessed it to be applied to sexually abused teenage girls. Secondly, I address implications of the presence of a neoliberal/postfeminist discourse of girls' promise and potential on sexually abused teenage girls' participation in investing in their transition to autonomous womanhood, beyond the security of CPS involvement. Following from these discussions, I note my dissertation's contribution to knowledge through bridging the academic domains of social work scholarship dealing with child protection and sexual abuse and Girls' Studies. I conclude

my with a reflection on the use of a girl-centred interpretive framework and the challenges and relevance of such a framework for research with teenage girls involved with CPS.

### **9.1.1 Failure to protect – self-protection**

Uncovered in my analysis was an expanded and multifaceted understanding of risk that included, yet stretched beyond, discrete definitions of risk laid out in CPS legislation. Integrated within this expanded view of risk and often shifting to the fore in CPS concerns were notions of sexually abused teenage girls as having contributed to their own circumstances of risk through failures to protect themselves from risky situations or risky behaviours. Coinciding with a recognition of teenage girls' proximity to adulthood and expectations of a certain degree of autonomy, was an understanding of sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS as being largely on their own in the world. CPS professionals did not necessarily have access to a non-offending parent to whom to turn for assuring the protection of an at-risk, risky sexually abused teenage girl. Kelly's situation was significant in this regard. As the only girl I interviewed whose case was closed by the CPS social worker at the conclusion of her evaluation for sexual abuse, it was significant that her mother was identified as having taken *all the needed procedures to protect all her children*. Differing from the other girls, Kelly was not on her own and her non-offending mother had proven to the CPS social worker her capacities as a "mother protector" (Krane, 2003). Added to Kelly's portrait of safety, was the CPS social worker's observation that Kelly was *doing well*. Documented in the CPS evaluation report was proof of Kelly's positive functioning: Kelly was pursuing adult education, had no boyfriend, spent most of her free time with a *trusted* group of friends or riding horses, and did not like to drink or go out late. Kelly's portrait looks distinctly different from those sexually abused teenage girls identified as displaying excessive risk-taking behaviours. Rather than failing to protect, Kelly was identified as succeeding and thus deemed not to be in need of protection.

Contrasting with Kelly, were those sexually abused teenage girls deemed to be in need of protection not only from the risk of revictimization but also the risks they posed to themselves. There is no doubt that CPS professionals are sensitive to the various challenges and

disadvantages facing sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS. Indeed, throughout my conversations with CPS professionals I heard their compassion and thoughtfulness with regards to sexually abused teenage girls. I also heard their shared commitment to assuring girls' safety. This commitment translated into efforts to mobilise sexually abused girls to take responsibility for resolving their situation of risk regardless of their difficult and/or marginalised circumstances. In this way, sexually abused teenage girls who have already been identified as failing to protect are paradoxically transformed into self-protectors. Once armed with the appropriate tools, guidance and knowledge, a previously failing sexually abused girl is expected to become self-protective and, in consequence, ought to be safe. Those continuing to place themselves at-risk are poised to receive ever more intensive CPS intervention through strategies of regulation and control, the most extreme of which being placement in an intensive supervision unit (locked unit).

Largely overshadowed in this process of responsabilisation of sexually abused teenage girls is the complex influence of girls' varied circumstances of difference and disadvantage on their capacities to effectively resolve the risk in their lives. But, taking account of such influence might contribute to richer understandings of the challenges facing girls in their efforts to manage risk. I do not wish to suggest that sexually abused teenage girls should be absolved of responsibility in assuring their own safety. I do, however, want to suggest that CPS protective interventions that implicate girls in the resolution of risk ought to be founded on deeper appreciation of girls' individual risk-management efforts as well as their complex and varied circumstances. Here, I envision a CPS practice that treats sexually abused teenage girls as social rather than rational actors. A consideration of individuals as social actors means recognising their expert knowledge of their respective experiences and contexts and respecting their understandings and negotiations of risk as complex, diverse and situated in time, location and circumstance. Of course such consideration relies on the development of collaborative relationships and conversation, both of which are likely to be complicated by the contemporary context of CPS practice which with its concentration on the identification, documentation and quick management of risk allows limited space to individual CPS professionals to take risks with

time and alternate visions of risk (such as those potentially offered by social actors). Adding to the challenge of entering into conversation with individual sexually abused teenage girls is the caution with which the girls I interviewed suggested they engaged with CPS professionals.

The sexually abused teenage girls I interviewed were conscious of the scrutiny of the CPS professionals with whom they were involved. For a number of them, their awareness of the potential to be judged as posing a risk to themselves or failing to protect led to them to censor their conversations with CPS professionals. With little doubt, such censor limits opportunities for CPS professionals to fully appreciate the details of girls' intersecting experiences of sexual abuse, girlhood, and CPS involvement or to learn from girls' situated knowledge of their respective contexts. And, it is hard to imagine the possibility of developing collaborative relationships within which girls' might feel safe to voice their thoughts, feelings, doubts or experiences when fear of scrutiny weighs so heavily.

At the conclusion of my second interview with Sanni, she told me, *It's cool that you hear me out because I wouldn't talk about all of this with [Ai-Lin or Corrine]. I don't know, not everything.... I've been really comfortable talking about it. It's really weird.* In reflecting back on this exchange, I wish I had taken time to explore with Sanni her thoughts and experiences relating to talking with CPS professionals or talking with me. What was *cool* about me hearing her out? What contributed to her feeling *comfortable talking* with me? And what did she understand to be the obstacles or possibilities to engaging in such exchanges with CPS professionals? Inviting sexually abused teenage girls to reflect on these or similar questions relating to finding safe spaces within which to talk with CPS professionals could provide opportunities to gain important insights into how to shift typical patterns of talking that are largely based on assessing and managing risk.

Without the benefit of Sanni's reflections, my suggestions for encouraging honest conversations between CPS professionals and sexually abused teenage girls involve encouraging CPS professionals to continue in their efforts to "listen attentively, communicate clearly, encourage cooperation, and demonstrate caring and empathy without judgement" (Carlton & Krane, 2013b: 104). I say continue because I believe that individual CPS professionals already

go above and beyond their CPS mandate in order to engage with sexually abused teenage girls. But, without organizational support of CPS agencies, CPS professionals are limited in the degree to which they are able to integrate knowledge gleaned from such conversations into CPS assessments and intervention plans constructed around managing girls' risks. In a manner similar to a recommendation Julia Krane and I offered regarding CPS practice with non-offending mothers (Carlton & Krane, 2013b), I suggest a shift in CPS policy and practice that encourages individual CPS professionals to slow down their everyday practice with sexually abused teenage girls so as to draw out girls' situated and complex understandings and negotiations of risk. This is not intended as a means of seeking evidence of their flawed or risky choices or actions but rather as a step towards honest collaboration with girls in developing protection plans that integrate a deeper appreciation of girls' experiences, contexts and social actions surrounding managing risk.

### **9.1.2 Optimistic confidence or cruel optimism?**

In Chapter 8 of this dissertation I drew attention to two competing narratives of sexually abused teenage girls' risk of experiencing poor life outcomes upon transitioning away from the security of CPS and their promise and potential to attain autonomous womanhood. Influenced by prevailing neoliberal ideology and a postfeminist sensibility this latter narrative evident throughout the interviews included expectations for girls to seize the ubiquitous opportunities available to them through investing in themselves by pursuing education, developing life skills and creating a healthy support network. According to this narrative of promise and potential, success comes to be located in girls' self-determination, effort and individual capacity. Girls' complex experiences of sexual abuse and its aftermath as well as their often difficult and disadvantaged circumstances, while not overlooked, tend to be treated as obstacles to be overcome through individual will and hard work. Sexually abused teenage girls' failures to overcome these obstacles are thus too likely to be associated with their individual inabilities or lack of motivation.

While writing this dissertation, I came across the term “cruel optimism” coined by Laurent Berlant (2011). Berlant explained cruel optimism as a relation existing “when something you desire is an obstacle to your flourishing” (1). She claimed cruel optimism to have prevailed since the “retraction ... of the social democratic promise of the post-Second World War period” in Western societies and concurrent with the rise of influence of neoliberal attitudes towards governing the welfare state (3). At the centre of Berlant’s theorising is the notion of “the good-life,” a “fantasy” which she observed as having taken hold in public consciousness over recent decades. Optimistically, the good-life sells the accessibility of “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy” based on a faith in “meritocracy, the sense that liberal-capitalist society will reliably provide opportunities for individuals” (3) who work at carving out lives that “add up to something” (2). Describing the fantasy of the good-life as “fraying” (3) due to growing evidence of labour market instabilities as well as the unevenness of opportunity based on race, class, sexuality, health, citizenship and the like, Berlant wondered about the cruelty of an optimistic promise of a good-life that is not universally available.

I bring up Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism as a counterpoint to the optimistic confidence I heard in participants’ accounts relating to sexually abused teenage girls’ opportunities to attain autonomous adulthood. I do not want to suggest ridding CPS involvement with sexually abused teenage girls of all optimism. I do, however, want to encourage an optimism that sheds its dependence on an individualism shaped by neoliberal ideals.

Recognition of leaving CPS involvement behind as youth transition to adulthood as a risky endeavour has precipitated increased CPS consideration and programming around supporting CPS youth nearing the age of majority. There is little doubt of the utility of such programming. The final evaluation report of the *PQJ* produced by Goyette and his colleagues (2007), identified results indicating the overall positive impact of participation in the program for youths’ development of autonomy. The authors noted a reduction in the negative influence of risk factors associated with deficits in skills and education as well as improvements in youths’ access to supportive community resources beyond the services provided by CPS. Nevertheless, in concluding the report, the authors highlighted the ongoing distinctions between the CPS

involved youth and college-aged youth uninvolved with CPS in their transitions to adulthood. In sum, the authors noted the continued disadvantages and instabilities faced by CPS youth as contributing to a lack of equal opportunity and recommended further efforts at equipping youth with the skills, education and social supports necessary for improving their chances at becoming productive autonomous citizens.

The implications of programs such as the PQJ or CPS involvement structured along similar intentions can be simultaneously positive and negative for sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS who are in the process of transitioning to autonomous womanhood. I do not dispute the value of encouraging both learning and social connection in the lives of sexually abused teenage girls. At the same time, I am concerned by the accompanying messages of responsibility and the potential for girls to be viewed and treated as failing when their trajectory towards autonomous womanhood looks different than the trajectory proposed as the ideal. To this end, I once again call for engaging in in-depth sensitive conversations with girls about their respective experiences, circumstances, motivations and doubts. I also suggest drawing from feminist intervention practices that encourage honest conversations about the potential influences on girls' aspirations for autonomy of structural inequalities based on age, gender, class, race, ability, citizenship and the like. This last suggestion is not intended to recreate a discourse of girls being at-risk of a patriarchal culture toxic to the success of girls and women. Rather, my suggestion involves engaging in practices that reduce an emphasis on individual capacity and self-determination as the best or only means of becoming a successful woman and thus, reduce the ease of placing blame on individual sexually abused teenage girls who struggle or even fail at achieving the neoliberal/postfeminist project of productive citizenry. As long as the promise of ubiquitous opportunity being universally available to girls willing to work hard and regardless of their circumstance is accepted, the accompanying optimism is likely to be cruel in its incitement to girls to strive for an ideal that may not be attainable (for any girl let alone a sexually abused teenage girl involved with CPS). For sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS, I propose a realistic optimism grounded in girls' individual experiences and circumstances and responsive to a wider socio-economic context still informed by uneven distributions of wealth and power.

### **9.1.3 Contributions to scholarship and further research**

An important aspect of my dissertation was bridging the two seemingly disparate academic domains of social work scholarship on child protection and sexual abuse and Girls' Studies. Integrating social work scholarship with Girls' Studies allowed me not only to contribute something new to the field of social work but also to respond to an identified gap in contemporary Girls' Studies.

A strength of Girls' Studies is its understanding of notions of girls and girlhoods as contextualised, shifting and influenced by prevailing socio-political ideology. Equally important in Girls' Studies is a commitment to attending to and encouraging space for girls' voices and experience in scholarship and research. I found these aspects of Girls' Studies particularly relevant to studying girls' experiences of the social work field of child protection. In turn, the emphasis in social work scholarship on giving attention to the details of populations living often marginalized and disadvantaged circumstances and receiving services from social institutions responds to a missing area of study in Girls' Studies scholarship. Inspired to broaden Girls' Studies beyond its early concentration on girls' interactions with and portrayals within popular culture, a number of Girls' Studies scholars have called for research that makes central the voices of girls from a range of social locations and prioritises efforts to gain insights into the identities and experiences of socially marginal girls. Additionally, these scholars have called for research that takes into account the influence of prevailing socio-political ideologies and involvement with public institutions on girls' experiences of girlhood.

My dissertation sits at the intersection of both domains in its concentration on the voices and experiences of a specific population of girls marginalized by virtue of designations as being at risk and/or risky and subject to intense welfare state intervention in the form of CPS involvement. As well, in taking account of the intersecting context within which sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS understand and negotiate concerns for risk and aspirations of autonomy, my dissertation benefitted from and was able to build on respective theoretical and substantive insights from both social work scholarship on child protection and sexual abuse and Girls' Studies.

In considering what I have learned from as well as the limits of my study, I propose avenues for further research. Firstly, in pursuing my dissertation through a girl-centred interpretive framework, the focus was always intended to be placed on girls' voices and experiences. As the study progressed, however, I became convinced for a number of reasons of the importance of including CPS professionals with experience intervening with sexually abused teenage girls in the context of CPS. The first reason, which I will address immediately below, had to do with my limited access to sexually abused teenage girls as research participants. Another reason had to do with my sense that I was missing out on an important perspective of sexually abused teenage girls' involvement with CPS. And finally, I recognised that if my dissertation was to be useful to CPS practice with sexually abused teenage girls, it was essential that I hear from professionals involved in the day-to-day work of protecting sexually abused teenage girls from risk. Kearney's (2009: 22) reminder was illuminating in this regard:

It is important to remember ... that even though more girls are asserting themselves publicly – providing real evidence that “girl power” is not just a marketing slogan – girls cannot on their own make the world a more respectful place for female youth. Girls' Studies scholars can serve as their allies, however.

Although Kearney, here, was referring to the implication of adults as researchers in the lives of girls, I found her comment pertinent not only as a reminder that my role as researcher ought to involve working as an ally with girls to support their voices and experiences being brought to the fore of attention, but also with respect to understanding CPS professionals' potential to assume a similar role of ally in their day-to-day involvement with sexually abused teenage girls.

Listening to both sexually abused teenage girls and the adults involved in their protection allowed me the opportunity to learn from multiple perspectives. I was not interested in privileging one set of perspectives – that of CPS professionals or that of sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS – over another. I considered both as important to learning more about how both sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals understood and negotiated concerns for risk and aspirations for autonomy within a setting I knew to be shaped not only by issues of authority but also by prevailing socio-political ideologies. I consider my dissertation as a starting point in this regard. Conversation muted by the weight of perceived expectations

emerged as an important but not fully explored theme in this dissertation. Further research with matched pairs of sexually abused teenage girls and CPS professionals would allow a deeper exploration into the details – the nitty-gritty – of exchanges relating to risk identification and management as well as aspirations autonomy within the context of CPS involvement.

A significant challenge to conducting my dissertation was gaining access to sexually abused teenage girls involved with CPS. When I set out on my dissertation, I was convinced of the importance of producing knowledge that is not only responsive and meaningful to the complex, multiple, and diverse lives of girls but also shaped by girls' own perspectives, experiences, and observations. However, what I was not prepared for was the degree of concern for the presumed risks associated with girls' participation in research. I found girls' access to participation was complicated or even obstructed by CPS social workers' concerns for risk.

Given that I was starting from a girl-centred perspective, I imagined the process of informed consent as one that prioritised girls' agency and respected their competency to make choices on their own behalf. Complications arose, however, in that even before engaging girls in conversations about my study and their participation, I had to gain the "consent" of their respective CPS social workers. Effectively acting as gatekeepers, CPS social workers were positioned to decide on girls' participation in my study based on their evaluations of the associated benefits or risks. Unfortunately, a common result of CPS professionals' weighing of the benefits and risks was their tendency to err on the side of caution. Without denying the possible benefit of girls' participation in research aimed at being meaningful to their lives, these professionals were worried for the potential negative impacts of participation on their sometimes already strained relationships with girls or on girls' tenuous hold on managing the emotional and behavioural fallout of their sexual abuse. Determinations of sexually abused teenage girls' vulnerabilities thus trickled in to influence my dissertation and to limit girls' opportunities to speak for themselves.

This experience has roused my concerns for the potential lack of girls' representation in not only my dissertation but in any research aimed at giving attention and voice to girls' deemed to be at risk or risky. My analysis is based on interviews with seven sexually abused teenage girls

involved with CPS. While I respect and appreciate their experiences, perspectives and voices, I remain concerned about what I may have missed given the absence of the voices of girls deemed too vulnerable to participate. Identifying girls as being too at-risk or too risky to become allies in the research process contributes to their continued silence and marginalisation. I encourage researchers adopting a girl-centred interpretive framework to take on the challenge of engaging the collaboration of gatekeepers and inviting the participation of girls from all social locations, but perhaps most especially those marginalized girls whose voices are rarely heard.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Articles 38 and 38.1, Youth Protection Act (Quebec, 2007).

**38.** For the purposes of this Act, the security or development of a child is considered to be in danger if the child is abandoned, neglected, subjected to psychological ill-treatment or sexual or physical abuse, or if the child has serious behavioural disturbances.

In this Act,

(a) “*abandonment*” refers to a situation in which a child's parents are deceased or fail to provide for the child's care, maintenance or education and those responsibilities are not assumed by another person in accordance with the child's needs;

(b) “*neglect*” refers to

(1) a situation in which the child's parents or the person having custody of the child do not meet the child's basic needs,

(i) failing to meet the child's basic physical needs with respect to food, clothing, hygiene or lodging, taking into account their resources;

(ii) failing to give the child the care required for the child's physical or mental health, or not allowing the child to receive such care; or

(iii) failing to provide the child with the appropriate supervision or support, or failing to take the necessary steps to provide the child with schooling; or

(2) a situation in which there is a serious risk that a child's parents or the person having custody of the child are not providing for the child's basic needs in the manner referred to in subparagraph 1;

(c) “*psychological ill-treatment*” refers to a situation in which a child is seriously or repeatedly subjected to behaviour on the part of the child's parents or another person that could cause harm to the child, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation. Such behaviour includes in particular indifference, denigration, emotional rejection, isolation, threats, exploitation, particularly if the child is forced to do work disproportionate to the child's capacity, and exposure to conjugal or domestic violence;

(d) “*sexual abuse*” refers to

(1) a situation in which the child is subjected to gestures of a sexual nature by the child's parents or another person, with or without physical contact, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation; or

(2) a situation in which the child runs a serious risk of being subjected to gestures of a sexual nature by the child's parents or another person, with or without physical contact, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation;

(e) “*physical abuse*” refers to

(1) a situation in which the child is the victim of bodily injury or is subjected to unreasonable methods of upbringing by his parents or another person, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation; or

(2) a situation in which the child runs a serious risk of becoming the victim of bodily injury or being subjected to unreasonable methods of upbringing by his parents or another person, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation;

(f) “*serious behavioural disturbance*” refers to a situation in which a child behaves in such a way as to repeatedly or seriously undermine the child's or others' physical or psychological integrity, and the child's parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation or, if the child is 14 or over, the child objects to such steps.

**38.1.** The security or development of a child may be considered to be in danger where

(a) he leaves his own home, a foster family, a facility maintained by an institution operating a rehabilitation centre or a hospital centre without authorization while his situation is not under the responsibility of the director of youth protection;

(b) he is of school age and does not attend school, or is frequently absent without reason;

(c) his parents do not carry out their obligations to provide him with care, maintenance and education or do not exercise stable supervision over him, while he has been entrusted to the care of an institution or foster family for one year.

## **Appendix B: Feminist research**

In this appendix, although I do not intend to enter into a lengthy discussion on the history or details of feminist research, I explore a number of its foundational and defining features in order to illuminate certain of its enduring roots in girl-centred inquiry. Indeed, a number of distinctive features of feminist research traditions continue to echo loudly in the evolution of a girl-centred interpretive framework to research.

Feminist research – “as a new branch of theories, methodologies, and method” – emerged within the context of the second wave feminist movement (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007: 22). Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) explained that during the 1960s and 70s, female scholars and students participating in feminist political actions and consciousness-raising became increasingly aware of “glaring contradictions between their lived experiences as women and mainstream research models, studies and findings” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007:5). Noting the failure of academic scholarship and traditional research frameworks to “‘give voice’ to women’s activities, experiences and perspectives,” feminist researchers sought to rectify the situation by modifying existing approaches to research, or generating new ones, so as to better delve into and reflect women’s experiences and perspectives (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007:6). In other words, feminist research was born out of the desire to liberate women’s activities, experiences, concerns and perspectives from the silence and invisibility imposed by male-dominated and biased research practices and by the patriarchal relations of power shaping academic as well as mainstream contexts.

Whereas early feminist researchers, oft associated with “feminist empiricism”<sup>49</sup> (Harding, 1986; Hesse-Biber, 2008; Morawski, 2001), made important efforts to destabilise sexism and androcentric biases in research by adding women to research samples and asking new questions aimed at drawing out their experiences, activities, and concerns, later feminist researchers challenged the ontological (understandings of reality), epistemological (ways of knowing) and methodological (ways of doing) underpinnings of conventional social science research (Harding and Norberg, 2005). To elaborate, these feminist scholars of the 80s and 90s claimed that to develop or unearth knowledge that attended to the complexities of gender (in general) and women’s lives (in particular) required confronting the basic tenets of mainstream, conventional social science (Hesse-Biber, 2008). Modelled on natural science and grounded in a positivist paradigm, conventional social science seeks to uncover general laws or truths of social life and to collect objective “facts” through neutral means of investigation (Inglis, 2012). Reliant on a “hypothetico-deductive method,” positivist social science aims to generate, test and verify hypotheses about objective reality through systematic observation and description of phenomena (Ponterotto, 2005: 128). To pursue such a method requires the researcher to be distant,

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<sup>49</sup> Feminist empiricism is not confined to history. There remain feminist empiricists today who are committed to the basic tenets of positivism, scientific objectivity *and* feminism. Such researchers believe in the attainability of objective and generalisable research findings through the application of proven value-free and neutral research methods. According to Harding (1986: 24), feminist empiricism “argues that sexism and androcentrism are social biases correctable by stricter adherence to the existing methodological norms of scientific inquiry.” For example, she noted that scientific objectivity can be enhanced by attending to gender hierarchies and including women’s voices and experiences in research. In starting from women’s lives, feminist empiricist research illuminates the perspectives “of the systematically oppressed, exploited, and dominated, those who have fewer interests in ignorance about how the social order actually works” (Harding, 1991: 150). Still dedicated to a feminist agenda, feminist empiricists employ conventional, positivist methods with the goal of documenting previously ignored or obscured truths about women’s experiences and to expose and disrupt gendered stereotypes of human experience and behaviour (Leckenby, 2007).

disinterested and unbiased in the practice of his/her research. As explained by Harding and Norberg (2005: 2009-2010), standard social science assumes impartiality:

good method is supposed to guarantee reliable research results. In the conventional view, research methods do not contribute any social features, such as culturally local values or interests, to the phenomena they map or to the maps themselves; good research methods are supposed to be culture free, value free.

In this sense, the researcher and his/her social context, values, and interests are deemed external to the research project.

Feminist researchers refuted such claims of objectivity and neutrality on the basis of both legitimacy and relevance. In terms of legitimacy, Harding (1986: 15), noted that what was considered in research

to be humanly inclusive problematics, concepts, theories, objective methodologies, and transcendental truths are in fact far less than that. Instead, these products of thought bear the mark of their collective and individual creators, and the creators in turn have been distinctively marked as to gender, class, race, and culture.

What became clear to feminist researchers was that, rather than objective and neutral, conventional social science tends to reflect the social values and concerns of dominant social groups (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Feminists critiqued conventional social science for not only ignoring or glossing over issues of concern to women (as well as other subjugated or marginalised groups) but also reifying differences between men and women as natural, biological or essential (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). They further critiqued conventional social science for leaving unexamined the various and complex ways that relations of power (based on gender, race, class and the like) might influence not only the phenomena under study but also the process of research. This view, shared by researchers and theorists adhering to critical perspectives, sees that “mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression” (Kincheloe, McLauren & Steinberg, 2012: 16). According to both feminist and critical arguments – if left unchallenged – the standardized pursuit of social science research reproduces and privileges patriarchal interests while perpetuating the marginalisation of women and women’s interests.

Taking this collection of critiques as a starting point, feminists took on the challenge of designing alternative approaches to research that more honestly observed feminist principles and understandings. Although to speak of feminist inquiry as unified and singular is somewhat misleading, the multiple feminist frameworks for conducting research<sup>50</sup> emerging from the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward tend to share a few common features. In general, feminist inquiry is characterized by (1) concerns for issues of power, (2) overt attention to the values and/or politics informing research, (3) commitment to reflexivity and critical reflection, and (4) in response to feminism’s interaction with poststructural, postcolonial and postmodern thought as well as to challenges posed by women/feminists of colour – consciousness of the complexity, difference and diversity of women’s experiences (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Fonow & Cook, 2005; Gringeri, Wahab & Anderson-Nathe, 2010; Hesse-Biber, 2008; Morawski, 2001). As suggested above and as I will comment on further below, this latter aspect has had particular influence on the emergence of a girl-centred approach to research.

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<sup>50</sup> For example, feminist standpoint epistemologies, liberal feminism, feminist postmodernism and poststructuralism, intersectionality, Black feminism, postcolonial and global feminisms, Marxist and radical feminisms, ecofeminism, etc..

*1) Concerns for issues of power:*

Attention to power in the construction of knowledge is widely thought of as essential to feminist research. This “power-sensitive” (Leavy, 2007: 88) approach surfaces in a number of ways. With respect to the practice of conducting research, feminists openly acknowledge that issues of power and authority emerge within and often complicate decisions relating to whom or what gets investigated, how questions are formulated, how research is designed, carried out and, disseminated, and who owns and benefits from it (Gringeri et al., 2010). In traditional social science, relationships between researchers and their participants have tended to be marked by authority, meaning that a hierarchy regularly exists between the researcher and the researched wherein “the researcher is the ‘all-knowing’ expert, the participant is not; the researcher has access to all the information about the study, its designs, and questions, the participant does not” (Campbell & Wasco, 2000: 785-786). Compounding feminists concerns around the authority oft played out in the researcher/researched relationship, is their recognition that issues of power may well seep into research by virtue of the fact that “the researcher and the researched usually bring different amounts and kinds of social power (class, race, gender, ethnicity, urban or rural backgrounds, etc.) to the research situation” (Harding & Norberg, 2005: 2012). Seeing that power imbalances are apt to undermine trust and hinder the building of open, collaborative relationships deemed beneficial for gathering relevant data, feminist researchers have sought to smooth out the unequal footing between researcher/researched through promoting respectful and egalitarian research environments (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Far from easy, this goal requires that feminist researchers concentrate not merely on determining and defining data collection techniques (i.e. interviewing), analytical processes, and methods of dissemination but also on how to bring each aspect to life in ways that give attention to, confront and minimise the varied and multiple differences in power possessed by the researcher and his/her participants.

Issues of power also infiltrate the substantive matter of much feminist research. Feminist researchers begin with an understanding of the persistence of social relations of inequality marked by domination and subordination, privilege and disadvantage. Alongside scholars and activists committed to other critical frameworks, feminists recognise that individual and group experiences, self-perceptions, actions and opportunities are deeply influenced by their positioning within these social relations, which themselves shift over geography and time (Kincheloe et al., 2012). Additionally, feminists see social forces of power as influential with respect to interpretation. To elaborate, rather than taking for granted assumptions about classifications or characteristics of individuals who are categorised according to their group membership (or lack thereof), behaviour or social location, feminists largely acknowledge such assumptions as having emerged from particular – usually dominant – interpretations, perspectives or discourses (Payne, 2005). These understandings contribute to feminist researchers’ decisions regarding the substantive foci of their research. As a result, much of feminist research seeks to bring attention to marginalized voices, experiences and perspectives; to problematize and deconstruct social and gender categorizations; and, to expose the varied impacts of social relations of power on everyday life. I do not mean to imply, however, that only vulnerable or marginalized groups or those individuals and phenomena associated with them are made the subject of feminist study. Certainly, an important aspect of feminist research is to give space and consideration to oft silenced or ignored groups or phenomena, but, as put by Harding and Norberg (2005: 2011), feminist researchers also participate in “‘studying up’ – ‘studying the powerful, their institutions, policies, and practices instead of focusing only on those whom the powerful govern.’” The authors note that in studying up, researchers are able to uncover how

daily life is shaped by the various practices of power exerted by institutions as well as by dominant conceptualizations or ways of thinking.

2) *Values and/or politics informing research:*

Feminist researchers tend not to shy away from acknowledging the political and/or social values and interests informing their research. Steinberg (2012: 190) explained that in

rejecting the authority of the certainty of science, feminist researchers charged that the so-called objectivity of modernist science was nothing more than a signifier for the denial of social and ethical responsibility, ideological passivity, and the acceptance of privileged socio-political position of the researcher.

In contrast, feminist research anticipates that the researcher take on an ethically and socially responsible approach wherein s/he acknowledges ideological or value positions and interrogates privilege and disadvantage. Rather than shrouding their intentions, interests, or social biases beneath a cloak of objective neutrality, feminist inquiry favours transparency and accountability and widely views value-free, unbiased research as neither achievable nor desirable (Harding & Norberg, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2008). “Feminists argue that all knowledge is *produced* in a social and political context” (Ackerly & True, 2010: 465). As such, common to feminist inquiry is the researcher’s declaration of the social values and/or political intentions informing the subject matter, process and purpose of his/her research. Once again in line with other critical researchers, feminist scholars “frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world.” (Kincheloe et al., 2012:16). And for feminists, that struggle includes a particular concentration on exposing and diminishing the varied, multiple and unequal effects of social relations of power based on gender. As observed by Ackerly and True (2010: 465), many researchers inspired by feminism and feminist activism “seek to do research that is explicitly of value to women and that could result in actions that are beneficial to women.” I would add that critical feminist research does not stop at exploring and exposing gendered experiences and inequalities but rather seeks to render visible and combat inequalities or patterns of injustice based on age, race, class, ability sexuality and so on. Feminist researchers tend to explicitly formulate questions, design studies and produce findings that attend to varied structural inequalities that impact the lives of – usually marginalized or vulnerable – individuals and groups.

3) *Reflexivity:*

Closely tied with feminism’s overt attention to researcher values is the notion of reflexivity. While reflexivity is widely considered as crucial to the conduct of feminist inquiry, it is not exclusive to a feminist approach to research. Rather it is frequently associated with both qualitative inquiry as well as critical research perspectives. As noted above, reflexivity is understood to be an integral feature of qualitative research. Patton (2015: 191) explained that “the term *reflexivity* has entered the qualitative lexicon as a way of emphasizing the importance of deep introspection, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one’s perspective.” He suggested that being reflexive requires the researcher to engage in an ongoing critical process of self-examination on what s/he knows and how s/he knows it. In other words, from the outset to the final writing up of a study, reflexivity involves closely attending to one’s circumstances, positions, perspectives and interpretations and their varied influences on and interactions with the research endeavour and eventual findings. As put by Pillow (2003: 178), reflexivity “requires the researcher to be critically conscious through personal accounting of how the researcher’s self-location (across for example, gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality), position, and interests influence all stages of the research process.”

Writing specifically about the use of reflexivity in feminist research, Hesse-Biber (2008: 338) referred to it as a process

whereby researchers recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice. Practicing reflexivity also includes paying attention to the specific ways in which one's own agendas impact the research at all points in the research process – from selecting the research problem to designing the method and the ways one analyzes and interprets findings.

Flowing from the understanding that the feminist researcher is not neutral, objective, distant from or disinterested in her/his research, reflexivity requires that the researcher acknowledge his/her embeddedness in all aspects of the research process and engage in an ongoing interrogation of the particular vantage point – a vantage point which, in today's world of *post*-perspectives, is understood to be contextual, multiple and shifting – from which s/he engages in each facet of the study. Campbell and Wasco (2000: 788) noted that feminist research challenges conventional scientific method by encouraging researchers “to tell both stories at the same time: the process of how the research was conducted as well as the outcome (substantive findings) of the research.” Taking up the feminist idiom that the personal is political, these authors suggested that feminist research “is both explicitly personal *and* political.” (788). As such, feminist researchers are invited to explore in depth the research process as well as the personal/political values, perspectives and circumstances informing and influencing that process. Campbell and Wasco (2000) added that that exploration ought to be articulated publically or explicitly with research participants as well as those audiences for whom the research is intended.

Exploring how researchers put reflexivity into practice, Pillow (2003: 176), noted that “qualitative researchers using critical, feminist, race-based, or poststructural theories all routinely use reflexivity as a methodological tool to better represent, legitimize, or call into question their data.” Here, she infers a connection between reflexivity and the trustworthiness of a study. Practising reflexivity – transparently, honestly and critically – might thus “be understood as the process through which the researcher establishes and articulates the basis for ... trust” (Probst & Berenson, 2014: 815). But, as observed by Pillow (2003), herein lies a complication. She bemoaned that while commonly understood and accepted as “standard methodological practice for critical qualitative research,” the use of reflexivity is rarely delineated or defined (176). Individual researchers are thus largely left to their own devices to determine what, when and how to explore and disclose personal information. Of specific concern to Pillow (2003: 182) was the question of how much a researcher should disclose; she wondered, “how much do we need to know from or about the researcher to trust or believe what she/he is reporting?” (182). Addressing the same issue, Probst and Berenson (2014) commented that perhaps the most common unease identified in literature critiquing reflexivity, is that of whether by focusing so much attention on the researcher's own circumstances, thoughts, values, positions, processes, etc., attention may too easily be shifted away from the people or phenomena under study. They reflected that,

While scholars agree that reflexivity needs to serve the research agenda and not the other way around, there are no clear guidelines for assessing how appropriately reflexivity has been used in a given instance; the line between utility and indulgence may not be evident to the researcher (817).

Elaborating on this line, Probst and Berenson (2014: 817) referred to Finlay's (2002) analogy of a swamp to describe the “murky, seductive landscape” of reflexivity. Finlay (2002: 226) noted that researchers pursuing critical self-analysis must navigate the dangerous potential of “infinite

regress,” or “getting lost in endless narcissistic personal emoting or interminable deconstructions of deconstructions.” Over two decades ago, Patai (1994: 64) similarly questioned feminist researchers’ popular use of reflexivity and worried whether “we are spending much too much time wading in the morass of our own positionings.” Patai (1994) further wondered whether engaging in reflexive self-analysis actually produces better research and specifically challenged the use of reflexivity as a methodological tool for establishing trust and legitimacy in research.

Pillow (2003), acknowledging Patai’s (1994) critiques of reflexivity, cautioned against assuming that simply being reflexive will result in research that is better or more legitimate, true and authentic. She pointed out that engaging in an endless confessional cannot cure the problems of bias, unequal power, or appropriating the voice of another – all of which might well emerge when seeking to represent someone else’s reality through research. Pillow (2003) insisted, however, that there is no need to throw out reflexivity and asserted her belief that the solution does not lie in ending discussion on researcher positions or social-locations. She proposed instead practising a “reflexivity of discomfort” (192). Rather than merely composing a simplistic or self-indulgent confessional tale potentially disconnected from the purpose of or participants involved in the study, Pillow’s reflexivity of discomfort pursues a deep “engagement in the complex and slippery process of struggling to understand the meaning of human experience” (Probst & Berenson, 2014: 826). Practising reflexivity in this manner means being vigilant as to for whom and for what goal the researcher is engaging in self-interrogation and personal disclosure. The researcher, in choosing what areas of reflection to pursue or not, how far to go, and how much to disclose, is thus reminded to keep his/her reflexive process relevant to the research purpose and to the people or phenomena being studied.

#### *4) Difference:*

Today, a familiar methodological and epistemological concern in feminist research is “how to understand the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other structural features of societies” (Harding & Norberg, 2005: 2011). This concern gained ground during the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is often associated with the growth of third wave feminism(s) (Ackerley & True, 2010; Archer, 2004; Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). As Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) pointed out, early feminist scholars were preoccupied with calling attention to the invisibility and misrepresentation of women in conventional research and largely constructed their research endeavours around revealing and correcting widespread androcentric bias. In other words, early feminist theory, politics and research focused “primarily on relations between men and women and the social construction of gender in order to address the inequalities experienced by women.” (Archer, 2004: 459). Without denying the importance and significance of these feminist efforts, later feminists began posing new questions about differences amongst women’s experiences and the potential for conventional scientific methods to adequately account for and represent such differences beyond identifying them simply as divergent from essentialised<sup>51</sup> characterizations of “woman.” This feminist critique of modernist or conventional scientific method coincided with two discreet but deeply influential developments: first, the groundswell of voices of women of colour seeking to expose the shortcomings of early feminism’s claim of speaking “universally for all women” (McCall, 2005: 1771), and second, feminism’s increasing interactions with

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<sup>51</sup> Grillo (1995: 19) offered the following clarification of “essentialism:”

Essentialism is the notion that there is a single woman’s, or Black person’s, or any other group’s, experience that can be described independently from other aspects of the person – that there is an “essence” to that experience. An essentialist outlook assumes that the experience of being a member of the group under discussion is a stable one, one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts.

poststructural, postmodern and postcolonial perspectives (Archer, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2008; McCall, 2005). Due in large part to both of these influences, “most feminists have discarded the notion of one essential experience of women in favor of a plurality of women’s lived experiences” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007: 20).

Powerfully influential on feminism’s embrace of difference, were critiques directed towards feminists’ “use of *women* and *gender* as unitary and homogeneous categories reflecting the common essence of all women” (McCall, 2005: 1776). These critiques largely originated in the activism and scholarship of feminists of colour who questioned feminist research with respect to whose stories were being told and whose not told, whose experiences were being foregrounded and whose marginalized (see, for example, Collins (1990), the Combahee River Collective (1982), Crenshaw (1991), hooks (1984), Mohanty (1988), Razack (1998), etc.). These feminists of colour confronted early feminist inquiry for its unexamined racism, contending that in relying on women and gender as universal categories, the focus of feminist research consistently centred on “issues of importance to white, middle- and upper-class women and neglected the issues of import to women of color and working-class women” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007: 18). They were forthright and clear in making their point – not all women are the same and not all women are oppressed or privileged in the same way. Hence, the feminist concept of “sisterhood” came under attack for its failure to fully attend to the differences and power relations that divided women (and feminists). In perpetuating a neglect of difference and a marginalization of particular women’s experiences and by pursuing feminist analyses that relied on homogenized/ing categories of woman and gender, feminist scholarship was critiqued as being complicit in the ongoing oppression of Black and otherwise marginalized women.

Out of these critiques emerged a need for new ways of understanding women and their experiences that would be able to take account of difference, complexity, power and oppression. An intersectional approach was advanced as a response to this need (Collins, 1990, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1988). To elaborate, McCall (2005: 1780) noted that,

interest in intersectionality arose out of a critique of gender-based and race-based research for failing to account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection—ones that tended to reflect multiple subordinate locations as opposed to dominant or mixed locations. It was not possible, for example, to understand a black woman’s experience from previous studies of gender combined with previous studies of race because the former focused on white women and the latter on black men. Something new was needed because of the distinct and frequently conflicting dynamics that shaped the lived experience of subjects in these social locations.

Since its inception, intersectionality has been touted as a framework capable of giving credence to the heterogeneity of women, the plurality of experience, as well as the influence of interconnecting relations of power on daily life. As a starting point, intersectionality considers categories of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc. not as discrete variables or characteristics of identity, but rather as interlocking signifiers of social locations within the context of a particular time and place. Additionally, an intersectional framework recognises that each individual occupies multiple categories simultaneously. For example, as Crenshaw (1989) noted, a woman of colour stands at the intersection of categories of race and gender (amongst others) and it is this positioning that determines her social location. More than simply a sum of her parts, a woman’s social location cannot be fragmented. In other words, no category of identity can be separated out from the whole of who a woman is or where she stands.

As put by Grillo (1995: 17), according to an intersectionality perspective, the fragmentation of identity wherein one aspect or category of identity obscures or usurps all others (i.e. woman or person of colour) is “entirely at odds with the [individual woman’s] concrete life.”

Merely bringing attention to different, plural and varied social locations marked by intersecting categories of identity does not, however, mark the end point of an intersectional approach. To stop analysis of experience simply at the point of drawing attention to differences would leave unexamined and uncontested the power relations that reinforce and perpetuate certain categories of identity as subordinate or dominant, oppressed or privileged. Intersectionality suggests instead that to gain a deep understanding of experience means also delving into what it means to live at particular intersections within the context of multiple interlocking systems of power and oppression. Elaborating on this notion, Collins (1990) suggested that each woman, by virtue of the intersecting categories of identity that signify her social location, is situated at a particular (albeit potentially shifting and multiple) point within a “matrix of domination.” According to Collins (1990), this “matrix of domination” refers to the overall organization of power in a society and is conceived of as a complex, varied, and shifting web of intersecting systems of power and oppression that is historically, socially and geographically specific. Important to an intersectional perspective is the notion that where a person stands in this matrix, or in other words his/her social location, is potentially both a subordinate and a dominant position. As put by Burgess-Proctor (2006: 36), “all people simultaneously experience both oppression and privilege; no individual or group can be entirely privileged or entirely oppressed.”

As noted above, intersectionality and its emergence from the critiques of feminist women of colour coincided with feminism’s increasing attention to poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism. Indeed, intersectionality’s emphasis on complexity and its dismantling of universal, essentialised concepts of woman and gender fits with poststructural, postmodern and postcolonial disruptions of modernist ways of thinking. As put by Gringeri et al. (2010: 394), the rise of postmodernist perspectives and the practice of deconstructing grand narratives prompted feminists to resist essential notions (i.e. woman) or binary categories of identities (i.e. male/female, rich/poor, white/black, young/old, etc.), to trouble such understandings, and to seek insight into “the complexities of multiple, competing, fluid and intersecting identities.” Grillo (1995: 16) referred to this practice as “anti-essentialism” which she further described as an “indispensable [tool] for dismantling the master’s house.” She explained that anti-essentialism works to decentre and deconstruct the privileged “norm” of the essential woman (who is principally identified according to white, middle-class, heterosexual experience) and to consciously explore and acknowledge women’s different experiences, particularly those experiences of advantage and oppression based on any number of variables including race, class, age, sexual orientation, education, etc.. Attention to difference thus becomes vital to understanding women’s experiences. Rather than relying on simplified, essential visions of women, Grillo (1995: 22) proposed that “we define complex experiences as closely to their full complexity as possible and that we not ignore voices at the margin.”

Worrisome for some feminists has been the possibility of infinite relativism, wherein each woman’s experience is considered to be so unique, different and fluid that commonalities are glossed over and the feminist pursuit for social justice for women is stymied (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Their fear rests on the concern that in emphasizing difference it becomes impossible to talk of any shared oppression. For example, “if each woman, if each Black, has a different experience, how can one say that women as women, or Blacks as Blacks, are

oppressed?” (Grillo, 1995: 21). Responding to this concern, Archer (2004: 461) suggested maintaining a “theoretical hold” on *both* a postmodern/poststructural approach to difference while at the same time being vigilant to the “realities” of the role of power, injustice and inequality in everyday experience. In such a manner, it is possible to take into consideration differences that are persistent, enduring and shaped by relations of power and inequality. According to Archer (2004: 462), taking such a perspective to difference encourages feminist researchers to “engage with the ways in which social identities and inequalities (such as gender, race and class) are indeed fluid, shifting and discursive, [while] acknowledging they are also enduring and patterned.”

Leavy (2007) too spoke of the crucial consideration of power and privilege when taking account of difference. She observed that an important intersection between feminist and postmodernist research, or knowledge building, is the recognition of and reaction to the marginalization that occurs “as grand theories are produced and in turn become self-legitimizing” (2007: 91). She explained that “grand theories have historically been oppressive for women and all minorities because they do not account for difference in a nuanced way nor do they challenge the assumptions on which they rest (which are themselves the products of complex relations of power)” (91)<sup>52</sup>. Simply, experience and identity – in all their plurality, diversity and complexity – cannot be disentangled from where (and when) they sit at intersections of relations of power, privilege and inequality. With this understanding, feminist research influenced by post-perspectives challenges researchers to develop methods and modes of analysis able to capture and communicate the differences and complexities of social life while simultaneously confronting those enduring relations of power that serve to structure and inform experience. In denouncing simplistic, homogenized and often marginalizing categories of identity and experience, feminist researchers are called on “to engage with the complexity of ‘real life’ differences and inequalities” (Archer, 2004: 470). Thus, adopting a framework inclusive of difference encourages researchers to critically examine 1) how interlocking systems of oppression and privilege serve to shape individual experiences and perceptions (of the specific phenomenon, theme or topic under inquiry), and 2) how individuals live, negotiate and potentially challenge these intersecting systems and their effects within particular contexts and relationships (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Collins, 1998).

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<sup>52</sup> For example, and as presented in Chapter 4, grand theories of human development were challenged by feminist scholars for their reliance on and perpetuation of a male bias. Only through the concerted efforts of feminist researchers were the experiences of women and girls made visible and theories of human development proposed that included notions of female development as different but no lesser than male development.

## Appendix C: Introduction Letters

### ***Risk and autonomy: Teenage girls' experiences of child protection following disclosures of sexual abuse: Participation of teenage girls***

My research study aims to explore how teenage girls experience child protection interventions following disclosures of sexual abuse. I hope to gain a deeper understanding of how girls' experiences of protective interventions intersect with, influence and are influenced by adolescence, a developmental stage marked by transition from childhood to womanhood. To elaborate this research asks the following questions:

- How do teenage girls experience child protection interventions following disclosures of sexual abuse?
- What are the consequences of child protection interventions, both intended and unintended, for sexually abused teenage girls?
- How do sexually abused teenage girls engage in the exploration, experimentation and emergence of autonomy that are often expected and even encouraged during adolescence in the context of child protection interventions?

The focus of my research study emerged from my ten years of experience as a social work practitioner in a child protection setting and the Sexual Abuse Clinic of a local pediatric hospital. Over my years of professional practice, I have been offered numerous opportunities to work directly with teenage girls in the aftermath of their disclosures of sexual abuse. Witnessing and attempting to support girls through their various efforts to cope with their experiences of sexual abuse while simultaneously living their lives as teenagers, has inspired my curiosity about how teenage girls experience and negotiate child protection interventions while traversing the potentially complicated terrain of female adolescence.

I am approaching this research project through a qualitative research method in which teenage girls' descriptions and understandings of their experiences will be the focus of study. I also intend to (1) review the organizational documents that guide investigations, assessments and interventions in response to child sexual abuse in general (i.e. Youth Protection Act, Manuals) and (2) review written documentation specific to the particular investigations, assessments and interventions in response to individual teenage girls' disclosures of child sexual abuse.

I hope to interview 15 teenage girls recruited through your organization and one other local organization. Recruitment of these girls will begin with professionals in each organization making initial contact with each potential participant and one or other of her parents. Once they have given their consent, their names and contact information can be passed on to me.

To obtain a research sample, participants for my study should be considered according to the following criteria:

- Teenage girls must be between the ages of 15-19 years and must have experienced child protection interventions following disclosures of sexual abuse.
- The sexual abuse must have been disclosed to a child protection professional during the participant's teenage years broadly defined as being between the ages 12 to 17 years.
- A child protection social worker must have found sufficient evidence to believe that the disclosed sexual abuse occurred.
- The sexual abuse must have occurred during adolescence which, for the purposes of my study, will be broadly defined as being between the ages of 12 and 17 years.
- Teenage girls' experiences of sexual abuse will *not* be limited to either intra or extra-familial sexual abuse.
- Participation does not require that the sexual abuse be the primary reason for child protection involvement. For example, teenage girls, involved with child protection because of "serious behavioural disturbance" (Article 38(f), *Youth Protection Act*, 2007), who have made confirmed disclosures of sexual abuse will be considered for participation in the study.

Eligibility will not be associated with where a teenage girl is living. For example, a teenager will not be excluded from participation in the study if she is residing in a foster or group home. Placement outside of the family home may arise as a consequence of child protection involvement related to the sexual abuse. Thus, involving girls regardless of their placement circumstances allows me to explore their experiences of various potential living circumstances following disclosures of abuse.

#### **My Contact Information:**

Email: [rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca)

Phone: 514.523.5057

#### **Phone number to provide to potential participants:**

514.398.7063 (Office of Julia Krane. The number is a private, confidential line and she will be able to pass messages to me)

**Risk and autonomy: Teenage girls' experiences of child protection following disclosures of sexual abuse: Participation of child protection professionals**

My research study explores how teenage girls negotiate autonomy and risk as they experience child protection responses to their disclosures of sexual abuse. It seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how girls' experiences of protective interventions intersect with, influence and are influenced by adolescence, a developmental stage marked by transition from childhood to womanhood. To elaborate this research asks the following questions:

- How do teenage girls experience child protection interventions following disclosures of sexual abuse?
- What are the consequences of child protection interventions, both intended and unintended, for sexually abused teenage girls?
- How do sexually abused teenage girls engage in the exploration, experimentation and emergence of autonomy that are often expected and even encouraged during adolescence in the context of child protection interventions?

1) My aim is to interview select **teenage girls** recruited through Batshaw and one other local organization. For the purposes of protecting individual girls' confidentiality, identification of potential participants and initial contact with them begins with social workers. Once a girl (and her legal guardian) has agreed to learn more about my study, they can agree to have their name and contact information passed on to me. I would then contact them to fully explain the study and what participation would entail. I will not share any information with their workers from that point forward.

Potential participants can be identified according to the following criteria:

- Teenage girls must be between the ages of 15-19 years and must have experienced child protection interventions following disclosures of sexual abuse.
- The sexual abuse must have been disclosed to a child protection professional during the participant's teenage years broadly defined as being between the ages 12 to 17 years.
- A child protection social worker must have found sufficient evidence to believe that the disclosed sexual abuse occurred (even if there has been a recantation post initial disclosure).
- The sexual abuse must have occurred during adolescence which, for the purposes of my study, will be broadly defined as being between the ages of 11 and 17 years.
- Teenage girls' experiences of sexual abuse will **not** be limited to either intra or extra-familial sexual abuse.
- Participation does not require that the sexual abuse be the primary reason for child protection involvement. For example, teenage girls, involved with child protection because of "serious behavioural disturbance" (Article 38(f), *Youth Protection Act*, 2007), who have made confirmed disclosures of sexual abuse will be considered for participation in the study.

*I am more than happy to talk with you about cases you believe might fit the criteria and to strategize around making contact.*

2) So as to gain a more complete picture of girls' experiences, I am also very interested in interviewing individual workers from various points of service at Batshaw. Specifically, I am interested in interviewing workers about their experiences of working with teenage girls following disclosures of sexual abuse.

If you agree to participate in this research, I will begin with one interview. The interview will last for about an hour and a half. I may invite you to participate in a second interview should it be pertinent to the research. The interviews can take place either at your work setting, or if you prefer, at the School of Social Work at McGill University (Wilson Hall, 3506 University Street, Montreal). The date and time of the interviews will be arranged to suit your schedule.

During my interview with you, I will ask you questions about your practice of youth protection. The questions will look something like this:

- What is the mandate of a youth protection worker in situations of alleged sexual abuse? What are your responsibilities?
- What is specific about interventions with teenage girls disclosing sexual abuse? Are their specific protocols or policies that guide your interventions?
- Tell me about how you become involved with teenage girls.
- Tell me about a specific case in which you became involved with a teenage girl disclosing sexual abuse:
  - How did her situation come to you?
  - How did you talk with her?
  - What did you do? What was the intervention?
  - What were the specific measures put in place for her? How were these measures determined?
  - What happened?
  - What were the challenges you faced?
  - How did her being a teenager influence your intervention and decision making?

I hope that you seriously consider participating in an interview, as I believe that workers on the front lines of practice need to have their voices heard. I believe that what you have learnt through your own practice is an incredibly important (but mostly absent) source of knowledge. Please feel free to contact me anytime should you have any questions or comments about my research study.

THANK YOU!

## Appendix D: Oral Scripts

### ORAL SCRIPT – POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT

SOCIAL WORKER OR SOCIAL WORK MANAGER TO READ THIS SCRIPT TO  
TEENAGE GIRLS OR YOUNG WOMEN VIA TELEPHONE CALL

**Risk and autonomy:  
Teenage girls' experiences of child protection following disclosures of sexual abuse**

Hi (name of teenage girl),

I am calling to ask your permission to give your name to Rosemary Carlton. Rosemary is a PhD student at McGill University with lots of social work experience with teenagers. Rosemary would like to talk with you about your experiences of child protection after you disclosed sexual abuse. Rosemary is aware that sometimes child protection becomes involved to try to keep girls safe after they've made disclosures of sexual abuse. She also knows that teenage girls can find child protection involvement to be helpful and difficult. Rosemary is very interested in talking with you to explain her research with the hope that you will want to share your experiences with her.

If you are interested in getting more information about the study, I could give your name and phone number to Rosemary, who would then could call you to tell you more about her research. Or, if you would prefer you can contact Rosemary yourself (and I will give you her phone number). If you are interested in speaking with Rosemary, I will first have to speak with your parent or legal tutor, as I cannot give your name and phone number to Rosemary unless s/he also agrees. Is this okay with you?

Also, I want to let you know that should you and your parent/legal tutor agree for me to share your name with Rosemary, I would give her only your name and phone number; I would not give her any other personal information about you.

Whether you agree or not to talk to Rosemary is completely your choice. Your decision has no effect on any service from our agency/hospital. Whether you agree to participate or not will be between you and Rosemary and nobody from our agency/hospital will be aware.

Date of phone call: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

ORAL SCRIPT – PARENT/LEGAL TUTOR

SOCIAL WORKER OR SOCIAL WORK MANAGER TO READ THIS SCRIPT TO  
TEENAGE GIRLS OR YOUNG WOMEN VIA TELEPHONE CALL

***Risk and autonomy:  
Teenage girls' experiences of child protection following disclosures of sexual abuse***

Hi (name of parent/legal tutor),

I am calling to ask your permission to give (name of teenage girl)'s name to Rosemary Carlton. Rosemary is a PhD student at McGill University with lots of social work experience with teenagers. Rosemary would like to talk with (name of teenage girl) about her experiences of child protection after she disclosed sexual abuse. Rosemary is aware that sometimes child protection becomes involved to try to keep girls safe after they've made disclosures of sexual abuse. She also knows that teenage girls can find child protection involvement to be helpful and difficult. Rosemary is very interested in talking with you as well as (name of teenage girl) to explain her research. She is hopeful that (name of teenage girl) will want to share her experiences with her and that you will agree to (name of teenage girl) talking with her.

May I give your and (name of teenage girl)'s names and phone numbers to Rosemary so that she can tell you each more about her research? I want to assure you that should you and (name of teenage girl) agree, I would give Rosemary only yours names and phone numbers; I would not give her any other personal information about you or (name of teenage girl).

Whether you agree or not to talk to Rosemary is completely your choice. Your decision has no effect on any service from our agency/hospital. Whether you agree to participate or not will be between you and Rosemary and nobody from our agency/hospital will be aware.

Date of phone call: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Portraits of research participants – sexually abused teenage girls

### DORA

Dora was 16 years old at the time of my interviews (2) with her. She was living with her biological mother and father. She is the youngest of three children in the family. Her older sister also lives in the home and her brother lives nearby with his young family. The family is of Greek origin and is quite religious, following the Greek Orthodox tradition. Dora expressed that her faith is very important to her as it provides her with strength as well as a deep appreciation of right and wrong.

Dora attends an alternative school and although she has already failed two years of high school, she is working towards completing her high school diploma and hopes to continue on to Cegep and university. Her goal is to become a child psychologist for victims of trafficking.

Dora stated *I've been through every stage of either sexual abuse, molestation, rape, trafficking. I've been through it all, the whole package.* She was first sexually abused at age 6 by her paternal grandfather. The abuse lasted for about three years. She made an initial effort to disclose at age 7, but it was not until age 12 – after the abuse had ended – that her disclosure was fully acknowledged. The abuse was not reported to the police or CPS authorities but rather was dealt with within the family.

Dora also spoke of having been “gang raped” by eight guys – *a gang de rue kind of thing* – at age 14. She explained that she and a friend were picked up at the bus shelter near her school by a group of 8 guys in their 20s who invited them to smoke weed. Dora and her friend continued to meet these guys in the days that followed. According to Dora, they eventually began demanding sex. Over a period of three months, the guys raped Dora and sold her to other men for sex. She expressed feeling trapped and alone. The guys threatened to harm her physically, to kill her or to kill her family – *It was hell. If I didn't do anything, they'd threaten me. They had a gun. They would scream. I was really scared of them and I didn't want anything to happen to my family ... they said they'd kill my family!* The police became involved after Dora disclosed the situation to her male cousin who then informed Dora's parents. All eight of the men were charged and convicted for the sexual assaults.

At age 15, Dora started seeing a 29 year old man who had lied to her telling her that he was only 20. He provided her with drugs (ecstasy, speed and other pills) and was sexually abusive. Dora expressed feeling particularly hurt by the fact that he abused her despite having known of her history of rape: *He knew about me and what had happened and he was doing it too. To me. I told him to stop and he wouldn't stop. Once I slapped him and he slapped me back so ... That was just, “what the hell is going on!!”*

CPS became involved with Dora not as a direct result of the incidents of sexual abuse, but rather a few months following her disclosure of being sexually assaulted and prostituted by the group of eight guys. CPS involvement revolved around Dora's acting out behaviours. Dora explained that the *social workers all came in because they [my family] didn't know how to handle me anymore.* After being placed under urgent measures in a detention centre for less than 12 hours, Dora resided temporarily at a group home for adolescent girls. Her situation was heard by a judge who agreed with the family's request for Dora to stay at a monastery for a period of 30 days before returning home. Dora agreed with the plan and upon returning home, she and her family began receiving services from a CPS family preservation team (social worker and educator).

At the time of my interviews with Dora, she was still under a CPS court order and was participating in the family preservation program with her parents. The criminal case involving the rape and forced prostitution was completed and all eight men involved had been convicted and sentenced. Dora's continuing concern was about what could happen to her upon their release from prison. She had been reassured by both the police and her CPS social worker that there was a restriction of contact in place and

that should any of the men approach her again, she could call the police for assistance. Unfortunately, these assurances seemed to do little to assuage her fears.

DANIELLE:

Danielle was 17 years old at the time of my interview with her. She was living with her mother and step-father. She has an older brother and sister as well as a younger sister, none of whom lived with her. Danielle described having a strained relationship with her father. The two had maintained only limited contact throughout Danielle's adolescence.

Danielle attended an alternative high school. After failing grade 9 twice, she was not permitted to repeat the year again. As a result, she enrolled in an independent line of study. Her stated goal was to finish high school and eventually go on to college. She expressed looking forward to the day she could announce being first in her family to go to college.

Danielle's involvement with CPS began at a very young age due to her parents' volatile relationship; her father's abuse of her mother; and, her mother's substance abuse (alcohol and drugs). When her parents first separated, Danielle was entrusted to the care of her father, as CPS did not believe her mother was capable of assuring her security and development because of drug and alcohol use at the time. But, at age 12, Danielle was removed from her father's home because of physical abuse. Between the ages of 12 and 17, Danielle moved between a number of different foster and group homes. A few months prior to turning 18, she made the choice to move in with her mother.

In her early adolescence, Danielle disclosed having been sexually abused by her paternal grandfather. Little information regarding the sexual abuse, the disclosure or its aftermath could be gleaned from Danielle's file.

A second interview was scheduled with Danielle; however, her life circumstances prevented us from being able to meet again. She discovered she was pregnant just before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The CPS social worker involved in Danielle's care removed her from her mother's home and arranged for her to stay with her boyfriend's family. The plan was that she would continue to receive services from a CPS program designed to offer services to CPS involved youth as they transition into adulthood.

FROST:

Frost was 15 years old at the time of my interviews with her and was living in a foster home with her foster parents, grandmother and two foster brothers. She had been living in the foster home since age 12 and told me that she hesitantly considers her foster family her own: *I'm still working on it, but I feel very part of the family. I'm part of their family and they tell people when they ask how many kids they have, they say three. They don't say two, they say three.*

Frost claimed not to have regular contact with her biological family except for with her older sister (Suzanne – aged 20) who was living nearby with her two young children. Despite living in the same city, Frost and her father rarely communicated with one another. This lack of communication was as a result of both Frost's choice and a CPS court order requiring only supervised contact between the two. Frost's mother and older brother were residing in another Canadian city. She said that she speaks with her mom about twice a year and communicates with her infrequently via Facebook.

Frost was attending a regular high school, but is two years behind in her education. She talked about being very active in sports, especially ice hockey, and had recently completed a training program to become a referee. At the time of my interviews with her, Frost was being paid to referee a couple of games a week.

CPS became involved in Frost's life initially when she was about 8 or 9 years as a result of her older sister's disclosure of being sexually abused by their father. At the time, Frost's parents were separated, their mother lived in another province and both girls resided in the care of their father. Upon investigation, Frost denied any sexual abuse but it was determined that she was in need of protection due to the risk of sexual abuse given her sister's experiences. Frost's father denied that he had ever sexually abused either of his daughters. Eventually, Frost was returned to her father's care as concerns escalated around her sister's acting out behaviour and questions arose as to whether her disclosure of sexual abuse was true or whether it was an extension of acting-out behaviour. Suzanne recanted her disclosure shortly after Frost was returned home and eventually she too returned to her father's care.

A few years later, Frost went to her school social worker and complained of physical abuse by her father. She was immediately removed from her home and placed in foster care. Shortly following her arrival in the foster home, she disclosed to her CPS social worker that her father had also been sexually abusing her. Both her disclosure and her sister's past disclosure were determined to be credible at that time. *The real reason, the main reason why I went into foster care was not because of the sexual abuse, it was because he beat me. Sexual abuse was just an addition like "and he does this" but it was mostly because he beat me and I didn't want to be beaten anymore!*

Frost has a CPS court order stating that she is to remain in foster care until the age of majority. No criminal proceedings were instigated and her father continues to deny either physically or sexually abusing his daughters.

KELLY:

Kelly was 18 years old at the time of my interviews with her. She was living with her mother, her older brother and her younger half-brother.

Kelly was attending an adult education program. She was working towards completing high school with the goal of pursuing post-secondary education in either photography or graphic design. She claimed that a principle focus in her life was horses. An avid rider, Kelly spent a lot of time at a nearby stable where she was boarding her horse. She also worked part-time at a local restaurant.

CPS became involved in Kelly's life following her disclosure to her older brother that their step-father had been sexually abusing her since she was 8 years old. Although CPS investigated the situation, given that Kelly was two months away from turning 18 at the time of the investigation and that her mother was viewed by CPS as having taken responsibility for protecting her children (Kelly and her 10 year old half-brother) by removing her husband from the home, Kelly's case in CPS was closed. The file remained open, however, for her younger half-brother who continued to have contact with his father, Kelly's step-father. It was determined that with the history of sexual abuse, Kelly's younger brother was at risk of being sexually abused by his father.

At the time of my interviews with Kelly, CPS was still very involved with the family with respect to assuring the protection of Kelly's younger half-brother. As well, criminal proceedings against Kelly's step-father were ongoing. Her step-father had pled not-guilty to the charges of sexual abuse.

MOLLY:

Molly was 18 years old at the time of my interview with her. I met her in a group home for young mothers. Her almost one year old daughter, Robin, was present throughout the interview. Molly was in regular contact with her mother with whom she had a strained and sometimes conflictual relationship. She has three younger siblings but Molly gave no indication as to the quality of her relationships with them.

Molly had a long history of involvement with CPS. CPS first became involved in her life when she was 9 years old due to concerns of neglect, drug and alcohol abuse, and physical abuse. From that point until

she reached the age of majority, CPS was in and out of her life and she has undergone numerous placements in CPS foster homes, group homes and residential units. In her early adolescent years, Molly began displaying various acting out behaviours that were deemed by CPS to be beyond that capacity of her mother to control. She was eventually placed under a court order in a residential unit until the age of majority.

Molly explained that when she was about 17 years old her CPS social worker encouraged her to participate in services aimed at supporting independent living (*PQJ*). She agreed; however, upon becoming pregnant she was not allowed to continue her participation.

Molly was sexually abused when she was 16 years old by the father of her boyfriend at the time. No police charges were laid and CPS determined that she was not at risk of sexual abuse as she was no longer in contact with the perpetrator.

Molly's file in CPS was closed when she turned 18. Her involvement with CPS did not, however, come to an end. Upon Robin's birth, Molly's involvement with CPS shifted in that rather than being considered the child in need of protection, she was the mother whose capacity to assure the security and development of her daughter was under scrutiny. Robin was removed from Molly's care given concerns for neglect. At that point, Molly was living on her own:

*I had my own place. I got my own place but they weren't really sure if I would get her back full time ever. So that kind of upset me. I wanted to be her mom but it was just a really hard time for me. So, I didn't think I was able to do it by myself.*

Molly agreed to move into the group home for young mothers so as to regain custody of her daughter. She expressed being committed to *doing everything I have to do to get them out of our lives* and to keep Robin in her care. At the time I met with Molly, she was attending an adult education program and was participating in various programs aimed at developing adult autonomy that were offered by CPS and her group home.

Molly and Robin's father were no longer in a relationship; however, she the two maintained regular contact. According to the CPS measures, however, Robin's father was allowed no contact with Robin until he too had agreed to a parental assessment and had agreed to receiving services aimed at teaching parental capacity.

### NICOLE

Nicole was 17 years old at the time of my interviews with her and was living in an intensive supervision unit. Nicole was attending the school attached to the unit and was following an individual learning plan developed with the goal of helping her to complete her high school diploma. Prior to entering the intensive supervision unit, Nicole had been attending an alternative high school in the community. Two years behind in her schooling, she was registered in Grade 10. Nicole's stated goal was to complete high school and then go on to CEGEP and university in the field of criminology.

Nicole has a long history of CPS involvement beginning at age 2 when she and her older half-brother were placed in a foster home due to issues of neglect. At that time, both children were living in the care of their mother as Nicole's mother and father had separated a few months earlier. Nicole was returned to her mother shortly afterwards but was removed once again only a few months later due to continued concerns around neglect. She was then entrusted to her father and step-mother's care where she remained until she was 11 years old. At that age, a new report to CPS alleging physical abuse by Nicole's father and step-mother was investigated and substantiated. CPS returned Nicole to her mother's home where she later disclosed having been sexually abused by her paternal step-grandfather for a period of 6 years while

living in her father's care. After pleading guilty to the criminal charges laid against him, Nicole's paternal step-grandfather was issued an 18 month suspended sentence by the court.

CPS involvement in Nicole's life continued upon her return to her mother due to concerns around conflict between family members, Nicole running away from home and suspicions relating to her having been sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. Nicole vacillated with respect to her claims of sexual abuse but her CPS social worker believed her initial disclosure. Eventually, her mother expressed finding herself unable to manage her daughter's behaviours and Nicole was placed in a foster home. From the age of 13 to the time of my interviews with her, Nicole experienced frequent moves within the CPS system, from foster home to group home to more secure residential units. She frequently ran away from these placement settings usually ending up back with her mother.

Nicole AWOLed a few weeks prior to my initial interview with her. On that occasion, the police had found her and returned her to the care of CPS. It was discovered that she had been forced into prostitution. After leaving the residential unit and finding herself with nowhere in particular to go, Nicole was approached by a young woman who offered her a place to stay. Once at the woman's apartment, she and her boyfriend gave Nicole drugs and the boyfriend later raped her. Apparently starting the following day, this man and the young woman began prostituting Nicole while keeping her in a locked room and feeding her drugs:

*I was supposed to stay with one of my friends from Facebook. Like I was supposed to meet him and everything. He never ended up showing up. So, at 11:30 at night, I'm in short shorts, freezing my ass off and this girl came up to me and started talking to me. And I'm like, yeah, yeah and we were smoking cigarettes and stuff and she starts saying, "I know a place where you can stay." I'm like OK. "The guy might try something on you, but ..." I'm like it's only for the night. So, we went there and I started my pills (ecstasy, MDMA) up again and just got scared shitless ....*

Nicole was reportedly rescued from the situation a few weeks later after a "John" anonymously informed the police that an underage girl was being held and prostituted against her will:

*I ended up crying one day 'cause I was just fed up. I ended up having a client and he saw me crying. He's there, "what's wrong?" I was, "nothing, don't worry about it." He's there "no, there's something wrong." He goes, he knocks on the door and says "she's having an emotional breakdown." And it was the boyfriend. And the boyfriend was like "oh, since when do you ever have a say! You caused the problem. So fix the fucking problem!" [me – He said this to you?] Yeah. The client closed the door and I burst out crying. And, he's there, "why don't you just come with me" or whatever. And, I'm like "I'm leaving today anyway. I'm going to see a friend." I thought if I say I'm going home to my mom, he'll be like "why aren't you already there?" So, he's there, "alright" and he left and he called the police.*

Upon being returned to the care of CPS, Nicole was placed in an intensive supervision unit outside of the city.

#### SANNI:

Sanni was 18 years old at the time of my interviews with her and was living on her own in an apartment partially subsidized by the CPS (Independent living). Before moving into her apartment, Sanni and her younger sister spent just over one year living in a foster home. Her sister was still residing in the same home at the time I met with Sanni.

Sanni's parents immigrated separately to Canada as adults. They met and started their family here. The couple, however, separated when Sanni was about ten years old following a long history of conflict and conjugal violence. At the time of their parents' separation, both Sanni and her sister remained in the care

of their mother but only for a short time before returning to their father's home. Their mother seems to suffer from mental illness (undiagnosed) and as a result was considered by CPS as well as Family Court to be incapable of providing appropriate care to her daughters. Sanni's mother has continued to live in the same city and has maintained regular contact with both girls through visitation and telephone calls. Sanni claimed that while she feels close with her mother she finds she often assumes the role parent with her mother.

CPS was first involved in Sanni's life when she was about 6 years old due to concerns related to conjugal violence as well as her father's physical abuse of her and her sister. She and her sister spent a year and a half in foster care before returning to their parents. After a number of years without CPS involvement, a report was investigated and substantiated for physical abuse of both Sanni and her sister. Sanni was also determined to be at risk for sexual abuse. Sanni was 17 at the time of the investigation. Her father was charged with sexual abuse and was awaiting trial. Police restrictions allow Sanni's father no contact with either of his daughters.

Sanni was working full time in a fast food restaurant when I interviewed her. She had completed high school and started attending CEGEP, but dropped out of school in the first semester after having trouble coping in the aftermath of her disclosures of abuse, her placement in a foster home, and the involvement of CPS and other professionals in her life. She told me that she intended to return to CEGEP and eventually go on to university. She explained that she was still searching, however, for direction and was unsure as to what she wanted to study or what sort of work or career she wanted explore in the future.

## **Appendix F: Interview Guides**

### INTERVIEW GUIDE: TEENAGE GIRLS

#### **Getting to know the participant:**

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. As this is the first time that I'm meeting you, I'd like to start by asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself:

- How old are you?
- Who do you live with?
- Tell me about your family?
- Do you currently go to school? If so, what is going to school like for you? If not, tell me about leaving school.
- Tell me a little about what you do on a typical day.

#### **Exploring the disclosure(s):**

The following kinds of questions are intended to help me understand the nature of the teenage girl's disclosure(s) (formal and informal, accidental and purposeful):

- Can you remember the first time you told someone about the sexual abuse? Talk to me about that first time you told someone about the sexual abuse?
- What did you hope would happen when you told?
- Tell me about what happened next?
- What has been good about having disclosed the sexual abuse?
- What, if anything, has been challenging or difficult since disclosing the sexual abuse?

#### **Exploring child protection involvement:**

The following questions are intended to open up conversation relating to the teenage girls' experiences of child protection involvement.

I realize that you have been involved with child protection social workers. I'd like to talk with you about your experiences with child protection:

- How did you become involved with child protection?
- Did child protection get involved because of your disclosure of sexual abuse? If not, tell me about what brought about child protection involvement in your life. What do you think were the reasons that child protection social worker(s) came to see you in the first place?
- What did the child protection social worker(s) do after you disclosed sexual abuse?
- How did child protection social worker(s) talk with you about your disclosure of sexual abuse?
- What happened after the child protection worker(s) became involved after your disclosure of sexual abuse? Tell me about the decisions the social worker made about you. Describe the actions that the social worker(s) took with respect to you and your disclosure of abuse.

#### **Exploring what child protection social workers do:**

- I understand that the job of child protection workers is to keep kids safe after something has happened to them. Talk to me about what the social worker(s) did to keep you safe.
- Tell me about what has been helpful about child protection involvement since your disclosure.
- In looking back, what do you think was not helpful?

The next set of open ended is intended to help me to understand the young person's transition from childhood to womanhood

I wonder about how child protection involvement in your life has impacted your day-to-day activities as a teenage girl:

- Tell me about some of the typical things that girls your age do.
- Tell me about how child protection interventions have impacted your involvement with these typical things that girls do, if at all.
- Tell me about what has changed in your life since the child protection social worker(s) responded to your disclosure of sexual abuse.

I intend to complete my interview by asking the participants to reflect on what might be helpful to them as they look back retrospectively on their experiences:

- If you could tell child protection social workers anything about getting involved with teenage girls after disclosing sexual abuse, what would you want them to know? How would you suggest they intervene with teenage girls? Is there anything in particular that they do well? Is there anything in particular that you would suggest they change? Is there anything in particular that they should know about teenage girls?
- How do you think child protection workers could improve their interventions with sexually abused teenage girls?

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE: CPS PROFESSIONALS

##### **Demographic questions:**

How old are you?

What is your marital status?

Do you have any children? (if so, how many? What age? What gender(s)?)

Can you describe your cultural background, racial identity, ethnicity?

Do you identify with and/or practice any religion?

What language(s) do you speak?

What is your educational background?

What is your work experience?

What is your work experience in CPS?

##### **Study specific questions:**

What is the mandate of a CPS professional? What is the mandate of a CPS professional in situations of alleged sexual abuse? Are there differences in mandate?

What are the responsibilities of a CPS professional in situations of sexual abuse? Are there differences in responsibilities relating to whether the situation has been signaled/not signaled? Are there differences in responsibilities relating to whether the situation has been deemed as “security and development compromised” due to sexual abuse or not? (for example, situations in which the child is deemed to be in need of protection for something other than their experience of sexual abuse)

Tell about what is special (or not) about CPS involvement with teenage girls disclosing sexual abuse. Are there specific policies or protocols that guide interventions? If so, what are they and how do they influence intervention?

Tell me about your typical practice with teenage girls in general and with teenage girls disclosing sexual abuse in particular. Are there similarities? Differences?

Tell me about a particular situation in which you were involved with a teenage girl having disclosed sexual abuse:

- How did her situation come to you?
- Tell me about her situation.
- How did you talk with her?
- What did you do? What was your intervention?
- How did the CPS mandate influence your intervention (if it did)?
- What were the specific protection measures put into place for her? How were these measures decided upon? Who was involved in determining these measures? How was the teenage girl involved (if she was involved)?
- What happened?
- How did her age and gender (her being a teenage girl) influence your involvement and decision-making?
- What were the challenges you faced?
- What are you proud of in terms of your involvement with this girl?

Can you tell me about another situation?

## **Appendix G: Consent and assent forms**

### ***INFORMED CONSENT FORM (PARENT/LEGAL TUTOR)***

#### ***Risk and autonomy: Teenage girls' experiences of child protection following disclosures of sexual abuse.***

**Principal Investigator: Rosemary Carlton, PhD Candidate.  
Sponsor/Funded By: SSHRC (Canada Graduate Scholarship)**

Your daughter has been invited to take part in my research about what it is like for teenage girls to have youth protection workers involved in their lives after disclosing sexual abuse.

I am a student at McGill University in the School of Social Work. Although I worked as a social worker with sexually abused teenage girls for over ten years, I am not working as a social worker right now.

#### **Purpose and General information**

As you know, youth protection workers often get involved with teenage girls after they tell someone about being sexually abused. The main job of youth protection workers is to keep girls safe from being abused again. Although youth protection workers are expected to be helpful, girls often experience youth protection involvement in different ways. The purpose of my research is to find out about the different ways that teenage girls experience youth protection involvement in their lives after disclosing sexual abuse.

I'm really interested in talking with your daughter about how being involved with youth protection workers has affected her life during her teenage years.

#### **Research Procedures:**

If you and your daughter agree for her to participate in this research, I will interview her twice. Each interview will last for about an hour and a half. The interviews will take place at the School of Social Work at McGill University (Wilson Hall, 3506 University Street, Montreal) or at a different, neutral and private, setting agreed upon by your daughter and myself. I will set the date and time of the interviews to suit your daughter's schedule.

During my interviews with your daughter, I will ask her questions about her experiences of having youth protection involved in her life. The questions will look something like this:

- Think back on when you first told about having been sexually abused and tell me about what happened next;
- Tell me about how the child protection social worker(s) became involved in your life.
- How did the child protection social worker(s) talk with you and what did you talk about?
- What did the child protection social worker(s) do?
- What happened for you after the child protection worker(s) became involved?
- How did the social worker(s) decisions and actions involving you affect your day-to-day activities during that time?
- How did the child protection social worker(s)' decisions and actions make sense for you as a teenage girl?

If it is okay with your daughter, I will audio-record the interviews. After each interview, I will listen to the recording and type out its contents word for word. Only my supervisor(s) and I will be allowed to read the type written version of your interview. The audio recording will be erased once I have typed it out.

Also, if it is okay with your daughter, I would like to look at her case file at the organization she has been involved with. In particular, I want to read what has been written in her medical file about her disclosure of sexual abuse and her involvement with youth protection.

### **Possible Risks and Benefits**

It is possible that your daughter may find our discussion to be upsetting at times. I hope that this does not happen, but I will encourage your daughter to tell me if she it does happen. I will make sure that she knows she can take a break from the interview or stop it at any time. I will let her know that we could set another time to meet or she could decide not to continue with the research at all. In either case there would be absolutely no negative consequence for her.

As well, if she has any uncomfortable feelings during the interview, I can connect her with an appropriate counselling resource if she'd like. Finally, with your daughter's permission, I will call her after each interview to check in with her about how she feels following our discussion.

Although there might not be a direct benefit for your daughter in talking with me about her experiences, I hope that what she tells me will help to improve how youth protection workers get involved with other teenage girls who have experienced sexual abuse.

### **Compensation**

I will give your daughter \$5.50 for each interview to cover the cost of transportation and I will give her two movie tickets to thank her for taking the time to talk with me. I am also providing you \$5.50 to cover your costs of transportation to and from our meeting place where you will sign this form.

### **Alternatives & Voluntary participation**

I want you to know that talking with me is completely up to you and your daughter. The interviews are voluntary and she should not feel any obligation to be interviewed by me. On that same note, your consent for your daughter to participate in my research is completely your choice. Whether you choose to agree for your daughter to be interviewed or not will have no effect on any social services you or your daughter are receiving now or may receive in the future. Even if you agree for your daughter to participate in my research now, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time and I will stop the interview process with your daughter. In such an instance, there would be no negative consequence for you or your daughter.

### **Confidentiality**

I will make every effort to keep all identifying information your daughter shares with me confidential except as required or permitted by law. Specifically, should your daughter mention anything suggesting that she or someone else is at risk of harm or child abuse, it would be my responsibility to inform the appropriate authorities (i.e. Youth Protection).

I may use direct quotes from your daughter's interview in reports, presentations or publications, but I will

**not** use real names and I will make every effort not to reveal any identifying details about her or anyone else she talks about during the interviews.

I will keep the printed copies of the typed transcripts in a locked drawer. I will keep the electronic versions of the interviews in a password protected file in my computer. Only my supervisor(s) and I will have access to the data files. I will destroy all versions of the transcripts within seven years following the completion of my study.

### **Contact person**

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me by email at [rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca) or contact me through my supervisor's office voicemail (Julia Krane at 514-398-7063). Her phone line is confidential and she will pass on any message from you to me. If you would like to speak with my supervisor, Julia Krane, you can reach her at the same phone number or by email at [julia.krane@mcgill.ca](mailto:julia.krane@mcgill.ca).

I consent for \_\_\_\_\_ (name of participant) to participate in this research:

Yes

No

☐

No

☐

Participant's name:

---

Name of Legal Guardian

---

Signature of Legal Guardian

---

Date: (dd/month/yyyy)

---

Name of the person who obtained consent

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Signature of the person who obtained consent

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Date: (dd/month/yyyy)

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*INFORMED ASSENT FORM (TEENAGE GIRLS YOUNGER THAN 18 YEARS)*

***Risk and autonomy: Teenage girls' experiences of child protection following disclosures of sexual abuse***

**Principal Investigator: Rosemary Carlton, PhD Candidate.**

**Sponsor/Funded By: SSHRC (Canada Graduate Scholarship)**

I am asking you take part in my research about what it is like for teenage girls to have youth protection workers involved in their lives after disclosing sexual abuse.

I am a student at McGill University in the School of Social Work. Although I worked as a social worker with sexually abused teenage girls for over ten years, I am not working as a social worker right now.

**Purpose and General information**

As you know, youth protection workers often get involved with teenage girls after they tell someone about being sexually abused. The main job of youth protection workers is to keep girls safe from being abused again. Although youth protection workers are expected to be helpful, girls often experience youth protection involvement in different ways. The purpose of my research is to find out about the different ways that teenage girls experience youth protection involvement in their lives after disclosing sexual abuse.

I'm really interested in talking with you about how being involved with youth protection workers has affected your life.

**Research Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in this research, I will interview you twice. Each interview will last for about an hour and a half. The interviews will take place at the School of Social Work at McGill University (Wilson Hall, 3506 University Street, Montreal). Of course, if this location doesn't work for you then you and I can decide together on a different place where we can meet. We will also set a date and time for each interview that works best for you.

During the interviews, I will ask you questions about your experiences of having youth protection involved in your life. The questions will look something like this:

- Think back on when you first told about having been sexually abused and tell me about what happened next;
- Tell me about how the youth protection social worker(s) became involved in your life.
- How did the youth protection social worker(s) talk with you and what did you talk about?
- What did the youth protection social worker(s) do?
- What happened after the youth protection worker(s) became involved?
- How did the youth protection worker(s) decisions and actions affect your day-to-day activities during that time?
- How did the youth protection worker(s)' decisions and actions make sense for you as a teenage girl?

If it is okay with you, I'd like to audio-record the interviews. After each interview, I will listen to the recording and type out its contents word for word. Only my supervisor(s) and I will be allowed to read the type written version of your interview. The audio recording will be erased once I have typed it out.

Also, if it is okay with you, I would like to look at your case file at the organization you've been involved with. In particular, I want to read what has been written in your medical file about your disclosure of sexual abuse and your involvement with youth protection.

### **Possible Risks and Benefits**

It is possible that you may find our discussion upsetting. I hope this doesn't happen but if it does, I really want you to tell me. You can take a break from the interview or stop it completely at any time. We could set another time to meet or you could decide not to continue with the research at all. In either case there would be absolutely no negative consequence for you.

As well, if you have any uncomfortable feelings during the interview, I can connect you with an appropriate counselling resource if you'd like. Finally, with your permission, I'd like to call you after each interview to check in with you about how you feel following our discussion.

Although there might not be a direct benefit for you in talking with me about your experiences, I hope that what you tell me will help to improve how youth protection workers get involved with other teenage girls who have experienced sexual abuse.

### **Compensation**

I will give you \$5.50 for each interview to cover the costs of transportation. I will also give you two movie tickets to thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

### **Alternatives & Voluntary participation**

I want you to know that talking with me is completely up to you. The interviews are voluntary and you should not feel any obligation. If you choose to talk with me or not will have no effect on any social services you are receiving now or may receive in the future. Even if you agree to talk with me now, you are free to change your mind and withdraw your participation at any time. If you don't want to answer any particular question, you may refuse. You have the right to stop the interview or refuse to continue with the research at any point, without any negative consequence.

### **Confidentiality**

I will make every effort to keep any identifying information you share with me confidential except as required or permitted by law. Specifically, if you tell me anything suggesting that you or someone else is at risk of harm or child abuse, it would be my responsibility to inform the appropriate authorities (i.e. Youth Protection).

I may use direct quotes from your interview in reports, presentations or publications, but I will **not** use real names and I will make every effort not to reveal any identifying details about you or anyone else you talk about.

I will keep the printed copies of the typed transcripts in a locked drawer. I will keep the electronic versions of the interviews in a password protected file in my computer. Only my supervisor(s) and I will have access to the data files. I will destroy all versions of the transcripts within seven years following the completion of my study.

### **Contact person**

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me by email at [rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca) or contact me through my supervisor's office voicemail (Julia Krane at 514-398-7063). Her phone line is confidential and she will pass on any message from you to me. If you would like to speak with my supervisor, Julia Krane, you can reach her at the same phone number or by email at [julia.krane@mcgill.ca](mailto:julia.krane@mcgill.ca).

I agree to participate in this research:

Yes                      No                      ☐

I agree for the interview(s) to be audio-taped:

Yes                      No                      ☐                      No                      ☐

I agree for the researcher to have access to my case file at \_\_\_\_\_ (name of agency):

Yes                      ☐                      No                      ☐

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Participant's name

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Signature of Participant

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Date: (dd/month/yyyy)

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Name of the person who obtained consent

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Signature of the person who obtained consent

**KEY INFORMANT CONSENT FORM**

***Risk and autonomy: Teenage girls' experiences of child protection following disclosures of sexual abuse***

**Principal Investigator: Rosemary Carlton, PhD Candidate.  
Sponsor/Funded By: SSHRC (Canada Graduate Scholarship)**

You have been invited to take part in my research about what it is like for teenage girls to have youth protection workers involved in their lives after disclosing sexual abuse.

**Purpose and General information**

As you know, youth protection workers often get involved with teenage girls after they tell someone about being sexually abused. The main job of youth protection workers is to keep girls safe from being abused again. The purpose of my research is to find out about the different ways that teenage girls experience youth protection involvement in their lives after disclosing sexual abuse.

I am interested in talking with you about how youth protection workers get involved with sexually abused girls during their teenage years. Hearing your point of view will help me to understand better the processes of, and the pathways and challenges to youth protection involvement with teenage girls in the aftermath of sexual abuse disclosures.

**Research Procedures:**

If you agree to participate in this research, I will begin with one interview. The interview will last for about an hour and a half. I may invite you to participate in a second interview should it be pertinent to the research. The interviews can take place either at your work setting, or if you prefer, at the School of Social Work at McGill University (Wilson Hall, 3506 University Street, Montreal). The date and time of the interviews will be arranged to suit your schedule.

During my interview with you, I will ask you questions about your practice of youth protection. The questions will look something like this:

- What is the mandate of a youth protection worker in situations of alleged sexual abuse? What are your responsibilities?
- What is specific about interventions with teenage girls disclosing sexual abuse? Are there specific protocols or policies that guide your interventions?
- Tell me about how you become involved with teenage girls.
- Tell me about a specific case in which you became involved with a teenage girl disclosing sexual abuse:
  - How did her situation come to you?
  - How did you talk with her?
  - What did you do? What was the intervention?
  - What were the specific measures put in place for her? How were these measures determined?
  - What happened?
  - What were the challenges you faced?
  - How did her being a teenager influence your intervention and decision making?

Although I will ask you to talk about specific cases, I will also remind you not to provide any identifying information about the individuals you might bring up during our interview so as to respect the confidentiality of your clients.

If it is okay with you, I will audio-record the interview. After the interview, I will listen to the recording and type out its contents word for word. Only my supervisor(s) and I will be allowed to read the type written version of your interview. The audio recording will be erased once I have typed it out.

### **Possible Risks and Benefits**

I do not foresee any risks to your participation in an interview. However, should our discussion become upsetting for you, I encourage you to let me know. You can take a break from the interview or stop it completely at any time. We could set another time to meet or you could decide not to continue with the research at all. In either case there would be absolutely no negative consequence for you.

### **Alternatives & Voluntary participation**

I want you to know that talking with me is completely up to you. The interviews are voluntary and you should not feel any obligation to be interviewed by me. Whether you choose to be interviewed or not will have no effect on your position here. Even if you agree to participate in my research now, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time and I will stop the interview process. In such an instance, there would be no negative consequence for you.

### **Confidentiality**

I will keep all identifying information you share with me confidential. If I use a quote from your interview in any report, presentation or publication arising from my research study, I will rephrase it or make it anonymous. I will **not** use real names and I will not reveal any identifying details about you or anyone else you talk about during the interviews.

I will keep the printed copies of the typed transcripts in a locked drawer in my office. I will keep the electronic versions of the interviews in a password protected file in my computer. Only my supervisor(s) and I will have access to the data files. I will destroy all versions of the transcripts within seven years following the completion of my study.

### **Dissemination of results**

In addition to producing a doctoral thesis, I anticipate publishing the results of my research study in journal articles and/or book chapters as well as presenting at professional and academic conferences. My intention is also to explore avenues through which to share my research findings directly with social work practitioners engaging with sexually abused adolescent girls at the local agencies participating in my research study.

### **Contact people**

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me by email at [rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:rosemary.carlton@mail.mcgill.ca) or contact me through my supervisor's office voicemail (Julia Krane at 514-398-7063). Her phone line is confidential and she will pass on any message from you to me. If you would like to speak with my supervisor, Julia Krane, you can reach her at the same phone number or by email at [julia.krane@mcgill.ca](mailto:julia.krane@mcgill.ca).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or at [lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca](mailto:lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca).

I agree for the interview(s) to be audio-taped:

Yes ☐ No ☐

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Participant's name:

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date: (dd/month/yyyy)

---

Name of the person who obtained consent

---

Signature of the person who obtained consent

---

Date: (dd/month/yyyy)

March, 2011

## Appendix H: Articles 54 and 91, Youth Protection Act (Quebec, 2007)

**54.** The director may propose as voluntary measures that may be included in an agreement

(a) that the child remain with his family and that the child's parents report periodically to the director on the measures they apply in their own regard or in their child's regard to put an end to the situation in which the security or development of the child is in danger;

(b) that the child and the child's parents undertake to take an active part in the application of the measures designed to put an end to the situation in which the security or development of the child is in danger;

(c) that the parents ensure that the child not come into contact with certain persons or that certain persons not come into contact with the child;

(d) that the child undertake not to come into contact with certain persons;

(e) that the parents entrust the child to other persons;

(f) that a person working for an institution or body provide aid, counselling or assistance to the child and the child's family;

(g) that the parents entrust the child to an institution operating a hospital centre or a local community service centre or to another body so that he may receive the care and assistance he needs;

(h) that the child or the child's parents report in person, at regular intervals, to the director to inform him of the current situation;

(i) that the parents ensure that the child receive health services required by his situation;

(j) that the parents entrust the child for a fixed period to an institution operating a rehabilitation centre or to a foster family, chosen by the institution operating a child and youth protection centre;

(k) that the parents ensure that the child attend a school or another place of learning or participate in a program geared to developing skills and autonomy and that the child undertake to do so;

(l) that the parents undertake to ensure that the child attend a childcare establishment.

For the purposes of this section, the director must, whenever possible, call upon persons or bodies active in the community where the child lives. He must also ensure that the required services are provided to the child or to the child's parents for the implementation of the voluntary measures.

Where the director proposes that the parents entrust the child to an institution operating a rehabilitation centre or a hospital centre, he must specify whether or not foster care is required.

**91.** Where the tribunal concludes that the security or development of the child is in danger, it may, for the period it determines, order the implementation of one or more of the following measures:

(a) that the child remain with his family or be entrusted to one of his parents and that the child's parents report periodically to the director on the measures they apply in their own regard or in their child's regard to put an end to the situation in which the security or development of the child is in danger;

(b) that the child and the child's parents take an active part in the application of any of the measures ordered by the tribunal;

(c) that certain persons designated by the tribunal not come into contact with the child;

(d) that the child not come into contact with certain persons designated by the tribunal;

(e) that the child be entrusted to other persons;

(f) that a person working for an institution or body provide aid, counselling or assistance to the child and the child's family;

(g) that the child be entrusted to an institution operating a hospital centre or local community service centre or to another body so that he may receive the care and assistance he needs;

(h) that the child or the child's parents report in person, at regular intervals, to the director to inform him of the current situation;

(i) that the child receive specific health care and health services;

(j) that the child be entrusted to an institution operating a rehabilitation centre or to a foster family, chosen by the institution operating a child and youth protection centre;

(k) that the child attend a school or another place of learning or participates in a program geared to developing skills and autonomy;

(l) that the child attend a childcare establishment;

(m) that a person ensure that the child and his parents comply with the conditions imposed on them and that that person periodically report to the director;

(n) that the exercise of certain attributes of parental authority be withdrawn from the parents and granted to the director or any other person designated by the tribunal;

(o) that a period over which the child will be gradually returned to his family or social environment be determined.

The tribunal may make any recommendation it considers to be in the interest of the child.

The tribunal may include several measures in the same order, provided those measures are consistent with each other and in the interest of the child. It may thus authorize that personal relations between the child and the child's parents, grandparents or another person be maintained, in the manner determined by the tribunal; it may also provide for more than one place where the child may be provided with foster care and state how long the child is to stay at each of those places.

Where the tribunal concludes that the rights of a child in difficulty have been wronged by persons, bodies or institutions, it may order the situation to be corrected.

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