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On Being and Becoming: An Exploration of Young People's Experiences with Status and Power

Keri L. DeJong
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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On Being and Becoming:
An Exploration of Young People's Experiences with Status and Power

A Dissertation Presented

by

KERI L. DEJONG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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College of Education

Social Justice Education

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An Exploration of Young People's Experiences with Status and Power

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Approved as to style and content by:

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Barbara J. Love, Chair

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Ximena Zúñiga, Member

_____

Patrick Mensah, Member

_____

Christine McCormick, Dean
College of Education

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And finally, to Kris Baker, thank you for being a complete and total love and for seeing me through both the joyful and challenging parts of this process. I love you!

ABSTRACT

ON BEING AND BECOMING:
AN EXPLORATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES WITH STATUS AND
POWER

MAY 2014

KERI L. DEJONG, B.S., COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

M.Ed., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by Professor Emerita Barbara J. Love

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how young people in a high school and a community-based setting experience status and power related to age. This study assumes that discourses of childhood are constructed with a socio-political purpose. Literature from Critical Youth Studies, Postcolonial Theory, Feminist Theory, and Social Justice Education provide the theoretical and conceptual foundations. This research expands social justice education literature to include adultism/youth oppression as a social justice issue, centering the voices and experiences of those targeted by youth oppression. Research questions explored 1) what information young people encounter on a daily basis that communicates age as a form of status, 2) the impacts of young people's status related to age, and 3) ways in which young people see themselves exercising power. Through thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) of structured group and pair interviews, this study explores the thinking and critiques of a diverse group of fourteen young people about the period of childhood Findings suggest that participants regularly navigated negative beliefs about young people that were pervasive at interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels. These beliefs often characterize young people as

irresponsible, disrespectful, lazy, apathetic, and spoiled. Participants' challenges were often trivialized or dismissed by adults on the basis of popular understandings that young people are immature, developmentally incomplete, and overly dramatic. Participants described navigating a harmful double standard of respect and a lack of supportive, equitable relationships with adults in a range of reported interactions. Some participants described "giving-up" as a strategy to maintain peace with adults, and forms of economic and political exclusion that kept them from challenging or changing their status. Other participants discussed ways they see "other" young people exercise power while acknowledging their own experience of powerlessness. Many participants described leadership opportunities as "charades of empowerment" that were limited and controlled by adults. This study concludes that young people's status indicates oppression and that young people's knowledge should be included in social justice praxis. The suggestions of participants and data analysis revealed nine specific strategies that adults can implement to support more equitable partnerships between young people and adults.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> In human relations, whatever they are——whether it be a question of communicating verbally … or a question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic relationship – *power is always present: I mean the relationship in which one wishes to direct the behavior of another*. (Foucault, 1988, p. 11; emphasis added)

Young people have important knowledge and experiences about power relationships in their lives. This knowledge and experience is accumulated through relationships with adults, other young people, and the social institutions that permeate their family, school, and community experiences. Young people have unique insight into the ways they wish to direct the behavior of others and what it is like when someone wishes to direct their own behavior. Popular conceptions of childhood and human development shape the logics of relationship structures between young people and adults (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997). These logics imbue adults with status, afford access to social and cultural resources, and grant leadership roles in institutions that are used to direct the behavior of young people as a group with the intention of ensuring their safety and strong intellectual, emotional, physical, and moral development (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Grossberg, 2003). These logics also relegate young people to a lesser status, one that emphasizes their development during a period when they are learning to become adults. In this study, discourses of childhood are explored as logics that shape status and power relationships in young people's lives. Many of the discourses of modern Western childhood are similar to the discourses that provide justification for modern imperial colonization. As such, childhood is explored as a period that is borne of the same ideological and discursive logic as colonization.

A view of childhood as a socially constructed category like race, gender, and sexual orientation that has been framed and influenced by Enlightenment thinking, links adult's desire to understand young people's minds to colonizing discourse practices. For example, Nandy (1983) suggests that adults seek to understand their own minds by studying children. The study of children that has been conducted by adults has led to constructions of childhood through adult's perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors. One effect of this effort has been the creation of younger people as a category that is different, separate, and the binary "Other" to adults (Burman, 1994; Canella & Viruru, 2004). This kind of "othering" and the organization of humans into binary categories often indicate oppression, as is further discussed in Chapter 2. Young people's lives and experiences have exclusively been studied and theorized by adults in academic literature. For this reason, this study invites young people to share their own knowledge and experiences related to their age and their status relationship with adults.

This dissertation research explores young people's knowledge, perspectives, experiences, and constructions of childhood, situated in their own context, which are necessarily complicated and nuanced by their own experiences and ways of making meaning of those experiences. There is a long, well documented tradition of adults studying young people and the period of childhood. For at least a century, parents, researchers, psychologists, educators, and mostly "adult aged"[1] people have sought answers to many questions about infants, toddlers, children, "tweens," teens, and young adults (Bradley, 1989; Burman, 1994). Adult perspectives regarding young people have been immortalized in academic discourse and inscribed on the lives of young people who

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[1] The age at which a person becomes an "adult" is not fixed and is often determined situationally. In this case, an adult aged person is one who is older than the age of 18 and, moreover, is of an age when she/he can be socially sanctioned as researcher, psychologist, or educator.

are raised in those institutions borne of "adult" generated theories about young people's needs and perceived best interests.

Social Justice Education (SJE) theorizes that age-based social identity groups are utilized to maintain dynamics of adultism/youth oppression (Hardiman Jackson, & Griffin, 2010; Love & Phillips, 2007). SJE is "an interdisciplinary approach for examining social justice issues and addressing them through education" (Zùñiga, Lopez, & Ford, 2014, p. 6). Issues like racism, sexism, classism, transgender oppression, religious oppression, heterosexism, ableism, and adultism have been examined and theorized extensively in SJE literature. Some of these issues have been examined more thoroughly than others. There is currently a gap in the SJE literature exploring, describing, and theorizing adultism/youth oppression.

This study proceeds from the assumption that discourses of childhood are constructed with a socio-political purpose. Zùñiga et al. (2014) explain that:

> Social justice educators understand social identity group differences, both within and across groups, as socially and politically constructed; that is, as subjective rather than objective, as fluid rather than static, as specific rather than abstract, and as rooted in particular historical, geographic, and cultural contexts. Because differences are often used to justify inequality on the basis of hegemonic beliefs and explanations, especially when these differences legitimize access to privilege for social groups associated with what is considered "normal," social justice education explicitly links conversations related to group differences to questions related to equity and social justice. (p. 6-7)

The analysis of childhood presented in this study is informed by social justice education theory, which assumes that we all belong to a range of social identity groups that are socially and historically situated within systems of privilege and oppression and that members of both privileged and oppressed/targeted groups are taught to embrace the relations of ruling that are imposed by unequal social hierarchies. This lens is important

because it creates the possibility to examine what purposes childhood serves, who benefits, and who is impacted (Adams, 2007; Bell, 2007).

Rinaldi (2005) states, "Childhood does not exist, we create it as a society, as a public subject. It is a social, political and historical construction" (p.13). Thus, a critique of childhood as a discursive practice that is colonizing invites us to examine how young people's lives and experiences are impacted by dominant developmental perspectives, which have been produced and maintained by adults. The construction of childhood and adulthood allow little room for young people to experience themselves as powerful, valuable, contributing members of society. Adults legislate policy, dictate daily schedules, and play the dominant role in determining the boundaries and possibilities of young people's lives. The perspective of childhood and adulthood as social constructions is in itself a critique of the arrangement of power relationships between young people and adults and represents a big leap from conventional thinking about the role of adults in relation to children. Because so many researchers have not made this leap, there is a need for young people to theorize their position and possibilities as well as their power and efficacy within institutions, like high school, that have been designed and maintained by adults for young people.

Young people enact agency and power in ways that have yet to be adequately described in Social Justice Education literature. Here I use the term *agency* to describe one's capacity or ability to make choices and take action in the world and the term *power* as one's ability to influence, organize, or direct the behavior of others (Hayward & Lukes, 2008). Through discourses of childhood, young people are often constructed as incapable of critical thinking or acting in their own best interest and thus in need of being

controlled by adults for the sake of their own safety. Young people resist youth

oppression and other forms of oppression in creative and powerful ways that dominant

developmental theories have not fully conceptualized, recognized, or described. Here I

conceptualize youth oppression as:

> the systematic subordination of younger people, as a targeted group, who have relatively little opportunity to exercise social power in the United States through restricted access to the goods, services, and privileges of society and are denied access to participation in the economic and political life of the society. (DeJong & Love, 2013, p. 536)

Much of the power and agency that youth exercise occurs inside the private

sphere. When young people exercise power, their actions and efforts are often dismissed

or downplayed by adults as disrespectful, problematic, annoying, overly emotional and

childish. Addison Graves, at four years old said, "If you'd just do what I tell you I

wouldn't have to be so bossy" (Creede, 2010, n.p.). In Addison's attempt to exercise

power by telling an adult what to do, she is naming a dynamic between adults and young

people in which adults, for whatever reason, often refuse to listen to or comply with

young people's directions. This quote illustrates another way that young people enact

power, which Addison names as "being bossy." Young people are not usually allowed to

tell adults what to do because that is a role and a manner of exercising power that is

commonly reserved for adults. Young people being "bossy" is often seen as a form of

disrespect to adults and, yet, is a form of power in that it can shift adults to act or react in

particular ways. Addison is pointing out that young people would not need to enact

power in this particular way that adults often find to be disrespectful if those same adults

would willingly follow young people's instructions. Addison's directions demonstrate a

form of enacting agency or power in a relationship where young people have very little room to exercise power.

Problem Statement

Young people have been relegated to subordinant[2] status through dominant discursive practices rooted in modern imperial colonialism[3], which have been developed and maintained by adults, representing adult interest that is vested in power over and control of young people (Burman, 1994; Cannella & Viruru, 2004). These adult perspectives limit our ability to understand young people as complete human beings because they represent young people as incomplete, on the way to becoming "complete" as adults. Lack of access to young people's perspectives about their own lives allows adult perspectives to remain uncontested and viewed as part of the natural order (Love, 2004). Lack of access to young people's perspectives reflects an oppressive relationship between adults and young people in which young people are relegated to a category of "Other." Lack of access to young people's perspectives interferes with our ability to see where adult/child power relations are already more fluid and emergent. Additionally, it interferes with the possibilities for understanding young people as complete human beings, in their own right, rather than as "on-the-way-to-becoming" adults.

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[2] I use "the spelling *subordinant* because it parallels the term used to refer to dominants. We do not use the term dominate to refer to those in the dominant role. The use of the term subordinate, which is a modifying adjective, seems to contribute to the reduction and objectification of members of the group to which this term is applied" (DeJong & Love, 2013, p. 541).

[3] See definitions.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status, power, and agency related to childhood within their lived experiences. This research provides the opportunity to examine the current arrangements of power relationships between young people and adults and the ways that young people see themselves and each other exercising power. This research also adds young people's perspectives, critiques, and thinking about childhood to the existing literature on childhood that has been conceptualized by adults.

Rationale

> One of the most important reasons for hearing children's voice … [is] making children's interests visible in the social and political process of directing and garnering resources for children. (Prout, 2003, pp. 6-7)

Critical childhood scholars have noted that the dominant constructions of childhood shaping the majority of research on children and the discourse about children has largely been conceptualized by adults (Burman, 1994; Canella & Viruru, 2004; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996). Over the past 20 years, critical childhood studies scholars have engaged in critiques of the dominant notions of childhood, which have been created by adults (Adler & Adler, 1998; Burman, 1994; Canella & Viruru, 2004; Christensen & James, 2000; Corsaro, 1997; James & James, 2004; Qvortrup, 1994). These scholars who have levied these critiqued have also argued for the development and implementation of research practices that are in alignment with these critiques (Best, 2007). Critical childhood studies scholars have addressed methodological concerns related to positivist

traditions of research with young people that assume "childhood" is a reality that is universal, stable, observable, and able to be described from an objective point of view (Bennett, Cieslik, & Miles, 2003; Best, 2007; Christensen & James, 2000; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett, & Robinson, 2004; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Waksler, 1991). Even though there has been an increase in research on young peoples' lives from young peoples' perspectives, there are very few studies that look at young people's experiences and theories of childhoods or of their age cohort. This constitutes a significant gap in the literature. Although I found several studies that asked young people to share stories about their abilities and disabilities, race, gender, class, and other aspects of their lives, I discovered very few that focused on young people's experience of childhood or of being a "child," "teen," "kid," and so on.

This study addresses the gap in the literature and centers young people's perspectives and knowledge on childhood and adolescence by asking young people about how they conceptualize and make meaning of their age group. A social justice perspective supports the voices of those who have not traditionally participated in research about their own social identity group. Social Justice Education literature theorizes young people as a social group that occupies a subordinant status (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2010). In the tradition of critical race theory, a social justice perspective suggests that dominant, "majoritarian" stories about a group targeted by oppression are incomplete without the voices of people living the experience of that subordination (Delgado and Solórzano & Yosso, cited in Love, 2004). "Majoritarian stories are the description of events as told by members of dominant/majority groups, accompanied by the values and beliefs that justify the actions taken by dominants to

insure their dominant position" (pp. 228-229). Adults are the dominant group, and it is the "stories" that adults tell about young people that insure adults' dominant position. For this reason, it is important that young people be subjects rather than objects of research (L. T. Smith, 1999).

Standpoint theory supports research that focuses on power relations by focusing on the lives of marginalized groups. In this case, young people are the marginalized group. Feminist standpoint theories (Collins, 1990; D. E. Smith, 1987) rest on three claims: 1) Knowledge is not objective but is situated in one's social context, 2) groups that are marginalized are socially situated in a manner such that they will have different knowledge and can ask different questions than members of the dominant group, 3) research that focuses on power relations should begin with the lives of marginalized groups (Bowell, 2011). Theories about childhood and young people are incomplete without the voices and perspectives of young people. Since a majority of the research on children used in the production of developmental theories has been conducted by adults and has not focused on power relations in young people's lives, this research provides a space for young people to tell their own stories and share how they make meaning of their age, status, and power relations.

Significance for the Researcher

As an adult by legal definition, I receive the privileges, resources, and entitlements legally guaranteed to adults. As a child, I longed to become an adult for many years so that I could feel the freedom to make everyday choices about what to eat, where to go, who to spend my time with, when to go to bed, and so on. As a young girl

who was raised poor, I was keenly aware of the few opportunities available to me to feel empowered or to take any kind of action that might impact the world around me. The opportunities that I did find to exercise power often included taking action that could potentially be harmful to others or myself. For example, I had a stepfather who was incredibly controlling about food in the home. My sister and I were not allowed to eat any food without asking. He would mark the milk container in the morning to see if we drank any without asking before he got home from work. While this may not be a widely accepted parenting practice, there was not much I or anyone else could do. He had complete authority over my sister and me. I engaged in resistance by sneaking food into my room (which he often found) or by pocketing any change I could find around the house and going to the convenience store to buy candy. Either way, if I got caught, I would get in trouble. If I did not get in trouble, I usually ended up with a stomachache from eating junk food. I felt completely hemmed in and limited by most of the adults in my life, even though many of them had good intentions.

As a Human Development and Family Studies major in college, I was provided with developmental theories that sought to explain young people's growth and development. Most of the authors of these theories were White adult men. I had access to one book that provided testimonials written by girls about girlhood titled, *Ophelia speaks: Adolescent girls write about their search for self*. In all other literature, young people were the objects of research conducted by adults and rarely were their own voices represented (Shandler, 1999). I was curious about how foundational developmental theorists, like Piaget (1952) and Erikson (1968) who were all men, began theorizing the development of young people. My experience was that men did not spend very much

time in the presence of children. As a young adult, I felt very skeptical about these theories developed by men who had limited experience of and with young people. I also felt disempowered by the lack of youth voices in discussions about child development. Without young people's perspectives, what possibility would there be for us to know how young people's status impacts their ability to address harmful dynamic with adults?

The suggestion made by Barbara Love (2010b), that all people, including young people might get a chance to theorize at all, marked a turning point in my thinking. Love explains, "With a liberatory consciousness, every person gets a chance to theorize about issues of equity and social justice, to analyze events related to equity and social justice, and to act in responsible ways to transform society" (p. 471). The idea that young people can play a part in both theorizing and acting in ways that contribute to the transformation of society felt much more hopeful than the disempowerment that I felt in my Human Development courses where young people were researched but did not seem to participate in informing the theory. I am certain that young people already reflect on their lives and experience in profound ways. Through this research I seek to present and amplify young people's thinking and analyses about equity and social justice in relation to being perceived and constructed as young people.

Significance for Social Justice Education

Social justice education is an interdisciplinary theoretical and pedagogical approach to understanding and transforming oppression through education at the individual, cultural, and institutional levels (Adams et al., 2010; Bell, 2007). Social justice education scholars have theorized racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and

more, yet adultism/youth oppression remain largely under-theorized in social justice education literature. Adults have been the primary theorists in this field. A primary tenet of SJE is the inclusion of the voices of those cast in the role of subordinant. Yet, the voices and perspectives of young people represent a significant gap in SJE literature. This research is significant to SJE because of its potential to begin to bridge this gap in social justice education theory and literature by bringing in the young people's voices and perspectives. The inclusion of young people's knowledge, perspectives, and experiences is significant for social justice education as a field that seeks to understand the experiences of target groups and challenge uneven power relations. This study will contribute to the development of social justice theoretical and conceptual frameworks by providing an exploration of young people's experiences with status and power in the context of literature that conceptualizes youth oppression. This study provides both time and space for young people to talk about how being their age impacts their daily life, how their relationships with adults both impact and inform their concepts about themselves, and what they see as being possible for themselves and for the world, right now. Theories of social justice education can benefit from knowing more about how young people experience power and agency. Young people have a unique perspective on the formation of social identities during childhood that can benefit social justice praxis. Young people's perspectives and participation can expand the field of social justice education by challenging adult centric views that assumes young people have little awareness of identity and injustice and as such can expand the view of young people as change agents, in their own right. Young people's perspectives will benefit social justice education by opening up a view of young people's agency, experiences, and an analysis of power

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relations between young people and adults that can shape adult allyship and adult accountability to young people.

This research investigates how young people theorize their relationships to adults, in general, and especially in relation to status and power. This research investigates whether young people see something different from what adults see. For youth to be more active participants in social justice education and in the production of social justice theory and practice, it is important to make young people's theories and knowledge available to social justice practitioners of all ages. This study seeks to be both a process of opening up and of troubling current constructions of childhood and to contribute to the existing body of knowledge that can be useful in re-conceptualizing childhood.

Research Questions

This study explores how young people conceptualize and understand childhood. The methodological design for this study is aligned with honoring young people's experiences and thinking. Four types of research question are used in qualitative research. These are exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and emancipatory. The central research questions and subquestions of this study are exploratory. An exploratory question investigates a phenomenon using open-ended questions (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The research questions for this study are:

How do young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power as young people?

   a. What information do young people encounter on a daily basis that communicates age as a form of status?

b. How do experiences that communicate status related to age impact young people?

c. In what ways do young people see themselves exercising power in their lives?

Adults have studied childhood and the lives and experiences of children for a long time, but very little of this research showcases the voices and perspectives of young people reflecting on childhood. The central research questions in this study create an opportunity for young people to tell their own stories, to have an opportunity to reflect on their own understandings and experiences of power and status in high school, which is critical to gaining more grounded understandings of young people's lived experiences, and to learn about how those understandings can inform social justice education theory and practice. Qualitative methods will serve as the best mode of inquiry for this study because gaining an understanding of a person's lived experience can be supported by listening to a person tell his/her stories. Quantitative methods cannot yield the same level of nuance and perspective required in a study aimed at showcasing thoughts, perspectives, and experiences. This study requires the inductive methods of qualitative research.

Key Terms

A number of terms and concepts are defined here for the specific purposes of this study. While common usage of particular terms might differ from the definitions used in this study, these definitions aim to help establish a common point of reference for the reader.

Adult: A person who has access to the legal rights and privileges of adulthood, including the right to vote, to be employed, to enter into contracts, and more because of her or his age. The Oxford English Dictionary defines adult as "a person who is fully grown or developed" and "a person who has reached the age of majority" (Oxford Dictionaries. 2014a)

Adultism: Also called Youth Oppression. Adultism is the subordination of young people combined with the establishment of privileges for adults that are not available to young people based on their age. For the purposes of this study, adultism is defined as:

> The systematic subordination of younger people, as a targeted group, who have relatively little opportunity to exercise social power in the United States through restricted access to the goods, services, and privileges of society and are denied access to participation in the economic and political life of the society. This subordination of young people…is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms, attitudes and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society. Adult supremacy is maintained by a network of laws, rules, policies, procedures and organizational norms that consistently deny youth access to power, privilege and opportunity and ensure the continued targeted status of people that are young. (DeJong & Love, 2013, p. 532)

Agency: One's capacity or ability to make choices and take action in the world (Hayward & Lukes, 2008).

Agent: (Also called "Dominant") "Social groups [and members of social groups] that are positively valued, considered superior and 'normal,' and are given access to resources and social power" (Love, 2010a, p. 1).

Dominant: Social groups that are positively valued, considered superior and "normal" and have more access to resources and social power than those in other social groups (Love, 2010a).

Domination: The practices and behaviors whereby "dominant [social] groups…set the parameters within which the subordinates operate. The dominant group holds the power and authority in society relative to the subordinates and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used. … [T]he dominant group has the greatest influence in determining the structure of the society" (Tatum, 2013, p. 7).

Liberation: "A vision of society in which the equitable distribution of resources results in the needs of all members of society being met, and in which members of society are socially, physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Love, 2010a, p. 1).

Modern Imperial Colonialism: Modern imperial colonialism refers to 16th century and later European expansion that resulted in the creation of European-controlled colonial empires through the ongoing exercise of political, economic, and military power by stronger European nations over nations and peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Young, 2001). Modern imperial colonialism is also understood as the imposition of Western imperial forms of knowledge, understanding, culture, norms, values, and organization, which leads to either the appropriation or dismissal of local forms of knowledge. Modern imperial colonial forms of knowledge are produced and maintained by adults.

Oppression: "Signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privileged

groups reap advantage, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of targeted

groups" (Bell, 2010, p. 22). Oppression makes privileges available to members of the

agent or dominant group that are not available to members of the target or subordinant

group. Additionally,

> Oppression is a systematic social [phenomenon] based on the perceived and real
> differences among social groups that involve ideological domination, institutional
> control and the enforcement of the ideology that the dominant group's logic
> system and culture is superior. (Love, 2010a, p. 1)

Oppression also

> co-opts identities by attaching meaning and status to them that support the system
> of social oppression. The pervasive and systematic nature of oppression
> normalizes the redefined nature of the differences associated with social identity
> and transforms them into oppressed and oppressor social group identities at the
> expense of more neutral or alternative conceptions of identities and status.
> (Hardiman et al., 2010, p. 28)

Privilege: "Access to resources and power available to members of dominant social

groups that is not available to members of subordinant social groups" (Love, 2010a, p. 1).

Power: The ability to influence, enable, or constrain a person or people's behavior.

Subordinant: Social groups that are negatively valued and have limited access to

resources and social power (Love, 2010a).

Subordination: "The relationship of the dominants to the subordinates is often one in

which the targeted group is labeled as defective or substandard in significant ways….

> [Over time,] the dominant group assigns roles to the subordinate that reflect the
> latter's devalued status, reserving the most highly valued roles in the society for

themselves. Subordinates are usually said to be innately incapable of performing the preferred roles. To the extent that those in the target group internalize the images that the dominant group reflects back to them, they may find it difficult to believe in their own ability. (Tatum, 2013, p. 7)

Target: (Also called "Subordinant") "Social groups that are negatively valued and have limited access to resources and social power" (Love, 2010a, p. 1).

Young Person: A person, from birth to around the age of 18 (or sometimes older), who is not allowed access to the legal rights and privileges of adults. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a young person as "a person generally from 14 to 17 years of age" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014c). The term *young person* can also refer to younger people. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a child as "a young human being below the age of puberty or below the legal age of majority" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014b). This means that a young person is anyone who is not yet old enough to be held as legally responsible.

Organization of the Dissertation

This introduction has provided the background and rationale for this research study, the purpose of the study, and has outlined the research questions. Chapter 2 reviews three interdisciplinary bodies of literature: 1) childhood as a socio-political construction rooted in modern Western colonial discourse; 2) discourses of childhood as colonizing ideologies and practices that draws from Postcolonial Studies, 3) colonization of childhood as oppression. The first two bodies of literature trouble the notion of "childhood" as it has been theorized and treated in modern developmental paradigms, as being natural and universal. These bodies of literature provide a historical perspective of

constructions of childhood and an analysis of the colonial discourses embedded in these constructions. The third body of literature provides the entry point from which this researcher has conceptualized this study and the frameworks for analyzing the constructions of childhood in the context of domination, subordinations, power, privilege, and oppression. All three of these bodies of literature serve as the conceptual and theoretical foundations for this dissertation research.

Chapter 3 describes the design and methodology used in this study. A rationale for why qualitative methods have been chosen for the design of this research is provided and participant recruitment, site selection, and the use of specific research tools are also discussed in Chapter 3. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the findings of this study. Chapter 4 explores the beliefs about young people that participants encounter on a daily basis that communicates age as a form of status. Chapter 5 examines the consequences of those beliefs as young people navigate status relationships with adults and peers. Chapter 6 presents how the participants conceptualize power, how power is exercised, and their perspectives on opportunities to exercise power. This chapter also presents messages that participants wanted to communicate to adults about ways adults can support young people. Chapter 7 discusses these findings and presents implications for further research and practice.

Summary of the Introduction

This introduction describes the background and purpose of this qualitative study exploring how young people make meaning of their status and power. A view of childhood as a discursive practice that is colonizing presents the opportunity to examine

the politics of childhood as well as how theories of childhood are anchored in a particular standpoint. Discursive practices that are similar to those used to justify colonial practices have positioned young people as subordinant to adults representing adult interests that are vested in power over and control of young people. As a result, there is a lack of access to young people's perspectives about their own lives, which allows adult perspectives to reign uncontested and viewed as correct. This study provides a counter to this discourse by inviting young people to share their experiences and knowledge about being their age and about what it is like to navigate their relationships with adults.

As described in this introduction, the lack of young people's perspectives about childhood indicates a major gap in the literature. This qualitative study addresses this gap by providing an exploration of young people's own perspectives on their childhoods and their experiences of being young people inhabiting childhood. This study highlights young people's knowledge and experiences, making those perspectives available to all people, including young people. Making those perspectives of young people accessible can support the creation of more flexible and open power relations between young people and adults and can be used to inform social justice education praxis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Introduction</u>

Most, if not all of what has been theorized, researched, and published in scholarly journals and presented in textbooks about infants, children, tweens, teens, and young adults has been developed by adults. These theories are often presented within a Western framework and add to a discourse that has a long history tracing back to The Age of Enlightenment in Europe and the "Western" world. Western Enlightenment theorists sought to discover the laws of nature that govern human growth, development, and interaction. This thinking was rooted in the assumptions that a true nature exists and can be discovered through rigorous scientific inquiry, setting the stage for prevailing modern thinking about young people (Seidman, 2008). Adults have produced the majority of the existing discourse about childhood and only recently have scholars begun to critique the view that there is a discoverable true nature in childhood. The lack of access to young people's thinking about their childhoods, combined with pervasive and prevailing developmental perspectives that have been produced by adults, limit the possibilities for understanding what might be natural and what might be socially constructed. A lack of access to young people's thinking and to their experiences conserves and reinforces adult's authority over young people's lives and leaves little room for different perspectives about young people to emerge.

Cannella and Viruru (2004) have asserted that childhood is colonizing. Postcolonial theory is often engaged "as a critical idiom; through which to analyse discursively the continuing legacy of European imperialism and colonialism and to

uncover the oppositional discourses of those who have struggled against its lingering effects" (Tikly, 2004, p. 173). Because the process of constructing and overseeing the maintenance of childhood is very similar to modern imperialist colonization, Cannella and Viruru (2004) assert that addressing these problems will "result in an awareness of the oblique and indirect ways in which power is used to control and colonize groups of human beings, power that may be exhibited by physical, material practice, but also through discourse and representation" (p. 109). Since colonization is never a complete process (Weenie, 2000), and it is possible that young people are able to maintain a sense of themselves as young people, analyzing childhood as a form of colonization creates the opportunity for young people to define childhood for themselves.

Organization of the Chapter

First, I define key concepts related to the theorizing of childhood, drawing from the most salient and pervasive constructions of childhood in Western modern thought. Next, I review some of the major discourses of childhood in Western modern thought. Then, I will present parallels between constructions of childhood and colonial ideologies and practices by reviewing literature that discusses how both have been developed over time as they are both rooted in Enlightenment thinking. Finally, I discuss why discourses of childhood are colonizing and will review Social Justice Education conceptual frameworks for analyzing childhood as oppression.

Bodies of Literature

This dissertation is premised on the assumption that discourses of childhood are constructed with a socio-political purpose. Three bodies of literature reviewed provide the conceptual and theoretical foundations for this dissertation research. The first body of literature explores childhood as a socio-political construction rooted in modern Western colonial discourse, drawing from Critical Childhood and Youth Studies literature (Bonnichsen, 2003; Côté & Allahar, 2006; Montgomery, 2003) early childhood education (Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Kinchloe, 2002; Cannella & Viruru, 2003, 2004; Viruru, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Viruru & Cannella, 2001, 2006), sociology (Giroux, 2000; Jenks, 1996; Males, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2002), cultural studies (Grossberg, 2003; James & Proutt, 1997), and feminist studies (Burman, 1994, 2007). Selected literature discusses childhood from a historical perspective, employs a critical lens to analyze the concept and discourses of childhood, and deconstructs modern Western notions of childhood in developmental psychology that constitute the prevailing view of childhood evident in many of the current conversations about children.

The second body of literature explores discourses of childhood as colonizing ideologies and practices drawing from Postcolonial Literature and cultural studies (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963; Foucault, 1969, 1995; Said, 1979; Spivak, 1988, 1990, 1996) and from feminist studies (McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 2006). This body of literature provides theories of power, analyses of discourse that constitutes childhood, views of domination and subordination, and a critique of Western positivist science as it is related to biological essentialism connected to colonial constructions of childhood. In addition,

this literature provides an analysis of intersectionality and intimacy as a mechanism of colonization.

The third body of literature examines the colonization of childhood as oppression. This literature review is rooted in social justice education literature, which provides the entry point from which I have conceptualized this study. Social justice education provides the frameworks for this analysis of constructions of childhood in the context of domination, subordinations, power, privilege, and oppression. Analyzing childhood as colonization, that is, as occurring within relationships of domination and subordination, can support the theory and practice already occurring in social justice education at various locations. Social justice education theorizes the socialization of humans into oppression, naming age as a social identity category through which oppression operates (Adams et al., 2010; Hardiman et al., 2010; Harro, 2010). Socialization is the process through which young people learn and internalize messages, values, behaviors, norms, and general roles associated with their social identities within a society currently characterized by oppression (Harro, 2010). A perspective of childhood as a form of colonization, and thus oppression, can strengthen an analysis of the socialization of young people by widening the historical and political context of youth oppression. A view of colonization expands the focus on socialization with a reckoning with, naming, and analysis of social and historical macro-level forces that have impacted and continue to shape constructions of modern childhood. Current conceptual frameworks in social justice education focus largely on the United States (Adams et al., 2010).

Key Perspectives Defining Childhood

Most academic disciplines in the U.S. use a Western scientific approach (e.g., human development, childhood development, psychology) that investigates, considers, and defines children through the use of rigorous Western scientific methods. First, a theory is proposed about childhood or children, then a hypothesis is formed, and finally the hypothesis is tested and retested (Rogers, 2003). One of the assumptions that undergird these Western scientific methods, in regards to childhood, is that youth are undergoing a developmental period in which the goal is to become an adult (Rogers, 2003). This assumption frames the theories that generate hypotheses to be tested. The results of these investigations aim to reveal nature, or biological/psychological truths about young people.

As these assumptions are rarely interrogated, the Western scientific method has seldom been able to investigate childhood outside of the notion that children are "in progress," on the way to becoming adults. This section presents a review of two key perspectives shaping the current predominant thinking about childhood in Western academic discourse. The first is a perspective of childhood as a biological reality, and the second situates childhood as a social category. These perspectives provide grounding for discussions of historical contexts, discourse practices, and postcolonial critiques of "childhood" in later sections of this study.

Biological Perspectives of Childhood

Many studies have relied on observations of physical growth and psychological change to understand childhood. Biological and psychological viewpoints define

"childhood" as a period of progress (Burman, 1994, 2007; Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2003, 2004; Nandy, 1983). According to this perspective, childhood begins with birth and is marked by growth in size, the acquisition of certain abilities and skills that include physical, neurological, hormonal, intellectual, and emotional dimensions. The end of childhood is less clear than the beginning. Though there are arguments as to when life actually begins, these arguments are beyond the scope of this paper. The biological and psychological perspectives of childhood reflect many of the most commonly held assumptions about youth. Because biology is understood to be "natural," the "biological child" is also conceptualized as natural.

This view of childhood as biological deals with the observable physical features related to childhood and to the psychological and emotional dimensions and characteristics of childhood. Observable physical markers are connected to constructed phases of biological development that hold that there is an "intrinsic nature" of young people connected to each of those phases (Côté & Allahar, 2006; Kennedy, 1998). Height, weight, size, and physical ability are a few observable characteristics that are used to establish the dimensions and bounds, as well as the norms of childhood. Infants are measured and weighed after they are born. In the United States, it is not uncommon for a child's weight and height to be shared along with the announcement of their birth. These measures are meant to convey the health of a child. There are, indeed, physical changes that are observable in human growth after birth; however, meaning is attributed to each change and is used to define what is "normal" for development. These perspectives are used to judge what is natural, and thus "normal" as to when someone

should be walking, crawling, talking and other forms of activity associated with these constructed phases.

Other biological markers involve hormones, neurological functions, cognition and emotion, motor skills, and speech patterns and development. These markers have also been used to identify the bounds of childhood and to convey norms for development (Piaget, 1972). Consistent with much psychological research, these dimensions are often dealt with apart from the social context within which they are viewed (Côté & Allahar, 2006). A student of Human Development will find theories in her textbooks that identify developmental norms within phases or stages of development. These stages suggest ranges of time when it is "normal" for children to walk, talk, emote, and more. These stages both reflect and support a wide range of factors impacting the lives of young people, including parenting, public policy and education issues. The developmental norms that have been foundational to perspectives of childhood as biological do not take into account that what is considered to be normal for children varies across cultures and class. Thus, developmental norms can be critiqued as not being biological but rather socially constructed.

Developmental stages often reflect and inform common assumptions about childhood and the young people inhabiting childhood. The period of "adolescence" provides a useful example. In 1905, G. Stanly Hall published *Adolescence*, which informed theorists, like Sigmund and Anna Freud, Kurt Lewin, and Erik Erikson (Côté & Allahar, 2006). Hall presented the idea that "storm and stress" is universal to all adolescents and is part of human's genetic make-up (Côté & Allahar, 2006). G. Hall (1905) postulated that "the life of each person repeats the evolutionary history of the

human species because of the influence of human evolution on our genetic-makeup" (p. 16). Hall and other theorists postulated that adolescence was the product of biology and genetics, rather than of culture. Though writing from his experience in a specific time, location, socioeconomic class, culture, gender, and age—Hall presumed that his theories of adolescence could be universally applied.

This viewpoint is reflected in many developmental theories today that, in turn, have shaped the common public understanding of adolescence (Proefrock cited in Côté & Allahar, 2006). The idea of storm and stress supported a view of this period as a kind of pathology which provided "legitimation for the juvenile justice system in the United States and the suspension of rights imposed by that system" (Proefrock cited in Côté & Allahar, 2006. p. 17). Similarly, this thinking served as the basis upon which much of the organization of schools is based; particularly, middle and junior high schools were developed to get people in the supposed stages of "storm and stress" contained and kept separate from younger people so that they would not contaminate the younger people with their "storm and stress" (Briggs, 1920; Koos, 1927; W. Smith, 1927).

Social Perspectives of Childhood

Childhood as a social category is viewed as a stage or a period marked by growth and "becoming" (Burman, 1994; Erikson, 1968; Jenks, 1996; Uzgalis, 2010). Childhood as a social category rests upon the assumptions outlined in John Locke's foundational text, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Uzgalis, 2010). Childhood is thought of as the period when the foundations of the individual are laid upon the *tabula rasa*, or blank slate.

> Locke holds that the mind is a *tabula rasa* or blank sheet until experience in the form of sensation and reflection provide the basic materials — simple ideas — out of which most of our more complex knowledge is constructed. While the mind may be a blank slate in regard to content, it is plain that Locke thinks we are born with a variety of faculties to receive and abilities to manipulate or process the content once we acquire it. (Uzgalis, 2010, The Limits of Human Understanding, para. 12)

Adults hold the responsibility for inscribing these blank slates with the moral and constructive information needed to participate in the society. Childhood, through this perspective, is rarely thought of as a practice or set of actions taken, socially and culturally (Jenks, 1996). It is the period when the social individual is shaped, grows-up, matures, develops a self, and receives everything that is needed in preparation for adulthood. In contrast, adulthood is viewed as a period of being complete, cognitively competent, fully human, mature, self-knowledgeable, developed, and desirable (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Jenks, 1996). Thus, childhood as a social category is a perspective that is engaged to advocate particular versions of social structure and organization in which adults are complete and young people are incomplete, in-progress or becoming until they achieve adulthood (Jenks, 1996).

Childhood, as conceptualized by anthropologists and sociologists, has traditionally been viewed as the Other to adulthood (see Bhabha, 1996). Both of these fields have gone to great lengths to research, understand, and describe childhood from the perspective of adults through situating adults as the norm, as the standard by which young people are measured. This dynamic invokes age-centric perspectives much like the common Euro-centrism present in these fields since their inception, whereby Europeans are presented as the norm and people of color are presented as "Other" (Jenks, 1996). Adult aged people research young people through an adult lens, centering the

perspectives and values of adultness and perhaps unwittingly, othering young people. This arrangement situates adults as knowers, researchers, and experts, assuming developmental completeness and a mature social location. Conversely, young people are constructed as Other.

This standpoint infuses socialization theories that seek to describe the process of youth as being prepared to become adults. Parson (1951) suggests that "socialization" refers to the process of child development, yet claims:

> There is another reason for singling out the socialization of the child. There is reason to believe that, among the learned elements of personality in certain respects the stablest and most enduring are the major value-orientation patterns and there is much evidence that these are "laid down" in childhood and are not on a large scale subject to drastic alteration during adult life. (p. 207)

Thus, this perspective views socialization as the process by which individuals take on (or have laid upon them) the social norms and values of the culture within which they live. The assumptions of the incompleteness of young people and the completeness of adults situate adults as occupying a superior stage or status to young people and so are in a position to define the boundaries and limits of childhood.

In summary, these perspectives of childhood as biological and social define the status of childhood based on views of biological and social development and progress where young people begin as blank slates to be shaped and prepared for the goal of adulthood. In the following sections, discourses of childhood are examined which pose challenges to these dominant perspectives of childhood. This dissertation research assumes that childhood is a social construction and so challenges these two key perspectives of childhood as biological (natural) and childhood as social (the Other to adults). Similar to Hendrick's (1997) thinking pertaining to constructions and

reconstructions of childhood, this study does not seek to deny biological or physiological dimensions of young people's lives.

> No attempt is being made to suggest that children's condition is entirely devoid of biological dimension, nor to deny the effects of physical being, though the nature of the consanguinity between the social, the psychological and the biological is extraordinarily problematic. (p. 35)

This study seeks to spotlight some of the assumptions and presumptions that attribute value and meaning to biological and psychological dimensions of childhood. The theoretical assumptions of this study hold that the modern Western notion of "child" is a social construction that has been co-created through social, psychological, and biological disciplines and practices. The purpose of deconstructing and critically analyzing the discourse involved in constructing children is not to ignore biological dimensions, but rather to expose and trouble the assumptions at the roots of the social constructions that have been attached to these biological dimensions of childhood.

Discourses of Childhood in Western Modern Thought

The discourses of childhood to which I have access are Western, and it is important that I do not presume to know what notions of childhood might or might not exist in other cultural contexts. In this culture, dominant paradigms defining and identifying childhood are Western, modern, and heavily influenced by the philosophical perspectives of European, White, educated, upper- and middle-class men (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; L. T. Smith, 1999; Viruru, 2005b). Cannella (1997) analyzes the history and discourse that emerged during Enlightenment and modernization to identify the "discourse practices of childhood" associated with dominant notions of childhood (p. 33). According to Foucault (1977), discourses are

structures of knowledge and systematic ways of creating or shaping reality that characterize particular historical moments. The "embodied acts of discourse," or *discursive practices,* provide the boundaries and parameters for what can be known, said, and thought (p. 199).

> Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories. Thus, each discursive practice implies a play of prescriptions that designate its exclusions and choices. (p. 199)

How we think about things is what constitutes those very things. Discourses emerge across diverse institutions and in the context of sociopolitical and institutional mechanisms. Some of the particular themes found in the discourse practices of childhood are "existence, individuality, universality, progression, and determination by experience, to name a few. These discursive practices have been used to justify, signify, and create what is meant by the notion of the child" (Cannella, 1997, p. 33).

In this section, I examine four discursive practices in modern Western construction of childhood presented by Cannella (1997). These are: 1) child/adult dualism, 2) the child and adult as individuals with souls to be saved, 3) the discoverable essence or nature of young people, and 4) the discourse of time, progress, nature, and universality (Cannella, 1997). I further examine a fifth discourse of childhood described by Burman (1994), which is the discourse of childhood as dependency. I briefly outline and review literature discussing the five themes related to common discourses of the child and childhood viewed through a postcolonial perspective. These discourses are helpful because they support a re-thinking or re-examination of that which is often considered to be natural and inevitable about young people and about childhood.

A review this literature provides an analysis of modern Western discourse practices constituting childhood that frames childhood in a socio-political context and acknowledges: 1) oppressive power relations while retaining the agency of the oppressed or targeted group; and 2) the detrimental effects of this relation to the "dominant" group (once children, now thought of as adults) as well, which ironically here, was once the target group (adults, formerly thought of as children). It is important to challenge the assumptions that emerge from these discourses of childhood as they continue not only to constitute and reify the identities employed in oppressive power relations but also deny agency to young people while they create privilege and opportunity for adults (Cannella, 1997, Cannella & Viruru, 2004).

Child/Adult Dualism

I played a game with my niece in which we name "opposites" of things. I asked, "What's the opposite of adult?" She replied, without hesitation, "Kids." This young person has been presented with a relationship between young people and adults in which the two are separate and opposite. This discourse practice of child/adult dualism both assumes and constructs "child" as separate from "adult." This separation grows out of Cartesian dualism, which made a distinction between the individual mind and the natural world (Lavine, 1984; Lowe, 1982). Cartesian dualism was used to represent difference in dualistic terms (e.g., savage/civilized, dependent/independent, small/large, innocent/knowledgeable) and contributed to widespread binary thinking (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). These binaries not only assume a separation between categories; they

privilege one position that is constructed as "subject" and disadvantage one position that is constructed as opposite and Other (L. T. Smith, 1999).

In the case of the adult/child binary, adults are in the privileged position (Walkerdine, 1984). "Children today are described as innocent, weak, needy, lacking in skill or knowledge, immature, fearful, savage, vulnerable, undefined, or open-ended, as opposed to adults who are intelligent, strong, competent, mature, civilized, and in control" (Nguyen, 2010, p. 10). Children are the Other in the child/adult binary (Cannella, 1997). In this dichotomy and through the associated discourse, children are locked into rigid, pre-determined power relations with adults in which the younger person's ability to exercise power is limited unless sanctioned by an adult or institution and young people's knowledge is frequently hidden or disqualified while adults are constructed as completely powerful and knowledgeable (Burman, 1994).

Individuals with Souls to be Saved

The discourse related to child and adult as "individual self-contained human beings… believed to possess independent reasoning and a soul that must be saved" is a discourse that has been used to justify adult/youth power relations in which adults are empowered to save young people (Cannella, 1997, p. 33). In this relationship, adults are constructed as full human beings and as such are in full possession of independent reasoning. Adults occupy the dominant position as they are imbued with the potential to determine how a soul can be saved. Young people, who are constructed as becoming adult, are constructed as not yet fully human and so occupy a subordinant position to adults. Young people are also constructed as being in need of saving.

Cartesian dualism allowed the construction of the individual, apart from nature and from other individuals and groups of individuals. Christianity imbued each individual with a soul, which needed to be saved. The responsibility for soul-saving went to adults. Nandy (1983) explains:

> [Through the] Protestant Ethic it became the responsibility of the adult to 'save' the child from a state of unrepentant, reprobate sinfulness through proper socialization, and help the child grow towards a Calvinist ideal of adulthood and maturity. Exploitation of children in the name of putting them to productive work, which took place [during] the early days of the industrial revolution in Britain, was a natural corollary of such a concept of childhood. (p. 15)

At the heart of the Protestant Ethic is Calvinism, named for John Calvin, who is largely responsible for bringing Protestantism to the masses. The Calvinist ideal includes a range of assumptions that permeate the modern Western discourses of childhood. Some of these assumptions include that all humans are born in sin and that we must be ashamed of our sins and be punished by God who will provide a harsh discipline, out of love, that will correct our wrongdoings. Calvinists also believe that a select few are chosen by God to restore humanity, and that those select few can be identified by their material wealth and success (in addition to their adherence to Calvinist principles and practices) (Weber, 2000). Protestantism, and particularly the framework developed by John Calvin, support the discourse constructing young children as sinful, savage, and unrepentant. Calvinist versions of Protestantism hold the view that all humans are naturally born "sinners" and that only through a harsh, yet loving discipline would children take on the rigid beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, and practices of Protestantism, thus putting them in a position to be "saved" (Weber, 2000). Even though adults are also classified as sinners, this discourse vests adults with the responsibility to discipline children in order to support the development of Protestant practices that might ensure that their souls be saved. Thus, the

discourse of soul-saving and child-saving served to justify adults' exercise of power over younger people, while also defining and justifying the education and socialization of young people by adults.

Western Science and the Discoverable Nature of Young People

A third discourse that is frequently addressed in modern Western literature is that there is a "true nature" of young people, a predetermined reality that can be uncovered through Western positivist science (Best, 2007; Burman, 1994, 2007; Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Jenks, 1996; L. T. Smith, 1999; Viruru, 2007). Enlightenment philosophies emerged out of mainstream European culture during the 18th century. During this period, reason and rationality were centralized and highly valued while earlier traditions and systems of thought not consistent with concepts of European rational knowledge were deprecated and disregarded as superstitious (Burman, 1994).

The scholars of the Enlightenment contributed to the creation of a social worldview that has become pervasive in modern Western thought. This worldview was shaped by the aim to understand the laws of nature governing human behavior and to use Western science in the promotion of freedom and progress (S. Seidman, 2008). This worldview led to the rise of the Western scientific method, notions of scientific rigor, and the value of the idea of objective observation based on a belief that rigorous scientific observation can uncover the truth, or the true nature of something or someone (Burman, 1994). These notions have supported the idea that some humans (at the time, these particular humans were White, European, formally educated, Christian, heterosexual, adult men) can objectively observe other humans and that a truth or essence of those

humans being observed can be discovered. The idea follows that "true nature" exists and can be discovered through such "objective" testing and observation. This "true nature" can then be applied to all humans who have been similarly categorized in the hierarchical order into which every being—plant, animal, or human—was assigned a place, presumably based on "natural laws." For example, one could observe a few young, White, male children, deduce that what was learned about those children being observed represents "truths" about what it is to be human, and reflect what is "natural" and thus "normal." These "truths" can then be used to compare girls, or children of color, or children in different cultural settings to the "normal" children. Any differences observed are labeled as deficits. This information is then used to validate and solidify categories of humans within a racialized, gendered, and classed hierarchy in which the observers who are White and male place themselves at the top.

Charles Darwin published the first child study in 1877, called "Biographical Sketch of an Infant" (Bradley, 1989; Burman, 1994). Burman points out that this was the first published study of its kind, even though earlier studies had been conducted by women which were not published. Thus, it was formally educated, European, White men who were the authors of the discourse and early constructions of the "child." Burman connects mid-19th century studies of infants conducted by these same men to a "quest to discover the origins and specificities of the mind, that is, the human adult mind" (p. 10). This quest, coupled with the construction of White, European, adult men as scientists and experts of scientific observation, situated White, adult men as the authors of and experts on science. The thinking of women and non-European men of all ages who would

conduct similar observation studies or who held knowledge of any kind about the human mind and body was dismissed.

White, European men had complete reign over the creation of knowledge about the human mind of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, classes, and more. Burman (1994) points out, "the child of that time was equated with the 'savage' or 'underdeveloped'; since both were seen as intellectually immature, 'primitives' and children were studied to illuminate necessary stages for subsequent development" (p. 10). Anyone who was not a White, European man was categorized as Other and could be subject to research and definition.

European, male adults studied young people and local people who were the objects of colonization in an effort to understand more about themselves, rarely turning the scientific gaze upon themselves. In this way, many who were studied and observed were seen as separate and different from those conducting the study. Enlightenment thinking of the previous century pertaining to the European adult man's ability to be objective was already embedded in methods of scientific observation. While there was a belief that objectivity was possible, the motivation behind so-called objective observational studies precluded calling into question the assumptions about the subject(s) of the observation or the impact of the power positions of the observer in the recording of the so-called "objective" "child truth."

Time, Progress, Nature, and Universality

The idea and value of progress is embedded in the foundation of "child development." The notion of progress, which is so much a part of our worldview that it

seems to be natural, unremarkable and unquestioned, assumes that human beings are in continual movement toward growth and advancement (Cannella, 1997; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996). Once we achieve the height of development in adulthood, humans are then presumed to be headed "over the hill" on a decent toward eventual death. Adulthood is commonly advanced as the goal of development. These notions of human progress/development, which are rooted in enlightenment and modernist discourse, are "linear, universalistic, deterministic, and establish advancing as a standard for normalcy" (Cannella, 1997, p. 63; see also Burman, 1994; Jenks, 1996). The fact that adults are almost always the only ones authorized to comment on childhood reinforces the belief that the expert on childhood is always an adult. As Western science looked for clues to understand adult minds through the observation of children, the framework of a linear development from child to adult took hold.

Who or when are youth, infants, children, adolescents, and elders? What are the age markers? An overview of relevant literature shows that there is not one commonly accepted definition or age delineation in response to these questions (Côté, 2000; Merser, 1987; Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003; Wyn & White, 1997). Rather, there are a variety of perspectives employed to confine people to a category demarcated by age (Côté, 2000; Merser, 1987; Wyn & White, 1997). Similar to racial and gender identities, age identities are socially constructed and serve particular needs. Just like defining who is White, or who is man, age identities are defined using nebulous criteria that change depending on the purpose for naming the identity. The identity itself has generally been defined and can be continually redefined by those with access to more power, privilege, and resources.

Developmental textbooks present stages of life that correspond to chronological age ranges. For example, Dworetzsky and Davis (1989) organize age categories as follows: "Beginnings: 0-1 years; Early Childhood: 1-6 years; Middle Childhood: 6-12 years; Adolescence: 12-18 years; Early Adulthood: 18 years; Middle Adulthood: 40-65 years; Late Adulthood: 65+ years of age" (p. vii-x). Burman (1994) points out that these limits on age ranges fail to take into account class, gender, racial and cultural diversity and variation, and constructs a norm that sets up the power to exclude and marginalize. The age categories are constructed to have a particular meaning, which has been sanctioned by the Western science that developed them. The categories are presented as the result of uncovering a "truth" about children—and not just the children who have been observed, but *all children*. When these "truths" are accepted to define what is "normal" and used to evaluate children who are not White, middle class, male, or able bodied, the only possible outcome is to find those children who are girls, children of color, children born outside of Western nations, children living in poverty, and children with any kind of disability to be "abnormal" or deficient.

Imperialism, globalization, and neo-liberalism project the Western "child" ideal to young people across the globe and beg that comparisons be made to this supposed "universal child" (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). This same construct is then applied to non-European peoples or people of color across the globe. The impact of the application of the "child" ideal is differential, creating privilege for those who most closely resemble the constructed "norm," while simultaneously constructing those who least resemble the constructed "ideal" to be deficient. There are wide reaching implications for the application of these ideals to people both inside and outside of the context in which they

are constituted. Intersecting forms of oppression, like racism and classism, help to shape the different ways in which young people of different races, classes, and abilities are viewed. Some kinds of young people (White, privileged) are infantilized and portrayed as "innocent," while others (young people of color and poor and working-class young people) are vilified and viewed as dangerous and a threat to society.

A current and common cultural understanding of childhood in the United States holds youth to begin from birth to age 17. Eighteen years and older commonly signifies the status of "adulthood." However, the definitions of both childhood and adulthood are frequently contested and redefined to meet the needs of adults and adult-run institutions. These needs include determining the age at which one would be able to choose to drop out of school; get a driver's license; enter into military service; purchase alcohol; provide legal consent for sex; get married; get a job; take out a loan, rent an apartment, or buy a house; be tried as a "child" or as an "adult" for a violent crime. Many of these categories are used to maintain some sort of privilege and power for those located as "adults." For example, these laws maintain the idea that young people need adults to protect them, which require youth to be dependent on adults for survival.

When these age restrictions and markers are examined within a historical context, their utility and purpose in developing citizens of a nation becomes apparent. The age at which one can get married, for instance, has changed as Western society moved from agricultural to industrial to a post-industrial society. During the agricultural and industrial periods, it was considered acceptable and normal for teen-aged women to have children early to provide the labor needed to support the family. In fact:

> The most influential legal text of the seventeenth century in England, that of Sir Edward Coke, made it clear that the marriage of girls under twelve was normal,

and the age at which a girl who was a wife was eligible for a dower from her husband's estate was nine even though her husband be only four years old. (Coke cited in Bullough, 2008, para. 4)

Without contraception, teen-aged young women were more likely to both marry and conceive early. Thus, the modern concept of "teen pregnancy" did not exist during pre-industrial society. The transition from industrial society to post-industrial society has seen increased social control of young women's reproductive capacity. Currently, in the United States, most states require young people to be at least 18 years of age to marry.

Even in Western societies, such as the United States, these definitions varied according to the needs of the owning class. For example, those kept in the bondage system of slavery had different age requirements from those doing the keeping. Vermont abolished slavery in its constitution of 1777 but kept the following age provisions. The "Declaration of the Rights of the Inhabitants of the State of Vermont" states:

> That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent and unalienable rights, amongst which are the enjoying and defending life and liberty; acquiring, possessing and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety. Therefore, no male person, born in this country, or brought from over sea, ought to be holden by law, to serve any person, as a servant, slave or apprentice, after he arrives to the age of twenty-one Years, nor female, in like manner, after she arrives to the age of eighteen years, unless they are bound by their own consent, after they arrive to such age, or bound by law, for the payment of debts, damages, fines, costs, or the like. (Cited in Harper, 2003, para.2)

Even though the state of Vermont worked to abolish the bondage practice of slavery, control was maintained through age restrictions that differed based on class, gender, and race. It is through the creation of a boundary between childhood and adulthood that adults are able to maintain the power to determine and define the lives and experiences of youth.

These examples show that age-related social practices are socially constructed and controlled by adults and are applied through legal statutes and practices that effectively

maintain social control. "The investment in portraying development as progress works to deny our histories of the personal costs in 'growing up'... turning the complex disorder of individual development into orderly steps to maturity reflects... interests in maintaining social control" (Burman, 1994, p. 19). As such, adults define childhood as a universal period of linear progress with a goal of becoming an adult. This maintains adult superiority and social control.

Child(hood) as Dependen(t/cy)

"Childhood" signifies dependency in much of the dominant discourse regarding childhood (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Grossberg, 2003; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996). Critical childhood and youth studies literature suggest that larger social and cultural issues have played a part in constituting images of "child" (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Grossberg, 2003; Hendrick, 1990; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1996). Since the nature of the child was thought to be the key to understanding adult minds, "debates about the nature of the child have been central to the ways the State has interacted with, and regulated, its citizens" (Burman, 1994, p. 53). Regulating childhood creates more possibilities for regulating and controlling adults. The construction of childhood as a period of helplessness and dependency has played a part creating the means for power to be freely exercised by adults by removing young people from the political sphere (Hendrick, 1990). Constructing young people as helpless and dependent has historically been used to justify removing young people from the political sphere, thereby consolidating power in the hands of adults.

Though removed from the political sphere, young people still played a significant role in the economy because of the demands of the labor market in an industrialized society (Hendrick, 1990). Adults needed labor to meet the demands for production of goods, and most families needed the wages that children were paid. Removal from the political sphere was soon to be followed by the limiting of young people's economic power by their legal removal from the workforce. This redefined the relationship between adults and children. Adults now had consolidated access and opportunity to exercise economic power and children were legally barred from this access. During the late 18th century, industrialization was accompanied by both increased risks in the work economy and decreased power in the hands of young people so that the need for the "protection" of children was easily highlighted. In fact, there was need for protection of all workers in dangerous work conditions, but highlighting children as being more vulnerable and so more in need of protection was used to justify their dis-empowerment and removal from participation in the political economy.

Industrialization brought about different labor issues than were evident in an agricultural economy. These were not specifically child labor issues, but in defining them as such, they could help to justify the construction of children in a manner that ensured their continued dependence on adults and the state.

> Factory children, in general came to be regarded as victims, as "slaves," as innocents forced into "unnatural" employment and denied their "childhood"... The wage earning child was no longer considered to be the norm. Instead childhood was now seen as constituting a separate and distinct set of characteristics requiring protection and fostering through school education. (Hendrick, 1990, p. 39)

Class issues played a large part in constructing young people as dependent through mass compulsory schooling. The rationale was that working-class resistance would likely not

be reproduced if young people were removed from the factories and inserted into other activities that could be monitored and controlled by adults (Hendrick, 1990). Public schooling was one response to that need. The construction of child that emanated from Enlightenment philosophies and positivist science presented younger children as ignorant and helpless and required that young people of the working class be socialized through formal education, which was replete with middle-class ideals, including that of obedience and silence (Burman, 1994). This construction supported the development of schooling in preparation toward a punctual, obedient, compliant, and efficient labor force, military service, and the general creation of citizenry that would be docile and governable.

This formal education was based on Protestant morals and ideals and was supported by the emphasis on bible study and the overt socialization of distinct gender roles (Hunt, 1985).

> A national childhood was constructed through schooling, which, although it was officially classless, rendered the child (and therefore the family) always available for reformation of their working-class morals. The process of schooling demanded a state of ignorance in return for the advancement of opportunities for a limited few. (Burman, 1994, p. 54)

This meant that working-class youth were removed from participation in the social-political world. Any political power diminished along with their knowledge of themselves as being both socially and politically valuable in their own right. The transformation of the wage-earning child to the schooled-child played a part in constructing the child as ignorant by devaluing their own cultural and community knowledge and by creating a dynamic in which older people are always experts who hold the knowledge that younger people "need" (Burman, 1994; Hendrick, 1990).

With the rapid transformation from an agricultural to an industrialized society, the removal of young people from the economic sphere made possible a relationship between adults and young people that came to reinforce young people's dependence.

> The reconstruction of the factory child through the prism of dependency and ignorance was a precursor of mass education in that it helped prepare public opinion for shifts in the child's identity (from wage-laborer to school pupil), for a reduction in income of working class families (as a result of the loss of children's earnings), and for the introduction of the state into childrearing practices. (Hendrick, 1990, p. 46)

Compulsory education decreased the possibility for young people to choose a life in which they were not dependent on adults to provide the necessary resources for their own survival. Also, the removal of young working-class people from factories and their subsequent insertion into schools served to strengthen the distinction between young people and adults as separate groups, conveying the status of young people as Other—no longer permitted to participate in adult daily life. This move both restricted the economic mobility of working-class families by removing the income of young workers and simultaneously prepared a way for the state to impose a middle-class moral education based on the notion that obedience and hard work would equal economic success (Hendrick, 1990). To this end, young people were subject to pedagogy in schools that prompted the development of a self-concept characterized by a sense of dependency on adults and the state.

A look into this discourse practice raises questions about young people and the assumptions currently inherent in adult-child, school-child, State-child relations. For young people who are very young, dependency is a reality and adult care is required. During the early years of life, a child is not capable of feeding, clothing, and sheltering oneself or speaking for oneself. However, this reality is used to justify the construction of

a relationship of dependence on adults that extends beyond what is dictated by actual physical need. Young people are confined to dependent relationships with adults, which are not based on the reality of what they can or cannot accomplish. For example, young people in several states throughout the U.S. are not legally permitted to work until they are 14; however, there are many younger people who would easily be able successfully balance part-time work and school thus reducing their financial dependence on adults. The dominant discourse of childhood as dependency confines many young people to relationships where adult "protection" may be more of a racket than a necessity.

In this section, I have outlined five major discourses constituting modern Western childhood: Child/adult dualism, individuals with souls to be saved, that there is a "Truth" or essence to young people that can be discovered through Western science, discourses of time, progress, nature, and universality, and finally the child as dependent and thus childhood as a period of dependency. These are some of the discourse practices that shape Western modern notions of childhood. They also constitute differential status where adults are assigned superior status and young people are relegated to inferior status. This differential status sets the stage for oppressive power relations between young people and adults. In the next section, I discuss how these discourses of childhood are parallel to colonial practices.

Parallels Between Colonization and Childhood

Scholars of postcolonialism have suggested that childhood is a social construction that has been deeply influenced and shaped by colonial thought and perspectives (Nandy, 1983). Both colonialism and childhood are rooted in Enlightenment thinking (Cannella &

Viruru, 2004; Nandy, 1983; Viruru, 2007). Enlightenment thinking is often characterized by rationalism or a focus on reason, notions of progress and laws of nature that govern human behavior (S. Seidman, 2008). Some features of Enlightenment thinking that become visible via a postcolonial critique are the same discourses that constitute modern Western constructions of childhood. They are: 1) construction of binary opposites, including: evil/good, inferior/superior, savage/civilized, dependent/independent, small/large, innocent/knowledgeable, and child as the opposite of adult; 2) construction of time as a linearity and assigned value to growth and progress on a linear time line; 3) value of individualism; 4) construction of a culture of experts and administrators concerned with "discovering" the "true nature" of people and things, organizing and locating those people and things into hierarchies, and then enforcing the boundaries of those hierarchies (Burman, 1994; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Nandy, 1983).

The development of childhood was a critical piece of nation building. Children were constructed to be dependent on adults, the family, and the State and to be "educated" and "socialized" in the direction that would eventually culminate in adulthood and citizenship. This singular conception of childhood was to be universalized (Burman, 1994). Burman asserts that the "'right' to childhood is adopted as a transcultural universal that links the First and Third Worlds in a relationship of patronage and cultural imperialism" (p. 55). In essence, the discourse practices employed in child "socialization" are replicas of the discourse practices of colonization.

Imperialism was once described to me as the "big brother" of colonialism. It is the driving force, both a method and a goal of colonization. Imperialism is, "characterized by an exercise of power, either through direct conquest or (latterly) through political and

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economic influence that effectively amounts to similar forms of domination" (R. Young, 2001, p. 27). It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive review of the many perspectives and understandings of imperialism and colonialism. For the purpose of this literature review, colonialism is conceptualized as both an ongoing exercise of economic, military, or political power by stronger nations over weaker ones (S. Seidman, 2008). Colonialism is also an imposition of colonial forms of knowledge, premised on the privileging of Western forms of understanding, culture, and living and the appropriation or deprecation of "local" or "native" forms of knowledge (S. Seidman, 2008). This understanding of colonialism sets the stage for analyzing where colonial projects and practices engaged the violence and exploitation of imperialism in order to create economic growth for the European empire, establish systems of control in the colonies with a minimum number of colonial administrators, and to "civilize" native populations. From this perspective, the goal of "civilizing" people is keeping those people who have been colonized in the service of the empire (Cannella & Viruru, 2004).

Colonization is an exercise of imperialism. It is necessarily political. Colonization traditionally refers to the physical occupation and usurpation of a land by people from another land. Modern European colonization was a project aimed at gaining economic wealth and power for the European empire. Colonization is also a socio-political practice in that European colonizers exercise power over colonized people, essentially forcing local people to hand over their own natural resources in the form of land, raw materials, knowledge, labor, and sometimes their own people, as was the case with the European practice of slavery (S. Seidman, 2008). Some view colonization as natural and normal, and as a developmental prelude or necessary precursor to achieving the status of so-called

"great nations," like the United States, France, Spain, or Great Britain. Even after physical colonization has ceased to exist, imperialism continues to impact the people of former colonies (Nandy, 1983). For example, many formerly colonized areas, like India, Jamaica, and Mexico retain the same educational structures, political structures, and economic structures of the former colonizer. Former colonies that retain these structures also retain the logics of the empire that created them. In this way, imperialism remains once independence has been gained as the values, practices, norms, and organization of the empire pervade the social structures and relationships of the former colony.

Neo-colonialism engages colonial rationale to organize and govern society inside the empire (Said, 1979). This is a useful distinction when considering childhood in a nation like the United States, which is both a neo-colony and an empire. The United States is an imperial economic empire where the colonizers never left and where the imperial projects of the empire continue its influence, power, and control. The United States can be described as a neo-colony because of the ongoing ways in which it borrows rationales and tools from colonialist projects. What makes neo-colonialism unique is that it administers its own citizens and residents who are Othered within the boundaries of the state, following colonial lines of thought, practice, and governing structures (Said, 1979).

As such, colonialism and imperialism affect all of the colonial subjects (in different ways, of course) because it is premised on binary thinking and discursive practices that construct the local people and culture as Other (uncivilized, less than, not fully human) and simultaneously supports a construct about the "self" as being civilized, more than, fully human, and responsible for the underdeveloped. In the United States, for instance, White, adult, heterosexual, owning-class, Christian, able-bodied men hold the

majority of political positions, own the majority of resources, and are most often on the dominant side of power relations. Young people, people of color, women, people with disabilities, queer people, and those who are targeted by oppression in the United States are constructed as Other. These relationship structures delimit possible relations with the Other and locks the colonizer and the colonized into power relationships that are in a sense predetermined, inflexible, and oppressive. These power relationships are similar to those between adults and children where children are constructed as Other and adults are constructed as the norm.

This study proceeds from the assumption that childhood is constructed with a socio-political purpose. Rinaldi (2005) states, "Childhood does not exist, we create it as a society, as a public subject. It is a social, political and historical construction" (p. 13). Childhood, like colonization, is political. Young people, like colonies, are viewed as a necessary precursor to the greatness of "adulthood." Leveraging a critique of childhood as colonization opens possibilities to address the colonization of childhood within a larger historical, cultural, social, political landscape. It is through this critique that the treatment of young people by society and by adults can be viewed from a social justice perspective as oppression. Oppression exists where unequal power, privilege, and resources are made available to adults while young people are marginalized, exploited, experience powerlessness, targeted by adult violence, and are engulfed by adult cultural imperialism (I. Young, 2010).

The discourses of childhood reviewed earlier in this chapter are parallel to discourses of modern European colonialism. Nandy (1983) describes a "homology between childhood and the state of being colonized which a modern colonial system

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almost invariably uses" (pp. 11-12). Nandy posits that European colonizers were clear

that colonization, while being "evil" was necessary to "civilize" people who had been

cast as "barbarian"". The colonizers saw colonization as a necessary stage to develop

civilized society and felt implored to provide this "assistance" to what the colonizers

viewed as the underprivileged (Nandy, 1983). In relation to childhood, adults and young

people are in relationship structures parallel to that of colonizer and colonized. Adults are

implored to protect and "civilize" young people who are seen as incomplete and

dependent humans.

It was in the context of the Enlightenment and modern historical periods that a

Childhood and Adulthood came to exist through a union of multiple factors. These

factors were: 1) European philosophies focusing on reason, progress, and scientific rigor;

2) Protestantism that made "saving" children an adult's moral responsibility; 3)

widespread European imperialism and colonization; and 4) several other social and

cultural factors (Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Côté, 2000; Côté & Allahar,

2006; Hendrick, 1997; Nandy, 1983; Plumb; 1975; Postman, 1982). Cannella and Viruru

point out:

> Although the Enlightenment is not commonly regarded as a colonial project,
> imperialism might be one of its longest lasting legacies. The Enlightenment
> signaled the end of such irrational ways of functioning as feudalism and
> superstitious values, while introducing beliefs in progress, science, free inquiry,
> and rational thinking. (p. 31)

The effects of centralizing rationality and contrasting it with irrationality led to

organizing of institutions and disciplines in relation to this dichotomy that persist today.

Centralizing rationality meant valuing the logics and reason embodied by the Western

scientific method and removing emotion and other senses from thinking. Anything that

was not characterized by European logic and reason and could not be empirically

supported could be defined as irrational.

Notions of Western, modern, imperialist childhood came to embody reason and

rational thinking and were pushed not only upon European children but also upon local

people in colonized lands, eschewing traditional local values and practices (Cannella &

Viruru, 2004; James & Prout, 1997; Nandy, 1983). Colonized people, like young people,

were seen as naïve, infantile, immature, and irrational (Nandy, 1983). Young people and

colonized people were both viewed as sinners or heathens who required saving.

> The new concept of childhood bore a direct relationship to the doctrine of
> progress now regent in the West. Childhood no longer seemed only a happy,
> blissful prototype of beatific angels, as it had in the peasant cultures of Europe
> only a century earlier. It increasingly looked like a blank slate on which adults
> must write their moral codes—an inferior version of maturity, less productive and
> ethical, and badly contaminated by the playful, irresponsible and spontaneous
> aspects of human nature. (p. 15)

In addition to providing the content of the moral codes Nandy refers to, Protestantism

also led to an adult sense of responsibility to save children from "the unrepentant,

reprobate sinfulness through proper socialization, and to help the child grow towards a

Calvinist ideal of adulthood and maturity" (p. 15). Viruru (2005b) suggests, "These

colonizing ideas have internalized themselves into the 'life-ways' of those living in

colonized countries" (p. 14). Thus, colonizing practices and ideologies have situated the

adult and the colonizer in the dominant position in respect to young people and colonized

people.

Colonization as a Primary Consequence of Colonial
Ideologies and Practices

We are often presented with a view of the world as being the way it is, naturally. We are seldom presented with a view of the world as constructed through discourse, ideology, and relationship structures. Without the opportunity to gain perspective on our "realities" outside of the discourse shaping them, it can be very difficult to question why things are the way they are or how they came to be viewed as they are. Cannella (1997) explains that even while many adults dedicate our lives to children in the form of our careers or as parents:

> We have created the ultimate "Other," a group of human beings not considered able or mature enough to create themselves. We have not analyzed the assumptions and beliefs that underlie our creation. We have accepted and contributed to the discourse/languages of 'childhood' without question or critique. (p. 19)

In fact, we hold a "that's just the way it is" attitude about childhood that discourages critique or resistance on the part of both younger and older people. In this way, the construction of childhood contributes directly to the depoliticization of a people, which necessarily limits the possibilities for resistance, and in turn, freedom, for young and old alike.

Like the saying goes, "If all you have is a hammer, all of your problems look like nails"—how we think about things is what constitutes those very things. If dominant perspectives on childhood are generated by adults, then those questions will serve to reflect, reinforce, and create adult agendas. Turning our critical lens to the discourse constructing childhood creates the opportunity to gain perspective on the realities of childhood outside of the discourse practices that have been outlined above.

Dominant Western discourses on childhood shape how we think about childhood, and thus construct our understanding of the child. These constructs of childhood are rooted in colonial ideology. Childhood is constructed as a period when the child is to be "socialized" by adults in the same way that local people in the colonies were to be "educated" to accept and value the goals of the colonizer. Socialization, like education, is not a neutral process but rather a political process concerned with conveying the morals, values, practices, and norms of society to young people. Those very young people are expected to champion them once they become adults. In this section, I examine the ideologies and practices that shaped colonial practice and illustrate that they are the same ideologies and practices that shaped dominant Western views of childhood.

Western Discourses of Childhood are Colonizing at the Sociological and Psychological Levels

Through the logics of dualism, progress, reason, and modern Western science, young people have been constructed and defined as the needy recipients of the morals, values, thinking, control, surveillance, and protection of the ruling political adult society (Canella & Viruru, 2004; Nandy, 1983; Viruru, 2007). These perspectives define the social structures and relationships of society and are to some degree or another internalized by everyone. In training, educating, and socializing young people into the raced, gendered, and classed logics of the nation, young people are prepared by adults for participation in service to the nation.

Childhood is a period when a citizenry is constructed, borne of the same ideological and discursive logic as colonization. Rose (1990) explains, "Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence...linked in thought and practice to

the destiny of the nation" (p. 121). There are many daily examples of more obvious practices associated with young people's training to become citizens—a status they only hold in name until they gain the full rights and privileges of adults[4]. For example, in the United States, young people are often required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance daily in their public school classrooms. Young people in elementary schools are required to form a line going to and from lunch and recess. Young people of all ages are required to obtain adult permission to leave their classroom and go to the bathroom. In every one of these instances, young people are learning to internalize adult control. To survive this, young people must accept their subordinant status to adults.

The colonizing ideologies of childhood that construct young people as being naturally out of control, unsafe, violent, immature, and innocent justify their othering, surveillance, observing, measuring, educating, controlling, and indoctrination. Empire cannot exist without "childhood" as it has been constructed. The rigid, predetermined power relations between youth and adults ensure a structural ability to define young people as future citizens who are in a training process, learning to take on and maintain the status quo of the nation. Youth who are invested with interests of empire and internalize them as their own become the champions of empire as adults, seemingly of their own accord. This process of nation-building produces a citizenry that need not critique or resist, as they have been constructed to submit to and accept authority.

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[4] Rights of U.S. Citizens include the right to vote, to work, and to stand for public office. In most states, young people can't vote or stand for public office until 18 or older and can't work until 14 years old (Citizenship in the United States, n.d.).

Western Discourses of Childhood "Other" Young People

Young people are rendered Other through a colonial discourse generated by a process of creating knowledge about the Other through observation (Bhabha, 1996). A post-colonial critique serves to expose the inscription of colonial power onto the body and space of those who have been constructed as Other (Slemon, 1991). Western discourses of childhood construct children and youth as Other, thereby legitimating uneven adult/youth power relations. This Othering of youth is prevalent in most research focusing on youth. During my initial literature search on youth oppression in 2010, I identified numerous studies that focused on observing and describing young people. A review of the first 20 studies that appeared when searching the Academic Search Premier database using the keyword *youth* revealed a sense that young people were being observed as if they were a different species from adults. This sense of youth as being so very different from adults shapes and legitimizes adult/youth power relations.

Foucault (1995) drew on the *panopticon* as the prototype of a mode of surveillance and monitoring that is applied in different institutions and especially to those institutions for children, like schools. The panopticon is a circular prison with a central guard tower that allows for surveillance of every prisoner from one location by a single guard. The prisoner can be viewed at any time without necessarily being able to view the guard. Having internalized the sense of being watched, individuals come to monitor themselves and self-discipline comes to replace coercion as the method of social control. The panopticon, "an architecture transparent to the administration of power, made it possible to substitute for force or other violent constraints the gentle efficiency of total surveillance" (Foucault, 1984, p. 217). Bhabha (1996) argues that a "subject people" (p.

37) is created through this colonizing discourse, which legitimates their oppression based on what the colonizer learns and the knowledge that is constructed through surveillance and observation. Even though child and prisoner are not synonymous and the rationale for controlling children is that it is for their safety, the discourse and construction of the "child" has been informed by a similar process where adults place children under surveillance, often with love and care, to both study them and control them (Viruru & Cannella, 2001).

Childhood is exoticized and romanticized and is the Other to adulthood (Said, 1979). Childhood, for adults, is both close (We were all once "children.") and foreign in that we will never be children again. Adults cannot know, as adults, what it is like to be a child today. It may be that this paradox contributes to the inability or refusal to acknowledge youth oppression. Many adults believe that we must have access to everything there is to know about childhood because we lived it. Some reason that it cannot be that bad because we are still alive to talk about it. Despite these experiences, we cannot say anything about childhood because we are not children and are only "growing" further away from childhood. Thus, children become the ultimate Other.

The dynamics emerging from the right and privilege to occupy the position of observer come to define the boundaries of adult/youth power relations. This dynamic also constricts the role of adults. Adults and young people are restricted to a relationship where young people are observed and "othered," and adults play the role of administrator. It is not to say that young people do not engage in their own observation, but their Othered status invalidates their observations in the eyes of adults, rendering them as immature or inexperienced. Adults always occupy the position of observer. This

role eliminates the need for violence or much physical coercion in controlling the bodies of young people. As administrator, the adult must take what knowledge has been created through observation and must impose guidelines and boundaries upon young people. This power relationship leaves little room for flexibility or fluidity, as the adult administrator is also subject to the surveillance of other adults.

Western Discourses of Childhood are Normative

These Western discourses of childhood are normative since they persist in the form of cultural norms that shape Western constructions of "reality." These cultural norms shape the way thoughts, feelings, and behavior are organized and experienced and goals are determined. They also serve as the foundation for political and ethical discourse. The view of childhood as being a universal, natural, and linear progression of development toward adulthood reflects the colonial ideology of childhood.

Colonial ideology relies on the implementation of methods of distinction or segmentation in defining and preserving the normative views of childhood. Macedo (1999) identifies particular strategies and practices of colonization in the "third world" that have been and continue to be implemented in the United States. Drawing on Memmi's (1965) earlier work, Macedo argues that colonial ideologies employ methods of "distinction" that create a standard or "ideological yardstick" as a social measurement by which members of oppressed or marginalized groups are determined to be lacking in some way. In the United States, institutionalized education is the primary site where colonial strategies are employed.

Standardized testing reflects colonial ideology in that it serves to measure linear development and is used to segment and stratify groups of young people. Standardized testing, tracking, and other modes of observation and social measurement embedded into education are used both to prepare young people to become "citizens" while constructing and enforcing distinctions that support hierarchies along class, race, and gender lines. As tests are written to reflect the cultural information and interests of the White, male, middle-class, they privilege young people who occupy these identities and give them increased opportunity and access, as they score higher than those whose cultural information, values, and interests may not be reflected on the tests.

Young people have colonial ideologies and moral codes forced upon them through the guise of objective science, which employs standardized testing as a measure of intelligence. For example, students are tracked into stratified educational paths by which some are labeled as regular or standard while others might be labeled and funneled into college prep or vocational paths. These labels speak volumes to those who must hold them and profoundly impact future trajectories, opportunities, and possibilities. These categories of difference serve as the foundation for colonialism. The differentiated categories were provided as justification of the rule or subordination of the colonized by the colonizer.

The institutions serving young people simultaneously prepare young people to serve and maintain colonial interests. As noted in the case of British colonialism in India:

> The entire enterprise of literary education itself emerges out of a colonial context…. Colonial administrators recognized that the most effective means of quashing rebellion against foreign rule was to assimilate young minds into the prevailing order, to confer upon them the urgent necessity of identifying with British social and cultural authority. (Nealon & Giroux, 2003, p. 144)

In the United States, Disney films, among other forms of media, provide for young people what British colonial literary education provided for the local people in the colonies. These films often portray White adult men as protagonists, men of color as savages, White women as innocent and docile, and women of color as evil or sultry. Similarly, the portrayal of young people in these films is constructive in that they portray children as innocent and less human than adults. In several animated Disney films, young people are portrayed as incapable of making responsible decisions because of their innocence. Young people are portrayed as innocents who cannot help but defy adult wishes because of their inherent immaturity and irresponsibility and thus suffer terrible consequences as a result. In these films, maturity and responsibility are portrayed as characteristics that are not available to young people. Young people in these films ultimately learn the lesson that adults know best and that they should aspire toward the version of responsibility and maturity exhibited by adults (Booker, 2010). The colonial education of young people through formal education and through the media maintains childhood as normative, as in progress toward adulthood, and as part of a raced, gendered, classed society.

The colonial ideology of childhood is embedded in dominant Western thinking and is reflected and supported at macro levels, like academe, public policy, and education policy. Rather than providing a view of childhood as a cultural invention, dominant discourses on childhood preserve its construction as a natural, predetermined period of time that is considered to be best understood by adults because they are no longer children. These discourses are colonizing as they have been inscribed onto all aspects of young people's lives. Adults who have been colonized as young people to take on the

goals, thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, emotions, ethics, and values of the dominant culture

will maintain those discourses of childhood unless alternative perspectives or

opportunities to critically reflect on the normative discourses of childhood are made

available.

Western Discourses of Childhood are Perpetuated in Everyday Public and Intimate Spaces

Western discourses of childhood are produced and reproduced in both public and

private spaces. Through the discursive practices of childhood, colonial relationships are

reproduced in the intimate spaces of the family and are internalized by the individual via

hierarchical relationships. Postcolonial theory has been employed in examinations of how

"relationships of empire" are transferred and internalized in both the individual and the

family (Nandy, 1983; Stoler, 2006; Viruru, 2007). Strategies of distinction, another

colonial discursive practice, associate traits or behaviors with one group to construct or

maintain identities that can be easily placed or located into social, political, and/or

economic hierarchies. They create the discursive means to connect individuals to a group

and to separate one group from another. These strategies were enacted and reinforced in

the intimate spaces of the home (Stoler, 2006; Viruru, 2007). For example, gender roles

are a strategy of distinction that construct associations between behavior, practice, and

gender. Women are discursively connected to preparing food, cleaning the home and

caring for children. Men are discursively connected to work outside the home and to a

limited role in caring for children.

Stoler (2006) examines the critical role of "domains of the intimate" in the

consolidation of colonial power" (p. 9) by examining how colonial strategies of

distinction construct difference and create justifications for power and domination inside the intimate spaces of relationships in a way that maintain colonial power relationships. Viruru (2007) explains that through the use of classification (age/status), defining what relationships should look like, who could be in a relationship with whom, and what kind of relationships were permitted, the relations of empire are transferred to the family and individuals in the family. In other words, the colonization of youth takes place not only at macro levels but also at micro levels—inside homes and internalized in the minds of young people. Colonialist discourse is inscribed on individuals and constructions of childhood are conveyed through the intimate spaces of family.

Nandy (1983) argues that beyond physical colonization, individual and group states of mind are generated and internalized through aspects of colonialism. Nandy characterizes colonialism as "the intimate enemy." Family is a primary location for the transfer of cultural information, including that of hierarchy, raced and gendered logics, and more. Thus, the discourse practices of colonialism become part of and shape the intimacy of family spaces.

As the racialized and gendered discourse practices of classification were engaged as "central colonial sorting techniques," these discourse practices were "transferred into the microcosm of the family where regulating authority aimed to control how, when, where, and with whom affect and sentiment could be shared" (Stoler, 2006, p. 2). Not only was there a focus to control sentiment but also to inscribe racial and gender discourses onto intimate spaces. Stoler explains that it was what people did in the private spaces of their lives that mattered: "with whom they cohabited; who slept with whom, when, and where; who suckled which children; how children were reared and by whom;

what language was spoken to servants, friends, and family members at home" (p. 25).

These are the relations that became regulated and that maintained and transmitted racial and gendered logics to children.

Stoler (2006) shares examples from the colonial Indies where Dutch children were not allowed to interact with "servant's" children in order to keep the Dutch children from learning the language of the colonized people. She also describes how Javanese nursemaids were required to hold the European children that they cared for away from their body so that that the children would not smell like the nursemaids. All of this served to ensure that European children learned the appropriate social behavior corresponding to their colonial status and to clarify and ensure that children internalized the boundaries of relationships with their caretakers who are both the objects of colonization and the subjects of their affection.

These racial and gendered classifications were conveyed and implemented through a larger discourse that used the family as a vehicle for their legitimization. Anne McClintock (1995) discusses the role of the family in both sanctioning this kind of social hierarchy and in conveying that hierarchy as natural and inevitable:

> Because the subordination of woman to man and child to adult were deemed natural facts, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social *difference* as a category of nature. The family image came to figure hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests. The family image came to figure *hierarchy within unity* as an organic element of historical progress, and thus became indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism. The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial thus depended on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children. (p. 45)

Identity categories were constructed as both different and natural and were imbued with status in a social hierarchy, which was also constructed as natural. In this process,

identity and hierarchy legitimized one another and also lent legitimacy to state

intervention. In other words, the constructions of men as the head of household and

women as subordinant to men, and children as subordinant to adults came to be viewed as

a normal, natural, and inevitable social hierarchy. Hierarchy could then be used to

demonstrate unity. Social hierarchy was presented and accepted as normal, both within

and without the family and came to be viewed apart from the historical context in which

it was constructed. As such, McClintock (1995) attests, "Imperial intervention could thus

be figured as a linear, nonrevolutionary progression that naturally contained hierarchy

within unity: paternal fathers ruling benignly over immature children" (p. 45). Social

hierarchy continues to be presented as inevitable and pre-determined power relationships,

like child as dependent with adult as protector.

Western Discourse Practices of Colonization and Childhood are Technologies of Power

Discourse practices of colonization and childhood are technologies of power that

shape the development and maintenance of social and cultural norms and human

practices.

> [*Technology* refers] to a complex of mechanisms through which authorities have
> sought to shape, normalize, and make productive use of human beings.
> Technology is an assemblage of heterogeneous elements: knowledge, types of
> authority, vocabularies, practices of calculation, architectural forms, and human
> capacities. (Lesko, 2001, p. 17)

Power is inscribed in each of these mechanisms of technology that are employed in

relation to colonization and childhood.

Definitions of power are varied, political, and contradictory. It is beyond the

scope of this literature study to provide an exhaustive review of power as it has been

theorized and argued, and yet, it is important to elaborate on how theories of power inform this study. In research conducted with students, teachers, and administrators, Kreisberg (1992) found that power was overwhelmingly associated with "relationships of domination, conflict, violence, evil, selfishness, hierarchy, and victimization [and that this type of] conception of power permeates our lives" (p. 30). Kreisberg refers to this predominant conception of power as "Power over" (p. 29). Foucault (1980) critiqued this view of power as limited.

> All power, whether it be from above or below, whatever level one examines it on, is actually represented in a more-or-less uniform fashion throughout Western societies…. It's the characteristic of our Western societies that the language of power is law, not magic, religion, or anything else. (p. 201)

In my own experience as a White woman educated, often uncritically in the United States, I find it all too easy to think of power in this way—as a property that emanates from a single source that can be possessed and dispensed (Burman, 1994; Foucault, 1972). For the purposes of this study, three perspectives on power support an exploration of young people's knowledge and experiences with status and power in childhood: Foucault's (1980) Analytics of Power can be used to examine how power is employed and exercised within power relations; feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1990; D. E. Smith, 1987) argues that power relations provide the means to constrain one's choices and so research focusing on power should begin with marginalized groups; and Boler's (1999) work on feeling power looks at how power and emotions connect and where feelings are a site of social control and resistance.

Analytics of Power

Foucault (1994) critiques this dominant Western conception of Power-over because he felt that it obscures underlying mechanisms of power:

> Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (p. 214)

To examine and understand how individuals are the conduits of power within a grid or web of power, Foucault focused on creating an analytics of power, which makes it possible to envision "power-as-effects" (Baker, 2001, p. 628). Rather than just looking at how power is imposed over individuals and groups, power-as-effect looks at how power is disseminated or enacted through people in power relations. In Foucault's (1980) analytics of power, power relations are examined by asking: "What is power? Who exercises power? What exactly happens when someone exercises power over another? What legitimates power?" (Lin, 2009, p. 8) For the purposes of this study, looking at power-as-effects focuses the analytics of power onto the power relations contextualized within systems of social networks that constitute the web of power rather than a static, hierarchical dimension. The analytics of power open a view of how power relations are nuanced and can flow in multiple directions. Standpoint theory enables an analysis of the experiences of power relations among those with shared marginalized identities (Collins, 1990; D. E. Smith, 1987).

Feminist Standpoint Theory and Relations of Ruling

Standpoint theory provides an opportunity to examine power relations between groups with different social status. Standpoint theory, as it has been articulated by feminists, like Dorothy Smith (1987), and Patricia Hill Collins (1990), rests on three claims: 1) knowledge is not objective but is situated in one's social context, 2) groups that are marginalized are socially situated to allow different ways of understanding a phenomena and can raise distinct or unique questions compared to members of the dominant group, 3) research that focuses on power relations should begin by centering the lives and voices of marginalized groups (Bowell, 2011). The dominant group's standpoint is often presented as universal. For example, as has been discussed elsewhere in this chapter, White European men's standpoint on childhood and child development has historically been presented as the universal standpoint on childhood. Women, people of color, young people, LGBTQ people, poor and working-class people, and other marginalized groups have their own standpoint. Of course, the standpoint is varied for individuals in these groups because all humans have multiple identities. Smith's Feminist Standpoint Theory supported the standpoint of White middle-class women. Patricia Hill Collins theorized Black Feminist Standpoint Theory to reflect the unique standpoint of Black women. Standpoint theory provides an opportunity to look at commonalities of knowledge and experience among those with shared marginalized identities in order to describe a common experience of power relations. At the same time, intersections or multiple standpoints from within a group can be theorized.

D. E. Smith (1987) describes "relations of ruling [as] a concept that grasps power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be

expressed in traditional concepts provided by discourses of power" (p. 3). She explains that the idea of "ruling" is meant to identify "a complex of organized practices, including government, law, business and financial management, professional organization, and educational institutions as well as the discourses in texts that interpenetrate the multiple sites of power" (p. 3). Smith theorizes that men have been the dominant constructors of this complex of organized practices and that it has been men's standpoint that has been represented in the symbols, practices, texts, laws, language, and theories that have been created and maintained by these practices. As such, White adult men's standpoint is presented as universal and other group's standpoints are viewed as less inherently credible. Through relations of ruling, the ideologies of the dominant group become deeply embedded into the deep consciousness of individuals in every group (D. E. Smith, 1987).

Not all power relations are characterized by domination and subordination, yet these relations provide the means to constrain or limit choice for some groups or individuals. Rolin (2009) argues that relations of ruling do not actually depend on an individual or groups' ability to exercise power but that their perceived power is enough to dominate another person or group.

> I argue that relations of power are not just like any other object of inquiry in the social sciences because they can suppress or distort relevant evidence. By relations of power I refer to a particular conception of power, namely, the ability of an individual or a group to constrain the choices available to another individual or group... Power in this sense of the term is a relation. Even though relations of power do not always involve domination, they function as vehicles of domination when they constrain an individual's or a group's choices in a way that is harmful for the individual or the group. I argue that because relations of power can be used to dominate people, they are likely to mobilize a complex set of motivations that prompt potential informants to either conceal or distort relevant evidence. (p. 219)

Here, Rolin explains that power is not objective and relations of power can distort or obscure evidence of domination due to one group's ability to limit the choices available to another group or individuals within that group. Given the status relationship between young people and adults, adults are ascribed authority via size, economics, cultural practices, and other mechanisms. In most places, young people are required to comply with the law and orders of adults, often without recourse. Young people perceive adult's power to take away privileges, punish, or otherwise limit young people's activities. Young people can rebel or resist adult's authority, yet the option does not always seem available, given the perceived power of the adults. To see why this option does not easily appear, another level of analysis can be employed to examine how young people internalize power relations and how that is connected to social control and resistance.

Feeling Power

To understand how relations of ruling are experienced by the parties involved, an examination of individuals' and groups' perceptions of power is useful. Boler (1999) examines where power and emotions connect and where feelings are a site of social control and resistance. "Feeling power" is approached in two ways: The first looks at how one feels *power* through internalizing social control.

> Feeling *power* suggests an approach to the question of social control. Behavioral and expressive conduct is developed according to socially enforced rules of power. How does one learn not to express anger at one's boss, or that doing so is very risky business? How are people taught to internalize guilt, shame, and fear as ways of guiding "appropriate" social conduct? (p. 4)

Childhood as a category has been discursively constructed as a period of social control, meant to guide and teach young people how to think, feel, and behave in relation to

others and to themselves. Feeling *power* asks how young people internalize the messages about the limits and boundaries of behavior related to a host of factors, including age and other social identities.

The second approach to examining the intersection of power and emotions is *Feeling* power, which explores what makes resistance to domination possible.

> *Feeling* power, on the other hand, directs us to explore how people resist our oppression and subjugation. For example, what gives women the courage to publically challenge sexual harassment? If we choose to resist the social control of emotions as part of the fight for freedom and justice, we are challenged to understand when and how the resistance and courage arise. But resistance, as a version of *feeling* power, takes many forms. (Boler, 1999, p. 4)

Given the ways that power has potentially hidden or distorted evidence of how young people exercise power, this perspective supports taking a second look at story lines about young people's behavior in order to explore how resistance occurs. Given the technologies of power that situate young people as subordinant through the colonizing discourse practices that have been discussed in this chapter, how do young people come to *feel* power or to resist social control to address injustices that they perceive?

As discussed in this section, colonial discourses operate at the sociological and psychological levels and pervade Western ideologies of childhood, construct youth as Other, are normative, are perpetuated and transmitted in every day public and intimate spaces, and are technologies of power. Colonial power relationships are presented as normal and hierarchy is legitimized. In this section, I explored these ideas and their relation to one another—childhood as a period of colonization. Childhood, like colonization, is political. Young people, like colonies, are viewed as a necessary precursor to the greatness of "adulthood." Each of these discourses represents mechanisms that shape, normalize, and aim to make productive use of human beings, and

by examining these mechanisms, more comprehensive understandings of colonial relations of power that pervade childhood become possible.

In summary, three perspectives on power have been presented to support an exploration of young people's knowledge and experiences with status and power in childhood: Foucault's (1980) Analytics of Power provides a tool that can be used to examine how power is employed and exercised within power relations. Feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1990; D. E. Smith, 1987) argues that power relations provide the means to constrain one's choices and suggests that any research focusing on power should center marginalized groups given their unique perspectives in relation to the dominant group. And Boler's (1999) work on feeling power looks at how power and emotions connect and where feelings are a site of social control and resistance. A purposeful analysis of power relationships between young people and adults as groups will support centering young people's individual thinking and experiences while taking into account patterns of power that illuminate ways that young people experience limits imposed on their ability to exercise power and how they might resist or push against those limits.

If how we think about things constitutes those very things, then the discourses of childhood shape and define not only the child but also the power relations between youth and adults. Our thinking reflects colonial ideologies. Childhood, like colonization, is maintained as adults continue to define the boundaries, values, behaviors, and actions of youth. As with colonization, youth culture is often devalued and ignored by adults. Young people are placed into institutions that are intended to shape them into citizens, into adults who are likely to maintain the national ideology and *status quo*. The sections

that follow analyze these relationship structures from the perspective of colonization of childhood as oppression.

Modern, Western Colonial Childhood is a Technology of Oppression

In this section, I present childhood as a mechanism of colonization that is also a technology of oppression based on the idea that colonizing practices and ideologies shaping Western constructions of childhood are, themselves, a form of oppression. Young people/adult relationship structures are characterized by differential status relationships of domination and subordination in which adults occupy the dominant role and young people occupy the subordinant role. These power and status relations, like childhood itself, are assumed to be natural, pre-determined, and fixed rather than being viewed as social constructions that reflect the hierarchical organization of Western societies. In these relationships, young people are often constructed to be reliant on adults for verification of their right to existence, their thinking, their correctness, and their right to consideration. Young people have no legally protected right to have their needs met except to the extent that adults concur that they are legitimate needs and that they should be met (i.e., child neglect laws are legislated and enforced by adults, often without young people's input). Because most of the resources required to meet young people's needs are controlled by adults, young people rarely have other means of meeting such needs on their own without the assistance of a caretaking adult or an adult-run system.

The following quote from an anti-adultism activist highlights this dynamic. "When we allow teens to have a voice and respectfully listen to what they have to say, they can help adults re-connect with our own idealism and hopes for a better world"

(Pevec, 2009, n. p.). Pevec, an adult, argues that allowing young people to have a voice and listening to them will benefit adults. Pevec seeks to verify the right for young people to have a voice and to be listened to so that other adults also see that it is important for young people to be listened to. This example is powerful in that it demonstrates how the construction of youth as subordinant to adults is so deeply embedded in adult/youth power relations. Social justice education literature supports an examination of how the construction of childhood and young people, as a group can be examined in the context of oppression.

Social Justice Education Conceptual Frameworks of Oppression

SJE literature reviewed for this study theorizes systems of privilege and oppression, the use of social identities by these systems, and the interplay between social identity and oppression on individual, cultural, and institutional levels (Adams et al., 2010). This literature seeks to theorize oppression in order to understand how to transform oppression into more liberatory systems, practices, and relationships. In this section, I review key SJE conceptual frameworks of oppression that provide theoretical underpinnings for this study.

SJE conceptual frameworks provide tools to analyze how social identities and the related, historically-based allocations of privilege and disadvantage associated with those social identities have created oppression (Adams, 2010). These frameworks of oppression assume that "social identity is based on social identity groups in advantaged or disadvantages social locations or positions" (p. 2) and that social identity groups are socially constructed to receive privilege or be targeted by oppression based on that

group's specific historical context (Adams, 2010; see also Freire, 1970). By understanding how privilege and disadvantage have historically been developed and assigned based on social constructions of superiority and inferiority, social justice education theory provides analytical tools to contest the idea that privilege and disadvantage are inevitable. Locating the historical origins of privilege and oppression supports the ability to challenge inequities.

SJE literature conceptualizes oppression as "a complex societal phenomenon" (Adams, 2010, p. 4) that occurs on the individual or micro level, the institutional or meso level, and the societal or macro level (Hardiman et al., 2010; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2010). These frameworks theorize the psychological processes of socialization that install and reproduce roles of dominant and subordinant related to social identities. Additionally, these frameworks provide tools to analyze the societal and structural dimensions of oppression as well as the discourses of oppression.

Bell (2010) explains that the defining features of oppression are pervasive, restrictive, hierarchical, occur through intersecting identities/relationships, and are internalized by those in the role of dominant as well as those in the role of subordinant.

> The term *oppression* encapsulates the fusion of institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that shade most aspects of life in our society. . . . Woven together through time and reinforced in the present, these patterns provide an example of the pervasiveness of oppression. (p. 21)

Oppression is restrictive in that groups that are targeted by oppression are both structurally and materially constrained. These restrictions impact the possibilities available to those in targeted groups while creating less restricted access to both material resources and self-determination for those in dominant groups (Bell, 2010). This

restrictive access is operationalized through hierarchy. "Oppression signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privileged groups reap advantage, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of targeted groups" (p. 22). Bell further states that, every person holds a constellation of multiple social identities, which make power and privilege relative for each individual. For the purposes of this study, I argue that young people occupy a subordinant status in the social hierarchy and within young people, as a group, some have *more* access to resources based on other identities, such as being White or owning class. Those in multiple dominant groups may see their access to privilege as natural and as something that they have earned and may experience difficulty in seeing how hierarchy limits and restricts the exercise of power and self-determination of those in the subordinant location of hierarchical relationships. Bell argues that oppression (both the dominance of advantaged groups and the subordination of targeted groups) is internalized into the "the human psyche" (p. 22). Finally, Bell theorizes that all forms of oppression have shared characteristics, including dominant and subordinant groups that have unequal access to exercise power and receive privilege.

Hardiman et al. (2010) conceptualize oppression as "an interlocking, multileveled system that consolidates social power to the benefit of members of privileged groups and is maintained and operationalized on three dimensions: (a) contextual dimension, (b) conscious/unconscious dimension, and (c) applied dimension" (p. 26). Further, they explain that:

> The contextual dimension consists of three levels: (a) individual, (b) institutional, and (c) social/cultural. The conscious/unconscious dimension describes how oppression is both intentional and unintentional. The applied dimension describes how oppression is manifested at the individual (attitudes and behaviors), institutional (policies, practices, and norms), and societal/cultural (values, beliefs, and customs) levels. (p. 26)

This framework demonstrates the pervasive nature of oppression and provides a tool for examining the multiple levels of manifestations of oppression that appear in the policies, practices, relationships, and individual behaviors of young people and adults.

Young (2010) supports an examination of the political and philosophical discourses of oppression using the "Five Faces of Oppression" (p. 35). These discourses constitute the levels and types of oppression that Hardiman et al. (2010) describe. The five faces of oppression, described by Young are: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence and will be briefly outlined below. These faces are applied as criteria in determining when individuals and communities, or groups, are oppressed.

Exploitation is the process by which the results of the labor of one social group (usually material wealth or prestige) is transferred to the benefit of another social group. Marginalization speaks to the process by which people, whom the labor system cannot or will not use, are expelled from or denied useful or productive participation in economic and social life, often resulting in material deprivation and dependency. Powerlessness includes the inability to participate in making decisions that affect the conditions of one's lives and actions; lacking in authority, status, and sense of self; limited concrete opportunities to develop and exercise one's capacities. Cultural imperialism speaks to the process by which the dominant symbols, activities, or meanings of a society reinforce the perspective of a dominant group while making invisible, stereotyped, or marked as "other" the perspectives of subordinant or targeted groups. This includes the presumed universality of the dominant group's experience, culture, and religion. Finally, the face of violence refers to the random, unprovoked attacks against members of (targeted or

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subordinated) social groups and their property, with the primary motivation to damage, humiliate, or terrorize, and take place in a social context in which this violence is tolerated and often enabled by legal and acceptable institutional and social practices.

Each of Young's (2010) five faces of oppression can be used to examine adultism/youth oppression. For example, the discourse that positions adults as more complete than young people supports cultural imperialism in which the activities and perspectives of adults are viewed as normal and correct, while the perspectives of young people are dismissed or trivialized based on the dominant group's perspective about young people. Young people are also legally marginalized from participation in the economy, given that there are laws restricting young people from working or being able to work enough to financially support themselves. This creates financial dependence on adults. Young people experience powerlessness when they are not permitted to make decisions that impact their own daily lives and are exploited when the benefits of their labor at school (i.e., taking standardized tests) are transferred into revenue for testing companies that adults own. Young people experience violence so often that government agencies (i.e., Child Protective Services) exist for the sole purpose of dealing with violence against children.

Liberation is a key framework of social justice education. SJE conceptualizes and theorizes oppression in order to support envisioning and actualizing the empowerment of individuals and communities to create social change (Adams, 2010). For example, Harro (2010) outlines a cycle for liberation that supports a vision for individuals to transform their oppressive behavior. Love (2010b) suggests that it is important to examine and understand oppression in order to envision how to dismantle oppression. She identifies

four dimensions for developing a liberatory consciousness that include awareness, analysis, action, and allyship/accountability. In each of these frameworks for social change, the literature suggests that individuals must be able to change their own viewpoints and behavior in order to make lasting change on the systemic/institutional levels.

These SJE conceptual frameworks of oppression are further complemented by additional frameworks that make it possible to analyze how oppression works. This understanding supports the development of theory and practice that aims to transform oppression. The following section discusses Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which provides a framework for an analysis of hegemonic adultism as a current dynamic shaping youth/adult relations (S. Hall, 1986). A presentation of the ways status, othering, and domination and subordination support hegemonic adultism will follow. Finally, an analysis of how dominant thinking about and treatment of young people meets Memmi's (1965) four criteria for oppression is presented.

Hegemonic Adultism

Presented with hierarchy as both natural and inevitable, there are few options available to young people and adults other than consenting to play the assigned social roles that are mandated by Western society. Gramsci conceptualized hegemony as a process by which a ruling group sustains domination not only through economic wealth and political power but by making the ruling group's own culture into the dominant culture, thereby legitimizing their rule (S. Hall, 1986). The language, values, norms, practices, knowledge, and worldview of the dominant culture are centered as both

"standard" and more valuable than other cultures. The idea of hegemony refers to a process by which power is maintained by winning a large degree of the subjugated people's "spontaneous consent" (S. Hall, 1986). Gramsci suggested that this consent is caused by the confidence that a subordinated group has in a dominant group because of the prestige associated with the dominant group's position and access to resources (S. Hall, 1986).

Hegemonic adultism describes the dynamic by which young people submit and consent to adult power with love and care. Adult culture, values, behaviors, and norms are viewed as the superior and correct. For example, "tough love" is offered as an effective way for adults to get young people to submit to rules in many situations. The idea behind "tough love" is that treating young people harshly when they break rules will help them in the long run. It is assumed that young people who are treated harshly will come to understand that the harsh treatment they received was indeed an act of love. Adults obtain "spontaneous consent" when young people seek to align themselves with adult expectations by carefully following rigid rules. Hegemony is obtained, in large part, because no alternate views of how the world could be are available. Young people are presented with a picture of the world that constructs them as dependent and subordinant. Young people's "consent" to hegemonic adultism offers them the best opportunity for access to the resources and care that they need for survival.

John Locke, an influential Enlightenment theorist, made the proclamation that:

If therefore a strict Hand be kept over children *from the Beginning*, they will in that Age be tractable, and quietly submit to it, as never having known any other: And if, as they grow up to the Use of Reason, the Rigour of Government be, as they deserve it, gently relaxed … his former Restraints will increase their Love…and a Care to make them capable to deserve the Favour of their parents, and the Esteem of every Body else. (Locke cited in Bañales, 2005 p. 51)

Locke describes a specific prescription for maintaining hegemonic adultism. His advice to adults is to be loving but strict so that young children will quietly submit to adult power, never knowing that there is any other option. Young people will then carry on the beliefs supporting hegemony into adulthood, through which moving from a position of subordination to one of domination, they will play the favored roles of the society. For Locke, learning the use of "reason," ultimately means that they have internalized the boundaries and control of the state. Having internalized the appropriateness of these relationships of domination and subordination, the "rigour of government" would relax as they now regulate themselves in a way that pleases the state and other adults around them. In this power relationship, governing adults are in positions to more freely exercise power, while young people experience institutional and systematic limitations. Young people's bodies, behaviors, desires, speech, and beliefs about themselves and the world are monitored and impacted by these relationships with adults. The colonial categories of "youth" and "adult" and their subordinant and dominant positionalities in the social hierarchy are evidence of oppression.

Status

Status is inherent in a hierarchy in which there exists a ruling group and a group that is ruled. The relative rank or social standing for an individual or group in a society is a form of status and status is related to hegemonic adultism. The status of one group or individual depends on the relative status of another group or individual. Max Weber (1946) defined a status groups as a group that can be differentiated based on particular qualities, like prestige. Further, he viewed status groups as hierarchical in relation to class

power, social power, and political power. Class power comes from having access to resources that other people lack or need. In this sense, young people have less status in relation to adults, given that they are marginalized from economic participation in the society. Social power is related to how one perceives her/his own power in relation to another. If young people internalize the discourse about adults being socially superior to young people, then one could make the argument that young people would perceive that adults have power over them, just as adults have likely internalized a sense of social superiority over young people. Political power refers to the ability to impact or in some way influence hierarchical power relations or systems. Given that young people are marginalized from participation in politics, they are not able to exercise political power. Thus, young people as a status group lack the prestige available to adults and have less status than adults as a group.

Othering

When the dominant group has ruling status, that group defines the norms, values, and acceptable behaviors of society. I have already discussed how Western discourses Other young people. Those who are different and separate from the dominant or ruling groups are constructed as the Other (Bhabha, 1996). This practice reifies status and excuses unequal treatment among status groups. What would be called mistreatment from one adult to another would be considered fully appropriate when an adult visits such treatment upon a younger person. For example, when one adult hits another adult, it is called battery, yet when an adult hits a child, it is often legitimated as spanking or discipline. It is the othering of young people that makes such mistreatment possible and

"normal." Even as I have been reading and writing about this topic, I found myself telling my four-year-old nephew to move out of a chair he was sitting in so that I could sit. It took a moment before I was able to realize that I would never ask another adult to move for me in such a way and for no reason other than I did not want to sit on the floor. In fact, there was a couch next to the chair where my adult sister and mother were lounging, and I never even considered asking them to move. As an adult, I felt legitimately entitled to the space my nephew occupied. While this may not be considered an abuse and many would refuse to acknowledge it even as mistreatment, the thinking that supports my own move to usurp his seat is the same thinking that validates the oppression (Bhabha, 1996; Said, 1979).

Domination and Subordination

My actions with my nephew reflect the unaware imposition of colonial ideology. This interaction represents a relationship in which our roles are predetermined, mine as dominant and his as subordinant. Imperialism, again, is a useful concept to frame this type of imposition as oppression. Imperialism is "the creation and maintenance of an unequal economic, cultural and territorial relationship, usually between states and often in the form of an empire, based on domination and subordination" (Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, & Watts, 2000, p. 375). Imperialism intrudes into the intimate spaces of familial relationships through the construction of hierarchy in age and gender roles that are justified as natural through colonial discourse. My rationale in handling the situation with my nephew could be explained as follows:

> You occupy the space that I want and since I am in the dominant position, as an adult, it is legitimate for me to ask you, the child, to release it to me and for you to

assume that you must do so, cheerfully, so as to not to default into insubordination.

While I was not aware or conscious of my thought process at the time, my behavior reflects my internalized colonization.

As is a practice consistent with the implementation of colonialism, imperial adult practices mean adults, like the colonizers, are able to usurp or assume control of young people, like the colonized. Cannella (1997) describes this practice:

> Older human beings (and often a particularly expert group) will decide for young people exactly what life will be like, a practice that has been referred to as imperialism. Originating with adults, child-rearing manuals, bedtime stories, literature, and mass-media impose on children a particular knowledge that dictates need. (p. 34)

In other words, this discourse that originates with adults depicts young people as subordinant and dependent on adults to teach them how to exist, believe, think, and behave. The adult/child relationship is thusly constructed to link expertise and control to adults and dependency and need to young people. It becomes the purview of adults to define the experience of children. Not only does this discourse legitimize the systematic control of young people, it also serves as the rational and justification for the rejection of any young person's or young peoples' refusal to submit to the control that has been legitimized by the needs that have been dictated.

Because "need" has been constructed and dictated, any refusal to submit to adult power becomes read as further evidence of need. In fact, resistance may even be pathologized. For example, young people who refuse to submit to adult control may be diagnosed with *Oppositional Defiant Disorder* (ODD), which is a diagnosis that is part of a class of Conduct Disorders. ODD is defined as an "ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that seriously interferes with the

youngster's day to day functioning" (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2009, p. 1). Symptoms of ODD include: "Frequent temper tantrums; excessive arguing with adults; often questioning rules; active defiance and refusal to comply with adult requests and rules" (AACPA, 2009, p. 1). The description of ODD is very similar to that of *drapetomania*, a disorder introduced in the mid-1800s that pathologized people of African heritage for resisting enslavement as a form of mental illness (Halpern & Dal Lago, 2002). This diagnosis served to validate the bondage system of slavery in the face of resistance by those who had been enslaved and to endorse the use of force—physical, emotional, or otherwise—to keep enslaved people under the control of White plantation owners. Like drapetomania, ODD not only serves to justify the oppression of young people in the face of youth resistance, it also constructs need and dependency where young people who are diagnosed with ODD are then believed to require adults to "treat" their "disorder."

Both children and adults are impacted by the production of this power relationship to which they are confined—adults to the role of dominant and youth to the role of subordinant. In the role of dominant, adults must take on the colonial role of "expert" in relationships with children and each other, even if they have been completely unprepared to do so after living in a society that generally keeps adults and children segregated. Young people are taught to associate and align themselves with adults so as to learn how to become adults

> The key to understanding this issue is to know that very few young people actually feel solidarity with young people as a group to begin with. Instead of going through a political conversion at age 18, denouncing their former membership, they spend their entire childhood identifying with the perspective of adults. We feel that we've been wrongly grouped with the other young people, who actually deserve to be treated with disrespect; we see ourselves as special.

The strategies that youth employ to dissociate themselves from other young people, trying to shed the negative status of childhood, form the basis for what evolves into full-fledged adult supremacy later on. (Bonnichsen, 2003 p. 2)

Young people are forced to assimilate and identify with adults, to think of themselves as not being fully human. The messages conveyed by the ideology of adulthood communicate that young people will get to be whole, powerful people—people who are listened to and will get to make decisions, and will no longer be controlled—once they pass into adulthood. In the meantime, young people often play the oppressor role in relation to younger people.

Once young people make it to adulthood, they are then pressured by other adults and institutions to act in alignment with the ideology of adulthood. The ideology of adulthood constructs adults as experts on life and as being more capable of handling situations without anyone's assistance. Consistent with this ideology, adults must not act outside the bounds of what is deemed adulthood. For example, when an adult ally believes that a young person is responding appropriately to the oppressive attitudes of another adult, the adult ally might be punished for agreeing with or supporting that young person's resistance. Also, adults must measure their ability to care for and control children in relation to other adults' opinions. New parents can attest to the constant barrage of opinions and advice that they are offered about parenting that reinforces the idea that there is a correct way to be a parent/adult that new parents must seek out and perform. This can create a great deal of confusion for children and adults as well, when their relationships may potentially be monitored and critiqued by outside "experts."

Similar to the dynamics of colonialism, adults are able to allocate young people's resources to support one's self and one's worldview because of their dominant and

"expert" status. According to Côté (2000), "[T]he idea [of] adulthood requires the idea of adolescence to make sense, for 'maturity' implies a previous 'immaturity,' and being 'grown up' implies having previously been childish or juvenile" (p. 2). Adulthood requires the maintenance of categories of childhood for the validation of its own existence. This is similar to the way the colonizer required the maintenance of the category of savage to validate himself as civilized, despite the barbaric practices that the colonizer might employ against the colonized. In this way, young people are positioned as a resource that supports the worldview of adults as "experts" and the justification for adults to exercise power over younger people. One way that some adults are able to manipulate and control this resource is by legislating access to resources and opportunity and allowing or disallowing participation in productive aspects of social life based on age. For example, the legal right to vote has been used as a means to bar the political participation, access, and voice of various groups throughout history. Currently, young people who are old enough to be tried as an adult for a crime are not considered to be old enough to vote. Even though not all adults are political or governmental authorities, all political and governmental authorities are adults. As such, adults are able to allocate young people's identity as a resource to support the maintenance of an "adult" category with all of its rights and privileges.

Memmi's Four Criteria for Oppression

Albert Memmi (1965, 2000), who provided an account of the psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonized and the colonizer, describes four criteria for identifying oppression. These criteria provide a useful framework for analyzing the

treatment and dominant conceptualization of childhood, like race and gender, as

oppression. Love and Phillips (2007) use Memmi's (2000) four criteria of oppression to

make the case for an examination of the mistreatment of young people as oppression. The

four criteria provided by Memmi include:

1) There is an insistence on a difference, real or imaginary
2) A "negative valuation" is imposed upon members of the group judged to be
   different
3) These negatively valued differences are generalized to the whole group
4) These generalized, negative valuations are then used to justify and legitimate
   hostility and aggression against that group. (p. xvii)

Consistent with Memmi's (2000) first criterion, difference is first constructed

through empirically based, positivist science and is then sustained in the discourse

practices of dualism and other colonialist discourses. The construction of difference was

discussed at length in the earlier section on the discourses of childhood. The context for

an insistence of difference is provided and supported by Enlightenment/modernist

discourse in which the child is constructed as separate and different from the adult and

the child is othered and is relegated to a subordinant status to adults Through these

discourse practices, policy and laws are created that limit young people's access to

resources and limit their participation in socially productive activities that are often

reserved for adults.

One example of the construction of young people as different from adults can be

found in laws and institutionalized restrictions that bar youth from purchasing "adult"

items, viewing "adult" material, or attending particular events or locations at times that

are arbitrarily defined as "for-adults" by adults. Many popular films are based on

cartoons and comic books that were originally created for and marketed to young people

but are remade into Hollywood blockbusters. Often these films are rated to restrict young

people from viewing material that has been deemed too violent, sexual, or otherwise "mature." For example, the blockbuster film inspired by the popular cartoon, *Transformers* (2007), was rated PG-13 to restrict young people under the age of 13 from viewing the film without an adult guardian. This rating scheme is based on the assumption that violence and sexual content can be handled once a person reaches a particular age and that this age of preparedness is the same for everyone. Additionally, this rating suggests that young people would not be able to handle the content of the film on their own but that an accompanying adult would be needed to help the young person make meaning of the film and its content. It further assumes that any adult would already be prepared, emotionally and intellectually to deal with the violence, sexual content, and language of the film. While this may be the case for some adults, it is not the case for all adults. The point here is that adults and young people alike may not be prepared for the content presented in films. In fact, people of all ages can benefit from having a buddy to talk with to make meaning of films. However, these laws are imposed on young people because of the insistence on young people being different from adults.

As per Memmi's (2000) second criterion, a "negative valuation" is then imposed on the group that has been defined as different. This negative valuation imposed on young people as being different, Other, and less complete or less-than adults has intense consequences. For example, negative valuations are imposed on all youth regarding their physical and mental capabilities. These negative valuations support "assumptions about [young people's] capacity to make decisions regarding their own lives, … to participate effectively in the workforce, and about their capacity to engage in acceptable social relationships" (Love & Phillips, 2007, p. 360). If young people are not able to make

decisions for themselves, are not able to participate in the workforce, and cannot engage in safe relationships, then of course, someone (read: an adult) would need to look out for them, to protect them. This negative valuation serves to justify the control and treatment of young people, in the name of their own protection and well-being.

Negative valuations are generalized to all young people, Memmi's (2000) third criterion. The implication of these ways of constructing youth is the notion that only full adult human beings possess qualities of rationality, responsibility, knowledge, independence and experience, and that these qualities are valuable to possess. All young people are represented as the binary Other of adults and as being in a constant state of incompleteness, on the way to adulthood. Grossberg (2003) explains,

> Kids are represented as essentially different than adults ("as mysterious freaks of nature")… since their brains are qualitatively different from human brains….all of their weird behavior is understandable while, at the same time, we [adults] are relieved of some of the burden of our responsibility to them. …. They are another species, some kind of animal, and we are failing to civilize, to domesticate, them. (p. 334)

The negative valuations that emerge from an insistence that all young people are essentially different from adults is reminiscent of colonial ideology in which the self-appointed charge for the colonizer was to "civilize" and "domesticate" the native people who had been represented as Other. The colonizer was both able to justify his responsibility to "save" the colonized people, just as the Otherness of the native people relieved him from the responsibility of viewing the colonized people as fully human and treating them as such. Because these negative valuations of young people are conveyed through the media, through authorities in educational institutions, and other "reputable" sources who have observed young people and their "strange behavior," they are taken as reliable and uncritically applied to all young people.

Mike Males (1996, 1998, 1999) has examined many pervasive negative myths and stereotypes that are currently applied to youth. Most frequently, the actions of a few young people are used to generalize negative valuations to an entire group. For example, the relatively few young (mostly White) men that have entered high schools and universities to engage in horrible shooting rampages have been used to support these myths of young people being dangerous. Racist stereotypes have long cast young men of color as dangerous, yet these negative valuations did not extend to young White men. These shootings by young White men have been used to generalize negative valuations to all young people.

Harpers Index of Teen Myths (cited in Males, 2001) debunks many of the pernicious myths about young people ranging from high incidents of drug abuse and overdose and high rates of murder and other violent crimes to myths that teens are the most dangerous drivers on the road. This article presents a comparison of data showing incidents of crimes committed by youth and adults. Time and again, the crimes that are being highlighted as endemic to youth are being committed much more frequently by adults. For example, the "average number of gun fatalities [in the US in 1998 was] 30,407. [The] number [of gun fatalities] involving persons under age 20, per year: 3,752" (Males, 2001, p. 2). These statistics show that adults are actually enacting much more violence than are young people.

Negative myths and stereotypes that portray adolescent youth as violent, reckless, hypersexed, welfare-draining, obnoxious, and ignorant are examples of commonly held stereotypes and assumptions that are used to attach a negative valuation to youth (Grossberg, 2003). These negative stereotypes were previously applied to groups of

people of color and to poor and working-class people. These myths have then been appropriated to devalue young people as a group. Similarly, younger youth are commonly described as innocent, dependent, and cute. These associations are negative in that they imply weakness, a need for protection, and a general distrust or dismissal of their thinking (Canella & Kincheloe, 2002; Giroux, 2000; Wyness, 2000). Young people who are White and who are also girls are often likely to be impacted by the same stereotypes aimed at very young children. Race, class, and gender impact youth differently as these forms of oppression compound with the negative valuations attributed to young people. Young people of color endure the impact of racism on top of youth oppression, as girls endure sexism and poor and working-class youth endure classism compounded with youth oppression. Young, White, owning-class boys are also the target of negative myths, stereotypes, and assumptions associated with their age, like being reckless, arrogant, disconnected, uncaring about problems in the world and unaware and uninterested in issues of equity and social justice.

Memmi's (2000) fourth criterion is that "these generalized, negative valuations are used to justify and legitimate hostility and aggression against that group" (Love & Phillips, 2007, p. 363). The policies that require youth in a mall under a certain age (usually 18) to be accompanied by an adult after a certain hour provides a perfect example. Love and Phillips (2007) quote a mall manager from the Ingleside Mall in Holyoke, Massachusetts who spoke about the mall's policy to require that young people have adult supervision after 6:00PM: "Just the fact that they're [young people], they are perceived by some people [adults] … as intimidating. It might cause you [adults] to leave, or not shop in stores you [adults] want to shop in" (p. 361). This policy is an

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example of how the negative valuation of youth, reflected in the assumption that youth are violent, dishonest, and even criminal, is leveraged to legitimate hostility and exclusions.

Another example of how a generalized, negative valuation is used to justify aggression and hostility toward youth is apparent in the implementation of Zero Tolerance Policies in schools. These policies are based on the assumption that youth are violent, drug addicted, and criminal. They aim to penalize misbehavior and set the stage for arbitrary violence to be committed against young people. These policies have led to widespread abuses of young people; young children are expelled for drawing guns with crayons, subject to random searches of their belongings, including full body searches, and more (Soling, 2009). A zero tolerance policy like this is reminiscent of a prison, not a school. Young people who are subject to zero tolerance policies have no legal recourse or rights as a group that would protect them from such mistreatment. In the following section, I discuss how intersecting forms of oppression also impact young people.

<u>Youth Identities and Intersecting Oppressions</u>

Young people hold a range of identities—some privileged or dominant and others that make them targets for oppression given the associated subordinant status. For this reason, intersecting forms of oppressions must be taken into account in discussions about youth oppression. Young people are further impacted by other oppressions, including racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, transgender oppression, religious oppression, and more. "Racism and classism, for example, intensify the disparities of power, privilege, resources, and status experienced by youth because of adultism" (Love

& Phillips, 2007, p. 363). In this way, oppressions are all interconnected and mutually dependent, in that one form of oppression maintains other forms of oppression. For example, class is often used to justify racism; racism is used to justify sexism, and so on.

These multiple forms of oppression complicate young people's experience of youth oppression. For example, groups of young people of color and poor or working-class young men might be considered dangerous, but a group of young White girls would be considered in need of protection or potentially *in danger.* Anti-gang "loitering" laws indiscriminately target groups of young men who gather outside of their homes or on a neighborhood corner. Such laws ultimately target and criminalize poor and youth of color whose neighborhoods and families do not have access to clubs and other community places to meet and congregate that serve to put middle-class and White youth outside the view and reach of the police. Not all young people are targeted by youth oppression in the same way. With that being said, the same criteria or set of characteristics might be applied differently to different groups of young people, but the consequences are the same: targeting, othering, and subordinating. The negative attitudes about young people held by some adults have been used to legitimize the exclusion and mistreatment of young people based on assumptions that their mere presence might put adults and other young people in danger.

Grossberg (2003) acknowledges the difficulty of analyzing oppression connected to youth-associated identities (i.e., infants, toddlers, kids, children, adolescents, teens, young adults, etc.) when other forms of oppression, like racism, are more present in related scholarship and general awareness:

> I don't mean to deny that the war on kids is linked in complex ways to the restructuring of racial and ethnic relations in the U.S., as authors like Jonathan

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Kozol and Henry Giroux have so powerfully argued, but too often this argument is made against a backdrop assumption that the rest of the kids are being treated all right. And they are not—albeit perhaps not in such visibly egregious ways. (p. 328)

Current analyses and perspectives of the experiences and treatment of young people are often limited to the available view of other identities and our perspectives on other forms of oppression. Young White boys are not being targeted by racism and sexism at school, and this reality can obscure oppressive dynamics that young White boys can experience on a daily basis at school, like bullying and emotional abuse by teachers or other adults. There has been a significant amount of research conducted to better understand how young people might be impacted by racism and sexism; however, my literature search did not uncover any research examining the impact of adultism or youth oppression, specifically, on young people.

The colonization of young people serves as the groundwork for preparing young people to take on dominant and subordinant roles of intersecting oppressions, like classism, sexism, and racism. It is through the othering of young people that youth begin making those Other distinctions along race, class, and gender lines in an effort to get outside of the disempowering Other that is young people's oppression. This perspective can be helpful to social justice educators and should be researched further—when young children with "dominant" identities are told that they have no experience of oppression, there is a missed opportunity to support and encourage healing from the hurts of those experiences of youth oppression. For example, White, owning-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian boys are being targeted by youth oppression but are told that they have no experience of oppression. These boys have been taught to shut out, deny, and ignore hurt. As they are taught to ignore their own hurts, they may also have to shut down their

attunement to the hurts of others, exercising the same denial. These are the same

individuals, who as adults, are overrepresented in exercises of imperialism, colonization,

and at the forefront of other oppressive institutions and who also seem to be the least

willing and able to acknowledge how they are enacting oppression.

Arbitrary Violence and the Normalization of Mistreatment

The oppression of youth is so normalized that mistreatment is seen as natural, that

is to say, it is seen as a fact of youth. Additionally, as in colonialism, the mistreatment of

youth is often enacted through arbitrary psychological and physical violence that is

employed at random times in an effort to control young people. Love and Phillips (2007)

describe the normalization of youth oppression:

> The normalization of the subordination of young people is so extensive that very
> little research examining the experience of young people characterizes that
> mistreatment as oppression. Seldom does the research examining child
> victimization, child neglect, child abuse, the mistreatment of young people in
> schools, abuses in the child welfare system, or infanticide describe that
> mistreatment as oppression. (p. 360)

Child abuse is rarely named as a form of oppression but is rather constructed as the result

of acts committed by dangerous individual adults. This rationale is used as further

justification for the restrictions placed on young people.

Part of the failure to connect child abuse with oppression is about conditional

definitions. What would be called violence between adults is considered to be "natural"

or "normal" when adults visit such behavior upon children. For example, Dobson (1970)

advises parents to spank their children with belts or switches and then to leave them in

plain view so that the children be reminded of the consequences of challenging authority

or of being "willful children." In other words, this physical and psychological violence is

enacted arbitrarily—often without cause, at the whim of the adult. If an adult were to treat another adult this way, this would be defined as battery. Dobson's attitude is consistent with colonial ideology and practices. This kind of treatment was justified to be used against colonized peoples to quash any kind of "willfulness." Yet, this treatment would never be appropriate among the colonizers, except for adults who are placed in subordination in prisons or chain gangs.

In general, very rarely is a connection made between these kinds of widespread, culturally sanctioned attitudes and the systematic mistreatment of children. It has been commonly held that the exceptional abusive parent, one who commits violence beyond the bounds of the punishment that Dobson suggests is appropriate, has behavioral issues, or is even pathological. However, like with colonialism where the abuse of native populations in the name of "protection" was considered necessary and normal, rarely is the mistreatment and abuse of young people seen as a tool of structural and systematic oppression. In this way the adult/child relationship structure is parallel to or mimics that of the colonizer/colonized.

The politicization and creation of crises in Western nations around child abuse started in the 1960s that served the dual purpose of concretizing the subordinated status of children while putting adults, the academy, and the state in a position to "rescue" and "protect" children and the institution of childhood (Jenks, 1996; Kitzinger, 1997; Wyness, 2000). Even so, child abuse is rarely named as a form of oppression but rather as the result of dangerous individual adults. There is an entire industry organized to protect children from these exceptional abusive parents, which one might suggest would negate the idea of this treatment as being exceptional. In fact, the protection industry that was

created never calls into question its own role in the maintenance of youth oppression. By perpetuating the idea that child abuse is not systemic but rather the result of a "few bad apples," the child protection industry is able to sustain jobs, programs, and funding that actually requires child abuse to maintain those jobs and services. The industry benefits economically from so many incidents of child abuse and thus secures its own existence.

Summary and Discussion of Literature Review

This literature review is important in developing a more comprehensive understanding about where young people are located in systems of power and privilege and how relations of ruling between adults/adult-run institutions and young people are installed in young people and reproduced in adults. This literature also challenges and expands current conceptual frameworks used in progressive education, like Social Justice Education.

This chapter began with a discussion about the key perspectives defining childhood as biological and social and was followed by a review of some of the Western, modern discourses of childhood that constitute those key perspectives as presented by Cannella and Viruru (2004) and Burman (1994). These discourses are 1) child/adult dualism; 2) individuals with souls to be saved; 3) Western science and the discoverable nature of young people; 4) time, progress, nature, and universality; and 5) child(hood) as dependen(t/cy). This literature shows that these discourses are embedded in notions of childhood as biological and social, as they have been developed over-time through use of Western scientific methods that hinge on assumptions about nature. As the literature review has demonstrated, these scientific methods were developed during the

Enlightenment era and assume that natural laws governing development and behavior, as "nature," can be discovered using rigorous scientific methods. These assumptions position adults as the knowers or experts on children and childhood and invalidate young people's knowledge. Any argument made to the contrary can be rebuffed using notions of childhood as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable.

The ideas and discourses that emerged during the Enlightenment era have had an enormous impact on the world. While there are many contributions of the scholarship produced during the Enlightenment era, this literature review focused explicitly on the parallels of the discourses of childhood and colonization while demonstrating that they are both rooted in Enlightenment thinking. Discourse analysis and the connection of childhood to enlightenment thinking and technologies of colonialism help to see how childhood has been socially constructed in the service of nation building and empire. Exploring childhood as a technology of colonialism and thus, oppression, expands the possibilities of viewing childhood as a construction with a socio-political purpose. As such, any discussion of childhood must include an examination of power.

This literature provides the conceptual foundation for my exploration of young people as a social group who, through the socio-political construction of childhood, occupy a subordinant status to adults are targeted by oppression. Gramsci's concept of hegemony provides the basis for understanding how young people are subordinated through economic marginalization in which adults as the ruling group sustain domination not only through economic wealth and political power but by making their own culture into the dominant culture, thereby legitimizing their rule (S. Hall, 1986). Adults are the ruling group and are able to obtain "spontaneous consent" when young people seek to

align themselves with adult expectations by carefully following rigid rules. Hegemonic adultism is obtained where no alternate views of how these relationships could be organized are available.

Hegemonic adultism provides for unequal status hierarchy in which adults, in general, have more access to class power, social power, and political power than do young people. Some adults have more access to these forms of power, given their other social identities and yet, in general, adult's unequal access to these resources conveys more prestige and status upon adults than young people who have very limited access without the support or assistance of an adult. Status relationships rely on one group being constructed as Other and modern Western colonial discourses of childhood make this possible through the discourse of child/adult dualism. Adults are constructed as dominant and young people as subordinant based on their status in the social hierarchy.

This perspective of hegemonic adultism helps in understanding more about power relations and the very limited opportunities that young people have to exercise power, given the ruling relations between adults and young people. Adults have the ability to completely constrain young people's opportunities for exercising legal power in the economic and political spheres. Young people are completely shut out of most decision-making processes about laws, policy, and procedures that impact their daily lives. Young people are marginalized from the participation in and regulation of the development of structures that determine where they go, who they are with, and what they can do most days of the week. Young people are excluded from the development of knowledge, theory, and scholarship about their own lives based on the structures and beliefs that position adults to be experts on young people and to publish their expertise. Thus, young

people are effectively excluded from creating change that would lessen or eliminate their own oppression. Lack of access to resources and forced dependency on adults who are in the dominant group, circumscribe their ability to engage in effective social change. This study presents an opportunity for a small group of young people to engage in theorizing about their own experience, their own lives, and their own power in their own voice.

Colonial practices and ideologies have seldom been able to completely colonize the minds of the people targeted by its efforts. Indeed, Western imperialist colonialism carries within it the seeds of its own demise (Weenie, 2000). Colonized peoples see within the structures of colonial organizations models for non-colonial relationships (Love, personal communication, March 31, 2011). This study proceeds from the SJE liberatory framework that holds that oppression of youth must be acknowledged and examined as a basis for creating liberatory possibilities. Even if the colonizers do not accept their behaviors and attitudes toward colonized peoples as oppressive, oppression is the result. Similarly, even if adults refuse to acknowledge the colonization of young people, oppression remains. The concepts of hegemonic adultism and youth oppression make possible a wider perspective on the impacts of colonizing childhood on both young people and adults. If the oppression can be observed, articulated, and theorized, then more effective strategies can be formulated and engaged to transform the oppressive power relations. Not only will young people benefit from this work, so too will adults. Young people are those who will inherit these roles of domination and without the opportunity to critically examine those roles, they will reproduce the oppression of young people when they move into the role of adult. Without some kind of intervention, awareness, and support, young people will have very little possibility for gaining

perspective outside of the experience of this oppression once they age into adulthood. For social justice educators, this knowledge supports the idea that the work of ending oppression can begin with work on adultism.

The following chapter presents the research methodology for this study, which seeks to center young people's experiences, thinking, and knowledge about being their age. This study aims to explore not only how young people experience their age but also how they experience authority, power, agency, and relationships with adults and other young people in the context of the literature that has been presented.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Children are experts on being children and their lives…therefore their views and experiences should be sought and respected. (Clark & Moss, 2001, p. 483)

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power related to childhood within their lived experiences. This chapter provides a rationale for research methodology, human subjects considerations, a description of the design of the study, a description of methodologies implemented for data collection and analysis, the process for testing validity and reliability in the data collection process, and the process for addressing researcher bias.

Research Approach

A qualitative approach to inquiry provides the best fit for this study as it allows this researcher to explore the nuance and complexity of young people's experiences, perspectives, and knowledge. This approach to research and inquiry allows me, as researcher, to build "a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswall, 1998, p. 15). There are four characteristics of qualitative research:

1) There is a focus on participants' insider perspective,
2) It involves fieldwork,
3) It requires that the primary researcher be the person to collect and analyze data, and
4) It required an inductive research strategy. (Merriam, 1998, p. 7)

These four characteristics are the tools that will allow this researcher to center young people's thinking and knowledge, to conduct research in the spaces that young people are inhabiting on a daily basis, to fully engage in reflexive practice while collecting and analyzing the data, and to center young people's narratives at every stage of this study. Qualitative methods provide the best approach to explore young people's lives within a context in which they make meaning about their lives, giving the researcher a view of how they do so (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Young people are experts on their own lives, and this research seeks to create a space and a forum for young people's theories, experiences, and understandings to emerge. Rossman and Rallis (1998) outline 4 premises that inform this research design:

(1) Research fundamentally involves issues of power;
(2) The research report is not transparent [nor objective] but, rather, is authored by a raced, gendered, classed, and politically oriented individual;
(3) Race, class, and gender [among other social identities] are crucial for understanding experience; and
(4) Historic, traditional research has silenced members of oppressed and marginalized groups (p. 66)

As much as researchers are biased by race, gender, and class, age also influences researcher bias. Young people constitute a historically oppressed and marginalized group, as is discussed further in Chapter 2 and as such require the researcher to proceed with awareness of power in the research process. These four assumptions frame the design of this study in a way that aids the researcher to be thoughtful about approaching the research in a way that is participatory, respectful, and supportive of young people's safety, thinking, and experience.

Qualitative methods support participants to be collaborators in this study by supporting the voices of those who have not traditionally participated in research about

their own social identity group (Love, 2004). As such, this research situates young people as subjects, rather than objects of research, a view that is consistent with the values associated with the conceptual frameworks of social justice education (L. T. Smith, 1999). A social justice perspective suggests that dominant stories about a group targeted by oppression are incomplete without the voices of people living the experience of that subordination (Love, 2004). Much of the scholarship about young people that informs developmental theories has been articulated by adults. This research provides a space for young people to tell their own stories, share their understandings of childhood, and of status and power related to their age.

Qualitative inquiry focuses on the experiences of young people that are articulated by young people currently occupying a time in their lifespan that is commonly referred to as "childhood." This method provides the opportunity to listen to, analyze, and share the narratives that young people provide in this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Social justice education theories, like much academic discourse, have been shaped by adults and have relied on dominant developmental paradigms to explain identity formation, socialization, and other concepts the frame the foundations of social justice praxis. By providing a structure and space to listen to young people, the data that emerges from these narratives can be used to inform social justice education praxis.

Research Questions

The central research questions and subquestions that guided this study are:

How do young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power as young people?

a. What information do young people encounter on a daily basis that communicates age as a form of status?

b. How do experiences that communicate status related to age impact young people?

c. In what ways do young people see themselves exercising power in their lives?

Description of the Study

This study examines high school age young people in two different settings in Western Massachusetts. One setting is a high school located in a rural area, and the other in a community setting. The rationale for selecting two different settings is to examine how young people who occupy a diverse range of class, race, and geographic locations describe their knowledge and experiences of childhood.

High school age is defined as young people in grades 9-12 who are between the ages of 14-18. Education is compulsory and most children begin schooling at around age 5 and complete a progression of grade levels. Thus, a majority of high school students are of similar age and are considered to be young people. Although some researchers use the term young people for people of all ages from 0 until somewhere into the 20s, this research focuses on young people who are between the ages of 14-18 because these are the typical ages of people in grades 9-12 (Field, Collins, Lovell, & Maroon, 2003).

Human Subjects Considerations

To ensure the safety and ethical considerations of the participants, this study has been designed in adherence with the standards that are outlined by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Young people receive special consideration in the

protection of human subjects because of their relative vulnerability, especially with regard to power relations with adults, and steps must be taken not only to ensure that no harm is done in the process of this research but that young people have a positive experience (Best, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Considerations that have been taken into account while designing this study include preparing an ethical research design with human subjects, following the regulations for research put forth for responsible conduct of research in the social and behavioral sciences, adequately assessing risk in the study, obtaining informed consent, maintaining privacy and confidentiality, being clear of conflicts of interests involving the subjects in this study, assuring proper data acquisition and management, and taking steps to conduct ethical research with young people. I asked potentially sensitive questions about childhood and about young peoples' daily experiences with adults, and in doing so, ensured their safety, protection of identity, confidentiality, and well-being of the participants in the study.

In preparation for developing the design of this study, I participated in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). To meet the guidelines for IRB approval, I first submitted the Human Research Curriculum Completion Report and the Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Curriculum Completion Report from CITI. Prior to piloting my research study and recruiting participants, I gained human subjects review board consent. I submitted my dissertation study proposal, including appendices related to interviews, focus groups, call for participant communication, permission form for Teachers and Principals to allow me to conduct research and informed consent forms for both participants and their parents and other relevant paperwork to the IRB.

Steps Taken to Ensure Confidentiality and Privacy

A priority of this research study was to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Particular steps were taken both to provide certain precautions and to assure participants that their privacy and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study. For example, in all emails, participants were addressed in the "BCC" field so that no individual participant could be identified by their address. Similarly, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Only pseudonyms were used in researcher memos and notes and participants' names that appear in transcriptions are referred to using their pseudonym. To ensure the safety of young people and to take into account their relative vulnerability, I was clear and transparent with participants about my status as a mandated reporter. I explained that I am able to ensure the participant's privacy and confidentiality in all cases except for reports of sexual assault or abuse. Researchers working with young people are required by law to report sexual assault or abuse that is mentioned in the context of any study. Once this dissertation study received IRB approval to proceed, participant recruitment began.

Steps Taken to Ensure Well-being and Safety

A priority of this research was to ensure the well-being and safety of the participants. The recruitment and interview methods were thoughtfully designed to offset some of the potential power dynamics that already exist between young people and adults and to create environments in which young people can provide support to each other. For example, each interview included the opportunity for two or more young people to be interviewed together. Young people had opportunities to talk and listen to each other

about their memories, experiences, ideas, and perspectives related to childhood. Issues

pertaining to safety and well-being of the participants are discussed further in the "Data

Collection Methods" Section.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

I recruited participants who are young people between the ages of 14-18 (See

Table 1). The rationale for the requirement that participants be between the ages of 14-18

and in a high school age setting is because this study focuses on young people's

experiences with status and power. The rationales for selecting high school age young

people in a high school and community-based setting, rather than younger people in a

middle school or elementary school setting is that high school age is still in close

proximity to younger childhood and yet is very near the commonly recognized legal adult

age of 18. This vantage point gives this age group a unique perspective from which to

theorize childhood. The rationale for choosing to interview young people at their high

school and in a community-based setting of the participant's choosing is that the focus

groups and interviews can be more convenient for their schedules, and transportation

would not be an issue that might prohibit some young people from participation. Also,

this researcher hoped that familiar environments might increase the participants' level of

comfort and candor during the interviews.

To recruit participants for this study, snowball sampling was employed at both

sites (Fowler, 1995). The first step was to initiate contact with the principal and teachers

at the selected high school and a young person and willing to organize a community-

based group. Once permission to conduct the study at each site was secured, I requested

the opportunity to present this research to groups of young people either in their classes or during other meeting times. This presentation included a review of the purpose of the study, a description of the research methodology employed, confirmation of the criteria required for participation, and a description of the time involved for participation of the study.

The Call for Participants Letter (Appendix A), The Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B), the Parent Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) the Minor Assent Form (Appendix D) and a brief Survey (Appendix E) was distributed to students who were interested in participating in the study. I included an envelope with each set of forms and asked those who indicated interest to sign the minor assent forms after having their parent(s) or guardian(s) read the materials and sign the forms. They were asked to complete the demographic form and brief survey by the following week. They were instructed to put all of the materials into the included envelope, seal the envelope, and either contact me to pick up the materials or give them to their teacher or program director who contacted me to collect them. Once I received consent form packets from students and their parents, I scheduled the focus group interviews.

Another rationale for these recruitment methods is that young people who already have relationships with one another and have the ability to choose being in a focus group with friends and allies might feel more comfortable and confident to share their own thinking and experiences during the study (Mayall, 2000). I believe that this configuration of young people offsets some of the power dynamics that already exist between an adult researcher and younger research participants in a school and community-based setting in which young people are required to abide by the instructions

and decisions of adults. Additionally, it is possible that many participants have not had the opportunity to talk about their perspectives and experiences of childhood. Listening to each others' thinking may stimulate and help them to clarify and articulate their own ideas, memories, and experiences that individuals in the group can feel more comfortable to share.

Diversity of the Participants

The 14 young people who participated in this study comprised a diverse group in terms of race and gender (See Table 1). Overall, there were 6 White people and 8 people of color. Seven of these people identified as female and 7 as male. Of the 6 participants in the community group, 4 people identified as White, and 2 people identified as Black/White/Native American. Also, 3 people identified as female and 3 as male. In this group, 1 person was 14, 2 were 15, 1 was 16, and 1 was 17-years-old. Of the 8 participants in the high school focus group, 2 people identified as White, 2 as Black, 1 as Black/White, 1 as Puerto Rican/Hispanic, 1 as Indian/Middle Eastern, and 1 as Latino/Spanish/Mexican/German. Also, 4 of those participants identified as female and 4 as male. Two of these participants' families immigrated to the United States. The average age of the high school group participants was older than that of the community group. In this group, 3 people were 16, 4 were 17, and 1 was 18-years-old.

Although participants were not asked to disclose their class background or sexual orientation, all of the participants gave clues that indicated working-class status at some point during the interviews. Only one participant identified as questioning their sexual orientation. Most participants "came out" as heterosexual during the interviews. When

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asked to report their gender, all of the participants wrote either "female" or "male." All of the participants presented their gender in alignment with their identified sex.

<u>Data Collection Methods</u>

Three methodologies for data collection that were employed in this study are: 1) a brief paper and pencil survey, 2) one 90-minute audio-recorded focus group, 3) and one follow-up, 90-minute, audio-recorded, semi-structured, intensive interview with at least 10 young people. There were options for additional follow-up contact to clarify, ask additional questions, review their focus group and pair interview transcripts, and check researcher assumptions via phone, email, or in person after the interviews. Figure 1 highlights each methodology in order.

Figure 1: Data Collection Flow Chart

The rationale for selecting these three methodologies (survey, focus groups, and interviews) and two sources (a public school setting and a community-based setting) is that triangulation of methods and sources increases the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conversations about childhood among young people are "social processes: components of how young people together constitute childhood" (Mayall, 2002, p. 121). Triangulation of these conversations among different groups of young people in different locations creates the opportunity to examine young people's

experiences through various perspectives, thus creating opportunities for deeper understanding (Patton, 1999).

By beginning with the brief survey, young people had the opportunity to begin thinking concretely about their own ideas of childhood, kids, teens, adults, and adulthood. The focus group was scaffolded to include the survey questions that each participant completed individually to bring each person's own ideas into a space in which she/he could share their thinking and experiences with their peers. Listening to young people in the focus group allowed the researcher to access ways in which young people in these groups "line up, confirm, modify, and develop their ideas about....childhood" (Mayall, 2002, p. 121). In the interviews, young people had more time to reflect and develop their own ideas in the context of their daily lives. The interviews allowed participants to revisit the knowledge of childhood that was discussed in the focus group and provided a space for divergent thinking or further development of thinking about status and power in childhood to emerge.

Paper and Pencil Survey

This short survey consisted of seven questions that ask participants to complete a phrase (Appendix E). For example, one questions begins, "Childhood is…" and another "Teens are…." The purpose of this survey was to initiate participant's thinking about their own conceptions of childhood and related constituent identities before the focus group in which they had an opportunity to share their thinking and experiences. In each case, the respondent is asked to finish the sentence. The rationale for asking the

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participants to complete a small number of questions is to reduce the potential for survey fatigue (Fowler, 1995).

Young people who submitted their own and their parent's consent forms were sent an email confirming their status as eligible. All of the participants had email accounts and access to the Internet. Participants had two opportunities to complete the short survey. The first opportunity was to complete and submit the survey with the demographic form, minor assent form, and parent informed consent forms. And the second opportunity to complete the survey was at the very beginning of the focus group interviews.

Focus Group Interviews

The informed consent forms notified the participants in the study that they were required to attend the focus groups and may be requested to participate in one post-focus group interview with another focus group member of their choosing. Focus groups were conducted at each site with 6-8 participants in each group and were scheduled for a maximum of 90 minutes. A total of 14 young people participated in the focus groups with 6 in the community focus group and 8 in the high school focus group. This researcher facilitated and audio-record each focus group. Participants were asked to answer questions about what it is like to be a young person on a daily basis (Appendix F).

The rationale for using a focus group interview is two-fold. First, creating the space for a group of young people to think together about childhood helps different and similar viewpoints to emerge where each participant are able to respond and engage with the ideas and experiences that are shared in the group (Kruger, 2008). A focus group

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creates a relaxed setting that mirrors more natural conversations. This method allowed me to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time, thereby respecting the busy schedules of young people.

Secondly, this arrangement might potentially disrupt the power dynamics that could make young people feel uncomfortable or unsafe discussing their experiences related to being their age. In a sense, the young people who participate in this focus group are in an affinity group with several other people their age and one adult present. In this way, young people have the power of numbers and the support of people with similar experiences. I asked questions about childhood and youth identities and asked follow up questions about young people's conceptions of adults, having a group of other young people at each participant's side to create a greater sense of safety (Mayall, 2000).

I followed Kruger's (2008) model of conducting focus groups with young people by including 6-8 people at each setting. Literature suggests that focus groups with young people range from 60 minutes (Kruger, 2008) to 90 minutes (Gibson, 2007). Gibson suggests that with a strong moderator, an engaging ice-breaker at the beginning of the focus group, and the inclusion of an activity can support young people to remain focused for a longer period of time. I am an experienced facilitator of group discussions and ice-breakers and so scheduled the focus groups for a maximum of 90 minutes, consistent with Gibson's findings. Further, as an experienced facilitator, I looked for clues provided by focus group participants that indicate their level of attention and engagement, signaling when the focus group should end. Participants remained engaged during these focus groups. In the community-based group, two of the participants had to leave after 90 minutes, and so we ended the interview promptly. The focus group interview conducted

in the high school continued beyond the 90 minutes allocated for the focus groups even as I tried to close the session. In each group, participants agreed that they had a lot to say about the questions that were asked.

The focus groups were conducted using a carefully planned structure and pre-determined focus to the discussion with around 6-8 open-ended questions and possible follow-up probing questions that give the feeling of spontaneity (Kruger, 2008). These questions (Appendix F) align with Kruger's (2008) five categories for developing focus group questions, including opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and ending questions. The opening question served the purpose of getting the group settled into the space, supporting the group's getting acquainted with each other and the researcher. The introductory questions got the group focused on the topic of the session and allowed the group members to hear each other's initial responses to questions about the topic. The transition questions allowed me to invite the participants to respond to deeper questions about their experiences and young people as they relate to childhood. The key questions are the very questions that I am using to guide this study and are the questions that guide the data analysis. The ending questions served the purpose of bringing the focus group to a close and gave me the opportunity to invite participants to be interviewed.

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, each participant wore their pseudonym on a nametag during the focus group. I made a diagram in my notes to identify each speaker by pseudonym and location in the circle to support data analysis. Participants were asked to consent to being audio-recorded during the focus group, and two digital audio-recorders with microphones were placed around the circle.

Intensive, Semi-Structured Interviews

At the end of the focus groups, I invited participants to schedule a follow-up interview that would last for a maximum of 90 minutes (Appendix G). I conducted these interviews myself. Participants who participated in the focus groups were invited to interview in pairs. Of the 14 focus group participants, I was able to conduct 5 interviews. Four of these interviews were conducted with pairs and one interview was conducted with a single participant. The rationale for interviewing participants in pairs is to increase the comfort level and sense of safety for participants (Mayall, 2000). Additionally, this method supports participants to be able to respond and react to each other's thinking in a more focused and intensive manner than possible in the focus group.

I used intensive interviewing methods, which allowed "an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). In the case of these interviews, the in-depth exploration was a continuation of the focus groups, centering on the participants' experiences of being a young person on a daily basis. The intensive interview process is similar to the in-depth interview process described by I. Seidman (1998), except that it is limited to one interview instead of a series of three interviews. During intensive interviews, "the interviewer's questions ask the participant to describe and reflect upon his or her experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). The intensive interview method begins with a few open-ended questions and then shifts into a more detailed and focused discussion (Charmaz, 2006).

The rationale for utilizing intensive, semi-structured interviews is that it provides an opportunity to follow up on themes touched upon in the focus group that relate

directly to the key questions of the study. Additionally, the intensive interview instrument gives me the opportunity to provide multiple styles of engagement to the participants and an opportunity for further reflection. This can offer support those participants who had a lot to say and were not able to share it all in the focus group format. Similarly, the follow-up interview supports people for whom the format of the focus group does not necessarily match their communication style. The short amount of time between the focus groups and the interviews allows participants the opportunity to reflect on their knowledge of childhood in the context of their daily routine.

To prepare participants for the event that questions emerged about their responses during data analysis, I established the option to follow-up with them after the interviews to check for clarity. The rationale for following up with participants is that having the opportunity to check in about assumptions I might make about their responses can reduce the possibility of misreporting young people's knowledge and is also a tool to check for researcher bias. These follow-ups were conducted through phone calls, email, or in-person meetings.

The interview process seemed to be very supportive of the participant's ability and willingness to share their perspectives and experiences. It could have been very awkward for the participants to discuss some of the struggles that they have with adults with an adult interviewer. Scheduling the focus groups first gave the participants the opportunity to get a sense of the researcher and the topic of the research. The questions supported the participants to listen to and share their experiences with each other in a setting where there was both agreement and disagreement about ideas that were shared or where people were able to say that they had very different experiences from other people

in the group. In the pair interviews, the participants were able to connect with each other and openly shared details of their stories with the interviewer. These interviews were an extension of the focus groups. Only one interview was conducted with a participant (Angie) whose pair cancelled at the last minute. Angie wanted to proceed with the interview even though she was without a pair partner. Angie and I had become acquainted at a regional youth empowerment conference, and I though this might help her feel more comfortable in the interview. Like in other pair interviewees, she freely shared many detailed stories about her experiences as a young person.

Data Management and Analysis

To protect the confidentiality of the participants in the study, I keep all surveys, focus group and interview transcriptions, audio-recordings, memos, email correspondence, and informed consent forms locked in a locking filing cabinet or password protected email account. I am the only person who has a key to the locked filing cabinet. The digital audio-recording devices used in the interview process were stored in the locked filing cabinet until I transferred the audio files to my computer, at which point I erased the memory on the devices. My computer is password protected, and only I know the password.

I used thematic analysis, an inductive qualitative data analysis method, to examine data from the interviews (Boyatzis, 1998). I provide a rich thematic description of the data set to convey predominant and important themes. Thematic description is "a particularly useful method when…investigating an under-researched area, or…working with participants whose views on the topic are not known**"** (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.

81). This research aims to center the voices and knowledge of the participants, and as such, I used thematic coding and analysis of the data to more accurately describe young people's perspectives, understandings, and experiences as presented by the participants. The following steps were taking to analyze these data. First, the recorded interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were checked against the recordings for accuracy. During this step, research memos were written to record ideas, possible themes, poignant quotes, and other thoughts that occurred to the researcher while listening to both the voices of the participants and seeing their words on paper. Writing these memos was intended to prevent me from imposing other frameworks and helped me to clear my points of view about what these data were saying for the second round of coding. The second round included going paragraph-by-paragraph and coding chunks of the entire data set. These codes were entered into an excel spreadsheet. Next, these codes from the spreadsheet were collated into themes and a codebook was created with definitions of themes to make sure they were internally coherent, consistent, and distinct (Boyatzis, 1998). These themes were used to do another complete, third round of coding in NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012). This process involved collapsing, expanding, merging, and refining themes. For the fourth round of coding, an alternate user was created in NVivo 10, and I coded the entire data set once again to check for inter-coder reliability, using the final code book as a guide. The coding matched at 90%. The rationale for employing inductive qualitative methods in data analysis is that these methods can center the voices of young people rather than requiring the researcher to play the role of the sole theorist (Best, 2007; Gallagher-Geurtsen, 2012; Mayall, 2002).

Researcher Bias

My standpoint as a researcher has already influenced my choice of topic, the methodology I have chosen, and will influence the interpretation of the data. As a researcher, I make decisions about how to conduct the research and how to process and interpret data through my own experiences and perspectives (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). As I was once a young person and am now an adult, I must work with a unique set of identity-related tensions. One source of bias is my own memory of being a young person. Biklen (2007) describes some of the contradictions inherent in memory as it pertains to this research study and is worth quoting at length.

> Memory is full of contradictions for ethnographers. The danger for narrators who construct their memories as links between their adolescent informants and the adult researcher who was once a youth rides on the implicit suggestion that the researcher can too easily access youths' perspectives. On the other hand, to represent memory as a form of bias that needs to be managed or overcome ignores the complexity and uses of the identity markers that fieldworkers bring to the research site, and sidesteps the collective aspects of even our most personal memories. Memories are not just individual but are also part of a 'social imaginary' that is rooted in national and cultural traditions and implicated in the larger relationship between youth and adults. Memory's contradiction for ethnographic work in the field connects its danger and desirability. (p. 251)

Biklen's comments highlight the need to acknowledge adult memories of childhood as a potential form of bias and also to acknowledge them as part of the social and cultural construction of childhood that can be a source of data about relationships between young people and adults. As an adult, I will be researching across identity and also in connection. Biklen states, "Adults have to negotiate difference, too, when they study youth, but they also have to engage connection since every adult was once a youth" (p. 252). I am not trying to overcome or ignore my own memories of being a young person but rather, I seek to work with those memories with awareness.

Some of the specific biases that I worked with have to do with my education and my age, in addition to my race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. As a student of social justice education, I believe that identities are socially constructed and that they can be implicated and impacted by oppression. This is a particularly important bias when looking at childhood, where the categories of childhood are often presented as natural and inevitable. As an adult who occupied the spaces of childhood as a young person for many years, I experienced both power and connection and also hurts that I associate with age and unequal power relationships between adults and young people. I believe that young people are targeted by adultism, and that as an adult, I am in the identity group that receives and maintains age privilege.

By naming these biases, I hope to hold them in awareness. I checked in with myself and with participants so that I could confront my biases and be sure that they were not impeding the voices and experiences that came through as the participants intended. I explained and reminded the participants that my goal was to share their stories, as they told them. This helped me to check and manage my own biases.

<u>Trustworthiness of the Data</u>

To ensure the "trustworthiness" of the data, I looked for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The use of three data collection methodologies increases the trustworthiness of the study. One strategy I engaged in was checking my perceptions with the participants. For example, I brought some of the survey results to the focus group for discussion and summarized major themes discussed in the focus groups and interviews to check with the participants

for understanding and meaning. I audio-recorded the focus groups and interviews while also taking notes of observations and themes. This enabled me to use and refer to direct quotes in the data analysis. I also had the opportunity to make follow-up questions to participants via email or phone to check my accuracy in capturing their sentiments and ideas. Participants were invited to follow-up with me if there was something additional that they wanted to share after their interview.

This research design was constructed to create more opportunities to do similar studies. Transferability and reliability have been ensured by keeping transcripts of the focus groups and interviews, detailed research notes, and by maintaining transparency of the research methods and process.

Limitations and Delimitations

Several factors provide limitations to this study. Awareness of these limitations helps to circumscribe their adverse impact on the study and findings from the study. Some limitations were inherent in the design, for example, the period of data collection was short, and therefore no data were collected that illustrate how young people's thinking about the topic changes over time. Second, only one researcher's perspective is represented in this study. This study privileges the perspectives of young people, based on the goals of the research. Except for my own adult perspectives, the perspectives of other adults are not included here, as they fall outside the parameters of this study. Third, the study population includes two small groups of young people in two different settings, both of which are located within a suburban area in New England. The small sample size allowed me to gather in-depth and rich data; however, it prevents me from assuring the

kind of diversity that would be more possible in a larger study. Results from this study cannot be generalized to groups of young people in other geographic regions nor to other social identity groups of young people.

Finally, I, the researcher, am an adult and am ultimately sharing young people's perspectives through my own lens. In doing so, I worked with the tensions of creating the space for young people's voices to emerge. The effort to create such space might inadvertently have solidified my own adult authority. The theory, frameworks, and intention informing this research both recognizes and seeks to alter rigid power relations between young people and adults. This study takes into account power relations and the related inequalities. For example, young people in each of the selected settings are in relationships with adults who have authority over them. As an adult researcher, I was assumed to have the authority over the young people who participate in this study. I was not able to change the authority that I was granted by both the participants and the adult gatekeepers. I can, however, maintain my awareness of it and implement strategies to minimize the impact that my adult authority might have on the research process. One step that I took was to clarify with participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time without incurring any penalty or any kind of negative regard on the part of the researcher.

Another way the study design takes power into account is by organizing focus groups and interviews in pairs, which creates the opportunity for young people to be organized into age-related affinity groups in which they outnumber the researcher. I assured the participants that other adult authority figures would not have access to the recordings of the focus groups and interviews. Even with these assurances, since young

people had very few experiences in which adults had been required to be accountable to young people in this way, a measure of trust was required for young people to consent to participation in this study.

Summary of Research Design and Methodology

This chapter has provided a rationale for the research methodology, human subjects considerations, a description of the design of the study, a description of methodologies for data collection and analysis, a plan for testing validity and reliability in the data collection process, limitations, and a plan for addressing researcher bias.

This research focuses on young people ages 14-18 in a high school and a community-based setting. The research proposal was submitted to the IRB and the study was piloted after IRB approval. Participant recruitment occurred during presentations to introduce the research at each site. During these presentations a packet containing the Call for Participants Letter (Appendix A), the Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B), the Parent Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), the Minor Assent Form (Appendix D), and a brief Survey (Appendix E) was distributed to those interested in participating in the study. The methodologies for data collection included a demographic questionnaire, a brief survey, one 90-minute audio-recorded focus group, and follow-up 90-minute audio-recorded semi-structured, intensive interviews with young people in pairs. There was an option for additional follow-up contact to clarify, ask additional questions, and check researcher assumptions via phone, email, or in person after the interviews.

Focus groups and interviews were transcribed and used with researcher notes in data analysis. Qualitative methods were used to analyze the data to center the voices of

young people rather than situating the researcher in the role of sole theorist (Best, 2007;

Gallagher-Geurtsen, 2012; Mayall, 2002).

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING STATUS: YOUNG PEOPLE NAME PERVASIVE BELIEFS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE

<u>Introduction</u>

This study explores how young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power related to childhood. In this chapter, I present and analyze data addressing the first of three research sub-questions guiding this study: *What information do young people encounter on a daily basis that communicates age as a form of status?* The intent of this question was to create an opportunity for young people in this study to share how age as a form of status is conveyed everyday in families, classrooms, schools, and communities. The goal was to provide young people the opportunity to share their experiences and thinking about what it is like to be their age, tell their own stories, reflect on their own understandings and experiences of status, and to create an opportunity for the participants themselves to contribute to research about their age group. Through a careful and systematic thematic analysis of the interview data—focus group interviews and paired interviews—this study seeks to capture participants' rich and complex understandings of young people's lives. For the purpose of this study, "status" is conceptualized as the social location or standing of a person or group in relation to another person or group. The term "participant" is used to describe the young people who were interviewed for this study. I refer to "young people" when discussing the beliefs that the participants encountered and discussed about young people as a group.

To provide an opportunity for participants in this study to describe how they experience status related to their age without guiding them in a particular direction,

participants were asked to discuss the following topics: what they like about being their age; the thoughts, feelings, or images that come to mind when they hear the words "childhood" and "youth"; what it is like being their age in different contexts; and what assumptions they notice people make about members of their age group. This chapter examines the information young people encounter on a daily basis that communicates age as a form of status. Analysis of these data captures how young people receive and experience the beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes that adults hold about young people as a group.

This chapter foregrounds the participants' experiences with beliefs about young people as they describe them. In so doing, this chapter details how these participants experience the beliefs and assumptions about young people that are communicated to them by adults in their families, schools, and in communities. In the interviews, participants often began describing their encounters with adults and some of the messages adults convey about young people before being prompted by the researcher. For example, most participants provided detailed examples of beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes that adults have about young people when talking about what they like about being their age and what comes to mind when they hear the terms "childhood" and "youth."

Every participant shared multiple examples of adults' beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes about young people. These messages were communicated through the media and through their interactions with adult-run institutions, such as schools and public spaces, like malls and grocery stores.[5] The beliefs adults have about young people seem pervasive and have a very powerful impact on the lives of participants on a daily basis.

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[5] Adults are in charge of all social, political, and economic institutions that young people engage with.

The thematic analysis of the interviews and focus groups with young people suggest that the prevailing beliefs often: 1) are negative, demeaning and generalized to young people, as a group, 2) are justified and explained with common understandings of biology, 3) are produced and reproduced through institutional mechanisms that define legal restrictions and privileges based on age; and 4) are combined with stereotypes and beliefs about their intersecting social identities, like race, gender, class, and ability. The following sections present the beliefs about young people that are encountered on a daily basis that communicate age as a form of status. The words of the participants are used to convey their experience of how these beliefs are encountered.

Young People Experience Adults' Beliefs About Young People as Negative and Pervasive

In this section, findings that examine beliefs about young people that communicate age as a form of status are presented. Participants encounter negative and generalized beliefs about young people on a daily basis. For instance, adults often communicate their assumptions that young people are inherently prone to irresponsibility. Participants explained that this comes across in rules that are created to limit young people from going to the bathroom or the library at school without the permission of an adult. The belief is negative as it conveys the assumption that young people will do things that they are not supposed to do without the supervision of an adult. Adults often generalize the behavior of one or a few young people to young people as a group. Notably, the behaviors most often generalized are almost always negative. For example, if a few young people get caught stealing, a store might implement a policy to restrict the number of young people who can enter at any given time. Based on the behavior of a

few, the negative belief that young people will shoplift is generalized, in practice, to all young people.

All of the participants in this study felt that there is an idea of a typical teen that exists in U.S. culture. The picture of a typical teen is readily available in various forms of media. A national study found that 8- through 18-year-olds consume upwards of 8-10 hours of media per day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). This indicates the number of opportunities participants have to encounter images about young people. Isabel describes watching a science fiction movie that described the "typical teen":

> **Isabel:** They were talking about this son, and they described him as "the typical teenager who just wants to party and do drugs," and I was literally like, "What?" like what does that even mean?... Why can't they just describe him as, "He's a kid who doesn't have his priorities in order." Why does that make him typical? I don't really understand.

The characterization of a typical teen and its generalization is pervasive. According to this participant, this movie defined teenagers as people who prioritize partying and drugs. Several participants stated that this is a common image of young people that they encounter and that it is generalized to all teens. Participants stated that when they behave in a way that adults feel is mature, responsible, articulate, visionary, or thoughtful, they are viewed as an exception or outlier in relation to the generalized image of the typical teen.

The analysis of the data reveals several themes that depict adults' generalized view of a typical teen, which is often accompanied by negative assumptions. Study participants explained that the majority of beliefs and assumptions that they encounter about young people were negative. The following section presents and describes some of

the most common stereotypes about young people that emerged from the focus groups and interviews.

Young People are No Good

Study participants discussed messages they receive that convey that adults think teens are bad or that they will do bad things without adult supervision. For example, Will explained that adults often behave as if they believe "teenagers are like roving bandits, or they are only around to cause mischief." Many versions of this theme were mentioned and discussed. Study participants encounter the belief among adults that young people will steal, are corrupt, are delinquents, are always "up to something," will make stupid mistakes, will do illegal things, are reckless drivers, cannot be trusted to be honest, and cannot be trusted to go to the bathroom at school without permission. Several participants also reported the belief among adults that young people are both addicted to and cannot be trusted with technology. Participants experienced all of these ideas and beliefs as negative. It is their experience that adults hold these beliefs about young people as a group, meaning that they are both negative and generalized.

Young People Cannot be Trusted

Most participants in the study reported some version of this stereotype that young people behave badly or have a propensity to do bad things. Jason explained that often adults believe, "I'm gonna do bad things or do things I shouldn't necessarily do but aren't necessarily bad because I'm a teenager." Participants shared that many adults often assume that getting drunk, partying, and doing drugs is a high priority for young people

as a group. Even when particular adults do not, in action, apply this stereotype to the participants, several people described how their lives were organized by adults in ways to keep them away from drugs, alcohol, and sex—thereby communicating to the participants that they are at-risk to engage in these behaviors. The idea is conveyed that young people need to be protected from these things because they inherently want to and are "hard-wired" to engage in these behaviors.

Young People are Disrespectful

Respect is a pervasive theme in the everyday lives of the participants in this study. The participants value respect and seek respect from adults. However, they often encounter adults who do not demonstrate respect for young people. For instance: 1) participants were often confronted with adults who believed young people are inherently disrespectful; and 2) that because of their age, adults feel entitled to disrespect young people. Orson, the youngest participants in this study at 14 years old, described an incident in the community in which he felt that an adult assumed that he was being disrespectful. An adult man was carrying a big hunting knife on his belt. Orson noticed the knife and said, "Oh, shit!" out loud.

> **Orson**: And [he] just gave me a dirty look. He was going down the stairs, and I didn't even know he was still there, and I wasn't even directing anything at him, and I started being stupid, and he thought I was disrespecting his girlfriend somehow. So he ran back over there, and he grabbed me by the shoulders and slammed me against the window. And he was like, "Show some Goddamn respect!"

Orson described feeling shaken by this incident. He suggested that the adult man incorrectly assumed that Orson was being disrespectful and felt entitled to behave in a

disrespectful and violent way toward Orson. Given the actions that the older man took, Orson reasoned that the older man believed Orson was not entitled to respect.

Young People are Lazy

A pervasive belief among adults is that young people are lazy. Participants reported that many adults believe what young people do during the day is not really work in the same way that what adults do during the day is work. Though participants have daily work schedule at school, homework after school, and participate in after-school activities, adults assume young people are lazy. It was not clear to the participants what made them lazy in the view of adults. None of the participants agreed with the general idea that young people are lazy. Olga stated that perhaps the amount of time she spent doing homework in her room gave her parents the idea that she was being lazy. However, given the amount of homework she is required to do, Olga explained that she needs quiet time to focus and complete the assignments. She also explained that after a long week of 10-12 hour days at school, she likes to have some downtime. Rose agreed, "Needing a rest, of course, does not make one lazy." Participants experienced the belief that young people are lazy as negative and also experienced this belief being generalized to young people as a group.

Young People are Apathetic

Participants described encountering a pervasive belief that young people are apathetic through their interactions with adults. For example, some participants stated that many adults believe young people do not care about politics or social issues. According to study participants, young people are not allowed to participate in politics, and this lack of opportunity to practice politics impacts the energy that they put into learning about political issues. To be characterized as apathetic is experienced by young people as a negative generalization.

Other participants discussed beliefs they encounter that portray young people as self-centered and only caring about what is going on in their immediate environment. Rex and Will described experiences among young people that defy the notion that young people are apathetic and self-centered, like the "Occupy Wall Street" movements and the Internet "hacktivist" group "Anonymous." These groups are tackling social and political issues and are largely comprised of younger people. Analysis of these data shows that participants experience this belief as both negative and as being generalized to young people as a group.

Young People are Doomsday

Study participants regularly encounter the notion that "young people are the future." This means that young people will one day be adults. Participants interpreted this notion as one that values adulthood and emphasizes that, in the present, young people are less valuable. This belief, coupled with the generalized and negative beliefs associated with young people, led to the assumption among participants that adults believe the future

is going to be terrible. Participants frequently hear from adults that young people are going to both inherit and make the future. Participants perceived the generalized and negative beliefs about young people being used to predict a terrible future, in general.

> **Allen:** [Adults] blame the younger generation, us, our generation, for how the world is now. How America is.…And they say we have to fix the future. But at the same time, if you think about it, they want to put the blame on us. But if they really thought about it, it could be on them. Blame is an endless thing. So it's pointless to put blame on anyone.

Like Allen, several participants discussed how adults think about young people as the future and as the people who are responsible for fixing that which is currently broken in the world. At the same time, study participants noticed that adults blame young people for problems that currently exist. Other participants suggested that the negative beliefs that adults have about young people make them think that young people will also fail in the future. Participants agreed that this perspective does not inspire hope for young people as a group. Rather, the combination of placing responsibility for fixing the future on young people, blaming young people for the problems the world currently faces, and holding generalized negative beliefs about young people leads to a sense of doomsday.

Young People are Spoiled

Study participants encounter a belief among adults that young people are "spoiled," meaning that young people receive a particular type of treatment or access to resources or are overindulged to the point that they become rotten or ruined. Young people sometimes have access to resources to which adults might not have had access as young people. For example, some adults may wish to give young people gifts like toys that can be played with during the free time that many adults find lacking in their lives.

Or, sometimes adults treat young people with leniency. Among some adults, having more access to resources and being treated with leniency signifies that young peoples' character is harmed. Participants encounter the idea among adults that young people are "spoiled" because they are perceived to have easier lives now than those experienced by adults when they were young. Orson and Jason explain:

> **Jacob:** Yeah. Their youth was better than ours. ….Some adults that I have seen have been like, "We didn't have the Internet. We actually got outside more. We had social lives. And we didn't have cars. We had to walk everywhere and get places on our own. You're spoiled because you get to drive, you get somebody to drive you there.

> **Orson:** Exactly. And also people say stuff like, "Oh, we walked everywhere." I'm like, "What do you think I do?"

According to these participants, adults think and believe that participants are spoiled. Adults feel like their lives were harder and that young people have it too easy. Having access to resources that were not available to adults when they were young, like the Internet and other forms of technology, are thought to be detrimental to young people's character. Most of the participants were careful to assure me that their lives were good and better than the lives of other young people that they know, but none of the participants agreed with the notion that they were spoiled or that being their age is easy.

Young People are Addicted to Technology

Several participants discussed beliefs among adults about young people and technology. These beliefs range from the idea that young people are "always on their phones," are "always texting," and that they cannot live without electronics and social media to the idea that young people already know everything about technology. With the exception of the latter, the related beliefs were often discussed in connection with the

belief that young people will do bad things. Jacob describes an exchange with his

grandmother in which she was upset with him for texting too much:

> **Jacob**: Everyone just sort of expects you to be a certain way. Recently, me and my Grandma got in a fight about texting and everything. I'm just like, "I don't text that much. I only have like 3,000 a month." And she says, "Well, you're just a teenager. A lot of people your age text a lot." I was like, "Where did you find that out?" …[S]he just sorta like assumes I'm gonna do bad things or do things I shouldn't necessarily do but aren't necessarily bad because I'm a teenager.

Texting is a primary form of communication among young people. The assumptions that

young people "text too much," as shared by Jacob's grandmother is rooted in the

assumptions that things young people do are negative. Young people acknowledge that it

may be true that young people text more than older generations. Even so, the belief that

they text *too much* or are on their phone or on Facebook *too much*, or the characterization

of young people's use of technology by adults as excessive, is experienced as negative.

Some of the study participants indicated that they are designated as the

technology "experts" in their homes. This might be viewed as a positive belief about

young people because it assumes they are experts with technology. They become

responsible to show their parents how to use technology, like wireless routers, smart

phones, and social networking websites, like Facebook. The assumption that young

people know how all of this technology works turns into a responsibility to fix things in

the home. Participants found this challenging at times, especially given that their

knowledge about navigating websites and operating systems does not necessarily

translate into knowledge about dealing with computer hardware, printers, and Internet

routers. Some participants felt their expert status ended up creating more trouble for

them, as they had to explain to their parent what they do not know about computer

hardware. In all cases of this theme, data analysis indicates that young people perceive

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adults' beliefs about young people and technology as largely negative or as potentially troublesome when the participants were not able to live up to their conferred expert status.

Young People are Clannish

Some study participants encountered a belief among adults that young people want to stick to themselves and do not want to be connected to adults. In a world in which young people have lives that are largely segregated from adults, except for teachers and family members, participants often felt more connected and emotionally supported by their peers with whom they spend most of their time. At home, several participants discussed spending time in their rooms, wanting to rest, recharge, and have time to think and be alone. This need is sometimes viewed by adults as young people *not* wanting to be connected to the adults in their lives.

> **Olga:** I mean, we still live at home, but we are growing apart from our parents. We want to distance ourselves from our parents, so we spend a lot of time shut off in our own rooms, with our "little Internets."

Olga felt that her move to spend time alone and away from her parents is a part of becoming more independent. Being independent does not mean that she does not want to be connected to her parents. This idea, and perhaps reality, about young people growing apart from their parents leads to what participants identified as an adult belief that young people do not want to be connected to adults at all. While study participants want time to recharge, to rest, and to be alone, they still want to be connected to the adults in their lives. Every participant described a desire to be seen and supported by adults in their life, which implies a desire to be connected to those same adults. The idea that participants do

not want to be connected to adults is another negative stereotype held by adults about young people that the participants encounter on a regular basis.

Summary

This section presented themes that emerged from the data analysis that revealed generalized and negative beliefs held by adults about young people that participants encounter on a daily basis. These beliefs were read by participants as forces that shape generalized, negative viewpoints about young people as a group. Participants shared how they had experienced or had been confronted with an image of a "typical" teen and how the image of the "typical" teen was generally a negative framing of young people as a group. Several participants felt that the image of a typical teen was comprised of stereotypes about young people as a group that were based in the behavior of a small handful of young people. The image of the typical teen is generalized to all young people as a group. Those young people who do not fit this image are seen as exceptions to the norm. Participants felt that these characterizations of young people were not correct or fair.

Participants also identified assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes held by adults about young people that participants identified as negative. The specific beliefs that emerged from data analysis were: young people are generally bad; they cannot be trusted; they are inherently disrespectful and so need not be respected by adults; they are lazy and apathetic; they are the future, and the future is going to be awful; they are social mediaheads; and they are clannish in that they do not want to be connected to adults.

Participants did not indicate that every adult holds these views, yet the impact or pervasiveness of conscious encounters with these beliefs was not mitigated by this knowledge. Given the ways that beliefs unconsciously shape human interactions, decisions, and behaviors, it is likely that there are also many unconscious encounters with these beliefs that increase the weight of the participants' experiences.

Young People Experience Adults Using Biology to Justify Negative Beliefs About Young People

Study participants identified beliefs about young people that are rooted in ideas about biological and psychological development. Many adults subscribe to theories rooted in biology to explain young people's behavior. These beliefs are, in turn, used to justify adults' treatment of young people, in general. For example, there is a biological reality that young people's brains develop from birth onwards. This information is used by adults to explain behaviors that are attributed to young people. For example, many adults believe that young people are prone to acting irrationally or are unable to make sound decisions because their brains are developing. These stereotypes and beliefs are informed by what is believed to be inherent or natural and, thus, essential about young people. Several participants discussed ways that maturity, thinking, and reasoning capability get associated with adults, and immaturity and struggles with reasoning get associated with younger people. The following section discusses themes related to assumptions about young people that are rooted in biology. Three key themes recurred in the study data: 1) young people are immature; 2) young people think they know everything but have incomplete brains while adults have greater reasoning ability; and 3) young people and their experiences cannot be separated from their "hormones."

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Young People are Immature

Participants in this study regularly encountered beliefs about young people being immature. There are two dimensions related to this belief. The first dimension is that young people are stereotyped as immature, and second, that young people who seem mature are extraordinary or an exception to the norm, or are behaving in an adult like manner. Study participants experienced the idea of maturity as confusing and frustrating. Individual adults define what maturity is and their definitions are perceived by participants to be both loose, loosely applied, and nebulous. Beth explained that one might be "mature for your age, but you can't ever escape how old you are no matter how mature you act." Beth's experience is that the idea of maturity is conflated with biological/chronological age.

Participants described frequent encounters with adults who thought the particular participant was mature or articulate for her or his age. In general, participants felt similar to their peers—not the same, but not abnormal or extraordinary for their age. Most of the girls who participated in the study and half of the boys alluded to times when an adult expressed surprise about the way they were able to "hold a conversation" or about the "maturity" of their thinking.

> **Olga**: Counselors would always say to me, "Wow, you're only 15? You're so mature for your age. You don't act like so many other 15 year olds." …I think people underestimate teenagers' capacities to be mature and to be responsible. If I'm in a situation like I was this summer where I'm responsible for kids, I'm gonna step to that, and I'm gonna be very mature. If I'm hanging out with my friends, I'm gonna be immature, and be who I am…**.** We are learning to be adults, and I think most of us at least have the capacity to be very mature and to be very responsible. Not that all teenagers are, but not all adults are either.

Like Olga, several participants pointed out that maturity, to them, is a chosen set of behaviors rather than something that naturally occurs in the growth process. Adults can

behave in ways that would be called immature if a young person were to conduct that same behavior. Yet, participants explained that this behavior is usually tolerated when it comes from adults and does not get labeled as immature. Maturity is something that is learned and taught, chosen or ignored. As participants explain, adults define maturity and select who is mature. Thus, maturity is a social construction. For participants in this study, the belief that some young people are exceptionally mature or articulate undermines teens as a group.

Young People have Incomplete Brains

According to participants in this study, common understandings about biology are sometimes used by adults in a way that devalues young people's capabilities to think and reason. Participants in this study reported that adults often presented the belief that young people are not biologically capable of knowing things because their brain is less developed than adult brains. Participants described encounters with this belief as a way that dismiss young people's thinking and participation in decision-making. Allen sums up this theme: "My dad, even if I am right, is like, 'You're wrong. You're wrong. Whatever you said was wrong. You're a little kid. You don't know what you're talking about.'" Frequently, this assumption takes shape when adults believe or say young people are dumb, inexperienced, or unknowledgeable simply based on their age. This assumption leads to automatic dismissals of young people's thinking. Several participants shared examples of times where they described feeling smarter, more experienced and more knowledgeable than teachers or adult family members assumed. This belief that young people do not know things is connected to the idea that young people "think they know

everything," which in effect gives permission to dismiss what young people say that they know.

Another iteration of this belief described by participants is that young people are unable to think for themselves. Angie explained:

> When I go to events [at the university], people take me seriously. But when I go to school, the administration, my principal, or teachers in general, just don't listen to me. I'm generalizing here, but they don't listen to me. Especially guidance counselors, actually….They don't listen to me or students in general. They don't think that we have enough experience or knowledge to formulate an opinion about almost anything.

When Angie is assumed to be a college student at the university, she feels that she is taken seriously. At her high school, she must navigate these negative beliefs about young people's developmental capabilities related to thinking. In high school, she is still viewed as a young person and treated on the basis of stereotypes about young people. The belief that young people are not able to think well about their lives supports the idea that young people are highly vulnerable to other people's influence and are incapable of participating in politics and political decisions that affect their lives.

Participants in the high school group explained that their district superintendent and the school committee were preparing to hire a principal for their school, and they had strong feelings about a particular candidate but no ability to influence which person was hired.

> **Sunshine:** They don't know what's going on in the school. They're not here. So how can they make an informed decision about who our principal is going to be?.... We have to deal with his rules and stuff. It's not fair.

> **Interviewer:** Do you think adults see how capable you are of participating in politics?

> **Sunshine:** No. They think we're all stupid.

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Josie: They think we're going to pick someone who's going to let us get away with the most stuff.

Participants notice a belief among adults that young people are not capable of thinking as well as adults. Sunshine and Josie feel prepared to share the responsibility of choosing a principal with the adults on the school committee who are responsible for making the final hiring decisions. Given their knowledge, based on their daily experience about what qualities make a strong principal, it does not make sense to the participants that the young people in the school would be excluded from participating in such a big decision. The person hired will be able to impact their school and their lives to a large extent. This is one of many ways in which the belief that young people are not as capable of thinking as well as adults plays out in these participants' lives.

Young People are Controlled by Hormones and "#TeenageProblems"

Another way that participants encountered beliefs about young people that are rooted in biology was the frequent interactions with adults who held beliefs about how hormones impact young people's behavior. Participants explained that adults who held beliefs about young people being overrun by hormones treated young people's feelings as less serious or real than adult feelings. This belief includes the idea that young people are experiencing an onslaught of hormones and because of those hormones, young people's feelings and behavior is characterized as dramatic and irrational. Four participants referred to their problems as #teenageproblems, referring to a popular Twitter hashtag and Internet meme[6]. Calling a problem a "teenage problem" is a way to indicate that the problem is less relevant, important, or serious than adult problems. An adult problem is

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[6] #teenageproblems evokes the popular Twitter and internet meme #firstworldproblems. The Tumblr that catalogs this meme can be viewed at http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/teenageproblems

more likely to be considered real and serious, as are adult's feelings. Participants described three ways that this belief takes form in their daily lives: 1) the belief that young people do not experience loss and love the same way as adults; 2) the belief that young people are controlled by hormones and cannot think for themselves, which reinforces the idea that young people's feelings of love are not actually love; and 3) the belief that because of hormones, young people are dramatic and so any problem experienced by a young person is overdramatized or exaggerated. This belief results in the dismissal or trivialization of young people's problems and experiences.

Participants noticed a confluence of the belief that young people do not experience feelings like loss and love the same way as adults with an assumption that young people are controlled by hormones. For example, participants weighed in on the term "puppy love." They explained that the phrase is used to describe young people's feelings of love as innocent, temporary and cute. Some participants felt that this term trivializes the sensation of love and makes it seem less than or different than adult love.

Participants frequently encountered the idea that young people are controlled by hormones and those hormones caused them to be overly dramatic. They explained that this notion contributed to a trivialization and dismissal of their problems.

> **Olga:** It's like, "Nothing's that bad. You're fine." My stepdad always makes fun of me about how I'm just hormonal.

> **Beth:** They always assume that we're being dramatic about everything. Especially...my parents say that to me a lot. They're like, "Oh, you're just being dramatic." And I'm like, "What if I'm not being dramatic, and you're just not listening to me?"

Participants noted that the belief that young people are naturally "hormonal" is connected to an assumption that young people are overly dramatic. The assumption that young

people are hormonal and dramatic minimizes and trivializes their problems and leads to the belief that young people can't think as well as adults because of their biology. Participants explained that this notion made them feel that their problems and challenges either will not be taken seriously or are not as serious as adult problems. All people have hormones and those hormones affect humans in various ways at various points throughout life. The idea that young people are naturally and categorically hormonal, constructs them as dramatic, full of angst, and out-of-control.

Summary

This section discussed beliefs and assumptions that participants encounter about young people, which are explained by common understandings of biology. Participants described how their attitudes, behaviors, and dispositions are measured against beliefs that young people are immature, that they naturally lack the ability to think for themselves, and that their hormones make them overly dramatic. Each of these beliefs situates young people as developmentally lacking or as less capable than adults.

Participants also described how adults determine the nature of maturity. While young people might behave in a manner that would be characterized as mature in an adult, they cannot actually escape the assumptions that they are biologically less capable and less mature than adults because of their age. Participants are reminded of this when they are told how mature they are for their age. Participants expressed frustration about the idea that they cannot think well or "don't know anything" because of their age. They understood that they have less experience than many adults but also felt that they often have important knowledge and information to contribute. Given the perceived beliefs

related to "hormones and #teenageproblems," participants felt that their experiences and emotions are dismissed as overly dramatic due to ideas about teenage bodies being flooded with hormones.

These beliefs and stereotypes are rooted in biology. Together, they combine to create conditions for the participants' actual thoughts, feelings, and experiences to be minimized, marginalized, or ignored. When these beliefs are directed toward young people, participants express that they have little leverage or power to interrupt these assumptions.

Young People Experience Cultural and Institutional Mechanisms that Reinforce Adult Beliefs About Young People

Laws, policies, guidelines, and rules use beliefs about age to restrict or grant rights and privileges to young people. These institutional mechanisms communicate generalized beliefs about young people as a group to the participants in this study. Beliefs and assumptions about age and about biology inform age-based legislation and policy that permit or prohibit young people from participation in various aspects of society.

Those age markers or restrictions reinforce negative beliefs about young people. Age markers are used by society, and specifically by adults, to indicate when people are legally, culturally, or socially permitted to do certain things. Privileges and restrictions are based on the perceived ability or maturity of young people as a group. These structures/markers are already in place when young people are born, so they seem to be inherent or "natural" and thus unquestionable to young people. Issues that participants discussed included age restrictions to be present in various locations, voting, driving, dating, giving consent to have sex, having a job, drinking alcohol.

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Public Spaces

One of the most frequently mentioned age restrictions was related to malls.

Participants described various locations where they were restricted access based on age.

For example, shoppers must be 18 years of age to be at the local mall after a certain time.

Many participants had been stopped by mall security and asked to show a form of

identification confirming that they were of age to be unaccompanied by an adult. Those

participants described that this policy is a form of discrimination based on assumptions

about young people being prone to dangerous or criminal behavior.

> **Isabel:** At the mall there's this rule on Saturday nights that if you're under eighteen you can't be there without a parent. Eighteen! A few weeks ago I was at the mall with [my boyfriend] and we were actually about to be leaving anyway, and this mall cop stopped us. This mall cop stops us and is like "How old are the two of you?....If neither of you are 18, you need to leave."

> **Sunshine:** Yeah. I can handle myself at the mall. If you're causing a disturbance, I understand, but you're shopping at the mall. Obviously...

> **Isabel:** They have this rule because of big groups of teenagers who go and hang out at the mall.

> **Allen:** And steal.

> **Isabel:** ...and cause disruptions. They steal. And they're not being consumers. But when you have those groups, you deal with those groups on an individual basis. Why do you need to categorize all people under 18 by these few groups of people? Just because I'm under 18 that means I'm going to be a disruption?

Even though research shows that middle-aged shoppers, ages 35-54 are more common

shoplifters (Dabney, Hollinger, & Dugan, 2004; Hayes, 1993), this policy communicates

to the participants that young people steal and cause disruptions. This belief is

communicated by adults through law enforcement, mall security, and embarrassing or

humiliating ID checks or other encounters with storeowners or workers. If women or

people of color were required to show identification to be present in the mall, this would

be viewed as an unequivocal from of discrimination. That such measures are considered legal is rooted in the pervasive assumptions and stereotypes about young people that are used to justify age restrictions. In a cyclical fashion, age restrictions both communicate and perpetuate negative beliefs about young people.

Politics

Another set of beliefs that communicate negative information to participants about young people as a group takes the form of age-related restrictions for participation in politics. The legal voting age was a particularly prevalent issue for participants during the time that interviews were conducted. Data were collected immediately before the 2012 presidential election. Of all of the participants, only Rex would have been old enough to vote. Many of the participants felt that they were informed enough to vote, were interested in voting, and had a particular interest in the outcome of the election. When asked if they felt they were currently capable of making informed decisions about local and presidential politics, Sunshine and Josie did not think adults felt young people were capable.

> **Sunshine**: I don't have the option to vote so I don't really pay attention. I know that probably sounds bad….If I was able to vote for this election, I would definitely be paying attention more, and I would want to know, because I have that opportunity.

> **Josie**: So many adults don't do their research….They just hear something one person says and vote for someone. Sunshine would do the research, and she's not allowed to vote, but that person would not do the research, and they are allowed to vote. I feel like age doesn't tell you anything about anyone.

These two participants are clear that if they could vote they would get more informed. They are equally clear that age does not necessarily mean a person is a more informed

voter. Sunshine does not show an interest in politics because she knows that she is not permitted to participate in many political processes. The stereotypes about young people's inability to think for themselves are present in the rationale for restricting people who are under the age of 18 from voting. This belief about young people marginalizes them from politics. This marginalization makes young people disinterested in participating, thus reinforcing the stereotype that young people are not prepared or informed and therefore should not participate in political decisions.

Economy

Privileges and restrictions related to young people's participation in the economy communicated particular beliefs about young people to participants in this study. Participants discussed age restrictions that prevent young people from participating in the economy through earning money and having more financial independence. Age restrictions related to signing legally binding contracts, having debit and credit cards, and gainful employment communicated negative beliefs about young people's capabilities to think, to be responsible, and to manage or understand finances. Beliefs and assumptions about young people inform and justify these age restrictions.

> **Josie**: There are certain hours you can't work during school nights… [The restrictions] are mostly for younger kids. You're not allowed to work past 10….You have to get a work permit through the school. If you are 15 years old, you need a physical from your doctor, which is really elaborate. I've always wanted to work and make my own money, but I had to wait for a really long time… I felt like there were less responsible people, [but] just because they were older, they were taking jobs. I know that they are older, they probably needed the money more, but I felt like I could have handled the responsibility better. Or at least equally.

Josie and Sunshine did not know why a physical examination by a doctor would be required for a 15-year-old to obtain a work permit but would not be required for an older person to secure the same job. Josie reasoned that the assumption that young people are irresponsible has something to do with the current age restrictions related to employment. Participants are regularly exposed to beliefs that young people are irresponsible. Age-related employment restrictions prevent young people from being able to work and demonstrate their level of responsibility. These restrictions reinforce those negative beliefs. Age does not necessarily indicate one's choice or ability to act responsibly. Age restrictions for participating in the economy communicate that young people of a certain age are lacking in some way when compared to adults.

Transportation

Nearly every participant explained that driving privileges and restrictions are enormously relevant to their lives. These privileges and restrictions are another way that beliefs about young people as a group are communicated to participants. There are several age restrictions in their communities related to driving. These include the age at which one can obtain a learner's permit and the age at which one can obtain a driver's license. There are laws aimed at younger drivers that restrict the age of passengers and the use of cell phones while driving. These policies communicate negative beliefs and assumptions about young people to the participants.

> **Josie:** There's this policy [at our school] that if there's a sporting event and people have to carpool, students can't drive. It has to be parents or the coach. So, even if [students] have their licenses and even if they are past the probationary period where other teens can't be in the car when they're driving, they can't drive ….They just think that we are totally reckless drivers.

For Josie, the assumption that young people are reckless drivers is at the heart of the policy that restricts young people from being able to drive other students to sporting events even when they are legally old enough to have passengers that are high school age in their car. This policy reflects negative beliefs about young people's driving abilities and the ability to practice safe driving in comparison to adults while also communicating to everyone that the school assumes young people are reckless drivers.

Sex, Marriage, and Legal Consent

Age restrictions related to sex, marriage, and legal consent communicate beliefs about young people as a group. Participants felt that age is not necessarily the best indicator for when someone can responsibly and reliably enter into social or legal contracts. Assumptions and beliefs about young people as a group inform these social and legal age restrictions. For example, some participants discussed how they choose not to drink or have sex, but that adults often assume that they will do so anyway. Adults who hold these assumptions support social and legal age restrictions. Participants explained that the ability to give legal consent to sex should be based on a person's ability to communicate and understand information about sex. However, certain legislation links the ability to give consent to age. They wondered what their age had to do with their ability to give consent. Participants reasoned that information, support from peers and adults, and a strong and safe relationship were better indicators of one's ability to give consent.

Rosie described a situation where she had feelings for an older boy in her school. He was 17, and she was 14. He was a senior, and she a freshman. They were not dating,

but decided to attend a dance together as friends. Due to assumptions that she regularly

encountered about young girls her age, she decided not to tell her dad. Rosie explains

what happened when he found out:

> **Rosie**: He automatically assumed that I would be having sex with him, which makes no sense….because I'm not about to have sex with anyone. I know I'm not ready for that…. If he knew me like my mom does, he would know that I'm not really having sex with this kid because…I'm not going out with him. I'm just close with him. Like we tried to get over our feelings and just get on with it because we knew we couldn't go out because he turned 18, and it was definitely illegal then.

> **Isabel**: That's not its intended purpose [of the law]. I agree that it might be a good idea to prevent some creepy ass 40-year-old [from] hooking up with a 16-year-old. But, people use it with an 18-year-old and a 17-year-old, and that's stupid.

Rosie notes assumptions among adults that 1) senior boys will take advantage of

freshman girls, and 2) freshman girls would not be able to say, "No" or avoid having sex

with senior boys. When her dad found out about her friendship with this boy, he

communicated the same beliefs that kept her from confiding in him in the first place. The

participants understood that the law is in place for the protection of young people, but

also felt that it communicates negative assumptions about young people's abilities to

think and make decisions about their own bodies and determine the safety and

appropriateness of their own relationships.

Summary

This section discussed themes that emerged from these data about age-related

restrictions and privileges that communicate beliefs about young people in the form of

laws, policies, rules, regulations, and guidelines. The themes discussed in this section

were age specific restrictions related to: 1) location, 2) participation in politics, 3) participation in the economy, 3) transportation, 4) sex, marriage, and legal consent.

In each of these themes, participants described ways that these restrictions were informed and misinformed by assumptions and beliefs about young people. Each of the four categories of restrictions that emerged as themes from the data is based in beliefs about young people's maturity, ability to behave responsibly without the supervision of an adult, ability to be interested and informed about society, and their ability to think well for and about themselves. At the same time, these age-related restrictions keep young people from having the opportunity to demonstrate behavior that counters negative beliefs about their maturity, responsibility, and their solid and aware thinking about their bodies and their lives.

Young People Experience Beliefs About Young People and Their Multiple Social Identities

In the interviews, participants describe adults seeing or constructing young people not only on the basis of their status in society as young people but also on the basis of their race, ethnicity, nation of origin, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability/disability. Participants explained that beliefs and stereotypes about young people's other social identities were presented by adults and adult-run institutions, like the media, and then were enacted by adults and young people, alike. Participants described how experiences related to being their age were further impacted by their race, citizenship/immigration, ability, gender, sexual orientation, class identities, and experiences. Participants frequently mentioned how beliefs and stereotypes connected to their other social identities are present in their interactions in school and their

communities. For example, participants who have learning disabilities reported frequently encountering stereotypes about people their age lacking commitment or being unable to think well about how to prioritize their daily lives. The messages they received were both about their identity related to their age and to ability. Most participants discussed some way that their intersecting social identities and the attendant stereotypes combine with and impact their experiences as young people. Themes related to intersecting social identities are discussed below.

Race

Race was mentioned or alluded to by participants in most of the interviews. Both participants of color and White participants mentioned ways that they were perceived or ways that they perceived themselves related to race. The participants of color appeared to have more of an analysis of their experiences related to race than did the White participants. Every single boy of color in this study gave at least one example of being followed or stopped in a public space. In each case, the boys explained that they were being followed because the store employees or mall security assumed that they were going to steal something. Allen explained:

> **Allen**: I went into the store the other day and the guy, the person, the cashier just followed me around. I just felt like it was such a stereotype. People say Puerto Ricans steal, so I guess I'm part of that.

The White boys in the study also mentioned being followed in stores or having store employees "look at them suspiciously," but none of those participants attributed those interactions to race. In addition, they seemed to have those experiences less frequently. Rex, a boy of color, suggested that dress affected how people are responded to, such as

being stopped in the mall. When asked what was likely to get someone stopped in the

mall, he explained, "People like to label people the way they dress." When asked what

kind of dress would bring more of a reaction, Rex described clothing that is more often

associated with younger people and often with younger people of color:

> **Rex**: Probably wearing a hoodie, saggy pants, Jordans. They'd probably be like, "What's going on over here?" Those people are more likely to get recognition than somebody who's just wearing a tie or a normal shirt or whatever, just walking around.

When asked if Rex thought that race had something to do with that, he replied. "I think

race kind of has something to do with it, but it's definitely the clothing."

Angie, a girl of color, explained that students of color are taken less seriously than

White students at her school, which creates perceptions about the levels of importance of

young people related to their racial identities.

> **Angie**: So we are trying to close the achievement gap, and we have an action plan about how to change things at our school, and it's really hard because our principal wants to protect the White faculty from our ideas that teachers aren't doing enough or they don't care. They don't take students of color seriously….I feel like White students generally, which is not entirely correct, don't face as much stuff with the achievement gap and don't have a lot of dissatisfaction with the school. They don't have to be taken seriously unless it's by their college advisor. I don't think they have as much experience dealing with school incompetence.

Angie points out that White students who are not posing a threat to the ways that White

faculty are engaging students and running their classrooms are having a different set of

educational experiences from students of color in the same school.

After Beth and Olga, both White girls, shared several examples of challenges they

were experiencing at school with teachers or with copious amounts of homework, they

continuously referred to their complaints as "White girl problems." They described that

the concept of "White girl problems" refers to problems that only White girls, with

privilege, in the "First World" would have. As a listener, I felt that the term was used as a dismissal of the problems they had shared because they felt their problems were not as "bad" as other people's problems, presumably because they are White and living in the United States. This speaks to the ways that White participants noticed that their racial identity is not targeted by racism and, in fact, makes them the recipients of racial privilege.

All of the examples that participants shared are complex in that each person has multiple social identities. Analysis of these data demonstrates that all of the participants in this study notice that young people of color are targeted by beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes that are rooted in racism. Some of the participants noticed and shared the way that young White people do not bear the same burden of racial stereotypes combined with age-related stereotypes.

Citizenship/Immigration

Issues of citizenship/immigration were described as ways that participants with parents born outside of the U.S. navigated two cultures: at home and in their current communities. Participants with parents who are U.S. citizens described citizenship as their rights to participate in political activities. Josie and Rex both described being children of parents who immigrated to the U.S. Josie described having a larger role in decision-making at home than her peers whose parents are U.S. citizens. Both Josie and Rex explained that they were in a position to help their parents navigate U.S. culture, and this created the opportunity to play a more engaged role in their family's decision-making processes.

> **Josie:** I feel like since I was the first generation American, my parents included me in a lot of big decisions. Because I knew how to use the Internet better than anyone in my house, whenever we'd plan vacations, even at eight years old I'd be helping my Dad book the hotel. I guess when I was younger, my main problem was trying to get my parents to understand me, understand my life, because there was a cultural barrier…. Back in the early parts of middle school or when I was younger, if I wanted to sleep over someone's house, I'd have to ask permission a week in advance and usually someone just asked you that day, so I had to get past that. That was hard.

Josie explains that she attributes engagement in family decision-making to her cultural experience of being first in her family to be born in the U.S. She is in the position to both convey and navigate cultural expectations of young people and of her family. Josie was navigating her parent's view of her as a young person and also as a person raised in the U.S. with different cultural practices and expectations from her parents. Additionally, she was navigating other people's stereotypes and beliefs about her and her parents, who were not informed about U.S. cultural norms around sleepovers and plan-making. She noticed and managed interactions with her parents and other people's parents when it came to making plans for sleep-overs and other social interactions.

Other participants who were born in the U.S. did not have to navigate the same terrain as did Rex and Josie. These examples indicate ways that participants encounter stereotypes related to their age that combine with beliefs and assumptions related to citizenship and immigration. Josie and Rex had to navigate assumptions that their families would operate in the same way as their friends' families, even though they had different cultural backgrounds and different experiences and expectations.

Ability/Disability

Data analysis indicates that perceptions and beliefs related to ability and disability were often present in participants' lives. Several participants disclosed that they had been diagnosed with ADHD, other learning disabilities, and depression. Many participants described struggling with issues related to ability in school. Jacob and Orson discussed how some teachers would support them, but when it came to accommodations like having an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan (services to support students with disabilities), they felt some teachers would become inflexible. In a learning strategies class that is intended to be a support for students with disabilities, Orson and Jacob detail the following experience:

> **Orson:** Some teachers look down on you. For the most part, I have really good teachers, but once we had this sub for my strategies class, and she looked down on everybody….She was like, "Let me see your progress report. I bet that you get bad grades." I didn't even do anything….Some people at school look down at students.
>
> **Jacob:** Then again, you were also in learning strategies, so that could have had something to do with it. Not even joking.

Jacob speaks to the negative stereotypes about ability that some participants encountered in many classrooms, and in this particular example, a learning strategies classroom. This strategies class is for students with learning disabilities who have Individualized Education Plans. The focus of this class is to support students to learn strategies that will help them to succeed in school. All participants with learning disabilities experienced teachers behaving as though they are "stupid" and are not able to prioritize well. Both Orson and Jacob describe their experiences with teachers telling them that they need to focus on school work and that they should quit playing sports in order to get their work done:

Orson: Some teachers, especially with sports and stuff, they are like, "Well, then maybe you should quit football." But the thing is, I'm more focused if I get exercise…. I can't focus if I'm jittery. I have energy. So it's better if I'm totally drained of energy in school because I'm more focused and more calm. And some teachers are just like, "Well, then, you're not getting enough work done. You don't have enough time to do work. You need to quit sports."

One way that participants with disabilities experience the combination of assumptions and stereotypes about being young and having a disability is through adults telling them to quit sports or other activities so that they have more time to do work. They also experienced teachers being inflexible with rules and due dates related to ADHD, even though teachers are legally required to provide time extensions as an accommodation. These participants believe that stereotypes about young people with disabilities make it more likely that they will get in trouble. The assumptions that young people are lazy or that they do not work hard enough or that they cannot make good decisions for themselves combine with stereotypes about ability and disability that construct people with disabilities as unable to know what they need or as purposefully disruptive. These stereotypes can prevent teachers from acknowledging that participants might know what they need to get focused, calm, and present in school. Participants with disabilities regularly encounter beliefs about young people that combine with stereotypes about people with disabilities.

Gender

Every participant described encountering stereotypes and beliefs related to gender. These beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes communicated to participants the spaces they could inhabit according to their gender and how they should perform their gender in those spaces, information about sexual activity and gender, the

commodification of girls' bodies, and social power related to gender. For example, if girls were assumed to be having sex, then they would be labeled a "slut" or a "whore," and if they were not, they were assumed to be a "prude." The experiences that participants discussed were often accompanied by shame and humiliation or by an internalized negative self-judgment.

Though every participant described stereotypes and beliefs about gender encountered in their interactions with adults, girls in this study described more gender-based beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes than boys. For example, Olga and Beth discussed expectations around sex for girls and how those are different for boys who are given more status if they have had sex. They explained that, for girls, being "hot" means being skinny. Their relative "hotness" was described as a currency or commodity connected to social power among young people in their schools. This stereotype was related to a sense of pervasive eating disorders among girls. Beth and Olga describe how girls' bodies are a form of currency or a commodity:

> **Beth:** I think it's also the attractiveness of relating to be a teenager. It's like, when you're an adult…. I just feel like your success isn't riding on your attractiveness. There are a lot of things...Attractiveness isn't what gets you through the world. It can, and it does, but...with teenagers it's kind of like the biggest factor. It's everything. Our biggest commodity.

> **Olga:** Teens judge teens based on hotness, and they're like, "You need to be skinny and conform." Adults just judge them on...

> **Beth:** Their fear factor. If they think that you're gonna be a dangerous teen. If you're a teenager and you dress like an adult, then they will have more respect for you. If you dress how most teenagers dress or if you wear a short skirt or short shorts or a tight tee-shirt…they think of you differently.

The way adults, in these girls' lives, convey judgment about what teen girls wear communicates beliefs and assumptions and stereotypes about both gender and young

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people. Olga and Beth explain that girls who are perceived as "hot" have access to more acceptance and an increased ability to exercise power by influencing other people in school. Adults also convey their perceptions about girls related to age and what dressing in shorter skirts and shorts means to them. Olga described the "virgin/whore" dichotomy that girls are subjected to in which all of their representations are found to be lacking. If a girl is deemed a "virgin," then Olga explained that she will be called a prude. If she has had sex or if she is assumed to have had sex, then she will be considered a "whore." Either way, these girls are dealing with undesirable stereotypes based on their gender and age that are experienced as negative.

Sexual Orientation

All of the participants in this study referred to sexual orientation in some way. These discussions included references to heterosexual relationships, heterosexual parents, and expectations connected to heterosexual relationships. Two participants discussed how the heavy focus on heterosexuality in their everyday interactions impacts young people who are questioning their sexual orientation. Beth and Olga discussed feeling a pervasive pressure to have or not to have boyfriends and felt that this pressure is very presumptive of their sexual orientation. Beth pointed out that age has to do with the way young people are perceived related to sexual orientation.

> **Beth:** If you are a teenager and you're like, "Oh, yeah, I'm gay," [adults are] like, "You don't know that. It's probably just a phase." There's a lot of judgment about everything relating to sex…. They're like, "You're a teenager. You can't be sure of anything. You don't know what you want." I feel like no one's ever really sure. No one's totally gay or totally straight.

> **Olga:** There's the flip side of that where people are like, "Are you gay or straight?" And I don't really know. And they're like, "What do you mean you

don't know?" And I'm like, "I guess I like guys, but I sometimes kinda like girls. I don't know. I'm still figuring it out."….I don't know. I have had literally no sexual encounters ever. How am I supposed to figure this out when I have literally never ever kissed someone?

Beth and Olga speak to the negative associations with being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning and the relatively small space these negative associations give a young person to explore her own sexual orientation. Beliefs about age that suggest young people are not able to think well about themselves or know themselves are deployed in relation to sexual orientations that are not heterosexual.

Class

Several participants described experiences with assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes related to socioeconomic class. Examples of these are assumptions that participants should know about Ivy League colleges, expensive brand name clothes, and should have their own car at 16. Participants who were raised poor or working-class and who did not know or have these resources discussed feeling shame and internalizing a negative self-image when they compared themselves to their peers who did have access to these resources.

Participants encountered class-related assumptions and stereotypes in their relationships with other young people more frequently than in their relationships with adults. Related to girls' bodies being seen as a kind of currency, participants explained that a person's body can be read as "hot" by dressing in clothes that are currently in style. Poor and working-class girls may not have access to the most up-to-date fashions. This is

an example about how girls who do not have access to expensive and stylish clothes have less access to the currency of "hotness."

Analysis of these data reveals that none of the participants in the study identified with having class privilege but rather identified as raised poor or working-class. Working-class participants noticed a strong connection between financial resources, class privilege and popularity at school. Wealthier young people with class privilege were seen as being more popular in their schools. Participants described their wealthier peers as people who were able to influence other young people, making them seem more powerful. The working-class students described having moments of shame about themselves related to their class. For example, Angie had to take the school bus to school, while her other peers owned or had access to cars to drive themselves to school. She was a 17-year-old junior and went to a high school in a middle-class neighborhood. She was also the only person her age riding the bus to school.

> **Angie**: [In the mornings] I usually have to run to catch the bus. And it's... the school bus. I'm 17, and most of my friends at least have their permits, and some of my friends have their own cars, which is really weird to me. And a few of my friends didn't even have to pay for their cars or help work for their cars. Their parents just gave it to them. And I just got my driver's manual to study the book for getting my permit. Some people drive themselves into school, and I'm one of the few upperclassmen who still take the bus, so it's kind of, so it's me and middle schoolers and some sophomores, and it's kind of embarrassing.

Angie describes feeling embarrassed to be the only person her age on her bus. She knows that she is riding the bus because her family does not have the resources to provide her with a car. Also, the other people riding the bus are younger than she is. She experiences her situation as the only person her age riding the bus, as abnormal. This is one way that assumptions about age intersect with those about class. Like Angie, poor and working-

class participants described feeling shame and developing a negative self-image related to their socioeconomic class.

Summary

This section presented assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes about young people that are communicated to participants along with stereotypes related to their multiple, intersecting social identities. Participants experienced stereotypes related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, citizenship, and ability combined with negative and generalized beliefs about young people. Analysis of these data suggests that young people experience adults' beliefs about young people through stereotypes related to racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism and that the participants also experienced young people taking on and acting out those related beliefs. These data demonstrate that participants did not all experience being their age in the same way, given their diverse multiple identities, and yet they all experienced negative and generalized beliefs about young people. Overall, the beliefs, stereotypes, and assumptions experienced and discussed by all participants were viewed as negative and harmful to young people as a group.

Discussion and Analysis

This chapter reviews themes that emerged from data analysis illustrating some of the ways participants in this study encounter and experience adult conceptions about what they can and cannot do as members of their age group. These beliefs about their age group communicate that young people have less status than adults. Overall, the thematic

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analysis reveals some of the pervasiveness of these beliefs as well as the negative consequences for young people. However, it is important to note that participants reported that their experiences with adults appeared to be more positive during their younger years and increasingly more difficult in their teen years. Perhaps this is because young people who are teens are ready to take on more responsibility and have more freedom than adults are willing to allow. Though the interviews included several open-ended questions, and neither the interview process nor the interviewer limited the discussion to struggles, and even when asked to talk about what they like about their age, participants rarely volunteered examples of easy or joyful experiences. While participants' stories and experiences convey that they lead very complex lives, full of activity, they also experience a world full of rules and guidelines that restrict, constrict and limit their lives. Because the focus of this study is on status, the participants' challenges and struggles are foregrounded. Having fewer rights and less respect than adults communicates a lesser status to the participants in regards to their age. The experiences that convey status to young people were often described as painful. As such, the thematic analysis suggests that there are many struggles in these participants' lives related to being their age.

The beliefs and assumptions about young people that participants experienced: 1) are pervasive, generalized to young people as a group and largely negative, 2) are often explained with common understandings of biology, 3) are produced and reproduced through institutional mechanisms that define legal restrictions and privileges based on age; and 4) are combined with stereotypes and beliefs about their intersecting social identities, like race, gender, class, and ability. These beliefs communicate that young

people occupy a subordinant status through messages that frame young people as less capable, responsible, intelligent, knowledgeable, and complete than adults.

The beliefs and assumptions that participants encounter mirror some of the patterns described in the discourse practices reviewed in Chapter 2. In this review, specific discourses about young people that constitute childhood, which include the teen years, suggest the extent to which the adult imagination about young people not only impacts prevailing constructions of childhood (and adulthood) but also how relations between young people and adults are constituted and reinforced over time. For example, one of the discourses reviewed was that of Child/adult dualism (Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Lavine, 1984; Lowe, 1982; Walkerdine, 1984). This discourse constitutes both a relationship and a separation between adults and young people in which young people are viewed as different from adults and also as pre-adults. In fact, this discourse treats young people as incomplete and adults as complete in relation to physical, mental, and emotional development. As young people are constructed as no good, lazy, apathetic, and so on, adults are constructed as the people who can be trusted to be responsible, who are hard workers, and as people who care about politics and current events. These discourse practices were engaged and communicated to participants through experiences at home, at school, and in the community.

The beliefs and assumptions that participants experienced that were presented in the first section of this chapter were generalized and negative. Participants were careful to note that not all adults held all of these ideas and beliefs all of the time; however, there was agreement among the participants that the ideas are held by enough adults enough of the time to be experienced as pervasive. Beliefs and assumptions that young people

cannot be trusted, are no good, disrespectful, apathetic, doomsday, spoiled, addicted to technology, and clannish were experienced by the diverse group of participants in this study. This information was communicated to young people through relationships and interactions with adult in their lives and through adult-maintained institutions, laws, policies, rules, and guidelines. For example, the beliefs about young people not being trustworthy or responsible are used in arguments for age restrictions related to driving. These beliefs are then communicated via institutional mechanisms that restrict young people from being able to drive without an adult in the car up until a certain age. The belief that young people are apathetic supports voting restrictions, and in turn, these restrictions reinforce the idea that young people are apathetic and uninterested in politics. The beliefs that young people are no good, disrespectful, and clannish support age-related restrictions for being at the mall after a certain hour without an accompanying adult. These restrictions communicate that young people cannot be trusted, especially in groups, without an adult present. These negative beliefs are generalized to young people as a group and are pervasive.

These beliefs reflect the first three of the four criteria for oppression as theorized by Memmi (2000): The four criteria include:

- There is an insistence on a difference, real or imaginary.
- A "negative valuation" is imposed upon members of the group judged to be different.
- These negatively valued differences are generalized to the whole group,
- These generalized, negative valuations are then used to justify and legitimate hostility and aggression against that group. (p. xvii)

The existence of the "typical teen" stereotype shows an insistence on difference between adults and young people. Even when young people behave in ways that are assumed or associated with adult behavior, as a category or age identity group, they are

still assumed to be different than adults. Individual young people are named as exceptional, yet this continues to reify their age category and position it as different from adults as a group. The assumptions held by adults that young people are not good, cannot be trusted, are disrespectful, lazy, apathetic, doomsday, spoiled, social mediaheads, and clannish are a reflection of a "negative valuation" that is imposed on young people who have been judged to be different from adults. Thirdly, the negatively valued differences are generalized to young people as a group. Some young people go to the mall and steal and so do some adults. Specific restrictions are applied to young people as a group, however, and are not applied to adults as a group. Some young people engage in risky driving practices and so do some adults, but specific driving restrictions are applied to young people as a group. Some young people text and drive and so do some adults, but specific laws against texting and driving are applied to young people as a group but not always to adults as a group.

Adults who were subjected to many of these beliefs as young people communicate these beliefs through interpersonal relationships, institutional policy and regulation, and through cultural productions of institutions, like media. These same adults often hold the best intentions toward young people and even work hard to support healthy lives for young people. In fact, many adults dedicate their lives to teaching, advocating, parenting, and serving children and teens. Even so, beliefs about young people are communicated through discourse practices that have been internalized by adults. Adults convey and reproduce assumptions and beliefs about young people through their behavior and practices. That adults reproduce these discourse practices does not mean adults are bad. Rather, it means that as people who care about young people, adults have an

important stake in engaging a critical lens and critical questions about these generalized and negative beliefs about young people as a group.

Participants experienced beliefs and assumptions about young people on the institutional level as reflected in social and legal restrictions and privileges. Participants' experiences and knowledge show how beliefs about young people as a group are institutionalized and how those same institutions communicate and reconstitute beliefs about young people. Social age markers were described frequently, sometimes as rites of passage, such as being able to get a driver's license or being old enough to legally consent to sex. Other social age markers were related to participating in the economy and voting. These age-markers restrict young people from having access to specific rights and privileges that adults are entitled to because of their age. These age markers are not consistent around age (i.e., in Massachusetts, one can work with a permit at 14; drive at 16; vote, enlist in the military, buy cigarettes and pornography at 18; drink alcohol at 21) but are universally applied to all young people regardless of an individual's ability to take on the related responsibilities. These age-based social and legal restrictions communicate to the participants that young people as a group occupy a position of lesser status than their adult counterparts.

Beliefs about young people that participants discussed encountering were combined with stereotypes related to other social identities. Participants experienced beliefs among adults and other young people about people their age in conjunction with stereotypes about their race, gender, class, citizenship or immigration story, sexual orientation, and ability. These stereotypes about young people's other social identities were described as first being encountered through adults and adult-run institutions, like

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media and then were enacted by other young people. Grossberg (2003) discusses the need

to look at common experiences young people have across their many axes of racial,

ethnic, classed, gendered, and sexual difference:

> Economically, politically and culturally, the situation of kids in the U.S. is intolerable and unforgivable, especially given the supposed "advanced" status of the nation and its economic wealth….[T]his demands that we consider the changing discourses within which kids are constructed and placed into the maps of every-day life in our society. I want to suggest that kids are increasingly de-legitimated, that is, denied any significant place within the collective geography of life in the U.S. ….While, on each of these axes we are witnessing rearticulated and reinvigorated attacks, I do believe that there is something new about the attack on kids…. I want to focus nevertheless on a certain commonality of their condition. (p. 1)

The de-legitimation of young people as a group and the denial of significant roles and

place in the social, cultural, and economic life of the nation require a look at the

commonality of young people's experiences. This examination must take into account

that various forms of oppression are operating at the same time.

Young people have multiple identities and have to navigate different stereotypes

depending on their constellation of social identities. The findings discussed in this

chapter demonstrate that young people are having a common experience related to their

age. The stereotypes that the participants discussed were generalized, negative and

disempowering. Participants described either having the stereotype applied to them or

being seen as an exception. They agreed that all people their age were being undermined

when an adult tells them, "You're really mature for your age." For example, participants

in this study experienced stereotypes about the "typical woman" (i.e., hysterical, weak,

subordinant), where society assumes the worst about her (i.e., likely to be raped, and

assault is her fault; unable to maintain a serious career, spoiled and protected by men,

etc.), where versions of biology are utilized to enforce subordination (i.e., immature,

cannot think as well as men, hormones make her irrational), and where society sets limits and restrictions based in stereotypes (i.e., outlawing abortion, not allowing her to choose how her health care is conducted) (see Johnson, 2005).

Like stereotypes about women, beliefs and assumptions about young people are also rooted in biology (Burman, 1994, 2007; Canella, 1997; Canella & Viruru, 2004; Viruru, 2007). Participants encountered beliefs about young people being immature, having incomplete brains, and being controlled by hormones. These same themes reflect dominant developmental perspectives that shape the common public understanding of adolescence (Proefrock, 1981). These developmental perspectives often go unquestioned and are used in ways that justify a lesser status for young people as a group. For example, participants were offended when they heard adults say, "You're mature for your age," or when they witnessed surprise on an adult's face about their ability to hold a conversation. They noticed that some adults feel free to hold all young people in contempt, generalizing a range of the negative ideas about young people to the entire group. When assumptions, stereotypes, and beliefs are thought to be inherent in young people, they are constructed as natural and unchangeable. As such, many of the young people in the study discussed feeling powerless to effectively challenge them.

The following chapter examines ways that the experiences and beliefs that communicate status related to age impact young people. This reflects the "discursive geography" that Grossberg (2003) described. These ideas, beliefs, stereotypes, laws, rules, and policies have significant consequences in young people's lives. These consequences are viewed by adults in ways that further reinforce the ideas, beliefs, and stereotypes and lead to enacting laws, rules, and policies that further impact the lives of

young people. Getting a picture of this discursive geography can provide opportunities to transform and interrupt the current arrangement of status and power in relationships between young people and adults toward more emergent and fluid relationships. More fluid and emergent status and power relationships can make room for young people to exist outside of negative beliefs that invade their lives.

CHAPTER 5

**NAVIGATING STATUS: HOW ADULTS' BELIEFS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE
IMPACT THEIR RELATIONSHIPS**

<u>Introduction</u>

This study sought to explore and understand how young people in a high school

and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power related to

childhood. In this chapter, I present and analyze data exploring the second question of

this study: *How do experiences and beliefs that communicate status related to age impact*

young people?

Participants were asked open-ended questions that invited them to discuss: what it

is like being their age in different contexts; what kind of assumptions they notice people

making about people in their age group; and how those assumptions impact their lives.

Participants were also asked to describe their experience of status in relation to people of

different ages. Participants in this study encounter pervasive beliefs about young people

that convey a lower status than adults on a regular basis. Beliefs that participants

regularly encounter about young people are generalized and negative, related to

stereotypes about their other identities, rooted in biology and so considered to be natural,

and are reflected in age-related restrictions and privileges. This chapter discusses the

impact and consequences of those experiences and beliefs that communicate status

related to age on the participants' lives.

Consequences of these beliefs appear in relationships between young people and

adults as well as in relationships between young people and other young people. In these

relationships, adults always occupy a higher status relative to that of young people. Given

the pervasiveness of the beliefs about young people, participants discussed constantly

navigating these status relationships in the focus groups and interviews. Data analysis

suggests three themes that deal with how beliefs about young people impact their

relationships with adults and with other young people. These themes include: 1) some

ways that beliefs about young people impact adult's expectations of young people, 2)

how status shapes relationships, and 3) how participants make meaning of status and

negotiate safety.

Adults' Expectations for Young People

Beliefs that convey young people's status also shaped participant's experiences of

adult's expectations of young people. Two of the youngest participants in this study

provided a metaphor that illustrates how assumptions about young people operate and the

impacts they have on the participants' lives in relation to adult's expectations.

> **Jacob**: It's sort of like you're standing in the middle of the street and cars are going both ways. People and their assumptions are cars in the street…. and you're in between the lanes, on the yellow line, except you're not trying to get across. You're just there. And then people that assume one thing of you, you're trying to get out of their way because they think poorly of you…, and people are going the other way thinking whatever they think, and you are dodging in between, trying not to get hit by cars.
>
> **Orson:** And depending on who you are, you get hit by a lot of cars. …I just get hit by a lot of buses.

This passage is emblematic of the frequency and intensity of participants' experiences

with assumptions about young people as a group and about participants as individuals.

Dodging oncoming negative assumptions requires that the participants understand and

then internalize the expectations that those assumptions convey.

Given the steady stream of information coming at the participants via assumptions

and beliefs about young people, much time and energy is spent navigating roles and

expectations at school, at home, and out in their communities. Three themes emerged describing participants' experiences of status related to adult's expectations of young people: 1) an intense pressure to manifest a successful future, 2) trivialized lives, and 3) working extra hard for positive regard. Each theme is discussed below.

Future Matters: Pressure to Manifest Success

There was resounding agreement among participants about the high amount of pressure that adults put on young people in school. Every participant in this study discussed being impacted by the ways young people's lives are oriented and structured to be about their future rather than about the present. These data show that consequences of this future orientation manifest in an intense pressure for young people to perform now in preparation for a successful future. This focus on the future challenges participants' ability to see themselves as complete and legitimate people in the present rather than as "potential" people. This future focus also results in a fear of adulthood.

This pressure to manifest a successful future frames participants' everyday experiences as events and decisions with incalculable meaning. Will discussed this future orientation and some of the impacts he experiences:

> **Will:** This is the point in life where you have to make a lot of decisions. You have to be decisive. And while it's not true that it's this way, it always feels very final. It always feels like this is it. You can't really change what you are doing. There's just this subconscious thought that might be in the back of everyone's mind that you don't want to wake up when you are thirty or forty years old and then just realize that you screwed everything up and you have made the wrong choices and you are miserable. It feels like every wrong move that you make is a step in that direction and it's…this particular point in your life when you feel the worst for making the wrong decisions…. Everyone tells you these are the best years of your life. This is going to set you up for college, this is gonna set you up for your job. You don't do well in school, you're gonna be a dropout, you're gonna be a screw-up. You're gonna go live in a cardboard box somewhere.

Will's sentiments were shared by all of the participants. Everyone described feeling a pressure to make the "right" decisions now to secure "the future." Most of these decisions are made with very few choices available and most options are pre-determined by the adults in their lives.

The feeling that making one wrong decision will ruin a person's future is further intensified by the reality that one will not know if they have made the wrong decision until the future is upon them. The future orientation of young people's lives makes it difficult for the participants in this study to experience their lives in the present. Will pointed out that young people are told that these are the best years of their lives, yet it seems that they may not be permitted to actually enjoy them until later in life as distant memories. Even so, the pressure to get good grades, to get scholarships for college, and to make the "right" decisions is enormous. Participants described feeling pressure to worry about their future, as if enough worry would ensure future success. One participant explained that he felt he had not worried enough about his future when he started high school.

> **Rex:** It's just gonna get harder.… A lot of decisions to make. College, work, what do you want to do when you're older, how do you want to live your life, what kind of profession do you want. That stress hits everybody. It's just downhill from here, I guess.…I've been feeling that since I entered high school. You gotta be awake. You actually gotta do your stuff, because if you don't do it, you're just digging a hole for yourself. You gotta worry about that kind of stuff.

This participant expresses discouragement and a sense of powerlessness for not having worried enough about his future. The idea that "it's just gonna get harder" and "it's just downhill from here" are connected to his feeling that he did not start thinking and worrying about his future early enough. This notion of "digging a hole for yourself"

comes from the fear that participants had made bad decisions earlier in their lives that would have an unknown, yet worrisome effect on their futures.

Every participant expressed some level of fear and anxiety about their future in relation to being an adult. These fears are about financial security and responsibility, feeling that they will have to make many new decisions that they have not been prepared to make, and that they will be held accountable in a different way than they have experienced as young people. For example, Sunshine talked about living a very sheltered life where all of her needs were taken care of. While she appreciated how her parents have taken care of her, she also felt that she was not prepared to live life as an adult. She had never worked, paid bills, or learned about things like taxes, health insurance, life insurance, rent, or a mortgage. Even the participants who had jobs or bank accounts that they managed on their own or with the help of an adult felt concern. Another participant argued that young people are not held accountable for their behavior in the same way that adults are. She explained that adults try to protect young people by intervening so that young people do not experience the full consequences of their behaviors. This protection makes her afraid to live her life as an adult.

> **Isabel**: There's just a lot of the money stuff that I don't have to worry right now. I'm sort of afraid of having to worry about that at some point because I feel like something about money is so real. If you screw up in something in school they don't kick you out. Nothing is really like a permanent mess up. I feel like money and paying bills is the number one thing that's unforgiving in the "real world," so to speak. The fact that I don't know a ton about it scares me–that at some point I'm going to be paying the bills and taking care of that stuff…. We don't have any reason to think we aren't invincible because we don't really face a lot of real consequences for anything we do which I actually don't like because it makes me afraid of what it's going to be like when I am really held responsible for things.

This participant's mom helps her to learn about balancing a checkbook. She has a job in which she has the experience of working part-time, making $8.65 per hour and sees how

much of her income goes to pay taxes. Yet she realizes that when she is an adult, not only will she not have the safety net of her parents' income, she does not feel prepared to be held accountable and responsible as an adult.

Trivialized Lives

Another consequence of negative beliefs and assumptions about young people is the trivialization of young people's lives. Participants in this study appear to have internalized the idea that their problems are insignificant or not as serious as adult problems. During the interviews, participants often trivialized their own problems and experiences by minimizing their impact or talking about them as if they were inconsequential or insignificant. Both participants and the adults in their lives collude with the idea that, because of their young age, the participants' experiences were less important than those of adults.

One way that the participants trivialized their own experiences was by referring to their problems as "teenage problems," evoking a popular Twitter #hashtag and Internet meme that is used to make fun of "trivial inconveniences" experienced by privileged groups. Josie, Olga, Beth, Rosie, Isabel, and Sunshine all referred to their struggles as "teenage problems." In the case of teens, this sentiment constructs their problems as less relevant, important, or serious than adult problems. An adult problem is more likely to be considered real and serious, as are adults' feelings. Josie said, "I don't feel like I have big problems. I just have my teenage problems. And then worrying about school." Whether or not participants' problems are big problems, calling them "teenage problems" frames them as insignificant.

Participants explained that many adults regularly trivialize young people's feelings or experiences by dismissing or rendering the feelings or experiences of the participants as inconsequential or insignificant. Olga shared about how her mother minimized the work she put into getting good grades:

> **Olga:** My Mom always goes on and on about how I don't try. And she always says it in a lighthearted way. She's like "Oh my God, this girl never tries. She always gets A's." But…I do try. I worked harder for my grade on my final for environmental science last year and I got a 93, which for that class, most people got seventies. I was so proud and my Mom was like, "It's not like you tried." I was literally in my room for hours every single night for the past two weeks, pulling my own hair out to work for this A, and you're not even going to acknowledge it?

Olga really challenged herself to do well and worked hard, yet she felt that her mother's attitude diminished her effort and hard work to get a good grade on her exam.

Beliefs about young people being dramatic lead to a minimizing or trivialization of young people's problems. Isabel describes the belief that adults hold about teens:

> **Isabel**: [Adults] assume that because you're a teenager that means that you're dramatic and therefore any problem that you complain about is being overdramatized or exaggerated which is not true because if I'm outwardly complaining about something it's because it's pretty bad.

The trivialization of the participants' problems left them feeling unseen by important adults in their lives and led some of them to internalize the message that teenage problems really are inconsequential.

Exhaustion: Working Hard for Positive Regard

Participants deal with issues of respect, both disrespect and a lack of respect, during a large percentage of their day. Participants reported regularly feeling that they needed to work harder to gain the acceptance or approval of adults through trying to

appear smart and by trying to gain respect or appear respectable. Beth and Olga explain

how often during a day they feel that they are working for someone else's respect:

> **Beth:** I'd say kind of a lot of it, because the entire time I'm at school, I'm definitely feeling like I'm always working towards someone's respect, like whether it be teachers or other students or something like that.

> **Olga:** Whenever I'm not alone, pretty much.

Olga and Beth echo the sentiment of many other participants when they say that most of

their day involves working for another person's respect. Participants explained that a

consequence of the assumptions, stereotypes, and beliefs about young people that they

encounter was a somewhat constant feeling of needing to work for positive regard, which

was often followed by both exhaustion and boredom.

A few participants talked about an expectation that young people act smart.

Acting smart is a behavior that the participants named as actions taken to counteract the

assumption that young people do not know things or are not intelligent.

> **Quentin**: People assume that I'm really smart and I'm really not. [everyone laughs] I'm not joking at all. I mean, I can be smart, but I just choose not to be, and I just...I don't know, being smart is just overrated.

Participants are not acknowledged for being smart; rather, they are acknowledged for

acting smart. Participants clarified that there is a difference between being smart and

acting smart. Looking smart includes actively participating in classes even when bored,

doing well on tests and homework, and acting interested in adults' interests. Quentin,

Jacob, and Orson all agreed that adults expect young people to work extra hard to act

smart but are not always willing to look for the actual intelligence of the young people

they are working with. All participants felt they were required to engage in this work of

"acting smart." Acting smart is a labor for positive regard.

Participants reported feeling exhaustion after working hard for positive regard during most of their day. This work requires constant attention on one's surroundings in order to read what will be required to look smart, interested, and engaged.

> **Sunshine:** I think you are always trying to prove people wrong. Everyone has an assumption of how young people are. So whenever you go out in public, whenever you hold a conversation with someone, you always have to be cautious of what you are saying and how you are saying it and how you are presenting yourself, because someone is always gonna judge you and be like "Oh, yeah. Exactly. You're stupid. You just said this." So you always have to be cautious of what you are doing because people are gonna throw that back at you.

Without even knowing what the specific assumptions are, most participants felt that the general picture that adults hold about young people is incorrect and needs to be proven wrong. This constant work required to hold this awareness and to respond in a way that could result in positive regard of the participant is exhausting to the participants.

Summary

Chapter 4 discussed themes illustrating that participants regularly encounter beliefs about young people related to stereotypes about their other identities, are pervasive, generalized and negative, are explained by common understandings of biology, and are reflected in age-related restrictions and privileges. Some of the consequences of these beliefs about young people are: an intense pressure to manifest a successful future, trivialization of participants' lives, and working hard to counter negative beliefs about young people. Participants must navigate these expectations. A future orientation keeps participants from being able to live in the present. Participants experience fear of making bad decisions now that will lead to failure in the future. A future orientation was also connected to a fear that they would not be adequately prepared

for adulthood. Thematic analysis also revealed that adults tend to trivialize young people's experiences and problems. The participants also tended to trivialize their own problems. To navigate these expectations, participants in this study described working incessantly to gain positive regard, especially from adults in their lives.

Unequal Status Shapes Young People's Relationships with Adults and Other Young People

Beliefs about young people's status impacted and shaped the participants relationships with adults and with other young people. A consequence of beliefs about young people is an unequal status relationship between adults and young people. This status relationship impacted how these participants felt about exercising their own power, making choices on their own behalf, and enacting their own agency. Similarly, participants talked about status relationships with adults impacting how they experienced status relationships with other young people. In this discussion, I explore two themes highlighting consequences that manifest in relationships: 1) status relationships between young people and adults, and 2) status relationships among young people and their peers.

Status Relationships with Adults

Every participant in this study shared examples of status and power relationships that they had with adults in their lives. These status relationships were most frequently with teachers or school administrators and with parents/guardians. The majority of these status relationships were described to involve adults occupying a dominant status and the participants occupying a lower status. Most participants described having a small number of relationships with adults that felt more flexible and open; however, the majority of

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their relationships with adults were characterized as unequal and more rigid status relationships. Participants described having little flexibility to negotiate power and status in their relationships with most adults.

In these relationships between the participants and the adults in their lives, there is a perceived status that is based on age. Older age conveys dominant/higher status and younger age conveys a subordinant/lower status. The higher status that is conferred by older age is accompanied by a sense of being able to act with more agency.

Sunshine: I have just been aware of the teacher to student power.

Josie: If you're a freshman and a senior, [teachers] treat you so differently. When you're a freshman, they can't see your cell phone at all. You have to have passes to go to the bathroom. You have to have passes to go to the library. You have to wait in the lunch line. You can't cut people. But now if you're a senior the teachers don't care if you're on your phones. I've never been asked for a pass as a senior.

Sunshine: I think that they are just trying to make [freshmen] accustomed to the rules, but then as soon as they get older they stop following the rules and then the administration stops trying.

These participants describe how adults in their school enforce rules and in doing so enforce their own dominance in relation to the younger people who are students. Students are conferred a lower status by being required to submit to rules that limit what they do and where they go. For example, the students are required to get permission from an adult to go to the bathroom. An adult does not have to ask for permission to go to the bathroom because their status allows them to act with more agency in the school environment. Sunshine and Josie also describe how status is conferred to older students via their status relations with adults. As students get older, they feel empowered to act with more agency by taking out their phone or going to the bathroom without a pass, even though these behaviors are technically forbidden without adult permission. Sunshine and Josie felt that

adults became more lenient with older students. Here, the participants demonstrate their awareness that with age, even just moving from freshmen year to senior year, comes increased status.

The Double Standard of Respect

In Chapter 4, a theme describing adults' belief that young people are disrespectful was presented. Participants reported that they regularly had to figure out how to navigate issues of respect and disrespect throughout their day. Several participants named the double standard of respect as a primary issue impacting their lives. There was a general understanding by participants that young people are required to demonstrate respect for adults, and yet, adults are not required to demonstrate respect in turn. Some of these experiences were at home, and some were in the community, but the majority of participants brought up the issue of respect and disrespect related to their relationships with teachers and administrators at school.

Beth explained, "It's mostly with teachers assuming I don't respect them because I don't treat them exactly how they think that they deserve to be treated." Beth is clear that some of her teachers expect a particular type of treatment that signifies respect, but she is not always willing to engage in this behavior. She felt that teachers are not always willing to show her or other young people the same respect. As discussed in the previous section, many participants felt that they were constantly expected to "act smart" and interested in what teachers were doing.

These standards of respect look somewhat different for participants who identify as girls from for those who identify as boys. There were multiple stories that boys told in

which an adult enacted some kind of aggressive behavior after feeling that a boy had disrespected them. Several of the stories that were shared occurred in a community setting with adults who were strangers. For example, Jacob described a time at which he and a friend were fundraising outside of a grocery store, and a woman approached him to donate five dollars. As she returned to her car, Jacob's friend said, "Thank you!"

> **Jacob**: And the guy in the car with her rolled down his window, and he was like, "What you say?" I said, "He said, 'Thank you.' And he was like, "Sure. Sure you said, 'Thank you.' And I'm like, "What else am I gonna say? It's not like I'm gonna be like, 'Fuck off. You just gave us money. I don't like you.' That doesn't happen. And he had three kids in the back of his car. They looked like they were about 17 or something. They rolled down their windows and started throwing stuff at us. And we were just like, "All right. Thanks. Thanks, guys. Appreciate the donation. Thanks for that."

Assuming that the adult in the car did not actually hear Jacob's friend say, "Thank you," the assumption that he would say something disrespectful to a person who had just donated money illustrates this belief that young people are disrespectful. As a consequence, this expression of disrespect was followed by an aggressive act of disrespect by the other young people in the car. This double standard of respect communicates and operationalizes unequal status relationships between young people and adults. Like Jacob's example in which there is an assumption that young people are more likely to be disrespectful, members of that group run the risk of being disrespected in ways that lead to emotional, psychological, and even physical harm.

Adult-centric Relationships

Unequal status relationships between young people and adults tend to be adult-centered. Participants felt that adults say the focus of their relationships is on young people but that the needs and experiences of adults actually shape, limit, and define those

relationships. Similar to the example above, it is the adult-centered need to have control of the school that supports rules prohibiting young people from going to the bathroom without adult permission. Dimensions of these adult-centered status relations include young people being required to take on adult perspectives, take care of adults' feelings in order to take care of themselves, and responding to the ways adult-centric relationships are shaped by adults' fear and need for power and control.

Taking on Adults' Perspectives

Adult-centric relationships were also apparent in other descriptions of relationships between young people and adults. Some of the participants were in status relationships with adults in which they described struggling with adults and then giving up and moving their viewpoints to align with adults. In these examples, participants described holding a particular perspective that adults in their lives disagree with or would not support. After struggling to hold their perspective, participants described a moment when they decided to change their thinking to avoid further conflict. Sunshine described an experience when she was around 13 years old:

> **Sunshine:** Oh my gosh. I think I was the most stubborn young person ever. I…always wanted to do everything my way. I got into so much trouble. If my parents said something like "Don't leave your milk on the table," I would leave my milk on the table just because I thought I could….My entire middle school and freshman year I was grounded. It was just little things that I would do…. I know that they were trying to help me and direct me but I just didn't agree with what they were saying but now that I'm older I kind of see where they're coming from so we get along better now…so that's the transition.

This experience typifies adult-centered status relationships between a young person and adults. Sunshine describes wanting to do things her way and getting grounded for most of her middle school and freshman years because she refused to give up her

perspective. After being grounded for all that time, she decided to align her thinking and behavior with that of her parents, which has helped her to experience more harmony in their relationship. In this example, Sunshine had to make the change to stop the conflict in her relationship with her parents.

Taking Care of Adults

Another dimension of adult-centric status relationships with adults is the practice that some participants described of keeping secrets from the adults in their lives to take care of them or to keep them from getting upset. These practices range from keeping secrets about where the participants go when they go out, who their friends are, who they are dating, and other ways that they keep their parents or other adults from knowing the real details of their lives. In each of the examples, participants felt that they needed to protect the adults from worry:

> **Olga:** I don't want my parents to know about me being depressed or whatever because I hate seeing them worry. I know my Mom worries about me all the time. I don't like seeing my parents worry about me. It just makes me more depressed.

Participants explain that when the adults worry, it makes life much more difficult for the young people involved. For this reason, participants withheld potentially important information about their lives. Olga has struggled with bouts of depression and anxiety, but she does not want her mother to worry about her because she then experiences even more depression and anxiety about her mother's worry. In most cases, participants explain that the worry would lead to more restrictions and limiting time with friends. Participants experience such limitations as a major challenge.

Adults' Fears Justify Control of Young People

Another dimension of adult-centered status relationships between young people

and adults is the way that participants perceive adults becoming ruled by their own fear

and how that fear leads adults to organize to secure and maintain power and control. For

example, Josie described her middle school as a prison-like environment in which adults

created rules that are based in fear:

> **Josie:** That place is a prison. After we left, the eighth graders…. all wore orange
> one day to symbolize that they were in a prison and the principal freaked out.
> They are like 13 and 14, and they have to walk everywhere in lines like it's
> second grade. They can't wear flip-flops because going up the stairs [in flip-flops]
> is dangerous.

It is Josie's perception that school administrators created rules that are intended to keep

the students safe but have the impact of making young people feel like they are criminals

in prison. The fear related to young people's safety leads to policies that demonstrate

adults' power and control of young people's bodies inside the school.

Participants also perceived adults demonstrating power and control where there is

fear of judgment by other adults. Several participants described experiences in which

adults restricted or judged the behavior or dress of young people based on the fear of

what other adults might think.

> **Beth:** I know that adults judge teens on their appearance…, "Oh, look at how you
> dress. You're wearing a short skirt. You must have no self-respect. You're
> dressing like a teenager. You must be a thug or in a gang." It definitely comes
> from adults. The way you dress, if you dye your hair. When I got my nose
> pierced, my Mom was like, "What will people say? You can't get your nose
> pierced because it'll send out a bad message that I'm a bad parent."

Beth's example describes the adult-centered fear about being judged by other adults as a

bad parent. This fear is then communicated by attempts to control how she dresses. In

this relationship with her mother, Beth experiences her mother's fear being more about

how people would judge her mother than about Beth. This fear of judgment by other adults limits how Beth is permitted to express herself through dress and piercing. In this status relationship with her mother, Beth must respond to her mother's fear about judgment, which orients their relationship in the direction of her mother's fears.

Sometimes, participants felt that policies had been developed as protections for students but then turned into methods for some adults to establish control over young people. Olga described a scenario at her school where the Assistant Principal seemed to create random rules that restrict students at school:

> **Olga:** We have this Assistant Principal and he really thrives on power and he makes these ridiculous rules. Every morning on the announcements he will have some new insane rule, like we are not allowed to eat lunch outside the cafeteria because a few kids would go and smoke pot or something. But a lot of kids would sometimes go eat in the library or go eat with their favorite teachers, and now we're not allowed to do that….[They are] cracking down more and more…and we're just being constricted. It's just ridiculous because it's not stopping anyone from doing anything.

Olga felt that these rules were created to demonstrate power and control over all of the students in the school. In this and other examples that participants discussed, an adult with more status creates a rule that is based on the behavior of a few young people but imposes limits on all of the young people in the school. Olga suggests that what may have originated from the concern that some young people might be smoking pot, turned into a general demonstration of power and control. All of the examples demonstrate unequal status relationships between young people and adults that are adult-centered. In these relationships, the needs, feelings, and responsibilities of adults shape, limit, and define young people's daily lives.

Equitable Relationships with Adults

Data analysis indicates that participants in this study had very few relationships with adults that felt equitable, but every participant had at least one in which they felt respected. Participants cherished these relationships. Overall, relationships with adults in which participants felt that adults listen to them, acknowledge their feelings, and where the relationships feel more flexible were viewed as being more equitable and desirable relationships. When asked to describe these relationships, participants often said they could tell they were respected when a teacher knew their name or when a teacher acknowledged how hard they had worked in a particular class.

Participants also felt respected by adults who would listen when they needed to talk about struggles they were having. In these more equitable-feeling relationships between young people and adults, the participants described feeling respected and feeling good about respecting the adults who had taken the time to get to know them.

Orson feels respected by his mom even though she is the authority in their home. He feels that they can communicate in a way that works for him:

> **Orson:** Yeah, my Mom doesn't really listen to me all the time. But I mean, granted, I don't really listen to her all the time either… We both listen to each other and then we repeat ourselves a lot and then we never get anywhere in an argument, so…neither of us really get heard ever. But we don't really fight either….My Mom was pretty good. I liked being a child at home. Because my Mom has actually gotten really chill with a lot of things. I have a lot more freedom now.

Orson explains that both parties listen to each other even though neither party ever gets heard. Orson explained that his mother makes an effort to understand what his life is like from his perspective, and he feels respected by her effort. The dynamic that is described here looks more equitable and flexible than many other dynamics that participants

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reported experiencing with adults. Earlier examples showed how participants like Sunshine would be grounded for arguing with her parents. Orson and his mother have a relationship that is more equitable and flexible in that they attempt to listen to and respect each other. In particular, their arguments do not always end with his mother enacting power and control. Orson explained that his mom would often have an opinion about what Orson should do. If he gave her more information, she would adjust her opinion. This shows flexibility in their relationship.

Status Relationships Between Young People

Participants in this study also described navigating status relationships among young people and their peers. In these status relationships, older young people occupy a higher status and younger young people occupy a lower status in relation to their older peers. Angie described how she sees young people's status in relation to people of other ages at her high school:

> **Angie:** I think young people are really low. In high school, everyone looks down on the freshman. If there is upperclassmen/underclassmen divides, it's usually only with the freshmen. So I feel like that is kind of a parallel to greater societal divides between older people and younger people. Because with the freshmen, we don't like them because they don't know how to walk in the hall, they're really loud, and they think they're really cool, but they're just little freshmen. They don't know how to do things. It's so annoying, being in the hall. People don't know how to walk. You stay to the right, like you're driving, and you don't all have a big huddle by someone's locker.

Angie perceives freshman occupying a lower status in relation to older students, and she feels that this status relation parallels unequal status relations between adults and young people. In her example, the younger students have not yet learned the codes and acceptable behaviors of the high school hallway and as such are viewed as "little

freshmen." The image of little freshmen conveys a message about status and power. The older young people in school have more status by virtue of being older and the younger people have less simply because of their age.

A few participants talked about how status and power relationships among young people are frequently scrutinized by media, schools, and adults in general. There is very little focus on the ways adults bully young people but an excess of attention on bullying between young people. Participants agreed that bullying was dangerous, but they also felt that the spotlight on bullying misses the nuances that young people deal with on a daily basis related to how status and power relationships play out among young people. Rex described a situation that occurred when he was 14 and a few older boys were picking on him because of his age:

> **Rex:** I'm with my friends, and these kids come through and just start picking on us… just because they were older.... I just punched this kid. It backed him up, I guess. He just didn't come back at me. That's when I started realizing age doesn't make a difference. As long as you can show that you're not just here to get picked on…. I did feel threatened because he wouldn't leave so I had to make him leave so I punched him and he actually did and I was like "Oh, wow, this kid wasn't actually anything. I can go up and punch him again." I feel like I could be his bully, but I don't think like that. I didn't have an intention of just going out and hitting somebody.

During this incident, Rex had the realization that age does not have to mean that you get picked on if you can demonstrate some kind of power. He was not looking to fight, but found that punching the person who was picking on him would lessen the bullying behavior. Rex explains that he felt like he could "be his bully," which demonstrates that he realized he could use violence to counter the other boys older age. This example captures some of the complexity of the status and power relationships between young

people when it comes to age, and in this case, gender as well. None of the girls in this study talked about using physical violence to demonstrate power.

Insider/Outsider Relationships

Another dimension of these status and power relationships is an insider/outsider dynamic connected to other social identities and oppressions. In these relationships, young people are negotiating both age-related status relationships alongside status relationships related to race, class, gender, and other social identities. Insiders, in these relationships hold dominant social identities. For example, White, middle-class boys have three "insider" social identities.

Angie described a relationship with a boy at her school in which she felt like an outsider because of her socioeconomic class. As a girl who was raised poor, she did not know about the specific schools, brands, or activities that were valued by middle-class students at her school, and this led her to feel like an outsider:

> **Angie**: He was like, "I'm going to Yale." I didn't even know what Yale was. I didn't know what a clothing brand was until I moved [there]. Because people were like, "Oh, I got this at J. Crew"…and I was like, "What the hell is J. Crew?" …And I'm like, "Oh, I shop at Old Navy. Sometimes Salvation Army." I knew that was not a good thing to say, so I never told them where I shop… [Moving to this town] was a really classist experience for me.

This status relationship was not established through bullying or violence but was much more subtle. Angie had not had access to the same social and cultural capital as the other students. She quickly picked up messages about what clothing brands were desirable and which brands or stores she should not mention. In this example, Angie felt like an outsider because of her class background. Other students in her school had access to more

resources and as such had more knowledge about colleges and other middle- and upper-class experiences and activities. .

Equitable Relationships Between Young People

Participants described relationships with their peers that were more equitable than those they had with adults. These relationships were explained as some of the most important relationships in their lives. In these relationships, participants recounted feeling seen, respected, listened to, and supported. For example, several of the girls in the study described how they struggled to find adults with whom they could talk about romantic relationships. They expressed a deep gratitude for their friends who would act as sounding boards, give relationship advice, and were open to talking about having or not having sex. These were topics that participants felt they generally could not discuss with adults. Boys in the study also discussed the importance of relationships with their friends.

> **Orson:** Because you know that no matter how you say it or what you say that they're gonna take you seriously, at heart they're gonna...I mean, of course, all your friends are gonna make fun of you. They're gonna tease you and stuff but you know that they don't dislike you and you know that they are there and stuff so...but you don't know with adults. Because sometimes adults just don't take you seriously and just don't even care.

This participant knows that his friends will care for him and take him seriously. He is not always sure that adults will do the same. Most participants shared similar sentiments. Sunshine, Rosie, Josie, and Isabel talked about how their relationships with friends were a major source of relief in their life and that often adults would prohibit contact with friends, knowing how precious and important these connections are. They reasoned that adults would prohibit contact with their friends because the adults knew the participants would change their behavior in order to be able to see their friends.

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Several participants reported trying to engage with other young people in more equitable ways, remembering what it was like to be supported by older young people and wanting to pay that forward:

> **Olga:** I try to be really conscious of how I talk to people who are younger than me, especially like sixth, seventh graders. I remember so clearly being in sixth and seventh grade, feeling like I was a real person, and [wondering] "Why don't people respect me?" So I always try really hard to give that respect that I always wanted.

Olga had older friends who treated her as a "real person" even though she was younger. This experience gave her a reference point for how she wanted to be in relationship with people who were younger than her. Given these experiences, she is able to think about how she can counter some of the behaviors that older young people use to enact their status in relation to younger young people. She commits to treating younger people with respect and in doing so seeks to create relationships that feel more equitable with those who are younger than her.

Summary

Consequence of beliefs and stereotypes about young people become visible in status relationship between young people and adults and among young people of various ages. Thematic analysis suggests that young people experience a double standard of respect and unequal status relationships with adults that are replicated in some of their relationships with other young people.

The majority of status and power relationships between young people and adults are characterized by the participants as adult-centric relationships in which the adult not only occupies a higher status but where the needs and experiences of adults shape, limit,

and define what young people do on a daily basis. Participants described various ways of taking care of adults as a strategy to care of themselves. They also described ways that adults are controlled or ruled by fear for young people or by fear of judgment made by other adults and how this fear leads adults to seek to establish power and control of their relationships with young people.

Participants also gave examples of the few but very important relationships with adults in whom they experience more equitability and flexibility. These were characterized by a sense of mutual respect with adults who could be counted on to listen to and acknowledge the participants' feelings and experiences. These adults, according to participants, acted against or did not appear to buy into the pervasive assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes about young people. These relationships with adults were perceived to be more flexible, equitable, and desirable than the more adult-centric relationships that felt rigid and disempowering.

Participants also named status relationships among young people of various ages. These took similar shape to those of adult/young person where the older young person has more status than a younger young person. A few participants gave a more nuanced view of bullying than they felt has been portrayed, in general, by the media. Some explained that the media makes all young people look like either bullies or victims, and yet, participants did not experience bullying as something quite so pervasive in their daily experience. Participants also explained that often adults are the bullies with whom they struggle the most. These status relationships also took the shape of insider/outsider relationships in which other social identities intersected with age and where young people who were in other target social identity groups experienced feeling like outsiders.

<u>Making Meaning of Status and Negotiating Safety</u>

To feel some sense of safety and security, the participants in this study made efforts to understand the beliefs about young people that they encounter on a regular basis and either consciously or unconsciously developed strategies for navigating the unequal status relations between adults and young people. Themes that illustrate how participants make meaning of their status relationships to negotiate their safety are: 1) giving up on their own agenda to ensure that there will be peace rather than tension with adults, 2) internalizing negative messages about young people, and 3) interpreting or making meaning of ways adults engage in surveillance of young people in public spaces.

Giving Up: Physical and Emotional Harm

"Giving up" was named as a strategy for dealing with adults' negative beliefs about young people and unequal status relationships with adults. Most participants described a bleak picture of the unequal status relations between young people and adults. There were no reports of physical abuse or violence during the interviews, yet participants' stories conveyed a sense of harm that did not always appear to be in the forefront of their consciousness. This harm or threat of harm was often emotional and psychological. Sometimes, the emotional and psychological harm led to physical manifestations of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Sunshine and Josie named giving up as a consequence and a strategy for dealing with the beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes about young people that they encounter on a daily basis.

> **Sunshine:** You just give up. You just call it quits at one point. It's just easier that way I guess.

Interviewer: Is giving up a strategy to maintain power for you?

Josie: I don't think it's power.

Sunshine: Peace.

Josie: Yeah. To keep the peace…I feel like it's a mature way. A mature thing.

Sunshine: I guess by keeping the peace you keep the power in a way.

Sunshine and Josie frame "giving up" as a form of maturity and a strategy for keeping their lives peaceful. This picture of maturity is what has been presented to them as a set of desirable behaviors that can only manifest when a young person has given up on holding her own perspectives. As a consequence, giving up has the potential to impact a person's life when she associates giving up her agency as a strategy to maintain peace. Giving up and maintaining peace is a key component of the installation, internalization, and replication of assumptions and beliefs about young people.

Some participants described negative impacts on their physical and mental health stemming from the roles and expectations related to beliefs about young people. For example, Olga and Beth described some of the emotional and physical consequences of dealing with the pressures of being their age, which were connected to negative beliefs about young people:

> **Beth:** When I'm doing something fun I'm not thinking about the future. But I'm always like, "I have homework that I should be doing."
> **Olga:** Yeah. It's always in the back of your mind. I very rarely am not stressing out about something. And the thing is, a lot of times I don't even notice how stressed out I am. I'm too busy to even comprehend my own stress until I snap and do something stupid, and then it comes out in a bad way and it's not good. It's not healthy at all…. [I had to take] a trip to the emergency room for having a complete mental breakdown.

Olga describes having developed a high threshold for stress. When she has gone beyond that threshold, she has required medical intervention. The fact that her threshold is high

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speaks to the pervasiveness of the stress that she experiences from the pressures of the future orientation that all of these participants regularly encounter. Other participants described shutting down emotionally when dealing with the assumptions, stereotypes, and beliefs that many adults in their lives held about young people. Rex talked about shutting down after being overwhelmed by the pressure of experiences related to his age.

> **Rex:** There's definitely pressure on you. Sometimes there's too much to handle, so that's what makes kids more, like not wanting to talk to people.

Whether young people are shutting down, giving up, or keeping themselves from being able to notice how stressful things are in their lives, the impact is harmful. Participants also use "giving up" to negotiate their own safety within their status relationships with adults. Giving up is a strategy that participants might be able to use to decrease tension that they sense adults feeling. Sunshine and Josie describe this as peace.

Is it True What They Say? Internalizing Constructions

On several occasions during the interviews, participants demonstrated that they had internalized or accepted some of the negative beliefs about young people to be true. For example, several participants referred to themselves as lazy during the interviews. When probed about what a typical day looks like for them, they described getting up early in the morning, attending several classes, staying after school for extra-curricular activities, such as playing a sport or going to work, and then going home and doing homework. When this packed schedule was reflected back to participants, they observed that they were not actually lazy. These comments reflect a demonstration of the internalization of the assumptions, beliefs, and stereotypes that emerged during this

study, which cast young people as "no good," not able to be trusted, disrespectful, lazy, apathetic, "doomsday," spoiled, addicted to technology, and clannish.

Internalization of these beliefs was also demonstrated by moments when participants second-guessed themselves or expressed a sense of "not being good enough". Will described growing up around adults who were condescending and he describes internalizing a sense of not being good enough:

> **Will:** There was a lot of condescension. Adults thought they were better than you. I was always told that I was mature for my age, which is an annoying statement, because again, that's condescending. And that's really all it was, in terms of treatment, because I was surrounded in my early life by a lot of adults. I wasn't really around many kids. And so there was always that lurking feeling that you're not really as good as everyone else just because you're not old enough.

Will received subtle messages that communicated to him that he was different from the adults in his life because of his age. Being told that he is mature for his age rests on assumptions that people his age are immature. Being regularly exposed to this sentiment led Will to feel that he wasn't "as good" as the adults that he was around because he could act mature, but he could not change his age. He could only be "mature for his age."

Internalizing Surveillance: Being Watched and Never Belonging

Participants discussed engaging in a process in which they make meaning of their status in relation to adults and then consciously or unconsciously organize their behavior in a way that might ensure their safety. Most of the participants explained that they often feel that they are being watched in the community. In these stories, participants talked about being watched by adults along with what they thought the adults were thinking. In every story, participants explained that the observing adult was either judging the participants in some way or was preparing to approach the participants to question their

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behavior or their intentions. All of the boys in this study talked about being watched and followed in the community. Most frequently these stories were about being followed or stopped by a security guard or store clerk. All of the boys of color described being followed in stores.

> **Quentin**: People just watch me. Every move I make. One time in Florida this guy followed me around the store.

Quentin attributed being followed more to being a large Black boy than to his age. The White boys in this study also told stories about being followed or having the sense that they were being watched. Jacob and Orson told stories about being followed because adults assumed that they had stolen something from a store. Will described how, for him, being watched feels more subtle.

> **Will:** It's not a grand reaction. It's a subtle thing. They might just give me a look or something. But every so often someone who's older might look at me for a little bit and they might maybe murmur something to themselves or say something, "It's odd," or whatever."

In this case, Will felt that adults are often "startled" by his presence and by him being in the community by himself. Most girls in this study shared experiences in which they felt they were being observed and judged when they were in public without an adult.

> **Olga**: I remember one time Beth and I were at the mall at like 3:30 on a Monday afternoon. We had just bought some Oreos and we were sitting in the middle of the mall eating them, and everyone who walked by was just looking at us like we were stoned out of our minds, and we were just sitting there.

Olga concluded that the looks from people passing by meant that they thought Olga and Beth were eating Oreos because they had been doing drugs. It is not acceptable for young people to be stoned in the middle of the mall. Given this perception of people's looks, Olga and Beth did not feel like they were welcome in that space.

Participants describe making meaning of their status with the adults they encounter in public spaces by interpreting what the observers are thinking. In every case, if the passing or observing adult did not communicate why they were following or watching the participant, the participants had a story in their mind about why they were being watched and what the observer was thinking. Their conclusions about what observers were thinking could be used to inform action they might take to be safe. These stories demonstrate both an internalization of beliefs about young people and the sense that they are constantly being watched, being judged, and feeling that they are out of place without an adult to accompany them in public spaces.

Summary

Status relationships between the participants and adults required the participants to make meaning of their status in relation to adults and then consciously or unconsciously employ strategies that might create more safety. Themes discussed in this section were: giving up in order to have more peace in relationships with adults, internalizing negative messages about young people, and interpreting adult surveillance of young people in public spaces. The negative beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes about young people are so pervasive and harmful that many participants developed a strategy for "giving up" to have more peace in their lives. Participants also demonstrated internalizing negative beliefs about young people being lazy, not enough, irresponsible, apathetic, and disrespectful. This internalization process was evident when participants talked about being watched and followed, as they attributed negative thoughts about

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young people to the people who were watching or following them. Participants often felt out-of-place as a result.

<u>Discussion and Analysis</u>

This chapter examined how experiences and beliefs that communicate age-related status impact young people. Analysis of these data indicates that participants' status and power relationships with adults and other young people are both shaped and impacted by the negative beliefs, stereotypes, and assumptions about young people through: 1) adult's expectations of young people, 2) status relationships with adults and other young people, and 3) making meaning of status relationships to negotiate safety in relation to the participant's subordinant status.

Analysis indicated that young people's roles and expectations were communicated to the participants through intense pressure to manifest a successful future, messages that trivialize participants' current experiences, and the perceived requirement that they work hard for positive regard. Life in high school, which is popularly conceptualized as a period of "becoming," challenges a person's ability to see young people for who they are and what they are experiencing in the present moment (Burman, 2007; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Lesko, 2001). Instead, as participants shared, every decision and action feels as though it could make or break their future. In this period of "becoming" (but "not yet"), they experienced frequent trivialization of their problems, opinions, and needs by adults around them, by the media, and even through their own attitudes.

Participants spoke at length of the constant awareness, work, and attention they dedicate toward gaining positive regard. While some participants sought positive regard from all people in their lives, the bulk of examples shared by participants focused on working to earn positive regard from adults. Participants perceived that adults do not have to engage in the same efforts and practices for positive regard. Through roles and expectations, these findings demonstrate ways that information about status is conveyed to the participants. The intense focus on the future (adulthood) and trivialization of the present (childhood) imbues adulthood with more value and importance while reinforcing the idea that young people are incomplete (Burman, 2007; Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Lesko, 2001). Participants felt that they had to work hard for positive regard by "acting smart," which was perceived to be something adults wanted the participants to do. Beth reasoned that adults respond better to young people who dress like, act like, or are willing to demonstrate that they value adult-like behavior. Thus, dominant status is conveyed to adults via the idea that young people are "training" to become adults. Simultaneously, subordinant status is conveyed to young people through the presentation of adults as people who have completed or achieved development.

Status relationships where adults occupy a dominant status and young people occupy a subordinant status are, in themselves, a consequence of the negative beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes about young people. In these relationships, participants described a double standard of respect as a major challenge facing their lives. Participants regularly experienced a double standard by which young people must demonstrate respect to adults yet report that many (though not all) adults feel entitled to disrespect young people. The majority of status relationships with adults were characterized as

adult-centric in which participants found themselves internalizing adult perspectives to avoid conflict, taking care of adults' feelings to take care of themselves, and negotiating adult fear that leads to a need for power and control over young people. Though they were less frequent, each participant had at least one relationship with an adult that felt more equitable and flexible. Participants' status relationships with other young people reflected age hierarchies with adults in which participants noted that older young people occupy a dominant status and younger young people occupy a subordinant status. Insider/outsider relationships were described to parallel age hierarchies and race, class, and gender hierarchies in which White or middle-class or male people were the insiders and participants of color, raised poor or working-class, and female people experienced being outsiders. Even so, most participants experienced a larger number of equitable relationships with young people than with adults.

These findings are consistent with literature depicting colonial relationships of domination and subordination. "Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another" (Kohn, 2012, para. 1). While colonialism usually refers to the domination and subordination of states, here, the parallel is drawn of childhood as colonization in which adults occupy the dominant status and young people, a subordinant status. These relationships are assumed to be natural, pre-determined, and fixed. The double standards of respect, adult-centered relationships where fear, power, and control are familiar dynamics, and status relationships with young people that mirror those with adults all evoke aspects of colonial relationships discussed in Chapter 2. These dynamics continue to construct adults in the dominant role as young people are relegated to a subordinant role. Even so, power relations are always shifting, and there are always

possibilities for resistance. The following chapter examines ways that young people see

themselves exercising power in their lives

CHAPTER 6

WHERE STATUS MEETS POWER:
YOUNG PEOPLE TALK ABOUT POWER AND WHAT ADULTS CAN DO

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power related to childhood. This chapter addresses the third question of this study: *In what ways do young people see themselves exercising power in their lives?* Participants were asked open-ended questions that invited them to share their thinking about power and being powerful as young people. Because "power" can be an abstract idea, participants were asked follow-up questions to probe their thinking about ways they see young people being powerful or enacting their own agency on a daily basis. Participants were asked the following questions:

- What are some ways that you see young people being powerful?

- Tell me a story about how you see yourself using your power or being powerful in your daily life?

When deemed appropriate, the additional probing questions were asked:

- What kind of decisions do you make on a daily basis?

- What are some of the ways that you speak up or use your voice on a daily basis?

- What happens when you speak up or use your voice?

- What helps you speak up or use your voice? What gets in the way?

This chapter presents themes that emerged from the data about ways that young people conceptualize power, how power is exercised, and the lack of opportunities to exercise power. In addition to presenting the participant's thinking about power, several participants also made recommendations that they wanted this researcher to communicate

to adults who might listen about how adults can support young people to be more powerful.

Conceptualizing Power

A review of feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1990; D. E. Smith, 1987), Foucault's (1980) analytics of power, and Boler's (1999) framework for feeling power indicate that power can be and is theorized and conceptualized in many ways. Love (2010a) describes developing a liberatory consciousness as being able to develop awareness of our surroundings and the ways that oppression manifests and to move from awareness to action. Rather than giving a definition of power, study participants were provided the space to share their own thinking and their own experiences related to power. When asked directly about power, most participants initially responded saying, "I have none." After probing further, a picture emerged of participants' complex relationships with power. This section discusses four ways that participants defined power pertaining to their lives: 1) Moving from awareness to action, 2) making choices and decisions, 3) power to self-destruct, and 4) power in numbers.

Moving from Awareness to Action

Participants explained that power is both related to awareness about their lives and the world around them and to the knowledge or ability to act based on that awareness. Participants demonstrated awareness of individual, social, and cultural dynamics along with awareness of actions that could be taken in response to particular dynamics. When participants demonstrated awareness, it was usually accompanied by

ideas about how to deal with or respond to that awareness. Awareness was most frequently described in relation to health and safety issues and to injustice or oppression connected to social identity groups including age, race, class, and gender.

Some study participants described exercising power as having awareness about how something might be harmful and then taking action to intervene or help stop someone from making a harmful decision.

> **Rosie**: For example, like with alcohol or even bad decisions in general if you can persuade someone in a good way to step away from that, that would be a big deal. You would be pretty powerful if you could do that. …. If you can say to someone, "oh come on that's not smart. Why don't you just do this?" and they end up doing it… and even if that just puts the idea in their head, then that's a pretty good thing. That's a big step.

Rosie describes having the awareness that alcohol is not healthy and acted from that awareness for her own health and safety. She was able to exercise power in moving from awareness to action by intentionally modeling another option of how young people can socialize with friends without drinking alcohol. As she mentions, it is powerful to be able to plant the idea in a person's mind by sharing or showing alternative possibilities.

Some participants explained that in order to exercise power, they must: 1) identify who can exercise power in situations where young people cannot and 2) figure out how to influence those people who appear to freely exercise power. There was widespread agreement that young people need adult allies to back up their choices and actions. Participants saw one part of power in having awareness of the specific adults who would be allies to young people. The other part of power was seen as influencing those allies to support the participants' ideas and actions.

Isabel: You have to get people to agree with you. If you want to see a change, you can complain all you want, but until you have an adult to back you, the idea isn't shit.

Mazzo: You need somebody who has power, like a teacher.

Participants discussed knowing which adults in their schools were most likely to share power with young people, which is the first part of exercising power, according to their view. However, to garner and use adult-power, they had to know how to sell their ideas to adults. Some participants felt that they had developed this skill and other participants had no idea how they would go about this process. Isabel, who was one of the participants most prepared to exercise this form of power, given her leadership experience and close work with adults in student council and the school committee, felt that awareness was the easy part. She explained that getting adults to back up young people's ideas was a major limiting factor in students' opportunities to exercise this form of power in school.

Some participants framed power as having an awareness of social issues and then being able to act by processing those issues. Here, participants explained that there is power in having the awareness and ability to process and understand larger social dynamics. Particular dynamics that were mentioned are how young people are treated and issues related to class, gender, race, and ability. For example, Angie shared that learning about classism supported her ability to have a different perspective on her own experiences related to class:

> **Angie:** When I experience something classist now, it's easy for me to process. I can totally understand now. When I was younger I would be like "Oh my God, what is wrong with me?" And my Mom would try...and her friends who are basically my aunts would give me support. But I didn't really understand it.

Classes and programs that focus on social justice have provided Angie with a framework to view classism as a system that benefits some people and disadvantages others. This information supported her ability to put her experience of classism into a larger context and to avoid assuming that something was wrong with herself or engaging in self-targeting. She was able to move from an individualized, personalized analysis to a systemic analysis. There is power in the ability to provide a larger, systemic analysis, according to the participant's definition of power. In this example, adults in her life were able to support her to get the information she needed to utilize the awareness, but she took action to apply the awareness to her own experience.

Moving from awareness to action includes noticing when someone is acting abusively or inappropriately and then taking action to address the behavior. Olga shared an example of a teacher who had been treating her and another student unfairly at school.

> **Olga:** We went to [that teacher], we went to guidance. We just kept going up and up and up until finally we had to have our parents go into the principal. That's how bad it got. Because no one would do anything about it.
>
> **Beth:** Yeah. You have to get your parents involved because once there's other adults, they won't listen to just the kids. They will listen to the adults.
>
> **Olga:** Yeah. You have to get the parents involved.
>
> **Beth:** You have to get up to their level.
>
> **Olga:** We had to go to the principal. We didn't go straight to the principal. We went through the whole chain of command.

Olga had the awareness that a teacher was treating her unfairly and that she could either take action to address it or she could allow the treatment to continue. She decided to take action. Olga was able to exercise her awareness of the "chain of command." She took action by attempting to address the issue with the teacher and then with the teacher's

supervisors. When that did not work, she got her parents involved, drawing on the awareness that one can tap into the power that other adults have. Through exercising power by moving from awareness to action, participants were sometimes able to create interventions that stopped inappropriate behavior.

Making Choices and Decisions

The act of identifying choices and then making decisions is another way that all of the participants in this study identified "power." There were two types of choices and decisions associated with power: 1) personal choices and decisions that primarily impact the individual participant and 2) social/political choices and decisions that involve other people.

The personal choices and decisions that participants discussed encompassed a variety of behaviors, such as getting out of bed in the morning, going to school, choosing what to wear and what to eat, what to study, who to be friends with, and participation in school activities. Josie and Sunshine talked about the power they have on a daily basis to decide how much effort they will put into their schoolwork and class participation during a given day or how hard they will study for a test.

These personal choices were limited for many of the participants because the consequences of making particular choices are undesirable. Beth described a power struggle that can emerge between young people and adults in relation to the power to make choices and decisions about their own lives. She explained that sometimes teens choose to do things their parents do not like because they want to show that they are not being controlled by their parents.

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Beth: Rebelling, staying out late, going to parties and getting drunk. Doing things that parents generally don't like because they want to feel like they have some independence….They want to show that they can make decisions….I think a lot of the teenagers who have problems with drugs and alcohol, it comes from their parents telling them that it's not okay, and they want to lash out and show that they are independent and that they aren't being controlled by their parents. But then those... parents are like "You can never do this. I'll kick you out of the house if I find out." And then they end up having serious problems because their parents are putting this fear and pressure of "You can't do this." And…if you tell someone so many times that they can't do something, obviously they are gonna do it. I mean, that's just the way people work.

Here, Beth theorizes that choosing to do something that is forbidden is a way that young people demonstrate independence, which is associated with power. Young people can make these important choices about what to do with their bodies as a way of exercising power. Making decisions means exercising power. On the other hand, decisions are often made in reaction or relation to the limits that are imposed by adults. There are consequences to exercising this power. These rigid limits push young people to choose what is forbidden. By choosing what is forbidden, these participants suggest that young people feel more independent. When one is independent, as in not under the regulation of another person, one can freely make decisions, thus exercise power. Opportunities to exercise power are limited, given potential unwanted consequences, such as being kicked out of the house.

Young people can exercise power by making social or political choices and decisions that involve other people. An example of this kind of decision is organizing events at school. Allen explained that he has never had power in his life, but feels that seniors are able to exercise power at school. Here he described what power looks like for seniors at his school:

Allen: [Power is]…being able to do what you want…. Make your own decisions. We can't do anything…[in this school]. We're talking about high school in

general. Like messing with the younger grades. Not bullying, but hazing, you know what I mean? Not really...messing with the younger grades, actually being able to participate in events, like making your own events. Maybe you want to have a class talent show. Like that kind of thing.

Allen notes that seniors have power in their school, and that it is taken away. Here he suggests that planning, organizing, and participating in events for and by students is a way that seniors can exercise power. However, in his school, all event planning has to be submitted through the board, which effectively removes students from being able to exercise decision-making power, thereby limiting student's opportunities to exercise power this way. Power for seniors at high schools in general, he theorizes, is commonly exercised through the hazing of younger students.

All but one of the participants explained that they are routinely excluded or barred from making "big" life decisions. They are rarely permitted to make daily personal decisions about where they go, what they do, and how they will behave without running the risk of unwanted consequences. Some participants explained that young people are not allowed to make decisions because "decision-making is too advanced for us teenagers." For example, when asked what kind of decisions they make on a regular day, Jacob and Orson respond:

Jacob: [I decide] what clothes I get to wear, sometimes.

Orson: I don't even get to choose what I eat for breakfast. Like, actually, I don't get to choose what I eat for breakfast.

Like Jacob and Orson, most of the other participants expressed frustration with the ways their daily decision-making is limited. These examples served as constant reminders of the ways that they are not able to exercise power in the same ways adults can. Josie was the only participant who perceived that she was frequently involved in making big family

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decisions and more personal decisions pertaining to her own life. The difference between Josie and other participants is that she did not feel powerless at home. Josie's role as a cultural and social liaison between her immigrant parents and U.S. culture provided regular opportunities for her to contribute to her family. Other participants were not in this role and had limited opportunities to contribute to their families in such a vital way.

Power to Self-destruct

Destruction is one form of power that several participants agreed young people have the opportunity to exercise. However, contrary to the beliefs about young people described in Chapter 4, when participants described examples of destruction, they were always about *self*-destruction rather than destruction of other people or things. The power of self-destruction is being able to negatively impact one's own life or one's own body. In some cases, self-destruction is related to the power of making choices and decisions in that self-destruction is consciously or unconsciously chosen by young people. Several participants discussed the power of self-destruction at home and in relation to their parents.

> **Beth:** I don't have any power over them….Except for maybe just the fact that sometimes they are worried about me. I guess that could be thought of as a form of power because I want to make them worry.

> **Olga:** That's something...I feel like a lot of teenagers use that. Teenagers will be anorexic or cut themselves or something...for the attention. If I'm doing something like that, I am just doing it because I am stupid. Because I'm frustrated.

The power of destruction is viewed by participants as a method for young people to get recognition or attention from others. In this case, making parents worry is a way to ensure receiving some attention from parents. This exercise of power comes out of frustration

rather than from a desire to harm oneself or anyone else. Even though there are wide-spread stereotypes about young people being violent or destructive to other people, power exercised through harm enacted by participants in this study was carried out by harming themselves or being self-destructive. Participants indicate that receiving attention is the goal of this exercise of power. .

Power in Numbers

Participants discussed power that young people can exercise by making an impact as a group when they are gathered in large numbers. Occupy Wallstreet and the Internet "hactivist" group, Anonymous, are political movements that comprise large numbers of young people. Participants indicated that these groups have been able to make social, political, and economic impacts due to their ability to exercise power in numbers. According to participants, young people also exercise power in significant numbers through Facebook, Twitter, Internet campaigns, and other social and political activities.

Some participants talked about the power of getting young people together, in person, to make changes or demands that would address injustice. For example, some of the older participants described having power in numbers at school.

> **Sunshine:** I think at school it's a lot easier to feel like we have more power because…. there's like three administrators and there's like 800 of us… so it feels easier to have power because there's more of us.

The ratio of 800 students to 3 administrators contributes to the participants' sense of power. When participants felt that many students would come together for a common cause, they expressed more confidence in their ability to make changes at school. This sense of power in numbers supported Josie and others to take action to challenge the

cancellation of an important event by the school committee. This event had long been a tradition for seniors, and it was an event that freshmen, sophomores, and juniors looked forward to. Josie posted something on Facebook that started students organizing to challenge the school committee's decisions. One hundred and forty students came together to demand that their event be re-scheduled.

> **Sunshine:** It's kinda powerful when you step up and do something awesome. We had power in numbers because I think if everyone wasn't behind, behind us on that idea, it wouldn't have gotten anywhere. Since we all stuck together and came together as a whole, like 140 of us in our grade, then we were able to do something about it. Because they knew, if it was like two people coming to them, "Oh, we want Senior Dress-up Day," but since you have all 140, that's a bigger number to have to deal with.

Power in numbers made it possible for students to make a demand that had not been heeded when only a few students contested the school committee's decision. A few participants explained that exercising power in this way requires that many people feel invested in a specific issue. Participants explained that more often than not, student leaders were not able to garner the support of the masses. Because at least 140 students felt strong enough to participate, they were able to have an impact in this situation.

Summary

This section discussed four themes that emerged from the data related to how participants defined or discussed power in their lives: 1) moving from awareness to action, 2) making choices and decisions that focus on themselves or others, 3) power to self-destruct, and 4) power in numbers. Participants saw moving from awareness to action as a two-part process for exercising power, especially in relation to health and safety issues, like drinking alcohol, and social justice issues, like noticing when classism

is happening. Gaining awareness supports thinking about appropriate action. Awareness included knowing how power is exercised by adults and how to tap into that power to support young people's ideas. The second theme for conceptualizing power is connected to moving from awareness to action where the action is making choices and decisions. These enactments of power were personal choices and decisions that primarily impact the individual participant or social/political choices and decisions that involve other people.

Participants expressed a great deal of frustration that most of their options to make choices and decisions were limited because the consequences of making their own choices and decisions were undesirable. Many participants explained that they did not feel free to decide things, such as what to wear or what to eat. Because the participants' lives are so structured and ordered, exercising power to make a choice or decision often means having to go against the wishes, guidelines, rules, or structures that have been established by adults. Participants explained that the power to self-destruct is a response to the confines that have been imposed on their lives and is an undesirable way to get needed attention. Finally, power in numbers is a way for a critical mass of young people to make demands for change.

How Power is Exercised

This section discusses five themes that emerged from analysis of these data in relation to ways the participants see or experience power being exercised. The five themes include: 1) using one's voice or "speaking out," 2) using technology, 3) popularity and hotness as currency, 4) maturity and responsibility, and 5) privileges granted by adults.

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When I Use My Voice…

Participants discussed two different ways that young people can use their voice as an exercise of power. The first is using one's voice to move people through art, music, and poetry. The second way to exercise power is by speaking up to share one's thinking or to challenge injustice. Participants felt that organizing 140 students to use their voice together to get their Senior Dress-up Day reinstated after their school committee cancelled it was a clear example of exercising power. Students in their school identified something that needed to change, and they banded together, using their voices to make a change. They were able to observe the effects of their actions, and they felt powerful. Participants explained that using one's voice alone was not an exercise of power unless using their voice accomplished some kind of inspiration or change.

> **Josie:** I feel like speaking up isn't really power unless you get something accomplished. I speak up in my government class all the time but I don't really feel powerful.

> **Sunshine:** Yeah. I speak up to my Dad all the time and it doesn't get me anywhere and I don't feel powerful. I feel less powerful when I don't get anywhere. So if I get somewhere with what I'm trying to say or do, then I feel powerful.

Here, Josie and Sunshine conceptualize power as both a feeling and as observable change. In these power relationships between teacher and student or between father and daughter, the participants explained that they rarely felt they were able to exercise power because they do not "feel" powerful. They do not feel powerful because when they speak up, they are rarely able to affect any type of change. In fact, several participants described feeling less powerful when they speak up but are not able to change anything.

Another dimension of this theme is exercising power through art, music, and poetry. Participants perceived power in the ability to impact an audience by taking artistic

risks. For example, some participants explained that young people who are able to write and read their own poetry to an audience is a way they exercise power. Angie reflected on her first experience at a music camp where she learned to take artistic risks and use her voice:

> **Angie**: [I went to a] badass band camp. It's all women. I felt powerful there. I wrote my first song there…..I've been on a stage by myself singing with people like two feet away from me and using literally my own voice and my own words to write something....Having the freedom to take a risk and make a mistake and have it be okay and have all these people here to teach you how to be better is totally power.

Angie theorizes that she exercised power through the use of her own voice. Because Angie had never been on a stage to perform her own original work to attending this camp, she experienced some risk and vulnerability. Moving through the fear of making mistakes in order to perform a song that she had written is an example of taking a risk to use her voice in a way that inspires people through music. In this example, Angie inspired herself by taking advantage of the opportunity to write a song and perform it in front of an audience.

Using Technology

Participants felt that young people are generally more prepared to use technology than are the adults in their lives. Some participants agreed that they are able to exercise power through explaining technology to adults. Every participant felt that he/she was well-versed in how to use social media and that young people, in general, exercise power through this venue. Participants also agreed that young people are able to exercise power related to technology because they often have knowledge that adults do not have.

Will: …I feel like that's where [young] people feel their strongest….In terms of technology in general, or most of it, our generation just tends to be a little more powerful there.

Rex: Yeah, like Anonymous… and Occupy Wall Street, and stuff like that….They expose things that the news won't expose. Like if a cop would beat up somebody, that's not gonna be on the news. We love our cops too much. So they will probably be the ones that are gonna post it. If they find out that a cop beats somebody up, they will find everything about that cop and leak it everywhere.

Using social media to organize other young people and adults to demand justice is an example of a way that young people use technology to exercise power. Rex and Will perceive that young people are able to use technology and social media to challenge abuses of power by police and government. Groups like Anonymous use technology in the form of social media to gather footage of abuses or data about incidents and then expose those incidents using those same social media outlets.

Popularity and Hotness as Currency

Popularity was a major theme for participants in this study. Popularity is described as a form of power or currency because it can be used to persuade and influence other people. Participants associated the means of popularity to the trappings of economic wealth and/or to "hotness." Some participants explained that in their school, the young people from wealthy families that had lived in the area for generations were the most popular people in school. Hotness was gendered in that it was frequently mentioned by girls in the study and was used to refer to young people who are popular, skinny, wear fashionable clothes, and are often the objects of other people's desire.

Olga: [Hot is] skinny…. Rich clothes. Tight little mosquito bite breasts. Straightened hair. Everything that I'm not.

> **Beth:** It's mostly skinny and dressing to show yourself off….But I mean, also, coming back to sex equals power, a lot of things are like "If you can get laid, you're a better person."

Wearing expensive clothes means having access to economic resources. The other looks of hotness – being thin, having small breasts and straight hair – all reflect dominant images of beauty. Girls in the study associated being hot with sex, and sex equals power, so hotness is a means of exercising power.

When one is seen or defined as "hot" then they are more likely to be popular in school. Participants explained that this is an experience specific to young people because adults have other things, like careers, money, and prestige to help them navigate the world. Hotness was named by most of the female participants as their main form of currency and this currency is a means to exercise power.

> **Beth:** When you're an adult….I just feel like your success isn't riding on your attractiveness. There are a lot of things...attractiveness isn't what gets you through the world. It can, and it does, but it's not the only thing...with teenagers it's kind of like the biggest factor….If you are attractive, it's like you have a free ride through everything.

Beth points out that adults have resources other than their looks to draw upon to be successful. Young people do not often have access to these resources or the latitude to exercise this kind of power. Being hot is a way of exercising power in school where popularity is the main currency. The body can be used as currency to gain popularity, which is a vehicle through which one can exercise power.

Maturity and Responsibility

Maturity and responsibility refer to a set of behaviors that participants often associated with adults. Maturity and responsibility were mentioned in relation to

following rules, being able to see multiple perspectives, being accountable for one's own actions, and being able to be counted on by others. Being perceived as mature or acting mature and being given or accepting responsibility were ways that participants felt young people exercise power. Some participants explained that they were presented with more opportunities to take on responsibility when adults perceived them as mature.

Angie spoke at length about her involvement in a youth empowerment organization where she feels that she has experienced many opportunities to take on responsibility because adults perceived her to be mature.

> **Angie:** When adults first meet me they don't expect me to be as mature as I am. I don't find myself mature, but I've always been told "Oh, Angie, you're so mature, you're so easygoing, you're so smart."…. I feel like I have been given a lot of good opportunities outside of school to have a chance to be powerful. I just have shrunken away from them…. I don't feel competent enough.

Angie notices the connection between being perceived as mature and the opportunities she has been given to take on responsibility while participating in the youth empowerment organization. This participant explains that as a young person with a leadership position in the organization, she can share ideas with the other leaders and can be on sub-committees where she participates in steering the organization. Even though she holds this leadership position and has been supported to take on more responsibility, she says that she has not done as much as she could because she does not feel competent enough. Other participants also felt that maturity and responsibility create the opportunity to exercise power but that they had not completely internalized the idea that they would be able to take advantage of the opportunities because of their age. Participants explained that they did not feel they could exercise power in the present time but that they could become powerful as adults.

Being part of a community in which some participants had access to a lot of youth empowerment work and a lot of young people and adults who are interested in youth living big lives, there are other ways that participants see young people exercising power. For example, just as one can exercise power through responsibility, irresponsibility can also be exercised.

> **Angie:** I feel like there's a lot of room for youth to take responsibility and power. Because if you're irresponsible, I feel like you are using your power to negatively affect someone else's life.

Data presented in Chapter 4 showed that young people are often assumed to be immature and irresponsible and so may have more images presented to them of exercising this type of power. This participant identifies taking responsibility as a form of power that is conscious. Being responsible means making the choice to act with integrity and to be accountable to other people. Being irresponsible is often connected to being immature. In Chapter 4, data about beliefs among adults that young people are immature and irresponsible were presented. These beliefs about young people are connected to their developmental stage and so are considered to be "natural." Participants challenged this idea by naming that irresponsibility is connected to choices that young people make. Irresponsibility impacts other people's lives, and exercising this type of power can also be chosen.

The power of maturity and responsibility relies on adults to create space and opportunity for young people to demonstrate maturity and to assume responsibility. To exercise this power, participants felt that adults must first identify young people as mature and then work with them to create roles in which they take on responsibility. The power to exercise immaturity and irresponsibility, however, can be freely exercised by

young people at any time, and does not need adults to create opportunities for young people in the same way as that of maturity and responsibility.

Privileges Granted by Adults

Using or enacting privileges granted by adults is a way of exercising power that is most explicitly connected to adults. Participants described ways they exercise power in their daily lives through the privileges they were granted by adults. For example, Josie and Sunshine talked about how freshman are required to get a pass from a teacher to go to the bathroom during class. Their passing periods between classes last for only a few minutes, and there is not much time to go to one's locker and travel to the next classroom. This often means either being late to class or having to go during class. Given this arrangement, Josie and Sunshine explained that one way they are powerful during the day, as seniors, is by having the privilege to go to the bathroom without a pass. This is a privilege that is granted by teachers and administrator in the school. They are able to exercise this power simply by virtue of being seniors.

Josie was the only participant who had relationships with adults where she felt they were equals. She experienced this sense of equality with her parents through her decision-making role at home. Josie was the only participant who expressed being involved in making big decisions in her family.

> **Josie:** I feel like since I was the first generation American, my parents included me in a lot of big decisions…. When you first asked that question, "What's it like to be a teenager in your house," I thought it's not that hard, and I get to help make a lot of decisions.

Josie explains that being the first-generation citizen in her immigrant family put her in a position to share power in her home. Growing up learning two languages simultaneously,

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she was in a position to provide cultural information and interpretation for her family. She exercised power at home through shaping her family's understanding of the larger societal and cultural norms. This example shows one way that young people can exercise power through the role they play in supporting adults. None of the other participants in this study occupied such a pivotal role in their family's decisions-making process.

Summary

This section discussed five themes that emerged from analysis of these data in relation to ways the participants see or experience power being exercised. All of these methods of exercising power were identified by their ability to create an impact or make some kind of change. The themes discussed were: 1) using one's voice or "speaking out," 2) using technology, 3) popularity and hotness as currency, 4) maturity and responsibility, and 5) privileges granted by adults. Using one's voice was conceptualized as a way of exercising power when speaking up to challenge something resulted in a change or impact. Using technology was discussed as a way that young people exercise power through social media to challenge police and government. Participants felt that this was an area in which they have more potential to exercise power than adults, based on their often superior knowledge and skills using social media. Maturity and responsibility were discussed as ways to exercise power that are dependent upon adults to create leadership opportunities for young people. Participants suggested that power related to immaturity and irresponsibility can be exercised freely. Finally, some participants gave examples of exercising power through privileges granted by adults.

Opportunity to Exercise Power

Participants in this study discussed ways that they did not have power or were not able to exercise power more frequently than the ways they were powerful. When asked about power or about feeling empowered, their initial response was some variation on, "I have no power." Though there are ways that participants see young people exercising power, their interviews communicate the feeling and experience of powerlessness that are always present and pervasive. Though participants reported ways that they exercised power, they described both ideas about young people and practices that adults engage in on a regular basis that lead to ongoing feelings of powerlessness. Three themes related to feelings and experiences of powerlessness emerged from the data. They are: 1) charades of empowerment, 2) potential for future power, and 3) power corrupts.

Charades of Empowerment

Data analysis revealed several experiences in which participants in leadership positions at school or in youth organizations felt they were token representatives of young people. Participants described being frequently subject to situations in which adults intend to "give" young people power but felt that these situations are more of a charade. In these scenarios, participants are presented with an opportunity to participate or engage in some way that was supposed to be empowering for them but did not result in actual empowerment for the participants. For example, several participants reported that adults in their lives create an arbitrary set of options from which young people can choose as a way of empowering them to make decisions or feel a part of whatever process is occurring. Beth's story illustrates this experience.

Beth: Teachers are like, "How many points do you want this project to be worth?" And then we'll vote on it, but the teacher makes the ultimate decision.

Olga: Or in gym, they will ask, "Do you want to play dodgeball or badminton?" ….It's little things...it's almost just to humor us, though. I feel like the power that they do give us is just like..."This will keep them from rebelling."

As participants reflected on this dynamic, one explained that she could not remember a time when she "had power." Often, the options or choices that the participants are presented with feel arbitrary and unimportant. Here the choices are about points on a test or which game to play in gym class rather than about choices that would have a larger impact on the participants' lives, like school policy or who to hire as the principal, for example. When options are given, however inconsequential they may seem, the ultimate decision rests in the hands of the adults in charge. The participants do not feel that they are exercising power in these situations. Instead, participants see these actions as a method of controlling or manipulating young people to go along with what has been planned for them.

Participants also described the experience of having adults solicit their feedback and opinions as a way to manipulate young people into believing that they have a stake in a process. For example, some participants reported that teachers often ask young people for opinions or feedback but then fail to use the content of what was shared.

Josie: Sometimes I feel like when adults ask for your opinion they don't really mean it…."Tell me how you feel, and then I'll tell you why you're wrong."… Sometimes at the end of the school year teachers will hand out [evaluations] like "How do you think I did? What would you change?"

Sunshine: …I don't think they listen to that….Just to make it seem like you have some say, when you really don't.

These participants regularly experience adults asking them for their opinions but do not believe that adults care about or will change their practices as a result of the feedback

they receive. Josie and Sunshine theorize that adults want them to feel as though their opinions are important, but that the effort is more of a charade of empowerment. If adults do not listen when they ask young people for their feedback or opinions or do not incorporate their feedback, then there is little opportunity for young people to change that which they are being asked to evaluate. Exercising power, in this situation, would mean being able to impact a process or a relationship. In these relationships, the participants' feedback and opinions do not carry weight, and the teacher ultimately decides which feedback to act on. For this reason, the participants experience this as an example of charades of empowerment.

Participants shared that adults often create token positions for young people in decision-making processes. These positions were described as roles that young people are asked to play to demonstrate that adults care about their thinking. Young people's ability to exercise power in these roles has been limited or nonexistent. As with giving feedback, young people's opinions and ideas do not carry the same weight in these token positions as that of the other adult members of the committee or group. For example, Isabel held a student representative position on the school committee. Several of the participants discussed how the student position provided no opportunity for Isabel to exercise power in the hiring of a new school principal. Josie and Sunshine describe Isabel's role:

> **Josie:** She does speak, but she does not get to vote. She just gives them the students' perspective.
>
> **Sunshine:** But the students do not [vote]. We can just go and put our input but in the end we don't get any say in it…. [Isabel is] just there so it looks like they are trying to listen to us, but they're not. She's there for show for them.

The student representative is not allowed to vote in school committee decisions. As a result, the student body is restricted from the means to assert their voice through formal

channels. Sunshine theorizes that Isabel is on the committee to make it appear that the school committee is taking young people's opinions into consideration. In reality, this is a charade. This is another way that participants felt that an illusion of empowerment was used to manipulate young people into feeling that they are participants in important decisions making processes when, in reality, they are not.

Another dimension of this theme includes charades of empowerment in classes at school. Several participants discussed experiences in classes aimed at cultivating dialogue about social issues or politics. The opportunities to talk and connect with each other in these classes are completely controlled by the adult leading the class. When the teacher controlled the flow and direction of the conversation, participants felt that they were prevented from practicing vulnerability and taking personal risks with their classmates. They do not get a chance to talk more freely about their experiences with topics like racism, sexism, and classism. One participant described her experience in a course on diversity that aims to empower students in the course to both dialogue and to think about taking action to improve education and opportunities for young people of color. She enrolled in the class because she had heard that it was a great way to connect with other students around similar interests. She found that the teacher's pedagogy made it difficult to work with some of the social dynamics in the room.

> **Angie:** [In] class, because we talk about really intense social issues and personal stuff…. a lot of my friends who are in the class are like "I hate this class. I don't feel safe in it." And I was really looking forward to unpacking certain things. And we don't get to do that. It's just...it's only upperclassmen and there's kind of a divide between the juniors and seniors. There's one girl who is friends with some of the seniors and our teacher kinda hates her, because she talks a lot in class. Yet that's the only way to actually build community with the other people in the class is to talk during class, which you're not supposed to do. Which goes exactly against what the design of the course….When we're having discussions in class and talking about articles that we read for homework or something, that's when

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she wants us to be talking to each other…. You only talk about the material if you talk in class.

This course had been introduced to Angie as one in which students would be able to dialogue about intense social issues, like oppression, in a safe environment. Some difficult dynamics in the class resulted in Angie and other students not feeling safe in the class. These difficult dynamics include what appears to be a divide between juniors and seniors and what appears to Angie as a strained relationship between the teacher and a talkative student. Angie believes that students need to be able to talk to each other in class to "build community" and increase their sense of safety with each other. Yet, the teacher limits the class discussion to specific material and does not allow students to attend to the difficult social dynamics in the class. The goal of the class is empowerment, yet Angie explains that the ways the teacher limits students' engagement with each other also limits their ability to practice vulnerability and openness with each other. The teacher is missing an opportunity for the students to empower themselves to connect and interact with the material. For these students, this is a charade of empowerment. One of the course goals is to empower students to engage with each other about difficult social issues in the world. Yet, the opportunities to discuss difficult social issues in the classroom are limited by the teacher and keeps students like Angie feeling disempowered.

Potential for Future Power

Several participants associated power with adulthood and thus their future. When asked about examples of young people being powerful, exercising power, or feeling powerful, few participants could think of a time that they had felt powerful or had

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exercised power in some way. Several participants discussed having the potential to be powerful in the future.

> **Angie:** If you asked me to describe myself I wouldn't use the word "powerful" and I feel like a lot of young people feel the same way. We have to wait until we are at least eighteen to be powerful.

Like Angie, several participants agreed that young people could not be powerful until they reached age 18 or older. None of the participants thought of themselves as powerful in the present time, though some could see themselves exercising power in some way once they became an adult.

> **Angie:** I see most of my potential to be powerful... as an adult. As a person who's graduated from college already. I see myself being powerful as a writer after college, as an adult, specifically. Everyone's been telling me "Oh, Angie, you're powerful now," and I see my maxed out potential as an adult….I feel like I don't have a chance right now. I don't have enough knowledge yet.

Angie identifies three sources of future power: adulthood as a source of power, being a writer as a source of power, and college completion as a source of power. At her current age, she does not find any currently accessible sources of power.

> Like Angie, other participants argued that education provides the means to be powerful or to exercise power. Working hard in school now means opportunity to be powerful in the future.

> **Josie:** I think in working with the situation [young people] have, especially in education, you are powerful to, whatever is going on in your life, to mold your own future. If you go to school and work hard, you are powerful enough to change things for yourself. Not immediately, but by establishing a good education.

> **Allen:** I feel like that's more motivation, to have a better future and stuff.

> **Isabel:** I think the point is that you have the power to take advantage of the opportunities that education gives to you. I think all power is in your education.

For Josie, education supports students to exercise power to mold their own futures. Josie explains that one way of exercising power now is by working hard in school, which creates more opportunities in the future. Allen and Isabel agree. Isabel stated, "All power is in education." While working hard in education is one way these participants describe the present time exercise of power, it is limited to making the choice to complete the work assigned by adults to eventually become educated. Adults also ultimately determine the process one must complete to be considered educated. Through this discourse, study participants speculate that the goal of education is to support young people's potential for future power.

Power Corrupts

Perceiving power as something that will warp or negatively alter the person who exercises it can lead to a sense of powerlessness. All of the participants in this study wanted to behave in ways that are in alignment with being "good" to other people. To some, exercising power would mean something negative about the participant. Some participants discussed being uncomfortable with the idea of having power because they have been told and believe that power corrupts humans. They shared the idea that power itself is not a bad thing but that the pursuit and desire to have power will corrupt a person, causing one to think poorly about other humans. Participants explained that having some power will always lead to a desire for more power.

> **Will:** I don't really tend to feel powerful. I don't really tend to pursue power. I just don't feel like it's worth pursuing. It doesn't feel right. I don't associate it with positive or negative, but I kind of tend to associate the vigorous pursuit of power to be greedy, and greed is always negative for me.

> **Rex:** I believe that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Some of the participants equated power with greed. They indicated that one should not seek power because it would lead to their own corruption. Angie describes how her father's thinking influenced her view of "having power" as inherently negative:

> **Angie:** It's always been negative to me, having power, because my parents, my Dad specifically, he was baptized, but now he's Buddhist, and he's always talking about how politicians, some politicians and some people are really power-hungry and that's all they want so it's never been a really positive thing for me. With my personality, I never really want to take a leadership role.

Angie learned at home that a drive for power is harmful because "power-hungry" people only care about power, not other people. Angie cares a lot about other people and has internalized this message about power being negative. As such, Angie explains that she never wants to exercise power in leadership roles. For these participants, the message that power corrupts has led to a fear or unwillingness to take on leadership roles. This self-imposed powerlessness is based on the fear of becoming corrupted and doing harm to other humans. Without taking on leadership roles, the opportunities for participants to exercise power are limited.

Summary

This section reviewed three themes related to opportunities to exercise power that emerged from data analysis. The themes are: 1) charades of empowerment, 2) potential for future power, and 3) power corrupts. Each of these themes illustrates ways that participants either envision power or actually exercise power. This is followed by ways that context and relationship structures with adults limited the opportunity to exercise power. Participants described charades of empowerment when they were token representatives without the full rights of membership that adults enjoy; when their

opinions, ideas, and thinking were weighted less than adults in decision-making processes; and when they envisioned ways to empower themselves in the classroom that were limited by teachers' control of the curriculum. Participants also experienced limited opportunities to exercise power, given that they saw themselves as having the potential to exercise power in the future but not in the present time. Education was viewed as a source of power, in that participants could decide to do their schoolwork now in a way that might determine the kind of future they have, and yet this opportunity to exercise power is limited by the choices and opportunities that are created and maintained by adults. Exercising power was associated with adulthood and thus the future. Finally, participants associated power with greed and corruption. This association provided a context for understanding why some participants did not want to seek leadership positions or other opportunities to exercise power.

What Adults Can Do To Support Young People

Throughout all of the themes discussed in this chapter, one common element in ways that young people feel powerful or powerless involves adults. Each theme provides perspective on ways that adults support young people to empower themselves or to block young people from exercising power either through defining power as a negative thing or actively making it difficult for young people to exercise power.

Without being prompted by the researcher, several participants wanted the researcher to communicate some specific messages to adults. Participants felt that adults have forgotten how difficult it was to be a teenager. They wanted to provide some reminders about what young people need from adults.

Josie: I feel like teenagers have things that they want to do to give more rights to teenagers, I guess, but then they grow up and they agree. They become adults and then the cycle continues and no one goes for any real change, unless teenagers are supposed to band together, and I don't even know what we would ask for. Respect us? I don't know.

Sunshine: Once you're an adult, then you have the adult mindset. You don't have the teenage mindset any more. It's just this cycle. Once you're an adult you forget about being a teenager,….That's what I'm scared of. When I'm an adult, forgetting.

Participants indicate that they want young people to have more rights but lack the resources and opportunities to exercise power in ways that can make changes. Most participants felt that there are things that adults can do to support young people to have better, safer, and more enjoyable lives but that adults have forgotten what it is like to be a teenager. This section outlines the recommendations made by participants for what adults can do to support young people. Though participants did not describe it in this way, this is an exercise of power by young people—to provide direction and instruction for adults about ways they can support young people.

Stop Stereotyping

All participants expressed a desire for adults to stop generalizing and attributing the misbehavior of one young person to all young people. Participants explained that negative stereotypes keep young people from being seen as people. They keep the majority of young people who do not behave according to those stereotypes from being seen. Participants posited that if adults can stop stereotyping, they will also be able to stop doling out general rules and restrictions that are aimed at addressing the behavior of a small number of young people while making those rules and restrictions apply to all young people. Instead, participants would like for adults to deal directly with young

people who need to be held accountable for their actions. For example, Isabel talked about how her school library became restricted for general use after a few students were caught socializing in the space when they were not supposed to be there. Her recommendation is for adults to deal with those few young people's behavior rather than restricting the entire student body access to the library.

Listen, Listen, Listen

Every participant discussed a need for adults to listen more to young people. Most participants talked about not having adults in their lives to whom they can talk, who will listen without judging and without trying to fix or rescue the participant from whatever issue they want to talk about. Only a few of the participants indicated that they knew adults to whom they could talk who would listen without judgment. Participants theorized that if adults would listen to young people more, then they would understand more about what young people are experiencing in their lives and would be better able to support young people to deal with difficult situations. For example, Rosie talked about an adult to whom she felt she could talk who had died. She struggled to find adults who could listen to her. She wants to be able to grieve about the loss of this person who was dear to her as well as about everything else going on in her life.

> **Rosie**: It's hard to find adults who really listen to you and don't judge you and stuff….and I think I really needed that at that time so it's hard losing that and it made me realize that that's hard to find when you're young.

Participants explained the difficulty young people encounter in finding adults who they feel will listen without judging or rescuing or taking some other kind of action to fix the

situation. The participants suggest that adults take time out and make a point to listen to young people.

Acknowledge Struggles

Participants believe that when adults can listen, they will also be able to acknowledge young people's struggles. Some explained that one way adults can support young people is by learning about and acknowledging the struggles that young people are experiencing in their current lives. Participants want adults to acknowledge that young people are living very full lives in the present time.

> **Rosie**: …As a message to all adults, I think that you just need to remember and think about the millions of things that are going on in our lives. Because, I think that's forgotten a lot and I think you need to consider what we're going through and don't just brush it off as teenage problems. Like, it's legit. These are real things that are going on.

Rosie explains that she felt adults often trivialize young people's problems. She recommends that adults remember that young people are going through a lot and that young people's problems are "legit" or are valid and real. Some adults will need to listen first before being able to acknowledge the struggles that young people are experiencing.

Validate Feelings and Experiences

Beyond listening and acknowledging, several participants shared that they would like adults to validate young people's feelings and experiences. Isabel explained that sometimes she wants adults to get mad *with her* about experiences she has had versus getting mad *at her* for being angry or upset. She wants adults to remind her that her feelings are normal and appropriate given the circumstances.

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> **Isabel**: Sometimes you just need someone who's going to back you up. You don't want someone who's listening but who won't respond and you don't want someone who will psychoanalyze you. You want someone who's going to be like, "Oh my god, can you believe this?" and they're like, "Yeah, that's ridiculous."

Isabel explains that adults in her life are often quick to psychoanalyze young people. She explains that adults can show that they are supporting young people by validating their feelings and their experiences.

Information and Perspective

Another way that participants felt that adults can support young people is by providing information that helps young people to take a broader perspective. Participants wanted adults to share more information about finances, health insurance, health care, navigating bureaucracy, death, and information related to love, sex, and relationships. Some participants gave specific directions about what adults can do to support young people in romantic relationships:

> **Rosie**: I think what adults need to stress to us is that we just need to keep it in perspective sometimes. They don't need to say "oh you're not in love", because you could be. You just have to realize that maybe you're not going to be together forever and just accept that that would be okay too. Just be ready for obstacles and be ready for things that may change your plans.

Participants want adults to listen to how young people feel, acknowledge that their feelings are real, validate those feelings, and then supply information about potential obstacles. They want adults to help young people to think about options and possibilities.

Decision-making

Several participants stated that an important way for adults to support young people is to create decision-making processes that include young people as equal participants. Orson described why he thinks this is important:

> **Orson**: …Adults do planning for schools, and I feel like teens should have some power in that just because kids could be more powerful if people would listen, just because we bring another way of thinking into it. We have a whole different way of thinking. There's nothing that's the same about the way adults see things and the way kids see things. Kids see it from a point below adults. Like, figuratively and literally.

Participants want adults to support young people to be a part of the decision-making processes that impact them directly. Participants explain that young people are able to see things from a different perspective from adults and that their thinking needs to be represented. They also want to be able to participate in and influence decisions that impact their lives. Participants describe experiencing that they must have the backing of an adult to be able to exercise power in schools. Without this backing, they explain that their ideas would not get any traction. Adults can support young people to participate in decision-making processes in a way that takes young people's thinking seriously and supports them to exercise power in their own environments.

Make Room for Mistakes

Some participants suggested that adults give young people the space to take risks, make mistakes, and support young people to reflect and learn from these actions. Participants explained that their lives are structured and removed from the "adult world." They believe that structures, such as schools, curfews, and after-school activities, were meant to keep them safe and engaged. Participants explained that these structures kept

them from having the experiences that would prepare them to transition into adulthood.

Rather than telling young people what to do, participants want adults to make space for them to take risks. They want to be able to trust that they can make mistakes and be okay with the adults in their lives.

> **Angie**: I'm saying, teachers want this to be a place to take risks, but she just says it. She gives us opportunities to take risks, but she doesn't make it a safe place to do that, and she offers ways to improve yourself after taking a risk, but I feel like it's not the same thing.

This participant wants her teacher to support her class to risk talking more openly about their experiences. She wants her teacher to support students in the class to make mistakes. She wants to be able to reflect and learn by taking risks. When her teacher described ways to improve oneself after taking risks, this participant receives the message that mistakes are not encouraged. This approach does not create the sense of safety that participants are looking for. Having more space to make mistakes and see that things turn out okay is one way for adults to support young people to better determine when they can, should, and want to take risks.

Teenager = Person

Several participants agreed that it would be helpful for adults to remember that teenagers are people in the same way that adults are people, only younger.

> **Isabel**: ….I'm not just a teenager, I'm a person. I do have my own thoughts and ideas and it's not all categorized by the fact that I'm a teenager. I think that people want to get to know adults on a personal basis because they think of them as individuals, but people don't think of teenagers as individuals…. I prefer to be thought of as an individual the same way anyone else would.

Participants want adults to see young people as individuals who are capable of thinking well and generating original ideas. Seeing young people as unique individuals can

prevent adults from generalizing the negative behavior of a few young people to all young people. Participants explained that this approach would help adults to actually see young people rather than whatever stereotypes might be operating.

Adults Need to Heal

Several participants shared examples of adults projecting their own fears, hurts, and discouragement onto young people. Approximately half of the participants talked about fathers who had difficult childhoods and acted harshly toward their children, reproducing the father's childhood experiences. In addition, participants want adults to work on their own partnering relationships so that they can model versions of healthy relationships for young people.

> **Rosie**: …Maybe some adults maybe haven't had those fun relationships or those briefly serious ones. I think everyone should know that love… like what it feels like. Because it still benefits you. Just because you end up getting hurt in the end, like you know that there's those experiences in life. Like you can still find someone who's going to be like that.

Participants believe that people learn and benefit from "knowing love," whether that love relationship lasted or not. They believe that when adults have not had the chance to experience love relationships, they are not able to support young people to navigate any kind of relationship. Rosie explains that even if one ends up hurt in the end, there are still benefits to knowing love. Adults can support young people to learn about and experience the benefits of healthy relationships.

Summary

This section presented themes that emerged from data analysis of the ways the participants want adults to support young people. Participants in this study want adults to stop stereotyping young people as a group; listen to young people without rescuing, fixing, or psychoanalyzing them; acknowledge young people's struggles; and validate young people's feelings and experiences. Further, participants want adults to provide young people with information that will support them to have perspective about their experiences and life. Given the limits of participants' opportunities to exercise power, they call for adults to include young people as equals in decision-making processes, especially related to those decisions that impact young people's lives directly. To explore their own capabilities and possibilities for exercising power, participants want adults to make room for young people to take risks and make mistakes. They also want adults to challenge stereotypical and generalized thinking about young people so that they can see teens as people, as unique individuals who are more than the constructs associated with their age. Finally, participants want adults to engage in their own healing work, especially the hurt they experienced with their parents or in other relationships. Participants believe that this will support adults' ability to think better about the resources and support young people might need to navigate their own relationships.

Discussion and Analysis

This chapter addressed the third research question of this study: *In what ways do young people see themselves exercising power in their lives?* Themes that emerged from the data described ways that young people conceptualize power, how power is exercised,

and the lack of opportunities to exercise power. In addition to presenting the participant's thinking about power, several participants also made recommendations for what they wanted this researcher to communicate to adults who might listen about how they can support young people to be more powerful.

Foucault's (1980) analytics of power, feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1990; Smith, 1987), and Boler's (1999) concept of "feeling power" are useful for a discussion about these themes. Foucault's analytics of power provides an examination of the flow of power within networks of relationships through inquiring: "What is power? Who exercises power? What exactly happens when someone exercises power over another? What legitimates power?" (Lin, 2009, p. 8). Feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1990; D. E. Smith, 1987) and the concept of relations of ruling examine power relations between groups with different social status through the voice of marginalized groups. In this study, young people are the marginalized group with a different social status from adults and their standpoint informs these findings. Power relations refer to "a particular conception of power, namely, the ability of an individual or a group to constrain the choices available to another individual or group" (Rolin, 2009, p. 219). Love's (2010b) discussion of a liberatory consciousness has been useful here in understanding power as movement for awareness to action. Adults are perceived by young people to "have power." Young people are perceived as having no power or limited power. This perception limits young people's ability to see choices, which limits their opportunity to exercise power.

Participants conceptualized power in similar ways. When asked directly about power, most of the participants simply said, "I have none" or "I don't feel powerful."

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What they shared in the interviews convey more nuanced and complex relationships with power. Themes related to how participants defined power pertaining to their lives included: moving from awareness to action, making choices and decisions, exercising the power to self-destruct, and power in numbers. Each of these themes indicates that participants conceptualize power as actions in which they are engaged in their intimate and everyday spaces. They also illustrate their power relations with adults in which their options to exercise power appear to the participants to be limited or rare. For example, the ability to gain awareness and then think about taking a potential action provides opportunities for young people to exercise power in their individual domain but little opportunity to make impacts outside of their intimate spaces. Boler's (1999) concept of "feeling power" looks at how one internalizes the messages about the limits and boundaries of behavior. Participants who want to "feel power" have internalized self-destructive behaviors as being within the limits and boundaries of behavior, given that see very few other options. It was only when participants were part of a critical mass of young people that they were able to see themselves exercising power in numbers and voiced that they felt powerful.

Analysis of these data reveals that young people exercising power in six ways: through using one's voice or "speaking out," using technology, through the currency of popularity and hotness, maturity and responsibility, privileges granted by adults, and through self-destructive acts. Participants often described power as a more complex relationship structure when discussing examples of self-determination or when describing times they were able to change something that was not working or was harmful to them. In general, few participants gave examples of times when they personally exercised

power but rather were able to describe what other people had done. One exception was Josie and Sunshine's description of mobilizing a large group of students to challenge the school committee's decision to cancel their Senior Dress-up Day. They were able to use Facebook to connect with people and get people to commit to taking action, and they were able to envision the possibilities for challenging the adults who had not listened to the few students that had protested. The other exception was Josie's role in her family who had immigrated to the United States. She served as a cultural liaison, which meant that she was frequently included in making family decisions based on her knowledge of U.S cultural traditions and practices.

One common element throughout all of the themes discussed in this chapter is that young people describe their experience of being powerful or powerless in their relations with adults. Each theme gives shape to ways adults support young people to empower themselves or to constrain young people from exercising power. This was done either through defining power as a negative thing or actively making it difficult for young people to exercise power. Their discussion of the exercise of power in relationship to other young people was limited.

Though the data show that these participants are not powerless, they describe ideas about both young people and adult behaviors that lead to a sense of powerlessness. Three themes related to powerlessness were discussed: charades of empowerment, potential for future power, and power corrupts. These themes highlight the contours of the limits young people encounter that shape their experience of powerlessness. Participants who were involved in leadership opportunities often described feeling more powerless than participants who had not been the recipients of "empowerment"

opportunities. These charades of empowerment communicate to participants that either adults do not know how to support young people to practice exercising power in social and educational spaces or that they simply do not want young people to be able to exercise power.

Some participants posited that adults want young people to think they can impact their surroundings but are not willing to give up their control. This demonstrates the participants' awareness of the complex ways that adults can shape and limit young people's opportunities to make choices and decisions and take actions that would allow them to participate in the construction of their own environments. For those adults who are genuinely interested in supporting young people to empower themselves, this information can provide important perspective for re-imagining partnerships between young people and adults.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: ENVISIONING NEW POSSIBILITIES

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand how young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power related to childhood. Qualitative inquiry provided an opportunity to explore how young people make meaning of their status and power relationships with adults and how they see themselves and each other exercising power. This research examined young people's knowledge, experiences, critiques, and thinking about the period of childhood and adolescence within the context of existing literature on childhood and youth, a literature that has been largely conceptualized by adults. This study addresses the dearth of literature focusing on young people's experiences related to being their age.

The primary question that guided this inquiry was: How do young people in a high school and community-based setting make meaning of their status and power within their lived experiences as young people? Three sub-questions that allowed me to address the primary question in greater depth were: What information do young people encounter on a daily basis that communicates age as a form of status? How do experiences and beliefs that communicate status related to age impact young people? In what ways do young people see themselves exercising power in their lives? Listening to young people allowed me to hear the ways in which young people in these groups "line up, confirm, modify, and develop their ideas about.... childhood" and their thinking about their current age (Mayall, 2002, p. 121). In this chapter, I discuss key findings of this study based on the interviews of 14 young people with diverse identities. I situate these findings in the

context of the bodies of literature presented in Chapter 2 that examined: 1) childhood as a socio-political construction rooted in modern Western colonial discourse, 2) discourses of childhood as colonizing ideologies and practices, and 3) the colonization of childhood as oppression. Finally, I identify contributions to the literature made by this research and discuss the implications of this study for research and practice.

Chapter 2 helps to situate this study within the context of critiques of dominant notions of childhood, discourses of childhood and youth, and youth oppression through a social justice education framework. These bodies of literature theorize that young people have been relegated to subordinant status through a long history of discursive practices rooted in modern imperial colonialism (Burman, 1994, 2007; Cannella, 1997; Cannella & Viruru, 2004). For example, the child/adult binary evokes the existence of the "child" as separate from "adult," thereby constructing "adult" as the "subject" and "child" as "Other" (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Walkerdine, 1984). "Child" is equated with "savage," "innocent," and "underdeveloped." This child/adult binary puts adults in the position to "save souls" as children are constructed as individuals, who are different from adults and whose souls need saving (Cannella, 1997; Nandy, 1983). With the rise of Western science, a belief emerged that there was a true nature or an essence of the child that science could discover and understand (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997). The discourse of progress on a linear timeline constructs childhood as a period of development that culminates in adulthood. This discourse situates childhood as dependency and represents adult interests that are vested in exercising power to control young people. All of these discourse practices parallel those that were used to legitimize

and justify modern European colonization. This is understood by substituting child/adult in the colonizer/colonized discourses on colonialism.

Dominant Western discourses of childhood shape how we think about childhood, and thus how we constitute the child (and the adult). Based on the extensive literature reviewed in Chapter 2, this study proceeds from the conclusions that our current constructions of childhood have been developed over time and are rooted in colonial ideology. Childhood is constructed as a period in which the child is to be "socialized" by adults, in the same way that local people in the colonies were to be "educated" to accept and value the goals of the colonizer. "Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence...linked in thought and practice to the destiny of the nation" (Rose, 1990, p. 121). Socialization, like education, is not a neutral process but rather a political process concerned with conveying the morals, values, practices, and norms of society to the young people who are expected to champion and to reproduce them once they become adults. These colonial power relations, where adults occupy a dominant role and young people occupy a subordinant role, constitute oppression.

There is a gap in the available literature that theorizes childhood and adolescence based on young people's knowledge, experiences, and expertize about being their age. Lack of access to young people's perspectives about being their age allows adult perspectives about young people to be viewed as a part of the natural order (Love, 2004). The findings from this study address this gap in the literature by asking young people to talk about their experiences with status and power related to their age. Although these findings are not generalizable to all young people, ages 14-18, this study presents important findings that add to the available literature examining how young people learn

about and internalize their status, and how that learning shapes, limits, and otherwise impacts their lives.

<u>Summary of Major Findings</u>

The findings of this study indicate that participants are constantly exposed to information, interactions, and experiences that communicate age as a form of status through their relationships with adults and other young people, through media, and through policies, rules, and guidelines that regulate young people as a group. Study findings that indicate that participants regularly encounter assumptions and beliefs about young people that are: 1) negative and generalized to young people as a group, 2) justified by adults through common understandings of biology, 3) are produced and reproduced through institutional mechanisms like legal age restrictions, and 4) are combined with stereotypes about their other social identities,

Study findings revealed that participants were negatively impacted even as they employed strategies to navigate the beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes about young people within unequal status relationships between young people and adults. These impacts were experienced when participants navigated adult's expectations for young people, status relationships with adults and other young people, and as they tried to make meaning of their status to best navigate their safety.

When participants were first asked about power, 100% of the participants' first response was some variation of "I have no power." Study findings demonstrate how participants conceptualized power and described how power is exercised, and what participants experienced as a lack of opportunities to exercise power. Overall,

participants were very specific in their declaration that they felt very few to no

opportunities to exercise power in their lives. They expressed the awareness that, in their

immediate domain, the ability to be destructive with their own bodies is a way to exercise

power and perhaps the only avenue for the exercise of power available to them that is not

controlled by adults. Participants described nine areas in which they want adults to

support young people.

Discussion of Findings

Participants in this study are aware of having unequal status relationships with

adults and sometimes with other young people. During a time when young people are

often framed as lacking the ability to think critically, these findings demonstrate that

participants were able to think about and share their critical analysis of their age as both a

structural location and a social group

This study suggests that there is a phenomenon that takes place in families,

schools, and communities that shapes young people's social relations at multiple levels.

This phenomenon is related to adults' pervasive and negative beliefs about young people

that relegate young people, as a group, to a subordinant status in relation to adults. This

subordination status negatively impacts these participants in myriad ways.

This phenomenon can be called "hegemonic adultism" because this unequal status

hierarchy effectively positions adults, as a social identity group, to have more access to

class power, social power, and political power than young people. Adults' unequal access

to these resources conveys more prestige and status upon adults than young people who

have restricted access to resources without the support or assistance of an adult. Adults'

exclusive access to economic wealth and political power makes adults' culture into the dominant culture. The dominant adults' values, norms, practices, and worldview are centered as standard and more advanced than young people's values, norms, practices, and worldview. For their survival, young people are required to submit and consent to the dominant group's rule in order to have access to food, shelter, and other important resources. Even children in wealthy families must submit to adults in order to have access to their family's material wealth.

Hegemonic adultism mirrors many of the dynamics of social oppression described in the literature that help to explain large systems of domination, like colonialism and patriarchy, that impact relations of ruling in everyday life. This literature, which includes postcolonial and feminist theories as well as social justice education theories, shows that the process by which this form of adult hegemony is installed mirrors many dynamics that scholars have used to describe and theorize the installation of colonial structures and ideologies.

I find it most interesting that despite how pervasive, insidious, and intimate this form of hegemony operates, this study suggests that these 14 participants not only recognized some of the ways the process becomes installed, and the struggles associated with navigating dominant/subordinant power relations at home, school, the mall, and other public spaces, they were also able to articulate a range of resistance strategies. Most importantly it appears that by engaging in conversations with other young people, through focus groups and pair interviews, they indicated coming to awareness in ways that resemble some of the emancipatory moments and critical consciousness described by Paulo Freire (1970) and Love (2010b). In the context of this discourse, it is also

interesting to examine 1) ways that status is produced and reproduced via colonial

discourse, 2) why young people's subordinant status qualifies as oppression, and 3)

participants' resistance to youth oppression/adultism.

Status is Produced and Reproduced via Colonial Discourse

Examination of study data revealed evidence of a range of the colonial discourse

and discourse practices identified in the literature review. Colonial discourse was

mirrored in much of what the participants shared about the assumptions, beliefs, and

stereotypes that they encountered in their daily lives about young people as a group. The

frequency with which participants encountered this discourse and the level of awareness

and intensity of experience related to these encounters was unexpected. I did not

anticipate that the beliefs the participants encountered about young people would be

experienced so frequently and so negatively. Discussed in Chapter 5, this comment from

Jacob and Orson clearly illustrates both the pervasiveness of the discourse the

participants encounter about young people as well as the negative way that participants

experience this encounter:

> **Jacob:** It's sort of like you're standing in the middle of the street and cars are going both ways. People and their assumptions are cars in the street… and you're on the yellow line, except you're not trying to get across. You're just there. And then people that assume one thing of you, you're trying to get out of their way because they think poorly of you … and people are going the other way, thinking whatever they think, and you are dodging in between, trying not to get hit by cars.
>
> **Orson:** And depending on who you are, you get hit by a lot of cars. I get hit by buses.

Jacob and Orson referred to adults and their assumptions about young people. This

passage conveys both a sense of intensity and danger in relation to daily encounters with

negative beliefs and assumptions about young people. Jacob and Orson's comments indicate that much of their sense of lower status comes through their interactions and relationships with adults. Their analogy of adults' assumptions about young people as cars and busses illuminates the frequency and force with which they are hit by negative assumptions about young people and gives us a picture of the often painful process by which their subordinant status is communicated to them. This metaphor gives us a picture of what participants feel the consequences might be for stepping out of the status roles that have been made for them. When one gets hit by cars or busses, survival is not guaranteed.

Burman (1994), Cannella and Viruru (2003), and Nandy (1983) describe childhood and youth as constructions, having been "made-up" through versions of the same discursive practices that made modern imperial colonization possible. Colonial discourse constructed local or native people in the colonies as savage, ignorant, lazy, and as generally inferior to the colonizers. Just as the native is cast as Other in colonial discourse, so is childhood discursively constructed as the Other to adulthood and simultaneously created and re-created as inferior to adulthood.

Similar to colonial discourse about native people, participants encountered negative beliefs among adults that young people are bad, not trustworthy, apathetic, irresponsible, and lazy in comparison to adults. These beliefs about young people encountered through relationships with adults through media and through policies aimed at restricting young people, communicate lower prestige and status associated for young people as a group, and locates adults as superior.

Participants discussed several moments when their feelings, experiences, and challenges were dismissed by adults on the basis of beliefs about biology. The discourse about young people's bodies as being overrun by "hormones" was the most common of this biology discourse. The participants reported that adults regularly trivialized their experiences and used assumptions about hormones to justify not listening to young people on the basis that hormones render teens overly dramatic. Similarly, participants discussed times when adults imposed restrictions on all young people because of something that one young person did. The discourse of young people, like the colonized, of being "savage," justified closing a high school library to all students when one single young person was caught breaking a rule in the library. This action, taken by school administrators, conveys the idea that all students in the school are at-risk of breaking rules and so all are subject to the same restriction as the offending student. These experiences reproduce the colonial discourses of young people as savage, lazy, dangerous, and biologically inferior to frame young people as subordinant to adults and in need of adult control.

In this hierarchy, adults are constructed as more complete human beings who have achieved the goal of development, while young people are continuously constructed as "becoming." Jacob's and Orson's metaphor and other participants shared experiences demonstrate that they experience and are aware of these discourse practices on a daily basis. Even if adults occupy their status position unconsciously, the discourses and discourse practices continue to communicate adults' higher status in relation to younger people through adults' acceptance of their own dominant status. As negative and

generalized assumptions about young people are engaged, adults are continuously re-constructed as superior to young people.

Discourses of childhood implement rationales and tools from colonialist practices that provide the means for both the replication and installation of unequal status relationships between young people and adults where adults are the dominant group and young people the subordinant (Nandy, 1983; Stoler; 2006). The adult group is constructed as superior and the younger group as inferior. This dynamic is viewed as natural and is justified with biological arguments that view young people as developing and adults as developed (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997). As the supposed inferior group, young people are viewed as potential during their state of "becoming," and as tools for progress toward a future that is imagined by adults. This discourse gives adults free reign over the present and relegates young people to a future that they have been excluded from constructing.

Participants provided a picture of the replication of these rationales and discourses. Josie and Sunshine discussed how they experienced teenagers, in general, being "underestimated and misunderstood" by adults. What teenagers have to say about their own lives is not listened to because "[adults] don't care." When I asked them if they had a theory about why that happens, they replied:

> **Josie**: Teenagers will say that [they are underestimated and misunderstood], but then they get older and forget about it. I feel like teenagers have things that they want to do to give more rights to teenagers….but then they grow up and they agree [with the adults who came before them]. They become adults and then the cycle continues and no one goes for any real change, unless teenagers are supposed to band together, and I don't even know what we would ask for. Respect us.

> **Sunshine**: Once you're adult, then you have the adult mindset. You don't have the teenage mindset any more. It's just this cycle…Once you're an adult you forget about being a teenager, kind of….That's what I'm scared of. When I'm an adult, forgetting.

Here Josie and Sunshine describe a major issue that they see young people facing (being underestimated and misunderstood). They explain that once young people age into adulthood, they have developed "the adult mindset." This adult mindset constitutes an internalization of colonial discourses about young people. Once young people become adults and they are able to occupy the dominant status, they no longer have incentive to challenge this *status quo*? It may be that Sunshine is afraid of forgetting about the oppression of young people once she is able to reap the benefits of adulthood.

The findings from this study help to fill certain gaps in the literature regarding the replication and installation of colonial relationships. The installation of negative beliefs about young people was reflected through participants' discussion of how they internalize negative beliefs about young people as a group. They described the process of replication through the enactment of those beliefs by individuals, social practices, or institutional policies and practices. Participants talked about "giving up" on what they want in order to avoid conflict with adults; internalizing negative messages about young people being lazy, apathetic, irresponsible, and disrespectful; and of internalizing a sense of always being watched and so not belonging (especially in public spaces). According to participants in this study, the consequences of predominant beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes about young people and the status relationships that accompany them is the limiting of possibilities for young people in the present.

Where There is Unequal Status, There is Often Oppression

As I conducted the interviews and data analysis, I was struck by parallels between participants' experiences related to being their age and the ways that members of other targeted groups have described their experiences with ableism, racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppressions. Indeed, the participants in this study comprise a diverse group across race and gender. Four students "came out" about having learning disabilities. In fact, every young person in the study had at least one social identity through which they experienced oppression in addition to their age. I was not surprised to hear that the boys of color in the study had been followed in stores, as this is an experience that has been well documented and discussed in the literature on racism. I was, however, surprised to find that all of the White boys in the study also reported being watched and followed by adult employees in stores. They discussed being threatened and harassed by adults in public spaces. The boys of color and the White boys were both experiencing youth oppression, while racism magnified this experience for the boys of color. In all of these situations, adults occupied a dominant status over the boys in the study on the basis of age.

This study expands existing theory about young people in society based on consideration of unequal status relationships between adults as a group and young people as a group as characterizing oppression. Status relationships are characterized by domination and subordination, which has been articulated as a component of oppression in both postcolonial literature (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963; Nandy, 1983; Ngugi, 1981; Said, 1993; Spivak, 1988) and in oppression theory presented in social justice education literature (Hardiman et al., 2010; Tatum, 2013, Young, 2000). Youth oppression/adultism

is also hegemonic (Hall, 1986). This means that the roles for adults and young people are presented as both natural and inevitable, providing few options other than consenting to play one's assigned role in the hierarchy. For example, participants recounted a situation where adults on their school committee had agreed to include a student representative on the committee. However, they did not permit that student's participation to equal that of their adult counterparts. The student, Isabel, who was also a participant in this study, was not permitted to speak unless spoken to during some key meetings and was not permitted to vote during the search process for a new high school principal. This arrangement effectively marginalized Isabel on the committee. These adults accepted their own hierarchical roles and dominant status as adults as natural and inevitable.

Adults, as the ruling group, sustain domination through economic wealth and political power while limiting young people's participation in both of these realms. Adult domination is further sustained by making adult culture the dominant culture and then using that domination to legitimize adult-rule (Hall, 1986). Given the roles and expectations presented to young people, adults are able to maintain power by winning a large degree of young people's "spontaneous consent" (p.15). This results from the confidence that young people have in the adults as the dominant group. This confidence comes from the prestige associated with the dominant group's status and access to resources (Hall, 1986). Isabel's experience with marginalization on the school committee exemplifies ways that adults are able to sustain domination through political power. Her experience also illustrates adults' unquestioned economic domination in that no one Isabel's age would have been eligible to apply for any employment at her school. Even though participants were upset that they were not able to participate in the decision-

making process for hiring a new principal, they did not shut down the school or stop the process in any other way. Adults were able to hire the person they wanted, counting on the "spontaneous consent" of young people in the school.

This internalization of status relationships is consistent with the process of hegemonic adultism: a dynamic where young people submit and consent to adult power with love and care. Participants in this study described transforming their perspectives to be more in alignment with adults' as a way to experience less conflict. Spontaneous consent requires that participants internalize the beliefs about young people and agree to a subordinant status relationship with adults. The internalization of negative beliefs was apparent in these data when participants referred to themselves as lazy and irresponsible and when they referred to the challenges they experience as "teenage problems." The term "teenage problems" is used to indicate that the teen's problems are less relevant, important, or serious than adult problems. This process supports participants' spontaneous agreement to the diminution of the significance of the problems they face, and their spontaneous consent to their own exclusion from the political and economic life of the society. This exclusion further replicates and maintains the dominant group's status, as they are able to maintain their own access to prestige, position, and resources.

When provided the opportunity to critically reflect on the beliefs they had internalized about young people, participants in the study often noticed that some of their beliefs about themselves were not actually true. Hegemonic adultism requires that young people internalize dominant narratives about young people as a group to justify their subordinant status as natural and their developmental capabilities as inferior based on biology. When the participants were able to reflect on the beliefs they had internalized,

they were able to view themselves in a different light and became less willing to accept the story about young people that had been presented to them and that they had internalized.

Similar to every other form of oppression, the oppression of young people as a social group is harmful to young people. Given that adults were once young people, it would seem that no one escapes the harm of this form of oppression. As such, adults have a vested interest in exploring adultism and striving to envision and create different possibilities for relationships with young people. It is possible that once young people transition into adulthood, the harms of youth oppression no longer impact them. It is more likely that those hurts accompany us into adulthood. Given the ease with which formerly young people are able to practice the subordination of young people when they become adults, it is likely that the oppression experienced as young people and internalized while being a young person is then acted out once emerging into adult, dominant status. There may be opportunities for adults to rethink the differential status relationships between adults and young people while taking steps to create more fluid and flexible status and power relations between young people and adults.

Power and Resistance

When I asked young people about times when they felt power, I expected them to have more easily accessible anecdotes illustrating the ways that young people exercise power. It was surprising when each participant responded to this question with some variation of "I've never had power." The participants in this study are active, empowered, complicated human beings, coming from different contexts and histories. They exist

within the status relationships described in this study and are targeted by youth

oppression and other oppressions as well. Yet, this is not the only story to tell about these

participants.

Themes presented in this study demonstrate that participants are not passive

recipients of adult knowledge in schools. They are already critical thinkers. When the

time and space was created for participants to talk about being their age, they were able

to name and critique the power relations between young people and adults as well as

those power relations that they experience across other social identity groups among

young people. Since colonization is never a complete process (Weenie, 2000), and it is

possible that young people are able to maintain a sense of themselves as young people,

this study highlights the importance of including young people's voices and perspectives

on how these power relations between adults and young people can become more fluid

rather than rigid and emergent rather than pre-determined.

Gramsci's (1971) concept of counter-hegemony is useful here. Carnoy (1989)

explains why Gramsci developed the concept of counter-hegemony:

> to describe the process of building a revolutionary culture rooted in existing
> subordinate culture shaped and extended through a revolutionary political party.
> The aim of that party, as Gramsci says was to develop an alternative to dominant-
> class capitalist values and norms, and, on the basis of that revolutionary culture, to
> overthrow the capitalist state. (p. 16)

McLaren (1998) argues that schools can play a role in developing an alternative world-

view. Giroux (1989) supports Gramsci's intention of "viewing intellectuals as not

elaborators of dominant culture but as a vital fundamental social and political force in a

counterhegemonic struggle" (p. 135). In these views, adult teachers/educators can support

student's ability to think critically about the world around them, when they have

internalized the common-sense perspectives about the world. Students can support teachers/educators, who are often adults, to develop their ability to think more critically about their relationships with young people. By doing so, there is a chance to develop counter-hegemonic movement that is envisioned, driven, and led by young people with adults as partners.

Young people and adults can be powerful even when they do not feel powerful. Boler (1999) described two aspects of feeling power that are relevant to this discussion. On one hand, participants describe "feeling *power*," which Boler frames as the experience of internalizing social control and "socially enforced rules of power" (p. 4). Participants felt *power* all of the time, given the extent to which their lives are constrained by the rules, limits, and laws at home, in school, and in the community. Participants described feeling *power,* as adults exercised power over their bodies and lives.

On the other hand, Boler (1999) distinguishes feeling *power* from *feeling* power. The latter provides a lens for examining the intersection of power and emotions. *Feeling* power, with an emphasis now on "feeling," supports taking a second look at story lines about young people's behavior in order to explore how resistance occurs. Participants' few examples of power were related to times when they *felt* powerful. These were moments when participants were acting against power being exercised over their lives and bodies to resist oppression. After reflecting on questions about when they felt powerful (I did not ask about feeling or experiencing powerlessness) and after sharing experiences related to feeling powerless or "not having power," participants were able to

describe some examples of ways that they or other young people have been powerful. Yet, few of them had ever *felt* that *they* were powerful.

Boler (1999) argues that young people internalize messages about the limits and boundaries of their own ability to exercise power. Study participants described experiencing "charades of empowerment" in leadership positions and having potential to be powerful in the future but not in the present. They also discussed having internalized the idea that power corrupts and reasoned that they should not try to be powerful for fear of their own corruption. These three themes were connected to participants' description of persistent, internalized feelings of powerlessness. Participants saw themselves as having potential to be powerful adults in the future, but had a hard time seeing themselves as people who can be powerful in the present time. Even the participants who were engaged in youth leadership positions experienced the "empowerment" part of their work as often more disempowering and discouraging.

The ways that young people are trivialized may contribute to this experience. Tuck and Yang (2013) explain how young people's resistance is treated as "precious" (p. 4).

> Because youth as a structural location is conflated with youth as a developmental category, youth resistance often gets special treatment, gets made precious. When youth resistance is treated like a precious thing, the real theories of change being theorized through youth resistance get trumped by a larger theory of change around youth as pre-adults. We maintain that there is nothing unordinary about youth resistance or resistance. Resistance is happening all the time, and anyone can be called to resistance at any time. (p. 4)

Participants in this study often described resistance, yet in that resistance they did not "feel" powerful. Participants conceptualized power as having the ability to move from awareness to action, make choices and decisions, engage in self-destruction, and display "power in numbers" by gathering many young people to transform a specific problem

that had been identified by the participants. These are all examples of power *and* resistance. In these ways, participants were able to "*feel* power" by challenging the limits of power that they had perceived or internalized (Boler, 1999). This occurred when the participants exercised self-destruction or the power to harm their own bodies and when they exercised "power in numbers." In both of these instances, participants were acting against power being exercised over their lives and bodies to resist oppression (Boler, 1999). Acts of self-destruction were demonstrations to the participants, themselves, of their ability to exercise some control over their own bodies and to make choices that could not be constrained by the relations of ruling with adults (Rolin, 2009). In the Senior Dress-up Day action, participants tapped into their social networks of young people to organize around a common cause and, in doing so, were able to challenge adults beyond what they would ordinarily envision as possible. They were able to challenge the decision adults had made, and they were able to have that decision changed to one that they favored. Thus, these participants were able to *feel* power. Each of these exercises of power is also an act of resistance to the daily experiences of youth oppression.

This conceptualization of power reflects an understanding of how power can move in different directions. It further reflects a more nuanced and complex understanding of power than simplistic "power over" theories of power (Foucault, 1980; Kreisberg, 1992). Viewing the act of making a choice as an exercise of power, for example, makes the ability to exercise power something that resides within each individual. Themes that illustrate ways participants saw themselves or other people able to exercise power included using their voice to impact a situation, using technology for social change, using popularity and "hotness" as a form of currency, engaging maturity and responsibility or

irresponsibility, and when behaving in ways that resulted in the receipt of privileges granted by adults. Each of these themes reflects relations of ruling, which Rolin (2009) defines as "the ability of an individual or group to constrain the choices available to another individual or group" (p. 219).

While adults have the ability to monitor and limit the choices of young people, participants demonstrated their ability to engage forms of resistance. One rather extraordinary exercise of power occurred spontaneously when participants requested that I include in the research report actions adults can take to support young people that were recommended by the participants. The recommendations made by participants became the catalyst to analyze study data for other recommendations that participants had made less explicitly. The list of suggestions include:

- Challenge the stereotyping of young people as a group
- Listen to young people
- Acknowledge young people's struggles
- Validate young people's feelings and experiences
- Provide young people with information and support perspective taking
- Include young people in decision-making in a real way
- Make room for young people to make mistakes
- Remember that teenager = person
- Adults need to heal

The existence of youth empowerment programs and youth leadership positions suggest to participants that adults have a desire to support young people to be powerful, yet participants explained that adults' efforts often do not work for them. Those in the dominant position believe that they know what is best for those who are in the subordinant position (Freire, 1970). In this case, adults believe they know what is best for

young people. Given that adults' efforts have not worked for these young participants, these nine recommendations provide a pathway through which adults can enter into their social justice work as partners with young people.

In the final analysis, these participants are not only aware, but understand status and power related to being their age. They experience their subordinant status in relation to adults all of the time. They articulated a sense of powerlessness and are able to name and experience limited opportunities to exercise power. They also experience the pervasive restrictions that adults, as a group, impose on young people, constraining their opportunities to exercise power. They recognize that the opportunities for them to consciously and deliberately engage in the exercise of power is largely restricted or constrained, controlled, and limited except in cases where they might destroy, inflict harm on self or others, or withhold from adults that which adults want from them.

This ultimately reflects the colonization of young people through the establishment and maintenance of a colonial relationship, whereby adults occupy the role of colonizer or dominant, and young people are the colonized or subordinant. This is mediated by the Western discourse of becoming in that the only way to change the colonial relationships is by aging out of childhood. The only way for a young person to move out of the colonized status is by aging and becoming an adult. Participants demonstrate that they understand the potential consequences of failing to comply with adult wishes in this hegemonic, colonial relationship. As Jacob's and Orson's metaphor illustrates, the consequences can be quite harmful. To avoid the consequences, many participants talked about "giving up" or aligning with adults to decrease tension and conflict with adults at home, in schools, and in their communities. When they aligned

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themselves with adults, they articulated being able to exercise more power but that power comes through privileges that are granted by and can be taken away by adults. Thus, they are locked into hegemonic dynamics with adults.

Many of the participants shared their vision of how their lives can be transformed, and adults are part of that vision. The participants called for active, engaged, and accountable allyship from adults. They asked that adults remember their own struggles and challenges related to being a young person so that they may disrupt the adult supremacy that invades their homes, shapes their education, and constrains their movement in their own communities. They protest the notions that would dismiss young people's experiences as natural, normal, and inevitable. Their resistance is not "precious" but powerful and important. Their resistance creates opportunities for adults and young people to create different relationships. These opportunities should be explored in social justice education theory and practice.

Implications for Social Justice Education Theory and Practice

Current SJE theory and practice focuses on racism, classism, sexism, transgender oppression, religious oppression, heterosexism, and ableism. Very little theorizing has been done in SJE about the oppression of young people. It is evident that other oppressions are used in the service of adultism. SJE theory could benefit from an examination of these intersections. For example, racism and classism appear to be used in the service of youth oppression through the implementation of zero-tolerance policies in schools and "Stop and Frisk" policies that overwhelmingly target young people (and

especially boys) of color. One of the significant contributions of this study has been to highlight this gap in SJE theorizing, most of which has been produced by adults.

For some, SJE is an approach for examining social justice issues (Zúñiga et al., 2014) and seeing them more clearly (Adams et al., 2010). For other theorists, transforming and ending oppression is a central goal of SJE (Freire, 1970; Love, 2010b). The findings in this research provide critical data for theoretical and conceptual work and practice of all of these approaches to SJE. Young people are not only targeted by racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, transgender oppression, and religious oppression; they also share a common experience of being targeted by adultism. Given their intersecting and multiple social identities, they will have different and unique standpoints through which they make meaning and engage the world around them (Collins, 1990; D. E. Smith, 1987). Social justice education practitioners of all ages would do well to take stock of these varying realities while examining the common experience of youth oppression to inform the development of strategies for transforming all oppression including youth oppression.

If there is such a thing as a foundational oppression, youth oppression should be explored as a foundational oppression. All forms of oppression rely on members of social groups to play the roles of dominant or subordinant. The findings of this study suggest that young people learn to play the roles of both dominant and subordinant through their experiences with youth oppression. As young people, these participants described daily experiences that require their demonstration of subordination to adults. These experiences teach them how to play the role of subordinant while teaching them to identify and desire the role of dominant. Memmi (1965) theorized that the colonized want to become like the

colonizer, to become the colonizer in an effort to change or distance themselves from the conditions of the oppression related to colonization. All of the participants in this study talked about their dreams of adulthood. Even when there was fear about adulthood, there was also excitement about the potential autonomy and power to make everyday choices that they had not yet been permitted to make. Through exercising power related to status that comes with older ages and other dominant social identities, young people are able to practice the role of dominant. For example, participants talked about beliefs and attitudes that older young people exhibited about younger young people. Participants witnessed high school seniors treating younger people as stupid or unwanted in the school hallways. Social justice educators and practitioners of all ages can create more powerful interventions for oppression and visions of liberations that challenge all forms of oppression by taking into account how young people learn domination and subordination. People of all ages have roles to play in this work.

I wonder, what was it about talking with peers within an adult-led interview structure that allowed for emancipatory moments and criticality? I also wonder what this process can tell us about possible implications for practice and research methodologies with young people? I was inspired by what happened when a space was created for these participants to talk about being their age with other young people. After most interviews, the participants took time to thank me for providing this space and explained that they felt that this research is important in that it gave them an opportunity to talk about these issues that they rarely have spaces to process. Indeed, through engaging in conversations with other young people, through focus groups and pair interviews, they indicated coming to awareness in ways that resemble some of the emancipatory moments and

critical consciousness described by Paulo Freire (1970). I believe that a pedagogy that supports young people to explore their experiences related to being their age should be further explored and implemented in social justice education.

<u>Implications for Adults Working with Young People</u>

Young people were explicit that adults cannot lead the work of ending youth oppression alone; they were equally clear that adults have an important role in this work. As a group in the position to frame the discourse around youth/adult relations and to determine what classes are available, what theory is read, and what material will be covered, adults can take stock of where they collude with youth oppression for their own benefit. As former young people, adults must notice where they still carry the internalized limits, feelings of powerlessness, alongside a sense of entitlement to the privileges of adulthood. Many adults lack the information that would enable them to be in effective partnerships with young people that are more liberatory and less oppressive. Through engaging a critical examination of the assumptions related to childhood and adulthood, adults can become more effective at challenging youth oppression *with* young people, in partnership.

As I have engaged in this research over the last few years, I have experienced that other adults express very strong feelings about this topic. They either get very excited about the possibilities of this research or they express resistance to the idea that youth oppression exists at all. Clearly, if youth oppression is to be changed, this historical amnesia will need to be examined and theorized. Adults who have been young people, who have been colonized with the discourses of Western modern childhood, and who

have experienced eagerness to move into colonizer status may suffer a personal and historical amnesia about their experiences of having been colonized. This will make it difficult for them to imagine a non-colonial relationship between adults and young people. These adults seem to view childhood as a rite of passage of which survival means entitlement to the benefits and privileges of adulthood as constituted within the colonial context. For these adults, it may seem that if we change the relationship between young people and adults, it will somehow eliminate, destroy, or invalidate their own experience, or diminish their occupation of the status of adult. Perhaps it would seem to these adults that they endured the challenges of childhood for nothing.

Other adults seem to acknowledge the idea that youth oppression exists but then express bewilderment about what to do. Whether intentional or not, this bewilderment functions as an avoidance strategy by effectively communicating, "If I don't understand adultism, then it doesn't exist." These adults often ask me, another adult, what can be done to address the examples of youth oppression on individual and institutional levels? It rarely occurs to these adults that we must bring young people into the center of these conversations about what needs to be done. Making a space for young people to discuss, analyze, and address their experiences with status and power is critical to challenging and transforming youth oppression.

An integration of the nine recommendations that participants have prescribed for adults to support young people can encourage, shape and inform the development of more equitable and flexible partnerships across age groups. Findings from this research indicate that young people need more positive ways to enact their own agency. Adults can take a supportive step in the creation of such spaces. Young people need venues

where they can reflect on and talk about experiences related to age. This may be with

adults, and it may be with young people alone. At the end of each interview, participants

in this study talked about how no one had ever asked them about their experiences related

to their age. Some participants said that being able to talk about their experiences and be

listened to by an adult was a very positive experience for them. Creating listening

practices for adults to use in their relationships with young people is one way to support

the creation of more authentic and equitable, multi-generational partnerships.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Further study of this topic is recommended to create both broader and more

localized understandings of youth that can inform the development of new theories and

practices for social justice educators. Questions can be raised about the reliability of this

particular study because another group of young people may give different descriptions

of their experiences with status and power. As such, additional study with other groups of

young people will reveal whether these experiences will be replicated.

I recommend that further research about youth oppression be conducted including

young people as both partners and leaders in research projects that seek to examine status

and power relations between young people and adults. Youth Participatory Action

Research (YPAR) is one method that can be used to develop and sustain multi-

generational partnerships. Cammarotta and Fine (2008) point out:

> Another step is needed to further distance critical youth studies from essentialized
> perspectives by acknowledging that resistance can be attained through formal
> processes in "real" settings, through multi-generational collectives, and
> sometimes among youth alone. YPAR represents not only a formal pedagogy of
> resistance but also the means by which young people engage transformational
> resistance. (p. 4)

YPAR can be social justice in action, in which young people are involved and supported to analyze their social context, engaging their unique standpoint to examine power, privilege, and oppression. YPAR can create the distance from essentialized perspectives about young people by supporting young people to transform the discourse related to age.

Using YPAR, I recommend that research about youth oppression engage a broader scope that uses mixed methods to gain a perspective of youth oppression from a larger sample of young people. This research could survey a large sample of young people about the beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes that participants in this study encounter about young people on a regular basis. Qualitative methods could then be used to examine how a sample of those young people experience and respond to youth oppression.

Another direction for future research could examine power and status relations between young people and adults by examining what more fluid, equitable, and emergent relations look like and what is required to support those relations in multi-generational relationships or partnerships. Finally, future research could be conducted to examine how adultism plays a role in the internalization and replication of other forms of oppression. This line of research has the potential to support social justice education efforts at individual, cultural, and institutional levels. In fact, the entire cycle of socialization could be theorized from the perspective of the oppression of young people.

<u>Concluding Remarks</u>

My goal in conducting this research was to explore and understand how young people make meaning of status and power related to their age. My hope was that a greater

awareness of the ways status, power, and youth oppression impact young people's lives can lead to a transformation of harmful status relationships and the generation of new possibilities for young people and adults to have more equitable, flexible relationships. As a social justice educator, I am excited about the possibilities that can emerge when a critical mass of adult practitioners work with young people toward transforming youth oppression. Just as the participants described their "power in numbers," I feel that social justice educators and practitioners of all ages can come together to create change through developing multi-generational partnerships that transform rigid adult-over-young people power relationships. Conducting this research has been a profound and transformative experience for me. I feel so much gratitude for the 14 participants who shared their time, their stories, and their thinking with me. As a social justice researcher, educator, and practitioner, I look forward to making issues of youth liberation central to my academic, professional, and personal work.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Organization	Age	Age Group Identity	Grade	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
"Olga"	Community	15	Teenagers	10th	Female	White
"Beth"	Community	15	Teenagers	10th	Female	White
"Angie"	Community	17	Teenagers	11th	Female	White/Black/ Native American
"Quentin"	Community	16	Teens	10th	Male	Black/White/ Native American
"Jacob"	Community	15	Teens	10th	Male	White
"Orson"	Community	14	Teens	9th	Male	White
"Sunshine"	High School	17	Teens	12th	Female	Black/White
"Isabel"	High School	17	Teens/High Schooler	12th	Female	White
"Josie"	High School	17	Teenagers	12th	Female	Black
"Rosie"	High School	16	Teen/ Young People	11th	Female	Latino - Spanish, Mexican, German
"Rex"	High School	18	Kids	12th	Male	Indian / Middle Eastern
"Allen"	High School	17	Young People	12th	Male	Black
"Will"	High School	16	Kids	11th	Male	White
"Mazzo"	High School	16	n/a	11th	Male	Puerto Rican/ Hispanic

Table 2: Interview Pairs

High School Setting	Community Setting
Sunshine & Josie	Olga & Beth
Isabel & Rosie	Orson & Jacob
Will & Rex	Angie

APPENDIX A

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS LETTER

Young People's Perspectives on Childhood Study

Dear <Name of Participant>:

My name is Keri DeJong. I am a doctoral candidate in the Social Justice Education Concentration in the Department of Student Development, College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am conducting research that seeks to explore young people's understanding of childhood.

I am contacting you to ask if you would be willing to participate in my study. As a participant, you would be asked to do four things: (1) complete a brief 10 question survey, (2) attend a pre-study meeting, (3) take part in one 90-minute audio-recorded focus group, and (4) take part in one audio-recorded 90-minute personal interview with another focus group participant of your choosing. The audio-recording will be transcribed and coded to find themes, which will be used as data for the study.

I will take steps to insure your privacy, confidentiality, and safety during your participation in this study. Prior to conducting my research, you will be provided with written assurance that details how your identity will be protected and your confidence maintained. Based on your final responses in the interview, you may be invited to a second interview to ensure that I have correctly recorded your responses.

Due to the fact that my research is on young people's perspectives on childhood, I am specifically looking for high school students who are between the ages 14-18.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I can be reached by email at kdejong@educ.umass.edu or by phone at 413.265.8344 or by U.S. mail at P.O. Box 2342 Amherst, MA 01004.

My research is in compliance with Institutional Review Board protocol at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Should you have any questions about my research, please contact my Advisor, Dr. Barbara J. Love by email at bjlove413@gmail.com. I would also appreciate if you would share this letter with others whom you think may be interested in participating and who meet the criteria for the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration in participating in this important research!

Sincerely,

Keri L. DeJong
Ed.D. Candidate
Social Justice Education Program
University of Massachusetts Amherst

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Young People's Perspectives on Childhood Study

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. This questionnaire determines your eligibility to participate in this study and provides me with some background on you as a potential participant. You are eligible if you are between the ages of 14-18 and you are currently attending a high school or participating in a community-based organization. If you do not receive an email from me within two weeks, this indicates that you will not be pursued further as a research study participant, and the information you provided will be destroyed.

Name _____

Name and Location of High School _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

1.   How old are you? _____

2.   What grade are you in? _____

3.   What is your gender? _____ Male_____ Female_____ Transgender

4.   How do you identify racially?

_____ White _____ Black _____ Latina/o _____ Asian _____ Native American _____

Bicultural/Multiracial (please list) _____

Other racial category _____

5. What term do you use to identify your age group?
   (i.e., young people, youth, kids, children, teens, adolescents, etc.)

_____

PARENT/GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: On Being and Becoming: An Exploration of Young People's Perspectives on Status and Power in Childhood

Principal Investigator: Keri L. DeJong

Purpose of the Research: My name is Keri DeJong and I am a doctoral candidate in the Social Justice Education Concentration in the Department of Student Development, College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst. I am conducting this research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation. This research study will explore the ways in which young people understand and make meaning of childhood.

Criteria and Protocol: Your child has been asked to participate in this study because she or he meets the criteria of someone who is between the ages of 14-18 and attends high school or participates in a community-based organization. In agreeing to participate in this study, your child would be asked to do four things: (1) complete a brief 10 question survey, (2) attend a pre-study meeting, (3) take part in one 90-minute audio-recorded focus group, and (4) take part in one audio-recorded 90-minute personal interview with another focus group participant of their choosing. The audio-recording will be transcribed and coded to find themes, which will be used as data for the study. The questions asked in the focus group and interview are intended to explore your child's description and understanding of childhood and about young people's status and power. Based on her or his final responses in the interview, she or he may be invited to have a follow-up conversation to ensure that I have correctly recorded her or his responses.

Confidentiality: Your child's confidentiality will be maintained by assigning a pseudonym in place of her or his real name and by removing any identifying factors from any and all documents in this research. All of the materials that I gather (i.e., audio-recordings, transcriptions, notes, codes, etc.) will be kept in a locked file cabinet to which only I have access.

Participant Rights: Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary. There are no consequences for you or your child should either of you refuse to participate in this study. Your child has the right to refuse to answer any question or to terminate her or his participation in this study at any time. You and your child also have the right to review any of the materials to be used in the study and to request a summary of the research findings. Additionally, you have the right to contact the Chair of my Dissertation Committee, Dr. Barbara J. Love, at any time should you have questions that I am unable to answer.

Benefits and Risks: As with any research study, a potential for risk exists. Your child will be asked questions about their experiences as a young person as well as her or his experiences in school that may result in feelings of discomfort and vulnerability. There are also benefits in participating in this study. The benefit of her or his participation is that she or he will be taking part in a study that will contribute to the limited existing literature on young people's perspectives of childhood. Also, your child will have the opportunity to reflect on the rewards

and challenges of being a young person with other young people. Your child will not be offered nor will you receive any compensation in the form of gifts or monies. No part of this study involves counseling and no advice or counseling will be offered in connection with this study.

Statement of Voluntary Consent: You will be given two copies of this informed consent. If you are willing to allow your child to participate, please sign both copies. You will keep one copy for your reference and records, and I will keep one copy for mine. In signing this form, you are consenting to allow your child's participation in this study, you are providing permission for me to use results of this study in my dissertation, at academic and conference presentations, in manuscripts for publication in academic and professional journals. By agreeing to allow your child to participate, you would also give me permission to share the results of the study with members of my dissertation committee for the purpose of completing my dissertation and fulfilling partial requirements for the completion of my doctoral degree.

Questions: If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by email at kdejong@educ.umass.edu or by phone at 413.265.8344.

This research is in compliance with University of Massachusetts Institutional Review Board protocol. Should you have any questions about this study, you are invited to contact the Chair of my Dissertation Committee, Dr. Barbara Love, by email at bjlove413@gmail.com. If you wish to contact someone who does not have direct involvement in this study, you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Dr. Sharon Rallis at sharonr@educ.umass.edu.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form, and you understand and agree to the terms and conditions of participation in this research study.

_____
Your child's printed name (Participant)

_____
Parent or Guardian's printed name

_____   _____
Parent or Guardian's signature   Date

_____
Researcher's printed name

_____   _____
Researcher's signature   Date

APPENDIX D

MINOR ASSENT FORM

Title of Study: On Being and Becoming: An Exploration of Young People's Perspectives on Status and Power in Childhood

Principal Investigator: Keri L. DeJong

1. WHO AM I?
I am a doctoral student in the Social Justice Education Concentration in the Department of Student Development, College of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst.. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree. I am also very interested in young people's lives and experiences in schools and community-based organizations.

2. WHAT IS THIS FORM?
This form is called an Assent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make a decision about whether you want to participate or not. Your parent or guardian knows that you are being invited to be a part of this study.

3. WHAT IS THIS STUDY ABOUT?
A research study is a way to learn more about people. I am doing a research study about young people and their description and understanding of childhood, being a young person, and any messages that you have received from the world around you about being a young person. Many adults have written about young people, but there is not a lot of literature that explores young people's knowledge and experiences pertaining to your age. This study is not about any individual person.

4. WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?
If you decide that you want to be part of this study, As a participant, you would be asked to do four things: (1) complete a brief 10 question survey, (2) attend a pre-study meeting, (3) take part in one 90-minute audio-recorded focus group, and (4) take part in one audio-recorded 90-minute personal interview with another focus group participant of your choosing. The audio-recording will be transcribed and coded to find themes, which will be used as data for the study. Prior to conducting my research, you will be provided with a written assurance that details how your identity will be protected and your confidence maintained. Based on your final responses in the interview, you may be invited to a second interview to ensure that I have correctly recorded your responses.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY
Your decision to participate in this interview is voluntary. Confidentiality will be maintained and participants' identities will be protected by using a pseudonym in place of your name and having other identifying factors removed from any documents produced from this research. All materials will be kept in a locked file, which I, the primary researcher, will only have access to.

6. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There are some things you should know about this study. As with any research study, a potential for risk exists. You will be asked questions about your experiences as a young person during your daily life as well as your experiences in school or community-based organizations that may result in feelings of discomfort and vulnerability. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can stop participating in the study at any time without any consequences.

There are also benefits to participating in this study. The benefit of your participation is that you will be taking part in a study that will contribute to the existing literature on young people's perspectives of childhood. You will have the opportunity to talk about your experiences with other young people while you also get to see what it's like to participate in a qualitative research study. You will not be offered nor will you receive any compensation in the form of gifts or monies.

7. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

When I am finished with this study, I will write a report about what I learned. To protect your privacy and confidentiality, this report will not include your name or that you were in the study. You will be welcome to read the report, if you would like to do so.

8. WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?

You can ask questions if you do not understand any part of the study. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me by email at kdejong@educ.umass.edu or by phone at 413.265.8344 or by U.S. mail at P.O. Box 2342 Amherst, MA 01004.

9. WHAT IF YOU WANT TO STOP BEING IN THE STUDY?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. You can stop being in the study at any point. There will be no bad feelings if you don't want to do this study or if you want to stop doing it at any time during the study.

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.
      (Print your name here)

_____   _____
(Sign your name here)   (Date)

APPENDIX E

SURVEY QUESTIONS

For each question, look at the beginning of the phrase and write your own ending to the phrase with one or more sentences. There are no "right" answers. I am interested in what first come to your mind!

1. Young people are_____

    _____

2. Teens are _____

    _____

3. Children are _____

    _____

4. Kids are _____

    _____

5. Adults are _____

    _____

6. Childhood is _____

    _____

7. Adulthood is _____

    _____

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Part A: Introduction
I am Keri DeJong. I will be moderating this discussion. I will also be recording the discussion and taking notes. (Have each participant introduce himself or herself by name, age, and saying something they like about being their age.)

Directions for Participants:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I appreciate your willingness to share your time and expertise. This interview is part of a research study that focuses on young people's knowledge about what it is like to be your age on a daily basis. Your interview will be part of the data that will be used for my dissertation study, which will ultimately add more young people's knowledge and experiences to the theory and literature about young people, which have most often been described by adults. You are the experts on your own experience: the experiences and insights that you share with me not only help to make this an interesting experience for each of the participants here, but will also help add your knowledge to the existing literature.

Everything you say here is confidential with just one exception. By law and for your safety, I must report possible physical and sexual abuse to a child protection agency where there are professionals trained to help young people who are dealing with abuse. Anything else you say here will be kept strictly confidential. To protect your privacy, pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant for the duration of this research. Your real name will not be attached to any of the interview transcripts or to any quotes from the interviews that may be used by the research to illustrate the different types of experiences that young people have pertaining directly to being their age. Therefore, your responses to this interview will remain completely anonymous throughout the research process.

If you or your parent/guardian have any questions about this interview or my dissertation after I leave, you can email me or call me at 413-265-8344, or you can contact the Chair of my dissertation committee whose information is listed on your copy of the assent form.

I want you to talk to each other rather than to me. I will start the conversation out with a few questions, but after that I will only jump in to get us back on track if we have gone off of the topic or to bring up something that you have not touched on. Feel free to disagree with what others have said or give another opinion: the more different ideas we hear, the more information we will have to work with. Again, we are interested in hearing your experiences, how you remember them.

I will let you know when we are near the end of our 90 minutes. If you have to go to the bathroom, just slip out quietly and come back as quickly as you can. Are there any questions before we begin?

Part B: Interview

1. **Introductory questions:**
   a. What is your name and age?
   b. What is something you like about being your age?

2. **Topic 1: Exploring meaning and experiences**
   a. When you hear the words "childhood" and "youth," what thoughts, feelings, or images come to mind?
   b. Can you share some stories about what it's like to be a young person?
      - At school?
      - At home?
      - In the community?
      - At the mall?
      - With your friends?

3. **Topic 2: Exploring stereotypes and their impact**
   a. What kinds of assumptions/stereotypes exist (are in the air) about young people?
      i. For instance, about young people's abilities?
      ii. Or about young people's responsibilities?
          1. Probing examples: "Young people need adult help to make important decisions for themselves" or "Young people aren't mature enough to vote"
   b. How do you think these assumptions impact young people?

4. **Closing questions:**
   a. What are some ways that you see young people being powerful?
   b. Is there anything you would like to add that was not asked?

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part A: Introduction

Greet both participants and re-introduce yourself.

Interviewer Opening Statement:

Thank you for coming today and agreeing to be interviewed for this study of young people's perspectives on childhood. This interview is part of a dissertation research study that focuses on young people's knowledge about what it is like to be your age on a daily basis. Your interview will be part of the data that will be used for my dissertation study, which will ultimately add more young people's knowledge and experiences to the theory and literature about young people that have most often been described by adults.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions in this interview. The questions ask about your personal experiences being in your age group on a daily basis. You are welcome to share as openly as you feel comfortable and you will in no way be rewarded or punished for sharing and particular answer. Your honesty and willingness to be specific and detailed in your answers would be most appreciated.

I want to reassure you that you will not be evaluated according to your answers and will not be impacted in any way by how you answer the questions in this interview. Everything you tell me is confidential with just one exception. By law and for your safety, I must report possible physical and sexual abuse to a child protection agency. They are trained to help young people who are dealing with abuse. Anything else you say or write will be kept completely confidential. I will not share your information with anyone else. No one but me will have access to what you say in this interview.

To maintain your confidentiality and privacy, your name and other identifying information will be removed from any documents produced from this research. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant. Your real name will not be attached to any of the interview transcripts or to any quotes from the interviews that may be used in the research to illustrate the different types of experiences that young people have pertaining directly to being their age. Therefore, your responses to this interview will remain completely anonymous throughout the research process.

(Note: Briefly review consent form, the need to tape record, that the participant can stop the interview at any point or refuse to answer any question without prejudice, etc.)

This interview will take up to 90 minutes to complete. I'll let you know when we're almost out of time.

Part B: Interview
I. Introductory Questions:
1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. How would you describe your current age group? For example, do you identify as a kid, teen, child, adolescent, etc.?

II. Daily experience as a young person:
1. Since the focus group, what have you noticed about being your age?
2. Tell me about a day in your life as an X-year old.

   Probing Questions:
   a. What is easy/hard about being your age?
   b. Do you experience being your age differently in different spaces? (i.e., school, home, the mall, out in the community, park, at night vs. during the day)
   c. How would you describe young people's status in relation to people of other ages?

III. Young people exercising power:
1. Tell me a story about how you see yourself using your power or being powerful in your daily life?

   Probing Questions:
   a. What kind of decisions do you make on a daily basis?
       i. For instance, what kind of decisions do you make at home?
       ii. What kind of decisions do you make at school?
   b. What are some ways that you set your own personal boundaries and limits? (i.e., decide you've had too much, not enough, or need more of something, etc.)
       i. What happens when you set a boundary or limit?
       ii. What helps you set a personal boundary or limit? What gets in the way?
   c. What are some of the ways that you speak up or use your voice on a daily basis?
       i. What happens when you use you speak up or use your voice?
       ii. What helps you speak up or use your voice? What gets in the way?

IV. Closing Questions:
1. Is there anything you think I should know to understand your experience as a young person?
2. Are there any thoughts about your experience that you would like to share that we have not covered?
3. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

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