Breaking the rules, breaking the law

Continuities in girls’ resistances as identity work

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This article argues that girls’ oppositional behaviours can be read as both acts of resistance and acts of resilience which are part of their identity work. Continuities are identified between school resisters and offending girls in patterns of control and resistance, and resistance and conformity, in specific interpersonal contexts. Girls’ tactics for managing life constraints and opportunities are relative to their marginalised positioning. Both girls’ and others’ constructions of femininity and gender-appropriate behaviour are central to the conceptualisation of girls’ opposition as resistance and resilience and as identity work. Resistances as identity work involve both acceptance and rejection of available cultural ideals. Reframing resistance as resilience and as identity work offers a positive alternative to pathologising and focusing on girls’ deficits and expectations of an inevitable and deterministic trajectory of failure and delinquency.

RESISTANCES AS IDENTITY WORK

This article argues that girls’ oppositional behaviours can be read as both acts of resistance and acts of resilience. The argument here is not for resistance as class consciousness, nor as a feature of subcultural style. Drawing on the literature on school resisters, offending girls, and ‘girl culture’, it is argued that resistance is part of girls’ identity work (Hey 1997), in specific contexts. Here I am most concerned with patterns of control and resistance as relational context, patterns of resistance and conformity as adolescent context, and patterns of marginalisation as social context. It is in the interaction of these multilayered contexts that meanings, behaviour and options are negotiated and girls work out what it is to be a girl. Both girls’ and others’ constructions of femininity and gender-appropriate behaviour are central to the conceptualisation of girls’ opposition as resistance and resilience.

Relational, adolescent and social contexts are not separated in lived experience. Similarly, patterns of control, resistance and conformity are discernible across contexts, and marginalisation can be identified both vertically and horizontally in specific contexts. For
the purposes of this article, however, contexts and patterns are separately highlighted for analysis of girls’ resistances as identity work.

The first part of the article draws on studies of school resisters. Each of the contexts is examined in turn. It is argued that school resistances are predominantly enacted interpersonally, in relations with teachers and peers. Resistances are posited as power struggles around identity issues, highlighted here as responses to control and agency towards self-empowerment. Adolescence has traditionally been theorised as the most important time for identity formation. Girls’ engagement with questions of the self, others, roles and place in the world are gendered experiences. Working out what it means to be a girl entails responses to and constructions of notions of femininity. Girls’ school resistances may be seen as attempts to counter others’ definitions of gender-appropriate behaviour. Contestation of cultural ideals of femininity takes particular forms in school within the discourses of rules, discipline and classroom management. In and out of school, girls’ identity work reveals patterns of both resistance and conformity to cultural ideals. The argument for resistances as identity work also relies on an analysis of girls’ social positioning as the context for their engagement with dominant gendered norms popularised and asserted through hegemonic practices. It is argued that school resisters are both marginalised and actively involved in marginalising others, as well as themselves.

The second section of the article explores continuities between school resisters and offending girls. The intention is not to trivialise or exonerate girls’ offending but to develop a framework for our understanding of offending girls as girls, one which does not rely on pathologising or taking a primary focus on girls’ deficiencies. It is argued that school resisters and offending girls share positions of marginalisation, though the contexts are different. Girls’ participation in popular culture and visibility in public spaces are specific contexts discussed in terms of being a girl; location both highlights continuities with school resisters and is implicated in the production of offending girls’ behaviour. Continuities are explored in terms of patterns of control and resistance and girls’ identity in relation to their and others’ perceptions of appropriate behaviour for girls. Positioning by race and class as well as gender interactively produce the specific aims and objects of girls’ offending. Girls’ resistances to oppressive circumstances are commonly expressed as oppositions to personal injustices. This opposition typically occurs alongside conforming behaviours as girls both desire and yet are unable to have confidence in the possibility that their circumstances may be different.

The final section of the article offers a reframing of resistances as resilience. Positive resistances, which can be part of a repertoire of survival strategies, are distinguished from self-destructive resistances. The reframing of resistance as resilience is context dependent. From the perspective of girls’ positioning, marginalisation and specific circumstances and relations, resistances can be interpreted as self-protection from the detrimental or limiting effects of gendered behavioural expectations and as a means of self-empowerment. Acts of resilience are spirited indications of a desire for more positive ways of being for oneself, and of being seen by others.
SCHOOL RESISTERS

Relational context: patterns of control and resistance

School resistances include quiet avoidance of classwork, outward appearances of compliance, and truancy. However, oppositional behaviour is most readily identified when it is visible, audible and openly displayed in the classroom as a direct challenge to specific adults or peers. In school, classroom resistances include refusing to participate, disrupting the class, being insolent to teachers, swearing and fighting. Some of these behaviours carry over to the schoolyard, with additional rule-breaking such as smoking, being in prohibited places, intimidation and bullying of other students.

School resistances are typically enacted in the interpersonal realm of relations with teachers and peers. The girls in Moran’s study (1984) are loud, avoid doing classwork, spend most of their time talking with friends, and are indifferent or antagonistic towards teachers and other students. In the schoolyard their preoccupations are smoking and ‘hanging out’ at the fence to meet boys. Talk is a principal form of resistance (Griffiths 1993; Hey 1997). Fuller’s studies (1983) represent non-compliant girls as ‘actively critical and contemptuous of much that was going on around them in and outside of school’ (Fuller 1983, p.167). Walker (1993) describes the classroom ‘repartee’ of working-class girls ‘for getting back at teachers, and for display and entertainment ... [including] bragging about their sexual prowess and resorting to fisticuffs when they deemed it necessary’ (Walker 1993, p.146).

Resistances are instances of power struggles. When teachers’ and school authority are exercised in ways that impinge on important aspects of individual identity, resistances may be expressed interpersonally but also contain critiques of schooling processes. In Fordham’s (1996) study, African American ‘underachievers’ prioritise above all else their identification as black where academic success is seen as requiring ‘acting white’ (Fordham 1996, p.328). Although they may be ambivalent about forgoing the option of higher achievement, their resistances are strategies for maintaining cultural boundaries and countering an ‘identity makeover’ (Fordham, p.92). For the ‘high achievers’, however, the solution to reclaiming identity is to counter perceptions of black inability. Because this involves ‘acting white’, a repertoire of strategies is necessary, to cover up their efforts and achievements and to counter peers’ accusations that they are violating boundaries. High achievers are thus involved in resistances to discourses concerning identity, expressed by peers, in order to resist the dominant discourses of the school.

Resistances are responses to perceived control or attempted control of aspects of identity. The coercive power of persons, situations or ideas may be experienced as circumscribing individual meanings, behaviours and options. This is not to suggest that girls are always subordinate, however. Resistances are also instances of girls’ agency and can be understood as strategies or tactics for problem-solving, asserting the priority of one’s own agenda, and having fun. More broadly, resistant strategies are enacted for ‘cultural management’ (Hey 1997, p.127).
Resistances draw on cultural practices of home and school, while both are variably contested. In Fold’s (1987) study, Pitjantjatjara girls successfully control certain pedagogical processes by transforming individual tasks into group ones. White, middle-class individualism and competition are thus replaced by ‘doing it our way’ (Fold 1987, p.80), with group rebukes ensuring conformity. Though directed at particular teachers, the girls’ assertion of alternative learning styles is both resistance to school values (see also Keefe 1992) and conformity to traditional Aboriginal practices. However, their refusal of some subjects is both assertion of their interests and rejection of ‘academic’ learning, and in the process rejects aspects of their parents’ and communities’ aspirations for them to learn skills in literacy and numeracy to complement traditional learning, for community self-management (Fold 1987).

The girls in both Moran’s (1984) and Walker’s (1993) studies do not see themselves as anti-school in that they do want to learn, but they do resist what they perceive as boring or irrelevant lessons, lack of help with classwork, and teachers’ differential treatment of students. Working-class girls see the double standards of teachers’ selective attention to the ‘posh’ and ‘brainy’ girls, the ‘goodies’. Responses to perceived teacher favouritism and power over credentialling results in overt opposition to those teachers. However, these interpersonal conflicts ‘entail [a] demand for education’ (Walker 1993, p.146), including the attention and approval of teachers. While resistances may be misdirected in terms of gaining such approval, resisters do win attention, albeit not of the kind legitimated by the school, and often with peer approval. Resistance, then, is the exercise of control and self-empowerment – albeit within the relational context of teachers’ greater control and empowerment.

Adolescent context: patterns of resistance and conformity

Girls’ resistances are integral to their constructions of identity and femininity. ‘Struggling to acquire the means to represent themselves to self and others is part of growing up. However, this active work always occurs under socially given conditions which include structures of power and social relations, institutional constraints and possibilities but also available cultural repertoires’ (Epstein and Johnson 1998, p.116). Working out what it means and how to be a girl is primarily located in the realm of the interpersonal, though self-representation is multilayered as girls learn the boundaries of different social contexts, their position within them and the expectations of others. Girls’ management of constraints and opportunities in their engagement in identity work involves both acceptance and rejection of available cultural ideals of as they ‘try on’ sometimes contradictory femininities.

The tasks of identity work in adolescence involve reconfiguring elements of past experience and imagining a future. Resistances may be responses to girls’ own and others’ expectations of maturity and emerging womanhood, experienced as limitations, relative to acceptable childhood behaviours (Gilligan 1991). In Brown’s study (1998), girls’ parodies of feminine refinement are intended as a distancing from what they see as constrained and undesirable ways of being. At the same time, needs for a sense of belonging
and acceptance by others, along with the promises of independence with maturity, may account for the contradictory logics and desires evident in patterns of girls’ conformity alongside their resistances.

The girls in McRobbie’s study (1991) combine disdain for the classroom curriculum with the wearing of makeup, contemporary fashions and hairstyles, thus breaking school rules and challenging school messages about appropriate behaviours for ‘nice girls’. Derived from images of femininity in teenage girls’ magazines, the girls wear their resistance into the classroom as a challenge. Pitjantjatjara girls (Folds 1987) attempt to control curriculum content by attending only preferred classes, such as home economics, which provide opportunities to explore their interests in beauty, fashion and urban culture. This is not to suggest, however, that girls’ interests are limited to elements of popular culture, nor that bringing in their own agenda is only about asserting those interests. McRobbie suggests that the girls ‘replaced the official ideology of the school with their informal feminine culture’ (McRobbie 1991, p.51).

McRobbie’s claim requires qualification, however. Resistance is not a total modus operandum but typically is enacted alongside expressions of conformity. School resistances represent multiple meanings, sometimes with contradictory aims, sometimes in conflict with other forms of resistance in non-school contexts. Accentuating femininity is both assertion of girls’ own agenda and disruption of the official one; it is also experimental identity work and intends to claim the attention of boys (Fuller 1983; Moran 1984; McRobbie 1991).

McRobbie and Garber’s (1976) study developed the concept of ‘bedroom culture’ to describe girls’ use of this private space to spend time with friends, to have fun, to share ideas, especially about sexuality and relationships. Informed by knowledge from life experience and the ‘romantic fantasy’ of magazines, movies and music, girls are involved in both consumption and production of meanings about adolescent and adult femininities. The girls accept and reject aspects of behavioural proscriptions as defined within both popular culture and their working-class culture. Romantic fictions of magazines do not simply replace girls’ practical knowledge of relationships; nor is the latter unaffected by romantic ideals. The girls look forward to and critique aspects of adult roles and relationships as women. Romantic fantasy is both an influence for conformity and informs a critique of perceived constraints in relationships between adults around them. School behaviours are not discrete from girls’ private constructions, including concerns with femininity. Resistances in school, as the site for both official school agendas and the ‘hidden curriculum’ of girls’ agendas, constitute an interaction of public and private identity work.

‘Dominant hegemonic discourses, always classed and racialised, are deployed to identify ‘who’ different ... students are in the collective (school) imagination’ (Epstein and Johnson 1998, p.128). Teachers have a key role in constructing, legitimating and perpetuating dominant discourses. Their labelling of students occurs not only within official discourses of school rules, discipline and classroom management. Behind this discourse, and sometimes overtly, is another discourse about gender-appropriate behaviour and
practices which attempt to regulate girls as girls. Teachers’ labelling of oppositional girls is sometimes in the same sexualised language used by students themselves – 'sluts' (Walker 1993); 'moles' and 'tarts' (Moran 1984; Epstein and Johnson 1998) – and assumes an association of non-compliance with sexual behaviour.

Teachers’ responses to the ‘sexualised and disruptive girl’ (Epstein and Johnson, p.120) are a mixture of legitimate management concerns, public and private judgements about girls as girls and as students, and as one component in the ‘desexualisation of the school’ (p.119) and the regulating of (sexual) conduct. It is in the attempted control of feminised and sexualised behaviour that girls learn its power in the school context. They may simultaneously learn its disempowering potential, through experiencing derogatory labelling, and its empowering potential, both through labelling others and in provoking teachers’ reactions. Thus, the primary aim of these resistances may be personal empowerment, especially when girls believe they do not have other means for empowerment, acceptance and success at school.

Identity work around sexual labelling involves confronting the double binds of gendered behavioural norms (with nuances of variation across social settings and social positioning). Sexual labelling creates a shifting fine line between presenting as attractive and being too sexualised in appearance (Lees 1997). Boys are accorded sexual entitlement while girls’ sexual desire is silenced (Tolman 1991; Fine 1993). Social messages that encourage girls to live up to an image of sexual desirability conflict with other messages that warn against the dangers of doing so. On both counts, reputation, as well as self-image, is at stake. Sexual labels are guarded against, used as weapons, fought about, and wrestled away from one’s good name. Double binds work as mechanisms for ideological and social control – specifically, control of girls’ bodies – and, because they are both internalised and externalised, girls’ compliance or resistance is subject to their own and others' surveillance and regulation (Walkerdine 1990; Fine 1993; Epstein and Johnson 1998). When girls distance themselves from specific images, claiming that they are ‘not like that’, they are implicitly involved in such surveillance and regulation, often with the effect of condemning other girls in the process.

A dilemma for girls in their resistance to sexual labelling is that attempts to counter it may incur further similar labelling. Sexual labelling is not confined in its application to sexual behaviour (actual, assumed or invented). Moreover, girls’ knowledge of sexual harassment and sexual violation constitutes a pressure for conventional femininity (Wilson and Wyn 1993). Girls are also aware of the double bind that may silence their resistance to judgements: speaking out is itself a transgression of acceptable behaviour. Whether to express opposition or self-silence, then, may largely depend on who is judging and on the perceived risks to reputation. Resistances and conformity are complex processes in identity work about being a girl and becoming a woman.

Social context: patterns of marginalisation

The concept of 'centre' and 'margins' refers to cultural capital accrued in social positioning (Apple 1997; Hey 1997; White 1998). Marginalisation is inherent in positioning by
race, class and gender, with each of these ‘categories’ having differential and interactive effects which locate individuals closer to or further from the centre. The values and ideologies of schools are, in the main, consistent with and part of the dominant values and ideologies of the white middle class and patriarchal hegemony that pervades both. Resistances to curriculum content, teachers and school processes can be seen as both cause and effect of marginalisation of those whose ‘cultural capital’ is different from that centralised and privileged by the school (Walker 1993; Hey 1997). Girls’ resistances may take centre stage in the classroom; however, resisters are typically marginalised in terms of educational outcomes.

Resisters have learned that academic success is the defining criterion for being valued in school and in this they are defined by their difference. Girls’ resistances may thus in part be an attempt to divert attention from or assuage their feelings about likely failure. Even while they may claim fleeting victories, their resistances contribute to the reproduction and exacerbation of their marginalisation, moving further from the educational promises of the centre and their own educational aspirations (Walker 1993).

Both in and out of school, girls use their friendship groups for working out the problematics of being a girl, and the right kind of girl (Hey, p.84). While girls’ friendships have been shown to provide mutual support and solidarity (Gilligan, Rogers and Tolman 1991; McRobbie 1991; Griffiths 1995; Brown 1998), Hey’s explication of the dynamics of inclusivity and exclusivity provides important insights into girls’ production of power as they produce their own subjectivities, with and against each other, and within and against other groups.

Antagonisms between girls are part of the agenda they bring into the classroom. The gossiping, passing notes, name-calling and fighting within and between cliques are all aimed at favourable positioning within the classroom hierarchy of popularity and social success. For girls who do not have the cultural capital for occupying privileged positions within the school (i.e. are not white, middle class and Anglo), another option is to invest more substantially in “unofficial” prestige (desiring) systems’ (Hey, p.127). Success in friendships and relationships can thus substitute for success in school, involving ‘a form of oppositional, subversive and parallel set of meanings through which they [take] apart the official discourse’ (p.84).

This often involves ‘othering’ girls who are different (Hey, p.69 ; also Fordham 1996). In the case study of working-class girls, who is in and who is out is demarcated through ‘racist exclusions’ (Hey, p.70) as well as judgements of other girls’ real or imagined sexual conduct. Some girls are targeted with both, as an enforcement of ‘compulsory white racist heterosexuality’ (p.70). Othering by class equates school success with middle-class girls, and therefore to be academically successful as a working-class girl would be to be a ‘snob’ (pp.76-9). The machinations of girls’ power struggles occur within the specific social and cultural relations of the school, ‘part of the network through which the forces of hegemony are variously installed (or contested) in culture’ (p.125). Girls’ conflicting relations can be explained as ‘multilayered’: part interpersonal dynamics, part mediation
of structured relations within the school, and part dialectical construction and reproduction of the dominant culture in which the school is situated.

**OFFENDING GIRLS: CONTINUITIES WITH SCHOOL RESISTERS**

Offending girls have more in common with school resisters than the vernacular definition of ‘offending’ as affront to moral sense, especially to norms of (middle-class white) civility and femininity. ‘What happens to girls and women in courts and prisons connects with what happens in the playground, in the family and at work’ (Cain 1990, p.6). Continuities are particularly evident in patterns of control and resistance and in girls’ and others’ perceptions of gendered norms and the interpretation of certain behaviours as transgressions of femininity. Girls’ offending and delinquency needs to be seen in its social context for behaviour has different meanings and consequences in different contexts, both in terms of girls’ intentions and in others’ interpretations of and responses to girls’ behaviour.

**Relational context: location, control and resistance**

The effects of resistances are not just consequences of the kind of oppositional behaviour enacted. Location is important in that schools provide a certain amount of protection at the same time as they enforce rules for the regulation of behaviour. Schools’ regulation of behaviour includes positive controls of destructive and self-destructive behaviours (Carrington 1993). The breaking of school rules generally has less serious consequences than breaking the law because of the school’s attention to developmental aims and functions (White 1998). Thus, school authorities may and do choose to deal with illicit activities as discipline or welfare matters.

Out of the school context, girls’ oppositional behaviour is problematised within discourses of delinquency. Location is integral to categorisation in that regulation of public behaviour outside school is the domain of police, welfare and legal systems and ‘a variety of social technicians concerned with the government of youth’ (Carrington 1993, p.32). Certain behaviours enacted within the confines of the school if enacted outside school incur legal consequences and a shift from the category of problem student to delinquent youth. Context and location create different definitions and consequences that do not hold beyond their boundaries.

For some girls, participation in popular culture can be a pathway to offending. Participation in common recreational pursuits may from a girl’s perspective be quite ‘ordinary’, conforming to peer group or local behaviour patterns and norms, with the primary intention of simply having fun. Most of the girls in Carrington’s study were ‘ordinary girls from housing commission areas ... having fun ... or just hanging around in groups’ (Carrington, p.32). Ogilvie’s (1996) research found that recreational involvement in illegal or perceived illegal activities is not uncommon amongst young people. Furthermore, lawbreaking is explained as ‘just something I did’ or ‘it was easy’ or ‘fun’ (Ogilvie, p.215).
When young people engage in illicit recreational activities in public places, they are more vulnerable to criminalisation, given trends towards more restrictive legislation and policing (O’Brien 1997). The regulation of young people’s use of public space results in mutual antagonisms between young people and police. Patterns of control and resistance characterise these relations. Alleged police threats, violence, racism and sexual harassment are a primary source of antagonistic relations (Youth Justice Coalition 1990; Alder 1993). ‘Acting smart’, verbal abuse and physical resistance challenge police authority and attempt to counter racism and sexism. In Cunneen’s study (1991), Aboriginal girls allege being called ‘black bitches’, ‘black sluts’ and ‘black molls’ (Cunneen 1991, p.7-8). Cunneen and White (1995) argue that a young person’s demeanour may influence police decisions and that assumptions concerning demeanour are partly gender based. Girls may be removed from the streets on legal grounds; the hidden agenda is transgression of norms of acceptable femininity (Carrington 1993), including the mere presence of girls on the street. Antagonisms are perpetuated as each side’s knowledge and expectations of the other colours approach and response. One result has been girls’ categorisation as serious offenders: in one-third of girls’ violent offences reviewed by Beikoff (1996), police were the victims, most commonly in the process of girls resisting arrest. Hostile attitudes towards police are not unilateral, however; young people do ‘distinguish between good and bad police officers’ (Youth Justice Coalition 1990, p.85).

Adolescent context: femininities, resistances and conformity

Lynne Haney (1996) analyses relations between workers and girls on parole or in the ‘Alliance’ detention centre (for pregnant girls and young mothers) as a complex web of controls and resistances around the challenging and reinscription of norms of femininity. For example, the girls’ offending is often initiated by their boyfriends and/or related to dependent and detrimental relationships with them. The primary aim of the parole officer (Carol), therefore, is to break the ‘cycle of male dependency’ (Haney 1996, pp.764-5) by challenging the girls about how their boyfriends treat them and guiding the girls towards independence. However, from the girls’ perspective, their ‘homeboys’ provide safety, income and status. The economic imperative is encapsulated in one girl’s comment: ‘if Carol gives me the money, then maybe I’d listen’ (p.766). Haney suggests that being young, poor and African American positions the girls at the bottom of hierarchies of power and privilege and that encouraging girls to get out of bad relationships, from the girls’ perspective, is effectively ‘robbing them of their one source of privilege’ (pp.766-7) and is just not viable. The economic rationale combines with conformity to fairly traditional ideas about roles in relationships. The girls indicate an acceptance of subordination in their desires to please, appease and hold onto their men. At the same time, their roles in offending transgress traditional requirements of femininity. A girl in this situation may be judged as behaving in inappropriate ways for a girl, whereas she may believe she is doing what girls are supposed to do, that is, to be in a relationship and support or go along with her man.
Baines and Alder (1996) (also Baines 1997) found that youth workers (in detention centres) generally claim that girls are more difficult than boys to work with. Girls are seen as more 'emotional' and demanding than boys. Furthermore, 'emotional' behaviour is often described as "hysterical", "dramatic" and "manipulative" ... On the other hand, young men's behaviour was more likely to be described in positive terms, including "honest", "upfront" and "straightforward" (Baines and Alder, p.27). Even when workers feel at greater risk of physical attack by boys, girls are still seen as more difficult because of personalised verbal abuse. Girls learn the power of verbal abuse from staff reactions and use it as a means of self-empowerment in a context where, from their perspective, there are few opportunities to gain power in other ways.

Messages about emotionalism are complex and girls learn how emotion may be expressed selectively or strategically. Containing emotion may establish a girl's tough reputation; at the same time, she may reveal her vulnerability to others she trusts. She may also use emotionalism to help her get what she wants. Anger may be the expression of 'struggle against either being or being seen as victims, their wish to fight back [and] to remain in control' (Brown 1998, p.57). Emotional strategies are part of girls' repertoire of 'resistances for survival' (Robinson and Ward 1991).

Baines and Alder contend that workers' responses may reflect the stereotyped 'fit' of boys behaviour as masculine, in contrast with girls' behaviour which is 'the antithesis of appropriate female behaviour' (1996, p.28). This transgression of femininity results in the pathologising of 'troublesome' girls and the labelling of their emotionalism as 'mad' or 'bad' (Baines 1997, p.22). Even when staff challenge such stereotypes the message to girls may be that approval is fairly arbitrary. The parole staff in Haney's study encourage girls' 'feistiness' as necessary for survival. However, when feistiness is directed at challenging or rejecting workers' goals for them, it is met with coercive responses, especially the threat of 'juvie', that is, being sent to a (regular) detention centre. The girls respond by accentuating their femininity and dependency and further romanticising their relationships, reinforcing precisely what the worker was trying to challenge. On one hand, the worker is encouraging nonconformity and girls' persistent, even exaggerated, conformity amounts to resistance. On the other hand, she attempts to coerce conformity, prompting refusal. This is not simply a case of girls' determined opposition. As discussed above, the girls have their own economic and romantic logics underpinning their traditional expectations of relationships. The girls' logics appear sometimes contradictory; the worker's mixed messages are similarly paradoxical. Struggles for control produce resistances on both sides. As with school resistances, the greater power and authority of the worker ultimately forces compliance, at least outwardly.

**Social context: marginalisation and cultural identity**

Continuities are evident between girls who are school resisters and girls who offend, in terms of their marginalised positioning. Offending girls are predominantly working class and Aboriginal. Their social positioning similarly marginalises them, though their location is further away from the centre, having forgone or been excluded from opportu-
nities to enhance their cultural capital through education and credentials. Socioeconomic position and educational disadvantage are continuing correlations. Marginalisation in the labour market is associated with offending (Gale, Bailey-Harris and Wundersitz 1990). The lack of employment available to young women results in many being ‘pushed into unregulated cash based employment in the service sector, or into informal unwaged labour in the home’ (Youth Justice Coalition 1990, p.28), associated with causes of offending in that family tensions and domestic violence are cited as reasons for girls leaving home. The criminal economy is a short step from the informal economy for supplementary income (White, Aumair, Harris and McDonnell 1997). In this context, offending behaviour may be an attempt to gain some power and control when little is experienced from other sources.

The cultures of specific groups (class, race, family, institutions) are always in part the mediation of dominant culture. When there are significant divergences relative to dominant culture, processes of accommodation or resistance are inevitable as an individual moves from one cultural location to another. Refusal or failure to adapt the ‘ordinary’ behaviour of one’s home culture, for example, may entail a transgression of norms in another context. Girls’ ‘toughness, boldness, and straightforwardness often label them as difficult and disruptive girls at school, even while they connect them with one another, their families, and their community’ (Brown 1998, p.128). Thus, normality and deviance, conformity and resistance, are culturally relative concepts (Griffin 1993). Individuals’ constructions of beliefs, values and norms occur within complex relations to the multiple cultures in which they live.

It is partly girls’ awareness of their marginalised relation to the centre that prompts their resistances. Although their actions may not be read as political, they are conscious of their oppressive circumstances, described in girls’ vernacular as personal injustices. This is evident in Walker’s study in the girls’ formulation of their situation and the object of their resistance: that teachers are only interested in teaching the ‘posh’ girls. Similarly, in Brown’s study, the girls circumscribe their own futures because they know that college is beyond their families’ financial means. In Haney’s study the girls echo the identification of education and income as simultaneously the credentials for success and out of their reach. In the three studies, the girls are aware that others occupy privileged positions that entail ready access to what they cannot obtain.

In Fordham’s study, access to cultural capital is delineated by racial positioning. The creating or reclaiming of identity ‘while concurrently embracing a world ordered by (an)Other’ (Fordham 1996, p.4) impinges on all aspects of students’ experiences of schooling and is the primary object of students’ resistances. Hutchings (1993) discusses the strategic resistances of Aboriginal children and the subversive effects of their offences on ‘the covert racial hierarchy operating in the town’ (p.355). Their actions are intentionally subversive, of oppressive legal and welfare systems, and a response to economic and racial subordination.

While the girls may not analyse their positioning and marginalisation in political terms, their experiences, and especially home-based knowledge (Haney 1996; Ward
1996) make them aware of the limits to rewards for conforming. The to-ing and fro-ing between conforming and resisting indicates a desire for what the centre promises in material and other rewards, simultaneous with a belief that this is unlikely because of their distance from the centre. Liberation and personal success are defined in terms of desired relationships and in material terms – in having a job, one’s own place, a car, perhaps a family later in life (Brown 1998; Alder and Hunter 1999). At the same time as the girls may be excited in dreaming of the future, the ‘gap between what these girls believe is going to happen and what they hope for’ (Brown, p.63) constrains their depictions of possible success. Their desire to believe, and a disbelief in, the meritocratic ideal is a tension that may be expressed in various ways, as hope or aggression or creative survival strategies.

RESISTANCE AS RESILIENCE

Robinson and Ward (1991) distinguish positive resistances from self-destructive ones: African American girls’ repertoire of ‘quick fixes’- drug use, offending, pregnancy, early school leaving – are ‘resistances for survival’ (pp.90-95). Such resistances are ultimately not in the girls’ own interest and perpetuate racist attitudes and the material conditions that are the objects of resistance. Similarly, Hutchings’ analysis of Aboriginal children’s ‘great shoe store robbery’ indicates a fleeting victory, but offending reproduces and perpetuates ‘the systems they seek to undermine’ (Hutchings 1993, p.351). That self-harm may be the final resort in girls’ attempts to reassert or maintain a sense of personal autonomy and identity (Griffin 1993; Hutchings 1993; Pini 1997) is indicative of the misplacement and futility of some resistance strategies.

Resistances for survival, though providing no magic repositioning in terms of access to cultural capital, may nonetheless represent resilient attempts to create positive options within the constraints of marginalised positioning. For example, Campbell’s (1981; 1987) analysis of girls’ gangs indicates how threats of aggression establish reputations for self-protection. The girls maintain an image of (and when necessary demonstrate) toughness at the same time as they reject the family violence they have grown up with and are intent on providing a safer, better upbringing for their own children. The gang is thus an alternative ‘family’, offering safety and a sense of belonging.

The notion of positive resistances reframes thinking in terms of survivors, rather than victims (Baines and Alder 1996), and social critics (Campbell 1981), rather than social casualties; even the emotionality of ‘difficult’ girls can be reframed as ‘a form of resistance or struggle against “the inner hold” of their oppressive circumstances’ (Hudson 1989, p.210).

Locating girls in the context of their social and cultural positioning may warrant a reframing of their resistances as resilience. Girls’ ‘resistance to unhealthy conventions or norms’ (Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan 1995, p.18) can be seen as indicative of strengths rather than deficiencies. Refusal to identify with images that denigrate oneself or one’s people; resistance to the romanticising of relationships that exclude experiential realities; resistance to idealised images of ‘nice’ girls; and speaking out about sexism and racism
(pp.33-37) are examples of ways in which resistances may be reframed as resilience. Resistances in school may similarly be interpreted as resilient when the intent is self-protection: from labelling that could be harmful to reputation; from failure that seems inevitable even when the effort to succeed is made; from daily boredom arising out of a curriculum and pedagogy that does not engage or value one’s life experiences. Acts of resilience are spirited indications of a desire for more positive ways of being for oneself, and of being seen by others.

CONCLUSION

It is beyond the scope of this article to detail pedagogical and educational policy implications. Analysis of the interpersonal contexts of resistance presented here points to the need for further research on how teachers as well as students, and workers (police, juvenile justice staff, welfare workers) as well as offenders, shape relations of control and resistance. The reframing of resistances as resilience, and as part of girls’ identity work, may point to ways of working for more productive responses to resistances, rather than further controls and perpetuation of the pattern. The literature on girl-friendly pedagogy has highlighted the relational in girls’ learning style preferences, though this may be a step removed from engagement of resisters in the first instance. Interactions of control and resistance tend to steer relations towards breaking down and producing alienation. Refocusing on resilience may provide insights for maintaining and building up relationships.

Analysis of the adolescent contexts of resistances highlights the control and regulation of girls’ behaviour as girls. Primarily expressed as relational conflicts, girls’ resistances indicate that they ‘fleetingly grasp that they are not who they are told they are’ (Cain 1990, p.7) or should be. Their very definition and categorisation by others is an object of their resistance as identity work. At the same time, both resistances and conformities indicate desire for acceptance, belonging and ideals of independence, good relationships and positive regard as young women. There is a need for ongoing reflexivity by adults working with girls concerning conceptualisation of those ideals. Even educators whose focal aim is the empowerment of girls have acknowledged the trap of substituting a different set of cultural ideals for traditional gendered norms, only to be met with resistances or lack of connection with girls (Kenway, Blackmore and Willis 1996). How teachers and other workers thinks about girls, what and how they ought to be, and the consequences of actions based on these assumptions require ongoing scrutiny in light of what girls themselves are expressing. Opportunities for girls to develop critical understandings of the social construction of gender and femininities may be provided within the school curriculum. Further research and practice in this area are needed, particularly focusing on girls’ lived experience, including how they negotiate double binds and make sense of mixed messages about being a girl. This work should be collaborative in order that teachers and other workers may learn from girls and reflect on their practice in light of such learning, while also assisting girls to make connections between their experience of the interpersonal and broader critiques both in terms of gender and social positioning. This work is not focused on taming anger but validating the legitimacy of protest.
We need to know more about the survival strategies and successes of marginalised girls and the factors that have enabled their success against the odds. Both resistances and conformities indicate desire for the promises of the centre. If resistances are in part a reaction to recognising the privilege of others and their own exclusion, the gaps between policy and practice concerning equity and inclusivity must be addressed. There is ample research and practice to guide the identification of girls ‘at risk’ and strategies, both preventative and compensatory, for counterbalancing risk factors. These approaches need to be strengthened, particularly regarding preventative strategies to ensure that all students have the literacy skills to cope with their schoolwork and that they feel known and accepted, with a sense of belonging at school. School and teacher practices that require ‘acting white’ or ‘acting middle class’ are unlikely to foster the latter. Family and social issues cannot be simply dropped at the school gate. Resistors should not be allowed to fall (or be pushed) through the cracks.

We may need to rethink resourcing, in ways that combine school and community resources. There is a need for review of ways in which individual needs are identified, and provision made for meeting those needs. Resisting girls make it clear that having someone to talk to, being taken seriously and obtaining practical support are all highly valued (Alder and Hunter 1999; Brown 1998; Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan 1995). More flexible provision for community resources, for example in health and welfare, to be provided on-site in schools and for life skills learning in the community may improve identification of and provision for individual needs while reducing the likelihood of stigma attaching to such opportunities. Similarly, ‘pathways’ provide flexibility in meeting the learning needs of senior students and may be a positive option for some younger students whose practical needs can be better met by community-based services. Community-based learning, life skills and personal development are all accredited as components of school subjects or courses when the program is devised by teachers or educational authorities. Student-initiated ‘time out’ for completing real-life ‘projects’ too often marks the beginning of the fall (or push) through the cracks. Developing a system for incorporating individualised, needs-based community projects may fulfil the dual purpose of practical support and enabling the student to maintain her enrolment.

Girls’ resistances are resilient acts toward self-empowerment, and they are a signal to those in primary relationships with resisters of opportunities to support girls’ empowerment in positive ways. It is in relationship that both the power and futility of resistances are learned and in relationship that more positive ways of being may likewise be learned and attained. The notion that resilience may be learned (Benard 1998) offers a positive alternative to pathologising and focusing on girls’ deficits and expectations of an inevitable and deterministic trajectory of failure and delinquency. Reframing resistances as identity work and resilience in adolescent relations on the margins necessitates a rethinking of issues of power, control, positioning and the rewards and costs of conformity. How to maintain ‘challenging’ girls’ engagement in school will be an important part of this rethinking. As Alder (1998) suggests, our conceptualisations of troublesome behaviour warrant further research which should be directed towards ‘a re-working and
re-framing, not only of our approaches to working with girls, but at the same time, what it means to be a “girl”" (Alder 1998, p.58).

REFERENCES


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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Manuscripts

1. Manuscripts should be typed double-spaced on one side of the paper, with generous margins all round. Single-spaced manuscripts will not be considered for publication. Three hard copies and a disk should be submitted (see below).
2. For anonymity in the reviewing process, authors’ names, affiliations, postal addresses and telephone numbers should appear on a separate covering page.
3. Articles should be approximately 6,000 words in length.
4. An abstract of approximately 150 words should accompany each manuscript.
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6. References should be indicated in the manuscript by giving the author’s name, with the year of publication in parentheses. If several papers by the same author and from the same year are cited, then a, b, etc, should be placed after the year of publication. References should be listed in full at the end of the paper in the following format:

7. All figures must be in camera-ready form.
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