Representations of Girlhood 
Through Zine Creation

by
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Abstract

Currently, girls’ media representations within mainstream media sources are dominated by the idea of the girl as a consumer rather than a media producer. This understanding of the girl as a media consumer rather than an active agent in her own representation leads to a limited understanding of contemporary girls and girlhood. Rather than allowing space for girls to have complex identities, mainstream representations of girlhood often only allow for a binary understanding of girlhood identity. I attempt to work outside this discourse by examining how girls can use zining, which I argue should be qualified as an alternative form of life writing, to both challenge and conform to popular notions of girlhood. In this thesis I examine a single zine series as a life-writing text object utilizing three representational strategies to guide my analysis.

Keywords:  girlhood identity; alternative life-writing; resistance; zining; media consumption
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who has helped me in completing my goals. My parents, Denise and Gary Harwardt, my partner, Max King, and my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Marshall. You have all made it possible for me to complete this process, thank you.
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

*BECAUSE* we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings…

*BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will change the world for real.*

(Hannah, Riot GRRRL Manifesto, 1991)

As a young woman growing up in the late 1990’s it was easy to see how girls were permeating popular culture. As third wave feminism began to take an ideological hold the idea of the girl was no longer relegated to simply the time before womanhood, and instead was repositioned as an important group within the feminist community (Mann & Huffman, 2005). Social-political groups like Riot Grrrl brought to the forefront the idea of girlhood as a unique social position, along with an anti-corporate ethos and a push for recognition of issues of sexual violence (Piepmeier, 2009). As these notions began to take hold within the popular imagination many of the ideals of the third wave feminist movement and Riot Grrrl were watered down by mainstream media culture, and presented to girls in movies, music, television, and print.

Girl centric movies like *Bring It On*, *Clueless*, and *Charlie’s Angels* and girl groups like the Spice Girls, Destiny’s Child, and TLC ruled the lives of me and my friends. The messages of girl power and empowerment that I embraced as a teen fueled a feeling that as a girl I could do anything and be anything. The rhetoric of girl power seemed like an inclusive and authentic message of individuality and proto-feminism that inspired myself and many other young girls. However, as the systems that produced these messages became clearer the type of girlhood that was promoted began to seem like less of an authentic representation of the contemporary girlhood experience. I found myself looking for representations of girlhood that more closely resembled the complex
and multifaceted relationship with identity that I was experiencing. In the search for this alternative portrayal I began to explore zine culture through punk fan zines, and eventually came to more girl focused zines. These girl zines even further muddied the girl power message that my favourite media sources had previously made seem so simple. As the zines explored alternative understandings of what it means to be a girl I became more and more aware of the disconnect between the realities of girlhood and the ideals that were promoted within the mainstream discourse. The question of who creates these media messages and ideals began to resonate in my life, and confuse the popular media messages that represented girlhood as a time that was fun, easy, and bright.

1.1. Who is a Girl?

This question, while perhaps simplistic, raises an important distinction within the current popular conception of girlhood. This categorization is not only defined through who is included, but can also be considered in reference to who is excluded from the popular understanding of girlhood. The category of the ideal girl as understood through the lens of Western media culture is what I will define as normative girlhood. Normative girlhood is best exemplified by white, middle class, heterosexual, and able-bodied girls (Currie, Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009). These girls dominate the air-waves and television screens, and while there may be subtle deviation from this type, the formula remains mainly unchanged and unchallenged. While this may represent media producers’ ideal girl consumer, it also creates a discourse surrounding girlhood that limits the reality of the message being sold. Mary Kearney (2006) notes that popular representations of girls are often uncomplicated and simplistic, providing little space within the narrative of girlhood for complex discussions of identity, and focusing instead on the easily identifiable features of normative girlhood (p. 3). Many scholars have noted that this conception of girlhood is one that limits girls’ understandings of identity choices, and creates a non-inclusive conception of what it means to be a girl (Aaploa et al., 2005; Harris, 2004; Harris, 2003; McRobbie, 2007).

This leads one to wonder if non-normative girls are afforded any space within the landscape of popular culture, and if so, how they survive. Resistance within boys’
culture has long been a pre-occupation for youth studies scholar, but girls’ resistance has often been developed only within the context of their relationship to and with boys (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). Resistant girlhood¹ has been portrayed within popular culture, however the representations are still often one dimensional and uncomplicated. As Henry Giroux (2002) notes, even when girls are shown as non-conforming they are still defined through their role as consumers, and understood only through their anti-mainstream consumer choices. Here Giroux (2002) identifies the limitations that girls face in the representations of resistance, as the choices that are set up for them are entirely centered around their identity within the consumer landscape. Anita Harris (2004) also explores the limited identity options for girls, as she notes that girlhood resistance in many narratives is written as an entire identity for girls, rather than simply an aspect of their identity. Harris (2004) identifies that within popular understandings of girlhood the range of identities is limited to what she identifies as “can-do girls” (p. 17) or “at-risk girls” (p. 24). The choice that is presented identifies resistance or compliance with these ideals as the only options within identity formation, and girls are not given the option of complicated and multifaceted identities that can both challenge and comply with the rigid rules of girlhood.

1.2. Girls Producing Themselves

Given this backdrop, media produced by girls provides an interesting counter point to the rigid representations of girlhood that are found within popular culture. I believe that zines and zine culture especially offer a unique option within this problematic narrative of girlhood. The self produced nature of zines provides a unique opportunity for girls to take the reins of cultural production, and also to present multifaceted and complex representations of themselves and other girls within their work. Melanie Ferris (2001) observed that zines often cover a variety of topics that are ignored within mainstream media such as non-normative sexuality and gender identity, mental health, self-esteem, and sexual assault (p. 2). These topics, which are often considered taboo

¹Resistant girlhood here refers to acts that purposefully challenge normative ideals of girlhood discussed earlier.
within the discourse of normative girlhood, are readily taken up by girl zinesters in their writing.

While zining may be considered a niche cultural form it is possible to consider zining, especially personal zines, as a form of autobiographical life writing (Poletti, 2008; Sinor, 2003). By linking the historical roots of diary and manuscript writing with the modern act of zining it is possible to see girls zining practice as historically linked to the early forms of life writing (Huff, 2000; Piepmeier, 2009). This is compelling when contemplating zining as a form of representation that provides a unique space for girls that is free from the pressures of conformity that can accompany more professional forms of life writing and autobiography. While Poletti (2008) has considered two representational strategies that are used within zines generally, it is interesting to consider the ways that girls specifically use these strategies to carve out their own space within a broader cultural landscape that limits what it means to be a girl. While the zining community may be considered a subcultural space where non-conformity is an expectation of involvement, the limitations that are placed upon girlhood are still present within the lives of the girl zine creators. Even though the cultural location of zining may be very welcoming to the ideas being espoused within girl zines the mainstream limitations placed upon girls still effect these zinesters self conceptions. Therefore, it remains important to consider how girls use these strategies to challenge the limitations set up by broader culture.

1.3. Purpose of Study

This thesis uses a feminist theoretical perspective situated within the third wave to explore how girls use zining as a form of alternative life writing. The main question driving this project is:

How do girls negotiate and resist the boundaries of the mainstream conception of girlhood through alternative life-writing in the form of personal zines?

For this project I studied a single personal zine series by a self-identified girl using two representational strategies identified by Poletti (2008), and a third original
strategy extrapolated from Poletti’s (2008) work. This allowed me to gain a deep understanding of how a girl can use zining as a form of life writing to create complex and multifaceted representations of girlhood and their own identity. Within the context of classrooms I was especially concerned with how girls use alternative life writing as a form of representation that may not be available within their lives at school, and as an opportunity to engage and question the public pedagogy surrounding girlhood. In the next chapter I will review the key literature within the fields of girlhood studies, cultural studies, and autobiography studies that will help to further clarify and answer my research question.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Since the 1990s, the study of girls in North America has often focused on perceived crises of girlhood (Pipher, 1994; Gilligan & Brown, 1992). In particular scholars attend to how girls are represented in popular media, and how girls are negatively affected by these representations (Kearney, 2009, p. 14). Youth studies scholars have considered girls’ relationship with media culture and how they challenge mainstream representations of themselves through non-traditional forms (such as virtual reality, graffiti, slam poetry, etc.), but it is still understudied within academia (See Carrington, 2010; Low, 2006). In this literature review, I focus on how girlhood is represented primarily through the viewpoint of adults, and how girls can and do push back against these popular representations through personal zines. I examine how girls are presented with limited identities through popular representations of girlhood in culture and academia, and how alternative media, and specifically personal zines, allow girls a space to explore non-normative aspects of their identities. The literature included is both theoretical and empirical in nature, and is drawn from academic research written between 1990 and 2011 in the fields of girlhood studies, cultural studies, and autobiography/life writing studies. I specifically chose these three fields due to the unique intersection they present. By considering how girls’ alternative life writing both challenges and conforms to mainstream ideas of girlhood it is important to interrogate not only the popular conceptions of youth and girlhood that are brought forward in cultural studies, but also the ideologies surrounding girlhood resistance that are more deeply considered in the area of girlhood studies. Within all three areas of inquiry I have included work that theorizes representations of girlhood and discusses the role of the girls’ resistant writing, reading which allow for girls to explore resistant identities.
2.1. Defining Girls

Until quite recently girls have been marginalized in youth and cultural studies. While there have been significant strides made with the rise of girlhood studies as a distinct academic discipline, this can still be considered quite a new area of scholarly study. Angela McRobbie can be considered a seminal scholar within this field, and has addressed the important question regarding girls’ lack of representation within youth and subcultural studies (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). Mary Kearney (2009), a cultural studies scholar, has more recently noted that the narrative surrounding youth has typically defaulted to a boy-centered narrative, and most discussions of girls and girlhood have been uncritical and stereotypical (p. 3). Even feminists have historically denigrated the title of girl as second wave feminists classified “girl” as an infantilizing term and created a strict definitional line between women and girls (Kearney, 2009, p. 8). However third wave feminism of the 1990’s began to embrace the title of girl, and girls and girl studies began to move to the forefront of popular culture and cultural studies.

As popular cultural and academic interest in girls rose so did the push to define and label them. Anita Harris (2004), a girls’ studies scholar, effectively deconstructs how these labels act as a limiting power in the narrative of girlhood and within girls’ lives. Harris (2004) identifies the binary definitions as being the “can-do girl” (p. 17) and the “at-risk girl” (p. 24). The can-do girl is packaged within neo-liberal values, and is largely defined around an individual understanding of success. These girls are portrayed as being heavily invested in academic and career success, independence, and fashionable consumerism (Harris, 2004, p. 17). Harris notes that personal success is valued above collective understandings of success that may have been more accessible to previous generations of girls. Girlhood studies scholars Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick, and Anita Harris (2005) in their book Young Femininity see this narrative as stemming from the girl power movement of the 1990’s. They discuss that the roots of girl power may have been in the politically engaged Riot Grrrl movement, but the current iteration has been commercially watered down and “positions young women as feisty, ambitious, motivated and independent” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 26). This mainstream narrative of girlhood emphasizes the role of personal responsibility and consumer choice, while
decoupling girls' identities from collective feminist and radical politics (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 30).

In opposition to the independent “can-do girl” (or the “girl power girl”) Harris (2004) offers the “at-risk girl”. Girls in this category are often seen as suffering from “poor personal choices, laziness, and incompetent family practices” (Harris, 2004, p. 24). Unlike the can-do girl the at-risk girl has limited social mobility and is typically from non-White and lower socio-economic status. Harris (2004) importantly notes that the problems that these girls face are often cast as individual problems, rather than being recognized as the result of systemic marginalization (p. 24). Girls who find themselves categorized as at-risk may find themselves being subjected to early interventions by the government and schools that create an underclass of girlhood that is strictly monitored and supervised.

Aapola et al. (2005) provide a different opposition point within the binary they identify. Rather than the “at-risk” discourse that Harris (2004) identifies Aapola et al. (2005) identify what they call the “reviving Ophelia” or the “girlhood in crisis” discourse (2005, p. 40). The “reviving Ophelia” narrative refers to Mary Pipher’s book by the same name that identified adolescent girls as “undergo[ing] a ‘crisis in self-esteem’…from which they never fully recover” (1994, p. 43). Pipher (1994) saw American teenage girlhood as being defined by a displacing of the “authentic self”, and instead looking to please others in their lives (p. 42). This definition of girlhood can be seen as problematic due to the essentialization of American girlhood as being White and middle class. This definition ignores the multiple categories that make up girls’ identities (such as race, class, sexuality, and ability), and positions young women as being inherently irrational beings (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 44-46).

The unifying characteristic of the “can-do girl”, the “at-risk girl” and the “girlhood in crisis” narratives are that all three “emphasize young female subjectivities as projects that can be shaped by the individual” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 54). These limited definitions provide very little room for girls, especially non-dominant girls, to explore identity in a meaningful way, as the narrow range of options for girls recast problems that girls may face as being the result of personality issues (such as low self esteem), or poor choices. Rather than promoting identity formation as a fluid and non-linear process, girls
are contained through academic and cultural understandings of girlhood that ignore the multitude of categories such as race, socio-economic background, and sexual identity that affect the lived realities girls.

2.2. Girls and Resistance

Girlhood studies scholars Marnina Gonick, Emma Renold, Jessica Ringrose, and Lisa Weems (2009) note that the binary used to define girls is often also used when discussing notions of agency and compliance (p. 6). Within the binary both agency and compliance are individualized and viewed as in direct relation of a girl’s location in the binary between a “girl power girl” and a “girl in crisis” (see Aapola et al., 2005). By framing resistance as an individual activity, rather than a collective activity, girls are pushed further into private worlds. This reinforces a neo-liberal understanding of identity that is focused on an individualization of the self, rather than community movements.

The individualization of girl’s resistance can be seen when examining representations of girls’ rebellion in the media. While it may seem counter-intuitive, popular representations of rebellion are also based largely around a model of consumer citizenship. As Henry Giroux (2002), a cultural studies scholar, notes in his analysis of the film Ghost World$^2$ (Zwigoff, 2001), the female main characters differentiate themselves from others at their school and society through a carefully defined set of consumer choices (2002, p. 298). Rather than shopping at the mall the main characters instead shop at thrift stores and buy records. While this may provide a chance to differentiate themselves from their peers the choice to showcase difference and individuality strictly through consumer choice acts to depoliticize and individualize the real struggles that girls face in attempting to create valid contributions in a society that denies youth public agency (Giroux, 2002, p. 284). Giroux’s work provides an excellent lens through which to critique broader depictions of youth within popular culture, his

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2 2001 film (based on a graphic novel of the same name) about two girls who are social outcasts who’s lives diverge while struggling to find meaning in their lives after their high school graduation. Despite the works celebration of alternative girlhood the main characters are still defined through their roles within the consumer marketplace, rather than as producers.
analysis does leave room for scholars to more actively question the more day-to-day depictions of youth, and specifically girls.

While Giroux argues that this model of rebellion stems partially from the devaluation of youth within contemporary culture, other scholars believe that for girls this consumeristic model of community has been present for quite some time. Kirsten Pike (2011) builds off Giroux’s work, arguing that the individualization and de-politicization of girl’s politics, which Giroux notes as being a central theme in *Ghost World* (Zwigoff, 2001), has been occurring since the second wave of feminism in girl focused media. Through her study of *Seventeen Magazine* from 1968-1977 she found that “Seventeen’s editors wanted to be a part of the conversation about women’s liberation but were reluctant to recommend it as a viable model of citizenship for girls” (Pike, 2011, p. 57). Instead of encouraging readers to take part in radical collective activism, girls were encouraged to buy liberation and citizenship through product purchases, effectively disconnecting collectivism from a desirable form of citizenship (Pike, 2011, p. 58). It is possible to suggest that the representation of female rebellion in *Ghost World* (Zwigoff, 2001) is simply a continuation of the type of citizenship, agency, and resistance that has always been foisted on girls, rather than an effect of a more current trend of resistance management due to a devaluing of general youth in Western society as Giroux suggests.

While it is important to consider that girls are often pushed towards a singular model of agency within their lives, Gonick et al. (2009) suggest that the discourse surrounding resistance should change to accommodate the multiplicity of categories that surround girls’ identities, rather than viewing resistance as being tied to the singular individual category of girl. The authors note that resistance and compliance are not either or options for most girls, and instead girls engage in resistance in spaces and ways that can seem contradictory (Gonick et al., 2009, p. 6). This contradiction is an important aspect of the conversation surrounding girls’ resistance. As previously discussed girls’ representations of identity are often limited by neo-liberal ideologies that place an importance on consumer-oriented models of identity and self. While this may be the norm within mainstream portrayals of girlhood many girls move outside these strict boundaries to experiment with more complex forms of identity representation that they feel provides a more authentic portrayal of themselves. It is important to consider
how girls work with and resist these de-collectivized identity politics rather than viewing resistance as being a static idea. By taking an approach that studies these contradictions in girls’ own voices it is possible to examine resistance in an in-depth way. The choice of studying zines makes sense within this context due to their role as an established space of resistance. As girls’ resistance is not viewed as threatening within this space it allows for girls to experiment with how they choose to resist, and to explore different representational tactics within the form

2.3. Defining Zines

Stephen Duncombe (1997), an American studies scholar, defines zines in his book Notes From the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture as being “non commercial, nonprofessional, small circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (p. 6). Zines are generally produced and consumed by young, White, and culturally middle class people who have embraced deviating from dominant cultural norms surrounding politics, sexuality, and cultural tastes (Duncombe, 1997, p. 8). Zine culture has expanded since the late 1990’s, with a broader base of authorship and readership. However, as a whole zine culture is still dominated by white middle class individuals (Piepmeier, 2009, p. 112). Melanie Ferris (2001), a women’s studies scholar, notes that distribution of zines is limited by the costs of zine making. As zinesters do not include advertisements and generally only sell zines for a few dollars (or postage) it is difficult for many zine creators to cover the costs of creation and distribution (Ferris, 2001, p. 5). The expansion of the internet has led to a greater number of electronic zines (or e-zines) being created, and has expanded the scope of distribution by making digitizing production and distribution practices(2001, p. 5). However e-zines are still often viewed as being an inferior form of zining, and is seen by many within the community as a less authentic form of zining due to its lack of physical workmanship (Piepmeier, 2009, p. 65). In addition to cost being a prohibitive factor in wide scale distribution, a unique feature that runs across zines and zine culture would be the DIY (or Do It Yourself) aesthetic that privileges a commitment to amateurism over professional level publishing techniques (Duncombe, 1997, p. 14). This in turn can increase the time constraints of zine creators as they are directly involved at all levels of publication and distribution.
Due to the underground nature of zines there is an expected level of disagreement within academia over the evolution of zines. Duncombe’s (1997) evolution of the zine is one of the most well accepted understandings of where current zine culture originated (see also Harris, 2004; Kearney, 2006). He cites science fiction fanzines from the 1930’s as the origin of zine culture (Duncombe, 1997, p. 6). He notes that science fiction readers would create these fanzines to share their own science fiction stories, and to engage in dialogue with the larger science fiction community (Duncombe, 1997, p. 6). Fanzines were embraced by 1970’s punk culture, and were mostly used to discuss underground punk culture and bands, and have since expanded to a variety of underground cultures and interests (Duncombe, 1997, p. 8). However these zines were written and read mostly by a male audience (Duncombe as cited in Ferris, 2001, p. 2).

While Duncombe’s (1997) evolution may adequately reflect the history of male zine culture, it is important to consider the unique status that girl zines have as one of the few areas of subculture that girls consider their own. This is evident in Allison Piepmeier’s (2009) alternative zine history, Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism, which is rooted in the history of first and second wave Western feminism. She discusses a history of self-produced literature in the early women’s movement such as scrapbooking and mimeographed pamphleteering as being direct predecessors to zines, as they link the personal nature of self-publication with the public nature of collective identity (Piepmeier, 2009, p. 29-39). Piepmeier (2009) also sees a direct link between early women’s self-publishing and modern girl zines in the nature of the content. Much of the early self-published literature dealt with issues that were considered transgressive for women to discuss, such as sexual health, and were attempting to help women gain access to information that was often censored out of traditional publications (Piepmeier, 2009, p. 34). In a similar vein girl zines tend to cover topics that are not generally discussed in traditional women’s magazines such as sexual assault, self-esteem, mental illness and relationships (Ferris, 2001, p. 2). In the context of this thesis it is important to consider the unique space that girl zines hold as one of the few forms within which girls can produce culture with limited intrusion. While it may never be possible to work entirely outside of dominant culture zines lo-fi aesthetic and distribution techniques make it possible for girls to involve themselves in the community with very little adult supervision or intervention. This viewpoint lends credit to Piepmeier’s (2009) assertion
that girl zines have their own unique history that is separate from male zine culture, however it is interesting to note that the history that she outlines is situated within adult women’s culture rather than within girl culture.

This alternate history of girls’ zine culture has specific relevance to personal zines (or per zines), which Duncombe (1997) defines as being “personal diaries open to the public, [and can include] shared notes on the day-to-day life [and] thoughts and experiences of the world” (p. 11). The similarity to diaries and diary culture could be one reason why per zines have been actively embraced by girl zine writers as a popular form of expression. This linking to a history of women’s and girls’ writing practices is an important reason to study girl created per zines. By actively exploring girls’ writing and personal exploration through zine creation it is possible to strengthen this link to a broader history of girls’ writing. Looking closely at the specific practices that are used within this context allows for scholars to consider the unique nature of girls’ work, and to more deeply consider how girls’ cultural production through zine creation differs from other types of cultural production.

2.4. Girls as Cultural Producers

Mary Kearney (2006) explores girls’ involvement in media culture in her book *Girls Make Media*. She notes that the lack of girls’ involvement in mainstream media production can be attributed to multiple factors, including: a lack of welcoming entry points (Kearney, 2006, p. 73), a limited number of female role models and mentors in media production (Kearney, 2006, p. 192), and the limitations of girls’ media education (Kearney, 2006, p. 100). She found that “most educators place little or no emphasis on improving young people’s knowledge about and engagement with the technical tools and creative practices that produce media” (Kearney, 2006, p. 100), instead opting to teach girls about how media affects them. Kearney (2006) suggests that by only educating girls how to analyze media creates “the often impenetrable wall that separates media analysis from media production” (2006, p. 101), and may leave girls with the mentality that their role in media is as a passive consumer rather than an active participant in the culture.
Though Kearney (2006) was able to identify several programs that focused on giving girls a hands on education in media production, they were often small programs that were minimally funded (See: It’s a She Shoot and Reel Grrls) and the creators worried that greater government involvement through funding would lead to a diluting of the original message (2006, p. 111). This exclusion from mainstream media production has led many girls to turn to, underground forms of media, which allow girls greater control of the message and the distribution of their work.

Zines and zine culture are one form of media that work explicitly within the micro-sector of media rather than in the commercial sector (Kearney, 2006, p. 70). The micro-sector of cultural production is an alternative mode of production, reproduction, exhibition, promotion, distribution, and consumption that attempts to work outside of the mainstream media consciousness and the government (Kearney, 2006, p. 70). Anita Harris (2003) recognizes the importance of girl zine work within the micro sector as a way to control and spread a message that may not be accepted by mainstream audiences. As many programs that are created for and by girls are often co-opted by commercial and governmental groups that privilege giving girls voice, over hearing girls words, and counter-intuitively encourages voice from a place of disempowerment by silencing any resistance. Grassroots forms of production – like zining – provide a space that is ideally free from this commercial and governmental intrusion (Harris, 2003, p. 44). By intentionally working from an alternative space girl zinesters may lose the attention of a larger audience, but are in turn able to control the distribution and use of their message (Harris, 2003, p. 39). This Harris concludes is a pro-active way for girls to manage against the co-option of their ideas and their identity by the government and mass media.

However, it is important to note that as zines have gained recognition in the public they have also become more publically accessible. Many public and university libraries now have zine collections that are publically accessible and curated by professional librarians (see Douglas College Zine Library; Vancouver Public Library Zine Collection). Though this does increase the reach of zines, it can also lead to a shift in control away from the creator, and may lead to pressure to conform to certain standards of professionalism or perceived appropriateness of subject matter in order to be included within a library’s zine collection.
2.5. Zines and Education

Education scholars have typically researched zines within the context of what Paulo Friere calls “informal education practices” (as cited in Rogers and Winters, 2010, p. 19). From this viewpoint zines are a way for youth who may feel marginalized in a traditional school setting to take part in outside-of-the-classroom literacy and educational projects that are self led. Canadian literacy scholars Theresa Rogers and Kari Winters (2010) provide an excellent example of this type of research in their study about a zine created by homeless youth called *Another Slice*. The authors note that the youth creators used the zine to connect with others within their community, and to counter dominant discourses surrounding youth homelessness (Rogers & Winters, 2010, p. 3). Rogers and Winters’ (2010) view the zine community within this context as a way for homeless youth to create connections and share their stories with others. As they do not have access to more formalized communities, such as a school community, this becomes an important part of their informal educational practices.

Education researchers Barbara Guzzetti and Margaret Gamboa (2004) also studied the non-traditional educational outcomes of zining. The researchers focus on the zine *Burnt Beauty* created by three high school aged girls. Similarly to Rogers and Winters (2010), Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) also found that the zining community provided the girls with “affinity groups to initiate and sustain students’ literacy practices outside of schools” (p. 423). While the research surrounding *Another Slice* primarily examined the youth creators, Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) examined the influence that a supportive teacher had on the girls writing. Interestingly, while they did find that the freedom of topics and styles within classroom writing supported the girl zinesters at becoming better writers, they would not suggest “teaching zines” as they felt that such practice would dilute the original resistant intention of zines (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004, p. 433).

While these scholars do provide an effective understanding of how zines can be viewed as non-traditional forms of educational practice, neither acknowledge the importance of literacy creation on the writers’ formation of identity. While this research is important and provides a strong base for education researchers to consider how zines contribute to a public pedagogy, it is also important to consider how these informal
literacy practices can contribute to the creators’ sense of self and identity. Rather than only viewing zines as a group educational practice that is intended to create and support alternative communities, it is possible to build on these ideas and study zines as a way to challenge the identity that is afforded to them within the context of mainstream society. By focusing on how zines can provide girls with the opportunity to tell their own stories, and not just the stories of their community, it is possible to view zining as a legitimate literacy practice.

2.6. Zines as Representational Life-Writing

When considering zines as representational work many may resist placing zines into the general category of autobiography or life writing due to their non-traditional form and content. This may stem from what Autobiography scholar Sidonie Smith (1993) calls a history of autobiography being situated around “bourgeois individualism” which worked to “[reproduce] and [consolidate] the West’s notion of the self” (p. 393). Smith describes the tenets of traditional autobiography as working to promote a universalized version of humanity that is focused around white, heterosexual, men. Naturalizing their stories as the only ones that existed in the time period. Smith (1993) found that even biographies that focused on historically marginalized figures sometimes fell into the trap erasing the socio-historical context from their stories, and instead focusing on them as “exceptional [people]” (p. 396). By casting these figures as exceptional individuals they are disassociated from the social movements that allowed them to achieve success in their era, and instead are viewed as succeeding entirely due to their own individual ethic. This is important to critique of traditional autobiography as communities that supported individuals are often erased from the stories that are told.

Marshall (2006) notes that representational life writing about girlhood is not solely based within zines and the zining community. While discussing Susanna Kaysen’s 1994 autobiography *Girl, Interrupted* Marshall notes the ways that Kaysen rallies against the conception of mental illness as being tied to girlhood identity. Rather than simply writing her story, Kaysen writes against the texts that were written about her by her doctors and mental health workers. While this allows her to create a space that actively questions her own girlhood identity, she refuses to align herself to a community of girls with mental
illness. Marshall notes “Kaysen found herself turning away from [her girl fans]”, and in a hope of finding a response that was more in line with what she considered a literary response (2006, p. 128). Kaysen’s response to her girl fans provides an interesting opportunity to consider the subjugated place of girls within the field of literature. Rather than considering her girl fans as members of a community of which Kaysen belongs, she places herself as being above them. This allows her to maintain her role as a member of the literary community, rather than as a member of girls with mental illness. This provides an excellent example of the problematic nature of mainstream autobiography. As it is situated within the mainstream media it has been difficult for authors to gain legitimacy without also distancing themselves from the larger marginalized population of which they are a member.

Giroux (2002) notes that stories of youth specifically have often been ignored due to the devaluing of youth culture. He argues that modern society ignores stories of youth movements that challenge the mainstream picture of youth as lazy and consumer driven troublemakers. In turn it becomes difficult for youth to see themselves as valued members of society (Giroux, 2002, p. 284). Kearney (2006) more specifically references the devaluing of teenage girls contributions to society as a way silence girls and women (Kearney, 2006, 81). Rather than chronicling their stories and the movements behind them, teen girls are often ignored within mainstream media outside of a limited narrative. This narrative works to reinforce popular conceptions of girlhood as being shallow and unimportant. By ignoring or removing the stories of teenage girls from the popular imagination it further marginalizes their stories and their identities.

This focus in traditional autobiography has shifted as conceptions of the self also shift. The Cartesian Self is depicted as being “well-defined, stable, [and] impermeable” (Smith, 1990, p. 11) and was rooted in the early 19th century. As the conception of the self as bounded was challenged, so were notions of what makes a suitable subject for autobiography. While there is still a strong emphasis on the exceptional individual in traditional autobiography, the shifting conception of the self provides space for non-traditional autobiographical subjects. As the understanding of the self broadens to include a “multiplicity of categories” (Smith, 1990, p.15) room opens up for previously “unauthorized” stories to be told. This re-conception of the self as moving and changing is well captured in non-traditional forms of life-writing such as zines (Sinor, 2003, p. 242).
As zines are often written by young people and actively promote divergence due to their role as a pre-determined space of resistance it is not uncommon to see individuals who are actively negotiating their identity. Zines could therefore be classified as a type of “genre resistance” due to the inclusion of previously historically excluded stories that actively map the “intermediary spaces” of identity that traditional autobiography does not generally include (Smith, 1993, p. 404-406).

Some scholars argue that zines cannot be truly representational due to the zine being a carefully crafted image rather than a representation of the “real self” (Piepmeier, 2009, p. 91). While they may not represent every aspect of a girl’s life it is important to consider how these shifting representations may show girls’ attempts to explore their changing identities and test the boundaries of that identity within the limits of their personal zine (Sinor, 2003, p. 247). While Piepmeier’s (2009) assertion may hold weight when considering zining in relation to the Cartesian Self, when you consider a conception of the self that is movable and changing personal zines may be a more authentic form of representational writing than more traditional autobiography. Sinor (2003) also points out that due to the disenfranchisement of girls in popular culture and sub-cultures there are very few spaces that girls are able to represent themselves (p. 243). The use of zine creation and writing allows girls to create a space in which they are able to portray themselves “on their own terms” (Sinor, 2003, p. 248), rather than having their representation re-purposed and shaped by adult culture.

Anna Poletti (2008) would also disagree with Piepmeier’s (2009) assertion that zines are not representational works. She notes that while traditional autobiography might see the transference of the self into language as a process that produces an “ontologically whole, seamless, and true” account (Smith as cited in Poletti, 2008, p. 97), a more modern approach views the process of writing as a form of re-enactment. Rather than the zine author simply chronicling a true representation of her self, Poletti (2008) sees autobiography through zining “as self making and the manifestation of productive performative process” (Smith as cited in Poletti, 2008, p. 98). She points out that since zines tend to call attention to their own making – through pointed retractions, varying quality of publication, and inclusion of mistakes – it is possible to consider the act of zine creation to also be seen as an act of creation of identity and self. Rather than condemning zines as non-representational due to their carefully crafted nature, as

However it is important to note that zines do have outside pressures upon them that may affect the representations that creators share. Due to the intimate involvement of the reader in zining, due to a direct distribution model that connects the author directly to their audience, the rules of the textual community play an important role in what is acceptable subject matter. Sinor (2003) discusses that just like other textual communities the zining community has rules surrounding how and what content is covered (p. 260). She mentions that there is a strict code surrounding the discussion of certain subjects, such as the discussion of body image, and that deviating from these rules can draw ire and a fall off in readership from the textual community. While this does not prevent a zine creator from creating and publishing more issues it will limit the community involvement that the creator experiences. It is also important to note that zine creators do not work in a cultural bubble. While zines may attempt to work outside of mainstream media, they are still affected by representations of girlhood within the larger cultural landscape. So while girls may have more space for self-representation in the zining community, there are still rules that limit the boundaries of exploration of identity.

2.7. Reading Zines as Autobiography

One of the major barriers that exist to reading zines through the lens of autobiography is the lack of familiarity that most readers have with both the form and the subject. Cynthia Huff's (2000) work on the reading of diary manuscripts is helpful when considering reading strategies for zines due to similarities that can be found in the non-traditional form, content, and authors in both zines and diaries. In a similar vein to zines, Huff (2000) notes that diaries are often ignored by mainstream autobiography due to their non-traditional form and their lack of canonical authority (p. 510). As diary writing is considered primarily a girl's activity diaries are often considered to be illegitimate within the world of mainstream literature. As both zines and diaries can be considered non-traditional texts many of the reading strategies she suggests for reading diaries can be applied to reading serial zines. She explains the importance of reading not only the
words in the text, but also the “extra-textual materials” that the author may have included in the work (Huff, 2000, p. 518). Rather than seeing these materials as extraneously included, Huff (2000) discusses the importance of viewing these objects as an important element of the work (p. 508).

Anna Poletti (2008) also notes the importance of reading, what she has termed, the “text object” (p. 91). By this she means reading the zine as a whole, including the words, artwork, and the form for clues towards the authors intended goal. She terms reading the whole text object to be examining the “constructedness” of the zine. This is a process in which the reader examines the “presentation of the text and images, layout, and photocopying quality, and how they effect, interact with, contradict, or interrupt the narrative” (Poletti, 2008, 88). Similarly to Huff (2000), Poletti (2008) requires the reader to consider that everything included within the text object holds importance within the overall work. Rather than viewing non-text material as being of lesser importance to the work, Poletti (2008) and Huff (2000) advocate for considering how these “extra-textual materials” work with and against the written material to contribute to the overall message of the work. This approach requires the reader to step outside of they are traditionally taught to read and analyze written work.

However there is disagreement methodologically in how to read non-traditional text-objects. Sinor (2003) notes that she feels like a “fraud” (p. 240) when she reads zines, as she is not a part of the zine creator’s textual community, and she never took part in the radical politics that the girl writers engage in. To counteract what she considers to be her own lack of insider status Sinor (2003) attempts to utilize Huff’s (2000) technique of acting as the empathetic reader (Huff, 2000, p. 506). Huff (2000) suggests that readers of non-traditional work, like diaries and zines, “situate [themselves] within the texts as much as possible” (p. 506) in order to overcome the inherent outsider status that academic readers of non-traditional life writing face.

In contrast to this position, Poletti (2008) advocates for zine scholars to take what Philip Lejuene considers “the position of the reader” (as cited in Poletti, 2008, p. 87). Instead of attempting to situate oneself within the text, as Huff (2000) and Sinor (2003) advocate, Poletti (2008) suggests that scholars attempt to place themselves within their intended role as the reader of the zine. As zines are created for people to read, Poletti
suggests that by acting as a reader, rather than artificially immersing oneself within the zine, a scholar has more of a chance of experiencing an authentic connection with the work. Though it is important to acknowledge the intended readership of zines may not be academic scholars, it is also important to note that by placing oneself on the outside looking in it becomes difficult to effectively interact with the text object in a natural way. Even as an outsider it is possible to place oneself into the familiar role of the reader “to understand more clearly how the texts function” (Lejuene as cited in Poletti, 2008, p. 87).

While many of these authors have created space through theory for the inclusion of zines as life writing, it still seems to be a fairly under examined area. The majority of work specifically surrounding zines as life writing is focused on providing a frame for readers to understand how to effectively read zines for their representational qualities, and while they may include examples of zines for the reader to consider (see Poletti 2008, 2005; Sinor 2000), there does not seem to be much scholarship dedicated to analyzing how these techniques are applied to a specific zine or zine series. While I do believe that this provides an effective overview for readers and scholars who may be unfamiliar with the concepts of zines in order to push research forward in the area it becomes important to apply these concepts, and consider the results in conjunction with the previous literature. In this research project I will attempt to add to the legitimization of girls’ autobiographical writing by using two of Poletti’s (2008) representational strategies along with a third strategy developed out of Poletti’s (2008) work to deeply examine a zine series. This will allow me to consider not only how girl zinesters write back to general conceptions of girlhood through non-traditional life-writing, but also how they use representational strategies over time to create representations of girlhood identity that are not available to them through the general media outlets. I situate this work through a history of girls’ writing that acknowledges the often undervalued and understudied presence of girls’ writing and self expression within general culture and subcultures.

In the next section I will outline the methodology choices I have made for this research project, and how they contribute to the creation and study of representational strategies in zining.
Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1. Zine Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

When considering zines to use in my project I looked for personal zines that were created by girl-identified individuals (including trans girls and older adolescent girls) that were in a serial format. I included only Canadian zine creators in my search, as I was looking to add to Canadian based zine and education research. All zines considered had to be published in the last five years to maintain the relevancy of the issues and ideas put forward. I also included this requirement to aid in contacting the zine creators. As most zine creators include contact information (P.O. box number or email address), older zines would likely not have up to date information. This was important, as I had to contact all zine creators to ask for permission to reprint their work, and to have them take part in a member checking activity.

In regards to thematic criteria, I only included zines that explicitly dealt with ideas of girlhood and change, and showed an evolving understanding of their own identity over several issues of the zine. I specifically looked at the zines in conjunction with Poletti’s self-representational strategies to consider whether the zines being considered would qualify as representational. I excluded zines that did not include aspects of collage, direct address, or popular cultural artifacts as they would not fit within the confines of this project. I had no exclusion criteria relating to race or orientation of the creators.

3.2. Participant Recruitment

I recruited my participant by contacting a Canadian based zine distributor. The distro owner is a zine creator who also runs a zine distribution website and tables their own zine and zines by others at zine fairs across North America. They provided me with a list of zines that they felt would meet my criteria. I ordered copies of all zines that were
available on the list provided, and narrowed the list myself based on my exclusion and
inclusion criteria. Once I had created a short list of zines that were suitable for the
project I contacted the zine creators through email to ask for permission to use their
work in my project, and to see if they were willing to take part in a member checking
activity. I excluded participants who did not respond within one month’s time and those
who were uninterested in participating in the member checking activity. I was left with
two zine creators who fit my criteria and were willing to take part in the project. I made
my final decision based on availability of the zine creator during the research period.

3.3. Methodology

I chose to approach this research project through a feminist qualitative analysis,
as I felt that my question of negotiating and resisting traditional boundaries of girlhood
identity could be best understood through a close and focused reading of the text
objects. I chose to use Poletti’s (2008) approach to reading zines by positioning myself
in the role of the reader. I believe that this allowed me to read the text object from a
position of authenticity, as the zines being studied were made for the consumption of
readers rather than academic study. Within this capacity I then attempted to
concentrate my attention on how my participant used strategies of representation to create a text
object that pushes the boundaries of traditional representational life writing. The choice
to limit the sample size to one participant was based upon my desire to engage deeply
with the authorial choices in the zines, and to track the progression of these choices over
multiple issues. I specifically chose to work with the representational strategies that
Anna Poletti discussed in her articles Auto/Assemblage: Reading the Zine (Poletti, 2008)
and Self-Publishing in the Global and Local: Situating Life Writing in Zines (Poletti,
2005). These strategies were beneficial to my project for a variety of reasons, but
perhaps the most important element of Poletti’s (2008) work for this project is her
exploration and understanding of the denigrated cultural status that youth, and I would
argue girls specifically, are given in the field of life writing, and the importance of
exploring alternative forms of life writing in an academic context (Poletti, 2008). This is
an important aspect of Poletti’s (2008) literary strategies as the text objects being
studied in this project do not fall within the general understanding of what constitutes life
writing or autobiography due to the age of the writer, the low status of the writer, and the
non-traditional form of the work (p. 87). These strategies provided a unique perspective on what constitutes life writing, and what can be considered a representational strategy that complemented my own perspective and research question.

As I stated in the introduction, I bring a feminist orientation that is situated in third wave feminism to this project as I focus on the understudied and socially devalued form of girls’ zines. I worked to empower both the researcher and the research subject, allowing me to elevate the role of the girl writer in my work. This choice of a feminist framework is also reflected in my methodology as I attempted to “place [myself] within the study so as to avoid objectification” of the research subject (Creswell, 2013, p. 29). Rather than placing myself outside the world of zines as an objective observer, I attempted to take on the role of the reader, which is the natural role of the zine audience (Poletti, 2008, p. 87).

Given this feminist methodology, I interrogate and acknowledge my multiple positions of privilege within this project. As a white, middle class, able-bodied person I approached this research with privileges that many of the zine creators did not have. In the context of the chosen zine series I specifically had to consider the privilege that is afforded to me as some one who has not experienced significant issues with mental illness. I attempted to maintain a relationship with my work that emphasized the validity of these issues and the damaging effect that poor mental health can have on a girl’s ability to express herself to others.

3.4. Data Sources

*Daisies and Bruises* Zine (Issues 1-3 & 5)

Interview Data

3.4.1. Daisies and Bruises - Zine Data

The chosen serial perzine, Daisies and Bruises, is produced and distributed by Erin Schulthies who lives in London, Ontario, Canada. The first issue of the zine was published in 2007, and the fifth and most recent issue was published in 2013. For this
project I examined issues one through three, and issue five. The author uses poetry, personal anecdotes, collage, and quotations (from films, music, and prose) to discuss issues of depression, girlhood, and the tension of identity that is created through seemingly conflicted understandings of self. The author re-purposes images and ideas from children’s media (e.g. Minnie mouse, Alice in Wonderland, Little Red Riding Hood) and juxtaposes these images and texts with stories of her own depression and struggle for recovery. By distorting these images of innocence and happiness with her own girlhood struggles the reader experiences a form of dissonance, and questions the tightly restricted notions of identity that surround modern girlhood (see Harris 2004; Aapola, Gonick, and Harris, 2005; Gonick, Renold, Ringrose, and Weems, 2009).

My reason for excluding the fourth issue is due to the unique nature of the issue. The fourth issue breaks the general format of the series and encompasses the author’s two-year struggle with depression and rehabilitation. While this fits thematically with the rest of her work, the change in format makes it difficult to compare the fourth issue with the rest of the zines’ issues. Therefore I have chosen to omit the fourth zine, and instead focus on the issues that fit within the usual format of the series.

3.4.2. Interview Data

I set up two email interviews with the author to allow me to verify and expand upon ideas that were brought forward in her zine. The interviews had set questions, but I provided a section for the participant to add any additional thoughts or reflections that they felt were pertinent. The first interview was after my first formal reading of Daisies and Bruises, and included questions regarding who she was, and what she was hoping to accomplish with the publication of her zine series. The second interview took place after I had completed two more readings of the zine series, and focused more heavily on concepts of identity and representation that came forward in my analysis of the zine series. The second interview also allowed me to clarify with my participant questions that had stemmed from the first interview and from the zine data.

I then coded the interview data along the same criteria as the zine data. This allowed me to check my own conclusions against the ideas of the author. I was able to confirm when I had made correct assumptions, and to correct when I was off base in my
interpretations. The interviews were also used to question the author’s own biases and ideologies within her work, allowing me to reach a greater understanding of the writer’s intention within her work. Due to my decision to approach the zine series from the position of the reader I chose to not include findings from the interview data except where they expressly contradicted my own findings. The general audience would not have access to the extra-textual knowledge that I as a researcher was able to access. Therefore I felt that in order to stay true to my intention to position myself as the reader I should attempt to only use this insider knowledge when it expressly contradicted my own assumptions, and as a way to ensure the trustworthiness of my work. By using the interview data as a member check it allowed me to maintain a high level of trustworthiness, without compromising on my intended position within the project.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Representational Strategies:

I used Anna Poletti’s work from her articles *Auto/Assemblage: Reading the zine* (2008) and *Self-Publishing in the Global and Local: Situating life writing in zines* (2005) to identify three representational strategies that were used in the serial zine *Daisies and Bruises*.

1) Use of direct address in co-creating identity

This strategy highlights the author’s intermittent inclusion of the audience to shape representation in conjunction with others (Poletti, 2005, p. 190). By directly addressing the audience through letters to the audience and visible editing the reader is invited to take part in the co-creation of identity. Rather than treating the reader as an objective third party the author purposefully and obviously shares and withholds information. This works by inviting the reader into their intimate world while simultaneously keeping them at a distance (Poletti, 2008, p. 88). In this strategy I looked specifically for passages that used a diary narrative in which the reader was the presumed diary reader, and passages that addressed the reader through “you” statements.
2) Use of “original” photocopied images through collage

The strategy of original collage provides an example of what Hillel Schwartz (as cited in Poletti, 2008) refers to as the process of “photocopying as re-enactment” (p. 97). Rather than viewing the photocopied image as a copy of reality, it is possible to consider the photocopy as an “original” piece that acts as a “manifestation of the productive performative process” (Smith as cited in Poletti, 2008, p. 98). By pairing together original work with cultural artifacts the final photocopied piece is unlike either of the pieces and “such work calls attention to its own process of enunciation” (Drucker as cited in Poletti, 2008, p. 98). In this strategy I looked for text objects that used a mixed-media approach including original drawings, photocopies of pictures, and author narrative. While this strategy does use work from mainstream media (such as magazine cut outs, and newsprint) I differentiate within my strategies between cultural artifacts and popular culture artifacts. While cultural artifacts are images or text that this taken from mainstream media it does not tap directly into popular culture through direct or indirect allusions to film, tv, music, or books.

3) Use of popular culture imagery and texts to subvert both the image and the text

Outside of the collage format zines often utilize popular culture artifacts to both re-enforce and resist messages from dominant society. Anna Poletti (2005) suggests that the use of these artifacts “closes the gap between media and consumer, allowing individual zinesters to reuse the language of the dominant public spheres of discourse to situate their life writing” (p. 189). By placing these objects within an unfamiliar context it allows the writer to re-position there meaning. In this strategy I deviate from Poletti’s work, as Poletti originally groups the use of popular cultural artifacts into the strategy of collage. However I believe that the unique relationship that both the author and the audience have with popular cultural artifacts calls for this third strategy that focuses solely on how the author utilizes mainstream media images and texts to negotiate identity.
3.5.2. **Themes**

I have chosen to discuss four themes that I have identified throughout the series *Daisies and Bruises*. I identified the four themes through a grounded coding technique in which I read the texts without a pre-conceived coding strategy in mind, and instead allowed the codes to emerge organically from the text (Creswell 2013). By analyzing these themes within the structure of the three representational strategies it is possible to consider how each strategy interacts with the identified themes, and how these themes are affected by the representational strategy being used by the author. It is then also possible to consider how these strategies are applied differently both across themes and across time. As different strategies can be more or less effective in conveying different themes it becomes important as a reader to notice the shift in focus with both the thematic content and the representational strategies used.

The four themes that I identified within this project are: (1) childhood/innocence, (2) challenging normative girlhood, (3) imperfection/expectations, and (4) connections/hope.

The theme of childhood/innocence is characterized by the coupling and decoupling of the idea of childhood with innocence. I looked specifically for instances where the author discusses memories of her own childhood, as well as her own general beliefs about the nature of childhood. As the series progresses the author uses all three strategies to both tie innocence with childhood and to actively question the idea of childhood as a time of innocence.

The theme of challenging normative girlhood directly relates to Anita Harris’s (2004) concept of the “can-do girl” (p. 17) and the “at-risk girl” (p. 24). The author shows a sophisticated understanding of self and girlhood in her representation of her own identity by questioning the opposition that is set up by others to regulate how girlhood is understood as a binary opposition rather than a continuum. In identifying this theme I looked for instances where the author sets up this binary within her own identity, as well as instances where she actively questions this binary.

The theme of imperfection/expectations is used to describe the author’s own shame around feeling as though she is failing to live up to societal expectations
surrounding successful girlhood. In this theme I was interested in identifying pressures placed upon girls to achieve success within neo-liberal society (see McRobbie, 2007). Here I looked for instances where the author discusses her struggles with mental illness and the pressures of maintaining an outside façade of perfection on both a personal level and a societal level.

The theme of connections/hope is characterized by the use of narrative directed towards the reader with the express intent of creating a connection. This is accomplished through questions to the reader, messages of hope, and activities meant to create a sense of friendship and connection between the reader and the author.

3.5.3. Zine Data

The data analysis for my zine data was a three part deep reading of the selected issues from the zine series Daisies and Bruises. Between each reading I gave myself a minimum of three days away from the coding material to allow myself to process the information from the previous reading, and to enter the new coding stage with a fresh perspective on the work. I created a coding copy of each of the issues to allow me to make annotations to the zines without compromising the original text object. In my first formal read through of the zine I took notes on my general impression of the zine and the themes that arose around representation. I used this read through as an opportunity to familiarize myself with the nuances of the zine series and to consider the role of Poletti’s strategies in this series in a general sense, rather than a specific one.

In my second read through I began to specifically look for the three representational strategies I was using. I took note which strategies were used most often, and if a specific strategy was used in a re-occurring context (for example repurposing of media when discussing the past). This allowed me to narrow my focus and to consider how and why the author would choose to use the representational strategies in this way. It also gave me cause to consider if some strategies were better suited to certain contexts and subject matters than other.

My third reading was similar to my second reading, however its focus was more detail oriented than the second. Here I again narrowed my focus towards the specific
examples of each strategy that I felt were the strongest. Within the context of these examples I considered how the chosen strategies worked together, and took detailed notes on why I coded a piece with a certain strategy.

Once I had completed all three readings I went back over my notes and considered how the representational strategies fit with the themes of the girlhood and identity. I organized the text pieces by representational strategy within each issue to gain an understanding of how the strategies worked together across an issue and across the series. As my area of interest was specifically focused on how girls' negotiate their own representation I took particular interest in conflicting messages of identity and girlhood.

3.5.4. Interview Data:

As I had created the interview questions with the intention of discussing both representational strategies and girlhood identity I had already created a clear connection to the zine data. I coded the interview data based on the discussion of each strategy and the discussion of identity formation. I allowed for multiple coding of sections of the interview data if there was a clear connection to more than one strategy or identity discussion. For the interview data set I coded each interview twice with a week between each coding session. Similarly to the zine data this allowed for me to enter each coding session with a fresh perspective on the data.

3.6. Trustworthiness

I utilized two different trustworthiness measures to ensure that my research was as transparent and truthful as possible. The most important of my trustworthiness strategies was the use of a “member check” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). As Creswell suggests I took rough drafts of my data analysis sections back to my participant to allow for her to provide feedback on the accuracy of my work. I did not provide raw data to the participant as I was interested in her feelings regarding the overall project and the representation of her work and herself within said project. This also presented the opportunity for the participant to suggest resources that she felt would be of interest and
helpful to my project. The member check provided me with the opportunity to address issues of language choice, and to ensure that the participant felt that her own work was being accurately represented within my project.

A second trustworthiness measure that I used was “clarifying researcher bias” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). Creswell notes that this strategy is important to ensure the “reader understands the researcher’s position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry” (Merriam as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 251). This is especially important in my own research project due to my previous experience with alternative cultures and the zining community. As I did not enter this experience as a complete outsider my views and findings may have been affected by expectations and past experiences within the culture. This also may have affected participant’s willingness to work with me, as I was able to access channels that may not be available to all researchers.

3.7. Ethics and Permission to Reprint

This study has been reviewed by the Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) Board of Ethics and was determined to be of “minimal risk”. Minimal risk is defined as when “potential subjects can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms incurred by participating in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the subject in those aspects of his or her everyday life” (SFU, 2008, Policy 6.1 a). I ensured that my participating author was willing to give permission to reprint her work within the context of this thesis project, and that she did not wish to have her identity concealed in any manner.

In the next chapter I will use the three representational strategies discussed previously to examine the zine series Daisies and Bruises. The four themes that emerged through grounded coding will bring focus to these themes and will be considered through all three strategies.
Chapter 4. Data Analysis

In this chapter I consider how the three identified self-representational strategies help answer my research question: *How do girls negotiate and resist the boundaries of girlhood through alternative life-writing in the form of personal zines.* These representational strategies helped me to identify patterns, and to better analyze the complex relationship that the chosen zine author has with her personal identity as a girl. My findings indicate that while the author has actively resisted some aspects of popular girlhood, she also identifies with many others. To better explore how the representational strategies identified relate to the question I have organized each strategy around four themes that were identified through the grounded coding method discussed earlier. These themes (*childhood/innocence, challenging normative girlhood, expectation/imperfection, connections/hope*) help to contribute to the understanding of how girl writers do not experience identity as a single entity, but rather frame their own understanding of girlhood identity as being a complex and multifaceted idea.

### 4.1. Strategy 1 - Use of direct address in co-creating identity

Within the zine series *Daisies and Bruises*, the author uses the strategy of direct address frequently throughout all four issues studied. The strategy is characterized through its direct interaction with the audience, accomplished by speaking to the reader as if they were a friend or a confidant. The author often uses long sections of uninterrupted narrative in a story telling or letter writing format in which she discusses updates within her life and zining experience, stories from her childhood, and discussions of her own mental illness. By including the reader in this intimate form of representation the author invariably invites the reader to connect with the work, and to be included in the process of identity formation. Rather than keeping the reader at a distance the author allows the reader to be included in the narrative through ongoing
updates and seeking a connection with the reader through the inclusion of letters to the reader and calls for responses from the audience.

When differentiating direct address from prose writing and other forms of story telling that are present within this zine series it is important to consider the zine’s role as an artifact that works within both the public and the private sphere. The excerpts identified as utilizing the strategy of direct address work as a form of public diary. One in which the author, while not necessarily referring to the reader through “you” statements, speaks to the reader as though she is speaking to a diary. The implication of the zine format is that the diary style places the reader into the role of the confidant. This strategy can be identified and separated from other strategies through the tone of writing, as direct address will generally have a tone that is closely associated with personal life-writing such as diaries and journaling, while other strategies tend to use a more detached tone or write from a third person narrative style.

4.1.1. Childhood/Innocence

The theme of childhood/innocence was not present through the representation of direct address until the third issue of *Daisies and Bruises*. In issue three, page nine the author provides a sample of a poem she wrote as a six-year old about snow and pairs it with a response to the poem that uses a diary style to discuss how this piece affects her now. The author’s use of the story format as she recounts to the reader how she remembers feeling when she first produced the poem mirrors the style that is often used when writing to a journal. Although the author never directly states she is talking to the reader through “you” statements the intimate tone and the frank and honest writing style allows the reader to be placed into the position of the presumed reader of this public journal. In this context the author has included the poem with the intention of representing a time in her life prior to feelings of loss and pain. She makes a clear distinction between the way she viewed herself as a child versus the way she views herself now as an adult stating “I’m reassured that somewhere inside me there is a girl who knows her path in life and has known it all along” (Erin Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 9). This implies that even though the innocent girl may still be present deep inside her, there is a loss somewhere between childhood and adulthood that buries that innocence. However, by discussing the girl still inside of her the author allows for a bridging of the
gap between her childhood innocence and her adult life, and the implication is that one cannot sever the childhood self from the adult self despite the deep changes that may occur.

The use of direct address in this instance makes the childhood poem compelling and meaningful to the audience. By tying the poem into a greater narrative of the author’s struggles with self-acceptance it is possible to see how the author’s conception of childhood has affected the rest of her identity. The reprinting of the poem in its original form next to the more polished narrative she has provided on the same page allows the reader to see the divide she is creating. The uneven handwriting, and the childlike misspellings communicate the young age of the poem’s writer. The content of the poem also provides the reader with a sense of innocence, as the poem provides an almost happy ending with giving “the snow a great big cheer!” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 9). Conversely the typed narrative provides a much harsher reality for the author, as she contemplates the loss of her childhood feelings of innocence and happiness. This use of conflicting narratives allows the author to show the reader two different sides of her own story, and provides an interesting and potent link between her conceptions childhood and adulthood.

This theme is found again within the representational strategy of direct address in the fifth issue of Daisies and Bruises. The author titled the section of the text “The Reasons Why” (fig. 1), and uses three pages of a story telling format to document her childhood anxieties and to link these anxieties to the sexual abuse she suffered as a child.
She recounts “there are hundreds of incidents like these where I remember feeling at odds with the world because no one felt the terror I felt. I thought I was bad, wrong, dirty, and the world wanted me dead” (Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 9). This narrative contains two stories to illustrate how her anxiety surrounding everyday life events as a child left her feeling disassociated from the innocence of childhood. Instead of linking childhood with innocence this passage creates an association between childhood and anxiety and a loss of innocence.

Unlike the previous usage of the theme of childhood/innocence this narrative illustrates a decoupling of the two ideas. Rather than viewing innocence and childhood
as being intertwined ideas, the author calls this association into question from the context of her own reality of a painful and uneasy childhood. The author’s use of her own painful childhood memories creates a contrast from the idyllic childhood that is included in the previous example. The anxiety and fear discussed in this piece are ideas that are often intentionally removed from mainstream representations of childhood, and the inclusion of these ideas as being common place within the author’s childhood memories creates an obvious disconnect from the mainstream narrative of childhood. In this instance, direct address vitally allows the author to provide her story with significant context, and in turn allows the reader to become invested in the worries of the author’s younger self. Long form story telling that is available to the author through the strategy of direct address can help differentiate quite specifically the authors understanding of herself in both her childhood and her adulthood, and gives the reader the necessary information to gain a deeper understanding of the theme as a whole.

4.1.2. Challenging Normative Girlhood

The theme of challenging normative girlhood can be found on the second page of the first issue of Daisies and Bruises in a letter to the reader titled “This is me” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 1-2) (fig. 2).
As the author begins by talking about the opposition found within this zine, she continues on to discuss the seeming opposition within her own self. “I dress in black but everything in my room is colourful, rainbows and toys…I feel like those two parts of me shouldn’t be mixed together, they are too opposite” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 2). In this introduction to the zine and to the author the reader finds themself trying to understand a multiplicity of identities that do not seem to fit neatly into the pre-determined understanding of girlhood. The author also seems to be struggling with this understanding of her own self as containing a multiplicity of identities that cannot be easily confined to the normative categorization of “the girl”. She posits “But even if these two parts of me don’t seem to mix well, they ARE mixed within me, aren’t they?” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 2). The reader can clearly see how the author struggles with this concept, but still attempts to embrace it to move closer towards providing a semblance of “truth” in the narrative.

The long form letter to the reader style narrative allows the reader to be placed within the author’s inner circle almost immediately within the zine series. By choosing to
disclose her struggles with accepting herself as having a multi-faceted identity the author references a seemingly classic struggle of modern girlhood3 (see Harris 2004; Aapola, Gonick, & Harris 2005) that connects the author to the reader. The choice to use the most intimate form of representation to introduce the concept of the multiplicity of girlhood identity places a level of importance upon the subject, and alerts the reader’s attention to both the theme and the form of representation.

The author again covers the theme of challenging normative girlhood through direct address in the third issue of Daisies and Bruises. In the format of a letter to the reader the author discusses her own struggles with depression, and reconciling her identity as a capable person with her diagnosis of depression. She considers how she attempts to fragment her identity to separate her depression from her “real self” in order to maintain her previous identity of what Harris would call a “can-do girl” (2004, p. 17).

I know that girl is still in me somewhere – can I be both girls at once? The real me and the me with depression? Will the world allow it? Are all the dreams that girl once had doomed to fail because life didn’t turn out like she thought it would? Where the hell does she go from here? (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 18)

The questioning of the world’s ability to accept a girlhood identity that makes room for not only a binary of happy or sad, but rather one that allows for the continuum of mental and emotional health is a step back from the acceptance she showed earlier in the zine series surrounding her own challenging of normative girlhood identity. The use of questions in this format allows the reader to infer that the author is not sure of the answer herself, and is in some ways looking to the audience to gain a greater level of understanding. The author invites the audience to consider these questions in their own life, and in the life of the author.

3 The struggle referenced here refers to the struggle for contemporary girls to be viewed outside of binary identities in the popular culture and imagination (the “can-do girl” vs. the “at-risk girl”) as referenced earlier within this paper in the literature review.
4.1.3. Expectations/Imperfections

The theme of expectations/imperfections as represented through direct address is first present in the second issue of the zine series. In the opening letter to the reader the author discusses her own struggle to finish the issue at hand due to a “tidal wave of depression” (Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 2). Within this narrative she recounts the creative high she felt prior to the onset of her latest depressive episode and the subsequent lack of creativity that came with her feelings of deep depression. In turn she discusses how the zine this narrative is located in was put to the side for months. Even as she notes that there is not technical deadline for the zine, she still felt as though she was failing herself and others by not producing the work on a somewhat timely schedule.

Though this section fits with the theme of expectations/imperfections, it is interesting to note that the context provided through this letter to the reader allows the audience to not only see how she feels as though she fails to meet the expectations of society, but also how she works to overcome the feeling of failure to meet her own goals. She notes, “I don’t know when this feeling will pass (if ever) so I’m digging my heels into the mud, just long enough to complete something” (Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 2). Despite her own feelings of failure to meet expectations of her she also shows the audience the resilience she has, especially in the context of a pursuit that is important to her. Without the use of direct address this section of narrative might have only provided a feeling of loss or imperfection, rather than a complex look at the authors motivations and depression. The theme of expectations/imperfections is again present through direct address in the second issue in a three-page narrative section titled “Working Class Hero” (Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 5) (fig. 3).

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4 This title could also be considered an allusion to John Lennon’s 1970 song “Working Class Hero” on the album Plastic Ono Band. The song was considered a revolutionary anthem of the 1970’s that discussed the exploitation that working class people faced from the bourgeois system.
In this section the author deals explicitly with societal expectations of her, and the types of expectations that accompany the idea of successful girlhood (see Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2007). The title refers to the author’s own inability to get and hold a job due to her struggles with mental health, and its subsequent effects on her feelings of self worth. She describes the struggle as such,

Imagine applying for a job, sitting through an interview. Trying to convince other people that you are THE person for them to hire, when you cant even convince yourself of this, even for a millisecond...you might upset customers, break something. You might not be perfect.

(Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 5)
This struggle with expectations surrounding finding work and keeping a meaningful job is underlined by the author’s own feelings that her inability to do so makes her seem like a failure to herself and to general society.

Again the direct address format allows room for the author to question the expectations that society has of her. Through the long form narrative the reader is able to interact with the author’s expectations of herself, and to see the problematic elements of the social contract that the author is held to without consideration for her own health and wellness (see McRobbie, 2007). The author actively questions the feelings of failure that she experiences in the narrative asking “What’s worth more, pleasing others, blending in, or having a moment’s rest from self-hatred?” (Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 6). The long form narrative format gives the author space to deeply discuss these conflicting internal ideologies, and to put them forward to the reader in a manner that allows the audience the space to consider them as well.

The final example of the theme of expectations/imperfections within the context of the strategy of direct address can be found in the fifth issue of the zine series under the title “I’m Not Allowed” (Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 13). In this narrative section the author details her feelings of being trapped by the past abuse that she has suffered. She notes that her friends have full and busy lives that provide them with little time for her, and that when she does interact with her friends she finds it difficult to relate to their lives. In this context she feels as though she is unable to fulfill the expectations placed upon her within her friendships, and in turn those friendships may suffer. She wonders,

What do I have to contribute to the conversation? I can talk about my art or my writing or my dog but then inevitably I go silent because all the things in my head eventually pool together in a type of funnel where gravity just pulls everything towards the abuse. Who wants to hear about abuse?

(Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 13)

The shift in focus towards the expectations within friendships is an important one to note. As the majority of the expectations discussed through direct address have focused on more general societal expectations this shift towards the expectations she faces within her social life provides a different view of the author’s personal life for the audience.
This shift also presents an opportunity for the reader to consider the myriad of expectations that are normalized within the lives of girls on a daily basis. The expectation that girls should be generally happy and productive is present on a micro level, rather than simply as an abstract concept that applies only at a societal level. As the author struggles with fulfilling the belief that as a girl she should be available to her friends as a source of emotional stability and happiness, it becomes clear to the reader that these generalized expectations of girlhood can be just as problematic as those that are present at a societal level.

4.1.4. Connections/Hope

The theme of connections/hope can be found in the first issue of the zine series on the last two pages titled “THANK YOU” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 28) and “Final note” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 29). I have chosen to include these two pieces as one as they work as a tandem to the reader. As the two pages sit side-by-side while the zine is open it is possible to consider these two pieces as part of a single larger piece that is meant to directly reach out to the audience, addressing them directly rather than simply being implied that they are the intended audience. The thank you’s page is a regular feature within the zine series that introduces the reader to a different side of the author’s life. In this feature she thanks her friends, sister, cats, and others who have read and supported her creative work. Unlike much of her other work she does not deal with larger issues, but instead is explicitly seeking to bring the reader into the intimate and somewhat mundane aspects of her life. By referencing friends and books that she has read as inspirations the author invites the audience to read these books to try to replicate her experiences.

In a similar vein the “Final note” section addresses the reader directly by saying “some of you ordered my zine. Some of you are close friends who I want to share my work with. And some of you never asked for a copy, never talked to me before” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 29). She goes on to invite whoever is in possession of the zine to contact her through her email account. However here the author does take back some of the privacy that she has given over to the reader by visibly crossing out her address. It is as though she decided in the later editing stages that the inclusion of her home address provided too deep a level of intimacy and vulnerability with her readership
and that she must remove it. Considering the intimate invitation to contact her that is on the same page it brings the reader back to the reality of not being an intimate friend of the author. The use of visible editing in direct address can be seen as a way for the author to draw attention to not only what is included in the work, but also what has been left out (Poletti, 2008). So it is important to note that while direct address is often used to create a sense of co-meaning with the reader, it can also be used by the author to create a noticeable distancing in the work between the reader and the author.

The theme of connections/hope through the strategy of direct address can also be found in the second issue of Daisies and Bruises when the author invites the reader to “JOIN MY BOOK CLUB!” (Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 22). The author provides a list of four books with pictures and one-sentence descriptions. The invitation seems to encourage the reader to create a connection with the author through reading the same books, and in turn writing to the author about the books. This is clearly meant to create a connection with the reader as the author chooses to share books that she views as important to her own life, in a hope that the reader will connect with the novels in the same way.

The handwritten style of the book titles and descriptors emphasizes the personal nature of the book club, as if the author was writing a letter to a friend recounting her favourite books and asking for their thoughts. The handwritten style is also important as it is somewhat uncommon within this zine series. The author uses handwriting somewhat sparingly throughout the series, and as such draws attention to the style when she does utilize it. As the reader it is not difficult to feel the change in style as a showing of intimacy, and as providing a sense of closeness to the author and her interests. Here the direct address style is slightly modified as it works in a list format, however as the title acts as a direct call to the reader it is possible to consider this text object within the realm of the direct address representational strategy.

The author again covers the theme of connections/hope in the third issue in a letter to the audience titled “Love Letter” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 2-3) (fig. 4).
The title of the letter itself provides a feeling of connection with the audience, as it seems as though the author is implying that this letter is in fact addressed directly to the person who is reading it. In this letter she directly addresses the reader thanking them for reading and supporting her zine series. She notes, “I write about me and largely for me, but each one of the pages in this hand-sewn book is for YOU. Enjoy! Love Erin” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 3). The intimacy within this passage seems to be intended not for the audience as a whole, but rather as a message to the individual reader. The emphasis that the author places upon the word “YOU” distinguishes, in the reader’s mind, the singular act of reading the zine. While the reader is still part of a general audience there is a feeling of being singled out from the community of readers within this piece.

This feeling of intimacy is again accomplished by the sign off of “Love Erin” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 3). This is the first time that the author has provided such a personalized notation within the series, and for a reader of the author’s previous two issues this sign off stands out with its familiarity and affection. As previous examples of
theme connections/hope within direct address have been clearly searching for a connection with the reader, this is the first time that the author has provided such a clear feeling of trust for the reader. Rather than using the approach of emotional guarding through editing that was evident in the first issue this example of connection/hope seems meant to reach out to the reader and emphasize the important role they play in the author’s creativity and in the zine itself.

4.1.5. Summary – Direct Address

The representational strategy of direct address could be found in conjunction with all four themes identified in this project. It seems as though the author felt more comfortable utilizing certain themes with this strategy than others. An example of this is the extensive and nuanced use of direct address in the theme of connections/hope. The theme was present across all four issues studied, and provided the reader with an increasing level of trust as the series continued. The use of letter writing and long form story telling allowed the author room to appeal directly to the audience in hope of a greater closeness. The author also seemed comfortable pairing the theme of expectations/imperfections with the strategy of direct address. She was able to provide a greater degree of context to her stories that allowed the reader to differentiate between the types and degrees of expectations that are placed upon her as a girl. The differentiation she makes between self, friend, familial, and societal expectations is evident in part due to the complex narratives she provides for the audience.

Though the author did include the themes of challenging normative girlhood and childhood/innocence as represented through the strategy of direct address they were somewhat sparse, and did not provide the best examples of either theme. The long form context allowed the author to provide good examples of the blurry lines within these themes that emphasized how her life experiences worked with and against the themes presented. However the lack of presence of these themes within this representational strategy could indicate that the author is uncomfortable using the strategy with these thematic ideas.
4.2. Representational Strategy 2 – Use of “original” photocopied images through collage

The representational strategy of collage allows the author to create unique images through the combination of original material and re-purposed artifacts. This combination of original and non-original work and the use of the process of photocopying allows the author to not only re-purpose these artifacts, but also to use the new context created through this reimagining to either subvert or confirm the original message of the artifacts. The recombination of work through photocopying allows the author to call attention to the process of creation that is evident in the strategy of collage. By considering the elements as separate pieces and as a whole text object the reader can consider the works through the critical lens of their own personal understanding of the pieces previous contexts. To read and interpret these text objects I employ Poletti’s (2008) idea of “constructedness” (p. 88) which “refers to the presentation of text and images, layout, and photocopying quality, and how they effect, interact with, contradict, or interrupt the narrative” (p. 88). This interpretative quality provides the reader with a unique set of opportunities in reading and decoding the text object. Unlike other representational strategies that may allow the reader a straightforward message, the reader’s personal context will come into play in the thematic interpretation of collages. By creating a unique text object through photocopying the author provides the reader with an opportunity to consider how this unique image can work with and against the themes identified.

4.2.1. Childhood/Innocence

The theme of childhood/innocence as expressed through the representational strategy of collage is evident through all four covers of the zine series *Daisies and Bruises* (fig. 5, fig. 6, fig. 7, fig. 8). The covers’ of issues one through three all fall into a similar thematic understanding of the link between childhood and innocence. The use of a plain background with an image of a cut out of a young girl provides the reader with images of idealized girlhood. The girl images in these three issues link with the idea of childhood as a time of innocence and simplicity. The lack of definition in the images is reminiscent of paper dolls, and provides the audience with an understanding of childhood as a time of simplicity. Within this context the title of *Daisies and Bruises,*
which is also present on the cover pages, gives the impression of childhood as a time that while may involve falling down, is still overwhelming a time of innocence and happiness. The bruises section of the title in this context seem like a typical marker of childhood, rather than a symbol of deep physical pain.

This is underlined on the first three covers by the use of girlish details. The first cover utilizes roses as the background of the girl figure emphasizing the girlish nature of the image, and evoking a whimsical feeling to the otherwise stark page. The cover of the second issue again breaks the bareness of the page through the use of hearts drawn as cut outs with broken lines as the edges. In the third issue this theme is continued with the inclusion of hand drawn flowers surrounding the handwritten title. All three of these covers use the addition of girlish imagery to balance out the blank space on the pages, and to draw attention to the lighter side of childhood.

In contrast the fifth issue of *Daisies and Bruises* actively resists the linking of childhood to innocence that is present in the previous three covers. Rather than an illustrated girl as the cover figure the author used a photograph of a girl from slightly above the waist to just below the nose. The girl is dressed in a stereotypically feminine child style of a shirt with a peter pan collar and bloused cap sleeves. Most significantly the girl’s blouse shows four distinct claw marks diagonally across the chest, as though an animal has clawed the girl. This image of a wounded girl creates a dissonance between the earlier cover collages that emphasized childish innocence, as the fifth issue’s cover collage emphasizes the dangerous aspects of childhood. In turn the title of *Daisies and Bruises* seems much darker, and the readers find themselves focusing on the risks that can be inherent to the life of a child. The cover collage is also distinct from the previous issues due to the lack of blank space on the page. The author centers the photo of the girl making her the focus of the page. As the reader it is difficult not to focus on the claw marks that disrupt the image, and throws the previous title pages into relief. This thematic shift importantly calls into question the idea of childhood as a time of innocence that had been accepted on the earlier title page collages.
Figure 5
Figure 6
Figure 7
4.2.2. Challenging Normative Girlhood

The theme of challenging normative girlhood as expressed through the strategy of collage can be found in the first issue of the zine series. In this piece the author flips the text object 90 degrees to force the reader to turn the page to the side to read the object. In turn the reader must focus on the page and evaluate it based partly on its difference from the rest of the zine. The text portion of the collage is spread across the entire page in a cut and paste format. The author uses the text portion of the image to discuss the highs and lows she experiences in her day-to-day life noting that "i suppose
it's worth it, to feel happy like that, but i'm getting a little seasick” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p.17) (fig. 9).

The text relates to the idea of the author being outside of the binary world of girlhood that is forced upon girls, in which the shades of grey and the vacillating between poles that the author reports experiencing here are considered outside the “norm” of popular girlhood.

This theme is furthered through the images that sit behind the text within this collage. The main image of a faded and pixilated female face is slightly obscured by
overexposed black and white butterflies, as well as three separated images of two single feminine eyes and a mouth with carefully applied lipstick. Even though the blurry face takes up most of the page the reader’s eye is drawn automatically to the crisp and clear images of the two eyes and the mouth, which are made up to look overtly feminine. The use of the disconnected facial features from the obscured face can be thought of as removing the parts of the face that are associated with femininity and girlhood, and in turn questioning the essentialist understanding of what constitutes a girl. The butterflies can be considered for their ties to re-birth, as a sign of the ever-changing nature of the authors understanding and relationship to identity and girlhood. The text object as a whole provides the reader with a sense of franticness and uncertainty that can be associated with the idea of identifying outside the strict boundaries of mainstream girlhood identity, as the eye moves not only from left to right with the words but all around the page to consider the seemingly disconnected images.

The use of collage in this instance allows the reader to consider not only the message that the words convey, but also how the images work with and against this message. Rather than providing well-known images to accompany the text the author utilizes the audiences presumed knowledge of the motifs surrounding femininity and rebirth. The representational style of collage allows the author to convey a complex message with very little text, and provides room for the audience to consider their own understanding of the pieces of the text object within their interpretation.

This theme can again be found through collage in the fifth issue of the zine *Daisies and Bruises*. The collage title “I AM A GIRL WHO” (Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 20) is a long form narrative that is punctuated by seemingly randomly circled words and a cut out center. The seemingly unrelated sections of a single sentence fill the page and work to answer the question of who the author is. The answer seems to confirm her understanding of herself as a complicated and non-normative individual in both her interests and her values. She notes that she “can’t get rid of her stuffed animals” (Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 20) while simultaneously “loves dark fairy tales like Little Red Riding Hood and The Little Matchstick Girl” (Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 20).

These statements are punctuated by the circling of single words throughout the page. The circled words, though seemingly random, provide an excellent example of the
multiplicity of girlhood identity, and actively resist the idea that girlhood must conform to a single ideal. The words “wishes…scared…idolizes…loves…tends” (Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 20) represent not only the soft feminine side often associated with girlhood, but also the darker side of her identity. The use of the words “scared” and “wishes” seem to represent the darker side of the author’s life, especially when taken into conjunction with her statements surrounding her mental illness and struggles with self esteem. The highlighting of these words works to create the possibility of a double reading of the page; one reading in which you simply read the list of statements, and a second reading in which you focus on the highlighted words as presenting a single statement regarding identity. This interpretative quality is a vital aspect to collage, as the reader is provided with space to consider the multiple facets of a single text object.

4.2.3. Expectations/Imperfections

The theme of expectations/imperfections can first be identified as expressed through the representational strategy of collage in the first issue of the zine series Daisies and Bruises. The collage reading “CAN SOMEONE TELL ME who or what I AM becoming???” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 16) is set over top of a barely visible pen drawing of a bent over girl with her head in her hand. At the top left the author has included five small boxed in images. The images are of a woman and a girl that are faded and over pixilated to varying degrees. The question that the author poses to the reader directly relates to the idea of expectations surrounding the author’s identity and path in life. The reader is able to assume that the author is losing her path in life, and that she is struggling to cope with a feeling of helplessness surrounding her own future.

The use of a fading line drawing forces the reader to focus on the seemingly blank centre of the page to view the image. The fading girl can be seen as representing the feeling of being lost, not only to the world, but also on a personal level. By pairing the image with the text and the obscured photos the reader is forced to consider how a lack of a strong sense of self-identity can be tied to feelings of imperfection. The question of what the author is becoming, along with the fading away of the line drawing seems to imply to the reader the author’s lack of identity within the greater structure of society. The use of a question format within this collage is important, as it seems to indicate that the author is seeking a way to connect with the outside world’s expectations.
of identity, and that the reader’s understanding of who the author is can help her find herself. The implication that she cannot locate her identity within the seemingly pre-determined options available to her furthers the theme, as the author feels that she falls outside of the expectations of society.

The theme of expectations/imperfections can again be found through the representational strategy of collage in the second issue of the zine series. The collage features an image of a girl standing against a brick wall, however the girl is blurred and fading, erasing her features and causing her to appear to blend into the wall. Below the photo the author has hand written in block lettering “I’M NOT ASKING FOR PERFECTION-I JUST WANT TO HATE MYSELF A LITTLE BIT LESS” (Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 14) (fig. 10).
The use of the fading girl seems to imply the author's feelings of losing herself, and provides the reader with a physical reminder of the toll that mental illness has had on the author's life. Rather than using an image of a girl that is easily distinguishable the author again uses an image that forces the reader to consider the expectations that society has surrounding the female body and how identity is tied into this understanding of the female form. When set against the text on the page the photo becomes more meaningful, as the feeling of the author's lack of sense of self is only bolstered by her words that she “just [wants] to hate [herself] a little bit less” (Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 14).
The use of collage here is especially meaningful, as the significance of the individual parts of the text object provides only one aspect of the message. The pairing of image with the text allows the reader to consider not only the message that the author is directly giving to the reader surrounding striving for self acceptance, but also the message that the image portrays surrounding expectations of female beauty and looks. By using the image the reader can consider how the author falls into these expectations, and attempts to subvert them within the same page.

Collage is once again used in the theme of expectations/imperfections in the third issue of *Daisies and Bruises*. The author mixes text and images to create a unique collage that allows for deep interpretation by the reader. The text at the bottom of the page reading “PIN IT UP AND THROW DARTS AT IT” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 23) is accompanied by an image of a dartboard with a girl’s face on it that is overexposed so as to white out her features. The girl’s face is laid over the bull’s eye on the board, and has a dart protruding from the top of the head. Behind the dartboard is what appears to be a hand written page from a notebook that the reader can assume is the author’s writing.

This image accompanied with the phrase “throw darts at it” can be read in two different ways within the context of this theme. The first reading is the idea of tearing down the expectations placed upon the author by others. By using a faceless girl as the bull’s eye the reader can assume the author is meaning to forcefully question the expectations placed upon girls in general as well as the author specifically. Rather than simply accept these expectations as fact the author chooses to actively reject them by throwing darts at a faceless representation of female beauty and lifestyle standards. The second reading is predicated upon the audiences reading of the faceless girl as the author. This is not an unjustified idea as the use of the author’s handwritten page in the background of the image allows the reader to assume that the girl in the collage is meant to be the author due to the personal nature of handwriting. In this reading the audience can assume that the author is meaning to question her own personal feelings of failure, and that by throwing darts at her own representation she is attempting to challenge the aspects of her identity that she has tied to these feelings of failure.
Both readings provide an interesting understanding of the author's work as well as her manipulation and use of the strategy of collage. Perhaps one of the strongest features of the strategy of collage is its ability to allow the audience to gain multiple and varied perspectives from the work. While not all collages do allow for these multiple readings, the featureless nature of this piece provides the reader with a myriad of ways to frame and understand the message the author is trying to relay.

4.2.4. Connection/Hope

The theme of connections/hope can first be identified through the representational strategy of collage in the first issue of the zine series. The collage features a floral background that has a rectangular text box laid over top with the words “you are beautiful” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 26) typed onto it, and at the bottom right hand of the page is a pin that reads “CUT OUT AND KEEP” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 26) (fig. 11).
The author seems to be encouraging the readers to consider themselves as beautiful, and furthermore to keep this message with them at all times. The use of the floral background maintains the impression of hope and optimism that the reader could gain from the words. By setting this message against the background the author creates a coherent message that works to reinforce the theme that is created through the words. Unlike other collages that attempt to subvert aspects of the text object, this collage is clearly making an effort to unify the messages in order to create a deeper impact with the reader.
The message on the pin also allows the audience to feel a sense of ownership over the work, connecting with the author on the level of creation. As the pin instructs the reader to deconstruct the work and carry it with them they are being asked to take part in a physical act of re-positioning the zine in their own life. Rather than simply trying to connect with the reader through sharing stories and ideas the author invites the reader to take part in a literal remaking of the page, creating for the reader a sense of connection with the author and the work.

This theme can also be found in the third issue of *Daisies and Bruises*. The first page of the third issue features a collage with the words “LONELY PEOPLE/ FILL YOUR HEART WITH HAPPINESS” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 1) over top of a background of hearts organized in vertical lines that alternate between pointing up and pointing down. The second line of the text is typed within an arrow that points to the right, indicating the following pages as the place to find the answer to the message. The hearts function in two ways within this collage: first they are a literal tie to the message of the text, and second the alternating pattern draws the reader’s eye into the centre of the page and helps to maintain the focus of the page on the text.

The text is an attempt to connect the reader to not only the author, but also to the zine as a whole. The use of arrow pointing inwards towards the rest of the pages allows the reader to feel as though the author is attempting to create a direct connection between the lonely people she is addressing and herself. The author appears to be inviting the audience to explore the zine that she has made, not as an unknown, but as a person with whom the author shares a similar self-conception. It seems as though the author is not only attempting to connect with the reader through this singular collage, but also by inviting the audience to read and relate to the zine as a whole. It is important to note that this collage is located on the first page of the zine, and will therefore be the first thing the audience reads when they open up the issue. This location makes the connection more meaningful by actively attempting to create a relationship with the reader that encourages them to relate not just to the material, but also to the author herself.
4.2.5. **Summary – Collage**

The use of collage within this zine series provided the reader with an interesting way to consider self-representation. The author used the strategy across all four themes, but she seemed to utilize collage most effectively with the themes of expectations, challenging normative girlhood, and childhood/innocence. In the theme of challenging normative girlhood the use of images and texts allowed the author to actively question how girlhood is represented within traditional media narratives, and how these representations affect our understanding of girls’ identities. Further by relying more heavily upon the use of imagery the reader is provided with a multiplicity of readings. Rather than simply being told what the author is thinking or feeling the reader must search for clues throughout the page, and attempt to understand the implicit meanings within the work.

The use of collage as cover art also provided the reader with an interesting way to see change within the theme of childhood/innocence. The author clearly felt comfortable using the strategy of collage within this theme, as the cover is perhaps the most identifiable feature of the zine for the reader. As the audience’s first encounter with the work will most likely be the cover the use of collage to express the changing nature of the work and themes within the zines allows the reader the opportunity to visualize this shift.

The author did explore the theme of connection/hope through collage, but it was in a limited manner. This could perhaps be explained by the interpretative nature of collage. The author may feel that this less straightforward strategy may be more difficult to work with in the theme of connection/hope, as this theme does require an explicit address to the reader that attempts to create a connection. However the use of a non-narrative format may provide the reader with the possibility of connecting with the work in non-traditional ways, as the collage format may allow for readers with a different set of experiences than that of the author to be drawn in by the work and to find a connection through less explicit means.
4.3. Strategy three - Use of popular culture imagery and texts to subvert both the image and the text

The use of popular cultural artifacts in zining is a unique strategy from that of collage due to the distinct effect that these artifacts have on the reader’s interpretation. Rather than presenting the artifacts as part of a larger unique image the author can choose to present the artifacts either with or without commentary. The artifacts well-known place within the cultural landscape allows the reader to consider not only the original intended message of the artifact, but also how it is framed within the context of the page and the zine as a whole. By utilizing these artifacts the reader can consider how their original message may be re-purposed to both question and confirm the hidden ideology within the work. The author’s use of cultural imagery from child and youth culture works to underscore the zines focus on issues of girlhood, identity, and the transition into adulthood.

This strategy is unique from the previous two strategies as it is an off-shoot of Poletti’s (2008) work regarding collage. By separating the use of popular culture artifacts from the strategy of collage it is possible to consider how these artifacts allow the reader to connect with both the original context of the work, and the re-positioning of the artifact within the context of the zine. While Poletti included the use of popular culture artifacts within the representational strategy of collage, I believe that by creating a third strategy that focuses solely on these easily recognizable artifacts it is possible to examine more deeply how the author manipulates the audiences pre-existing relationship with the work, and how the author repositions the work to express her own understanding of identity.

4.3.1. Childhood/Innocence

The author first explores the theme of childhood/innocence through the strategy of popular culture artifacts in the first issue of the zine series. The author links the idea of childhood as a time of innocence to the Disney character Minnie Mouse in three ways. In the first representation the author provides a narrative of her own idolization of Minnie Mouse, and her subsequent disappointment upon meeting the “real” Minnie Mouse at Disney World. She notes that upon meeting the character she felt “ Completely
heartbroken, let down and made a fool of by her hero...[and her] passion for the world-renowned mouse ended right there” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 8) (fig. 12).

In the second representation the author paired this personal narrative with a quote from the film adaptation of the novel *Girl Interrupted* (Wick, Konrad & Mangold, 1999). In this quotation the character of Lisa discusses her wish to be a professional Cinderella, and that her friend could be a professional Minnie Mouse. The character of Lisa in the film posits that as a professional character “everyone would hug her and kiss her and love her and no one know what’s inside that big giant head” (Girl Interrupted as cited in Schulthies, Issue 1 p. 9). The final representation of Minnie Mouse is an image of the animated character smiling coyly in her signature outfit, and is placed between the personal narrative and the film quotation.

All three representations of Minnie Mouse seem to signify the author’s understanding of childhood as a time of innocence, and that moving into adulthood involves giving up the childish beliefs of youth. The narrative of the author’s first meeting of Minnie seems to represent the first taste of the hard reality that is associated with
adult life. Once the author finds herself faced with the reality of Minnie Mouse she can no longer idolize the character, and instead finds herself devastated. Pairing this personal narrative with a quotation from the film “Girl Interrupted” (Wick, Konrad & Mangold, 1999) provides the reader with an interesting companion to this story of disappointment. The character of Lisa discussing the dream of being professional characters with the other girls at the institution allows the reader to consider how the idea of childhood as an innocent time can function as a way for the author, and adults generally, to escape the painful situations they may be in through childhood fantasy.

While these two discussions of Minnie Mouse may approach childhood and innocence from different sides of the story, the personal narrative is a retelling of a loss of innocence from meeting the character, and the film quotation shows a longing for the innocence that the character can bring, they both consider the idea of Minnie Mouse to be synonymous with joy and love. The author notes that Minnie Mouse is “Loved everywhere and completely untouchable” (Schulthies, Issue 1, p. 9), in a similar way that the character Lisa sees being a professional Minnie as ensuring that the person within the costume will be loved by everyone despite any personal problems. These two narratives are only made more poignant by the image of the smiling Minnie Mouse. As the mouse is dressed in a way that highlights her girlishness with a cap sleeved dress, a large bow, and long eye lashes the reader is forced to confront this symbol of innocence. By bookending this image between the narrative and the quotation it is possible to see how the character can be both a symbol of innocence and a symbol of disillusionment for the author.

This representational strategy is used again in the exploration of the theme of childhood/innocence in the second issue of Daisies and Bruises. In this usage of the strategy the author uses a quotation from Heather O’Neill’s (2006) book Lullabies for Little Criminals to question the idea of childhood as a time of innocence. The author uses a quotation from the 12-year old main character of the novel stating, “so what if a hand came out from under the bed and grabbed me? That would be nothing” (O’Neill as cited in Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 17). This text is accompanied by an illustrated image of a young child lying awake in bed.
The quotation plays upon the popular motif of children not only imagining monsters under the bed, but also being afraid of them. The reader would undoubtedly be reminded of images of scared children with overactive imaginations. By using a quotation that inverts this common narrative the author forces the reader to consider why the child in the quote would not be afraid of the monsters under the bed. The implication is that the author feels as though childhood may not be a time that is synonymous with innocence for all children. This decoupling of the ideas of childhood and innocence also calls into question the image placed at the top of the page above the quotation. Rather than imagining the child in the image as being afraid of the dark, the readers find themselves picturing much darker things for the child to be scared of.

The author once again explores the idea of innocence and childhood as being linked in the fifth issue of the zine series. The author uses a collage of recognizable fictional girl characters such as Amelie and Little Bo Peep alongside an excerpt from the Tegan and Sara song “More for Me” (2005, track 5). The images included seem to indicate a fondness towards what the fictional girls represent, as the characters are all prototypically happy girls. The author situated the images in the background into what appears to be frames, creating the impression that she has hung their pictures on her wall. The reader can infer that the author considers these girls to be close to her heart, as they are hung on the imaginary wall of her zine in the same manner one might hang family pictures. The passage from the Tegan and Sara song reads “If I could have one wish/ I sure wish that I had never grown up/ I got a picture of the way I looked/ When I was three/ I came out laughing, screaming, dancing” (Tegan and Sara as cited in Schulthies, Issue 5, p. 10).

The fictional girls’ images that are present as the background to the page are recognizable as being ideal images of childhood, and the Tegan and Sara excerpt characterizes childhood as the antithesis to adult life. By crafting the background in a familial manner the reader finds themself imagining that the girl characters in the pictures are representations of the author’s idealized childhood self. The unreality of this creates an interesting predicament for the reader. As the author is viewing childhood through the lens of fictional characters, it is not difficult to imagine she sees the belief that childhood is a time of innocence as being fictional at its core. By pairing these images with a passage that celebrates the joy of childhood the reader is forced to
consider how much of the author’s views of childhood are based upon reality and how much is based in fiction.

4.3.2. Challenging Normative Girlhood

The author uses the strategy of popular culture artifacts to explore the theme of challenging normative girlhood in the second issue of *Daisies and Bruises*. The author includes a poem by slam poet Alix Olson (2006) titled “Eve’s Mouth” alongside images of a dress form, a young girl playing with a doll, and an image of the three of swords tarot card. The poem deals explicitly with well known fictional and non-fictional girls, such as Queen Victoria, Little Red Riding Hood, Helen of Troy, and Rapunzel, and places them into modern situations that emphasize the unrealistic expectations that girls are placed under. Olson uses a strategy of rewriting classic fairytales into modern times to subvert their original meaning. An example of this is the reimagining of Rapunzel:

Now we’ve got to Rapunzel, she’s chilling the tower,/ waiting for the handsome prince she’s sapped of all her power./ Finally, one day, the handsome prince in town,/ called up to Rapunzel, “Yo girl, let it down!”/ But our dear Rapunzel was nowhere to be seen,/ yes, our dear Rapunzel had learned something keen./ “All that time alone kinda taught me how to cope, / so I shaved my head and I made a rope! 

(Alix Olson as cited in Schulthies, Issue 2, p. 13)

By using a piece that focuses on a well known fairytale the author is able to call into question ideas surrounding what constitutes successful girlhood. Within the original Rapunzel tale Rapunzel must be saved by the prince, who is also implicated as her rapist, in order to achieve success as a girl. Her reward for her patience and obedience is marriage to a handsome and wealthy prince.

By recasting Rapunzel as a girl who is unconcerned with the trappings of what is generally considered successful girlhood, forsaking her long hair and her romantic relationship, and instead emphasizing her new persona as an independent girl with little regard for traditional feminine beauty the reader is forced to confront how girlhood is defined. As fairytales are often see as prescriptive stories for young girls the retooling of the story provides the reader with a chance to consider how these rules of girlhood maybe antiquated or problematic in the lives of contemporary girls. Rather than simply
telling the story of an unknown girl who breaks away from the trappings of traditional
girlhood the use of a well-known character provides the author the opportunity to tap into
the audiences’ relationship with an already established character and story.

The author once again explores the theme of challenging normative girlhood
through the strategy of popular culture artifacts in the third issue of the zine series. The
author reprints a 1903 print titled “The Two Paths: What Will the Girl Become?” (author
unknown) (fig. 13) in which a young girl is shown travelling down two dichotomous paths
in life.

Figure 13
One path, that resonates with Anita Harris’ definition of the “at-risk girl” (2004, p. 24), portrays the girl first succumbing to “bad literature” and then moving on to “flirting and coquetry”, “fast life and dissipation”, and finally ending up at the age of 40 as “an outcast” (unknown author as cited in Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 17). The opposite path, which aligns with Harris’ idea of the “can-do girl” (2004, p. 17), shows the girl starting out with “study and obedience” and continuing with “virtue and devotion”, moving on to become “a loving mother”, and the final image shows the girl at the age of 60 as “an honored grandmother” (unknown author as cited in Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 17).

The dated style and language of the image provides the reader with an interesting consideration of how expectations around successful girlhood identities have both changed and stayed the same since the original publishing date of “The Two Paths” in 1903. While successful girlhood may no longer be solely defined as motherhood and marriage, there are still strict definitions of how to be a girl. As the contemporary girl reader can undoubtedly feel the pressures of what Angela McRobbie calls “the new sexual contract” ⁵ (2007) it is not unrealistic to see how the reader can draw a parallel between the pressures of girlhood that are shown in “The Two Paths” and the pressures identified in the works of McRobbie (2007) and Harris (2004). By providing a classic, but dated, example of popular cultures’ push to create a binary understanding of girlhood identity the author allows the reader to consider how these standards have shifted, but not changed. Rather than making a case for the truth of binary identities the author creates space for the reader to question the validity of this idea in relation to their understanding of the author and her work. While this may not be a current popular culture artifact the reader can identify its place within the cultural canon and correctly assume it is a historically culturally relevant piece.

4.3.3. Expectations/Imperfection

The author explores the theme of expectations/imperfection in the third issue of the zine series Daisies and Bruises. In a two-page piece the author provides an image

⁵ Angela McRobbie’s “new sexual contract” discusses how neo-liberal ideologies contain women and girls’ lives and sexualities by creating an expectation for professional success while still emphasizing the need for women to sexually submissive to men (2007, p. 721).
of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf alongside a personal reworking of the well-known fairy tale (fig. 14).

Rather than following the classic format of the tale in which Red Riding Hood proceeds along the path to grandmother’s house, in this rewriting the author has the Red Riding Hood leaving the trail to hide not only from the wolf, but also from her family and the world as a whole. The author casts herself as the main character in her rewritten tale, taking on the voice of Little Red Riding Hood rather than using an omniscient third person narration style. In this telling the main character is desperate to escape from the pressures of life noting “I have erased myself from your maps/ And fled unnoticed into the woods./ Obscuring my footprints/ I leave no trace,/ only a lingering memory/ Of a girl with doomed existence, one/ Too perfect to survive.” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 20).

Within this retelling the author has cast herself as unable to fit into the narrative that society has provided for her, and chooses instead to escape to her own safe world away from “The hunters and wolves” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 20) of the world. Little Red
Riding Hood is traditionally a cautionary tale for young girls surrounding the dangers of strange men, by reframing this story in which not only the wolves are the danger, but also the hunters and the grandmothers the author has cast the world as the danger. Subverting the notion that following the path is what will keep the author safe she writes “I have found a clearing in this wilderness,…The thorns protect me and the trees provide shade.” (Schulthies, Issue 3, p. 20). Here the woods are the author’s safe place, and the notion of home and family as being safe is contested and re-examined through the reframing of the story. By challenging the readers understanding of the popular fairy tale the audience is confronted with the expectations that are placed upon the author and how these expectations negatively affect her life. However rather than allowing these unattainable ideals to prevent her from living the author instead paints the alternative world she has created as her haven.

4.3.4. Summary – Popular Culture Artifacts

The use of the representational strategy of popular culture artifacts was an effective approach for both the themes of childhood/innocence and challenging normative girlhood. The youth focused artifacts used by the author provided the reader with a well-focused context in which to interpret the text objects provided. By focusing on youth based artifacts the author was able to create a clear connection between the binary nature of popular girlhood identity and her own shifting understanding of childhood and innocence. By presenting these artifacts either as re-written works or in their original format the author made a conscience choice in the process of creation. The technique of re-writing allowed the author to actively subvert the message of the original artifact. This technique calls upon the reader to consider their own personal relationship with the original artifact in their interpretation in conjunction with the reimagined story. The choice to leave the artifacts in their original format allows the reader to rely more heavily on their own interpretation of the artifact, and allows for the audience to consider the greater context provided by the zine in their analysis of the artifact.

However this representational strategy was not as widely used across all four themes as the previous two strategies. The limited use within the theme of expectations/imperfections, and the complete lack of use in the theme of
connections/hope could be due to the implicit link between girlhood and more generally childhood and the artifacts chosen. By choosing to use artifacts that are intrinsically linked to these ideas it can be difficult for the reader to separate the artifacts original meaning in order to connect them to themes that are seemingly unrelated.
Chapter 5. Conclusions

In this study I was interested in how the selected author used zining as a unique form of representational life writing to support her in exploring and crafting a complex picture of contemporary girlhood. Specifically my research question in this study was: How do girls negotiate and resist the boundaries of the mainstream conception of girlhood through alternative life-writing in the form of personal zines? I investigated the specific representational forms that the author used to accomplish this goal, and how she used these strategies to actively question and comply with what I term normative girlhood. My research in some ways had many similarities to the body of literature surrounding girls’ life writing and identity, however there were some key divergences from the literature that I will summarize below.

Scholars have discussed the act of zining as a “pedagogical exchange…of contumacious, critical response’ to contemporary popular and subcultures, mixed with celebration and parody” (Nehring as cited in Poletti, 2005, p. 184). My research confirms the importance of zining as a way for the author to have this “pedagogical exchange” between contemporary cultures notions of successful girlhood and the author’s own personal experiences. This is most evident in her discussions of mental illness and sexual assault. As the author creates a space for the dialogue to occur not just in her own journal, but in the semi-public world of zining. By using an alternative form of life-writing the author is giving herself the ability to create this exchange between herself and the broader culture. What I had not found in previous research was a focus on how zine authors can specifically use popular cultural artifacts, as stand alone pieces or as part of larger works, to facilitate this exchange in their work. Poletti (2008) discusses the use of popular culture artifacts in conjunction with collage, but there is very little published research on how zine authors use the tools of popular culture to create a conversation about culture as whole with the audience. I found that cultural artifacts were often used as a way to subvert the original intended message, but could also be used to draw in and include the reader in a memory or story that the author is
sharing. This was the case with the use of Minnie Mouse in the zine, while the author in some respects was attempting to subvert the cultural understanding of Minnie and Disney, she also used the artifact to celebrate the idea of innocence and what Minnie did represent for the author. There was very little in the literature that discussed the dual role that these artifacts can have within zine in creating and facilitating "pedagogical exchange".

Another major finding within this project was that while zining is often used to resist popular understandings of girlhood, it is also a space for girl authors to confirm and comply with these normative understandings. An example of this would be the author’s affiliation with what she calls “girly” imagery. She uses this imagery throughout her zine series, in many ways confirming the idea of these images as “girl things”. While this may not seem to fit with the rest of her identity, it acts as a way for the author to allow the reader to see her as complex individual who challenges the binary of resistance and compliance. While this fits with some aspects of the research surrounding the unreality of the limited portrayals of girlhood, it also provides a good example of how complex girlhood can be represented and what this looks like as a cultural product (Harris, 2004; Aapola et al., 2009). The zine series presented here works to undermine not only popular understandings of successful girlhood, but also how mainstream culture understands and represents resistance for girls.

Finally this project provides a tangible example of how a girl author can create space for herself to explore unpopular or taboo aspects of girlhood identity, such as mental illness, sexual assault, and an unconventional coming of age. By working outside the mainstream life-writing community the author is able to create a location for her work that attempts to free itself from outside influence, and gives her the opportunity to discuss aspects of her life that would be deemed inappropriate in more traditional forms of life-writing. Importantly it is also possible to conclude that the author is able to explore these taboo subjects by using strategies that are also uncommon within traditional life-writing. The focus upon these strategies in conjunction with a specific zine series allowed me to deeply consider not only the types of subjects that the author discussed in her work, but how specific and unique strategies worked with these themes to create a unique space for the author to explore ideas that are not openly discussed in girls’ life-writing.
5.1. Limitations

Perhaps the biggest limitation within this project is the small sample size used within this project. While narrowing my focus to a single zine series did provide me with ability to do a deep and focused reading of the series and the strategies across time, it also limits the generalizability of the research. Other scholars can draw conclusions from the work, and hopefully use the strategies that are discussed and developed in future research, but the specific conclusions regarding themes and the use of strategies in specific instances cannot be taken out of the context of this project.

Another limitation within this research is the underground nature of the zining community. While the internet has provided greater access to the community through independent online distributers (online distros) and personal shops (e.g. Etsy) there is still a large number of zinesters who work entirely offline or purposefully run small and selected distributions, and are therefore not necessarily accounted for in this study or in the general body of literature. As such researchers, like myself, cannot easily make a claim for understanding the inner workings of the zining community, as the insular nature invariably makes it difficult to truly gain a cross section of the scene. Therefore it is important to acknowledge that the knowledge gained from this research is not necessarily representative of all girl created personal zines in content or in strategies.

The final limitation I will discuss here is the general age of zine creators in relation to this project. While I was interested in girl produced zines, and explored zines from girls of a cross section of ages within my initial research, the majority of girl created personal zines that I found were produced by older age girls who are either in their late teens or early twenties. This is due to younger girls often being unable to access the zining community as producers due to limited financial means to produce, reproduce, and distribute their zines. This lack of younger aged girls producing zines could also be due to the fact that without an older sibling or friend who can act as a gateway to the community it becomes difficult for younger girls to find and access the zining community on their own, and they are therefore less likely to create zines. While my definition of girl was inclusive of anyone who self identified as a girl, the older average age range of girl zine producers could skew the topics chosen and the strategies used within the girl produced personal zine community.
5.2. Implications

The first implication that can be taken from this research project is regarding the types of representations that can be found in the work produced by the author. When girls claim space to produce their own cultural works they can and do produce nuanced and articulate understandings of their own complicated and complex identities. When compared to the limited options that girls are provided through traditionally produced media and life-writing it is possible to see the vast difference in not only style, but also complexity of representation. It is important in an academic context to consider not only how these representations of identity differ between independently produced work and traditionally produced work, but also why this gap in representation exists. It becomes imperative to consider how girls represent themselves in relation to how they are represented in order to consider how to bridge this gap, and facilitate a more authentic representation of girls across media sources.

A second implication of this research is the importance of broadening the definition of autobiography and life-writing to include informal and noncommercial literary productions. By limiting the definition of life-writing to only include works that are professionally produced and published there is invariably a limitation placed upon the genre of who’s work will be valued and who’s work will be denigrated (Smith, 1993). This has shown itself to be true in relation to the lack of professionally produced life-writing by girls, and with the exceptions to this promoting an individually focused hero story (Smith, 1993). By broadening the definition of the genre to include forms of writing that are outside the current canon it is possible to naturally diversify the stories being told and the choices that are legitimized within the lives of the authors and the readers.

An important third implication that this research supports is the power of writing in the lives of girls today. Despite a general shift towards more digitized forms of communication and self-expression the continued existence of zines and the zine community reinforce the importance that physical writing can have in the lives of both the writer and reader. Within the community the act of writing provides a space for girls to not only represent themselves, but also to connect with like minded individuals in a space that is as much their own as is possible. The element of connection that is provided for these authors not only reinforces the importance of their stories, but also the
importance of the work that they are creating. This connection is strengthened by the extra-textual aspects of the zining community. It is not uncommon for zine packages to arrive with “extras” such as pins, patches, glitter, and personal notes from the author. These personal additions to the zines reader reinforce the feeling of community, and provide an extra opportunity for the writer to celebrate the importance of their work and the importance of the reader within that work.

5.3. Directions for Future Research

While this project presented a narrow scope, it does provide valuable jumping off points for future research. An interesting consideration for future research would be to perform a comparative analysis on the differences between alternative life writing and mainstream and educational girls’ life-writing, such as school based journaling projects and girl written teen magazine sections such as “embarrassing stories” features. Future researchers could compare the representational strategies used within these mediated spaces with the representational strategies identified within this research project.

Another option for future research would be to consider the unique situation that Canadian zine creators are faced with. As girl zine creators must navigate a small affinity group spread across a large geographical area, it becomes difficult to connect with others within the girl zining community. A focused study on the unique distribution and community practices of this population would provide an interesting context for research such as my own, and help to create a stronger understanding of the cross section of Canadian girl zine creators.
References


