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I Learned to Pick My Battles: Girls Dissenting in Oil Country

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore how girls living in a community economically reliant on the extraction of fossil fuels navigate gender expectations, loyalties, ideologies and moralities within their family structures, their places of employment and their affective communities. I describe how girlhood(s) within resource dependent communities are composed of and configured through the social, political, and economic conditions of extractivism, and the social relations that exist within these material conditions. The meeting of the material conditions of resource extraction and the social relations that exist within these environments, can be understood as "zones of entanglement." An exploration of girls' lives within these zones of entanglement, highlights how girls maneuver within the processes of social acceptance, belonging and notions of the "good life" by engaging in various strategies that work to create opportunities, while also reinforce foreclosures. These strategies include moving between speech and silence, learning to pick their battles, taking up space, and engaging in care-work. Through engagement in various strategies girls learn to protect themselves while maintaining opportunities for hope, connection, and transformation in their own lives, and in their interdependent relationships and attachments.

Keywords

Critical Girlhood Studies; Girlhoods; Extractive Studies; Feminist Studies; Saskatchewan

1. Introduction

As I cruise down the highway in my turquoise Nissan Versa to my field site in rural Saskatchewan, I count the prolife billboards standing tall in the ditches of the prairie towns I pass. I read the infantilizing slogans directed towards those in positions of power over girls, urging them to consider the consequences of allowing a girl to make choices for her own body, such as "She can never erase the memory" and the political crusades demanding you to ask yourself, "Is your representative prolife?" I scan the surrounding fields for something else to distract my attention, and I am left counting pumpjacks.

Although I had grown up under the influence of the Catholic church, prolife propaganda, and extractive populism[1] as a girl in rural Saskatchewan, it was when I talked to Andrea, a social worker in the community, that I realized the influence and power these institutions continued to have over girls' lives. Andrea highlighted for me that there are dissenting voices, including feminists, in rural Saskatchewan, but it is not something that is celebrated or normalized. As a school counsellor in the local high school, Andrea often felt she was the only person offering a feminist perspective in the school and in the community. In working to educate students about consent, toxic masculinity, sexism, and misogyny, she regularly heard people refer to her as "the fucking feminist" who was "trying to push her agenda again."

Andrea expressed to me that despite her passion and devotion to speaking up for women and girls, she had tired of feeling like a lone voice or believing she could influence real change in a community filled with bigotry and misogyny. Despite her own feelings of defeat, she remained optimistic about work being done by girls in the community who were using social media and YouTube to educate themselves and others on issues of gender equality, feminism, and human rights. She expressed that the willingness of girls to find their own path for feminist work, often navigating difficult family and social relationships to do so, gave her a sense of hope for girls living in this industrial context, but that it didn't change her own decision to leave the community for a larger centre where she could feel more supported in her own work.

The prolife billboards, often funded by local religious institutions, provide a symbolic reminder of the reproduction of gender norms in rural Saskatchewan by humiliating, silencing, and stigmatizing "certain kinds of girls"—the *fucking feminists*. The pumpjacks represent southeast Saskatchewan's economic

1. Extractive populism is the idea that the extraction of resources such as oil, natural gas and coal, is a key component to the success of Canada's economy and is justified and necessary as it provides benefits to *everyone* within extractive zones and beyond.

reliance on resource extraction and act as symbolic objects of cultural loyalty to the extractive industries that are seen to be essential to local stability, prosperity, and growth in this context of extractive populism. Prolife signs and pumpjacks, standing side-by-side along Saskatchewan's rural roads, become symbols of white working-class rural values and subsequently represent the white working-class rural nuclear family as the "good life" (Ahmed, *The Promise* 38; O'Connell 537; Walkerdine et al. 13). These value-laden objects highlight the gendered, classed, and racialized nature of extractive populism. As symbols, they work to solidify rhetoric about the naturalness of gender and gender expectations for girls, directing them towards what is considered "good," and encourage homogenous identities of acceptance and prosperity in extractive contexts, leaving little room for ambiguity and dissent (Eaton and Enoch, "Great Again" 22; Elliot, Jaffe, and Sellers 9). To critique extractive industries where they are inextricably embedded in the historical, economic, political, and cultural fabric of the landscape, can be seen as critiquing the local culture, community and family structure, or the places where one is meant to belong (Rogers, "Deep Oil" 68).

With restricted opportunity for collective or public dissent in the process of belonging to the affective community in extractive zones, social constructs and relational interdependencies create and maintain expectations for girls' obligation to and expression of certain ideologies, loyalties, and moralities, often with an expectation to blindly invest in the objects—family and economic prosperity from extractive industries—that are framed as their path to happiness. Sara Ahmed contends, "happiness is not simply used to secure social relations instrumentally but works as an idea or an aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others, creating "scripts" for how to live well (*The Promise* 59). These gendered "happiness scripts" provide a set of instructions for what women and men must do in the local context in order to be happy, whereby happiness is what follows being natural or good (59). In the context of rural working-class extractivism, women and girls are expected to be "good" by reproducing feminine aspects of carework, including maintaining community and kinship ties, while also being "tough enough" to accept male notions of belonging that dominate extractive culture. Who is considered a "good girl" in the local context, is dependent on a girl's willingness and ability to maintain class allegiances by "going along with it." Ahmed argues that by going along with happiness scripts, we "get along" and to get along is to be willing and able to express happiness in proximity to the right things (59). Loyalty to happiness scripts work to reduce girls' own relationships to "happy objects" as unimportant and ignorable. As Sheena Wilson writes, "women's relationship to oil… is portrayed in the mainstream media in a limited number of largely superficial ways… that either neutralize or trivialize

women's political and economic relationships to oil" (244). By recognizing the trivialization of women's relationships to extractivism, we see that girls' lives, and their social relationships within petro-cultures more broadly, are almost entirely ignored. Kendrick contends that this constitutes living an "invisible life" in the shadow of the oil and gas industry (177).

It is with the intention of nudging girls away from the margins and into spaces of visibility within the petro-cultures in which they live, that I engage in an analysis of girlhood(s) and zones of entanglement through critical feminist ethnography. In the following paper, I examine the ways girls living in one extractive community navigate gender expectations, loyalties, ideologies and moralities within their family structures, their places of employment and their affective communities. I describe how girlhood(s) within resource dependent communities are composed of and configured through the social, political, and economic conditions of extractivism, and the social relations that exist within these material conditions. The meeting of the material conditions of resource extraction and the social relations that exist within these environments, can be understood as "zones of entanglement." An exploration of girls' lives within these zones of entanglement, highlights how girls maneuver within the processes of social acceptance, belonging and notions of the "good life" by engaging in various strategies that work to create opportunities, while also reinforcing foreclosures. These strategies include moving between speech and silence, learning to pick their battles, taking up space, and engaging in carework. Through these strategies girls learn to protect themselves while maintaining opportunities for hope, connection, and transformation in their own lives, and in their interdependent relationships and attachments.

I acknowledge that committing to critical feminist ethnography with girls means recognizing there indeed exist girls whose investments and desires may not align with my own, and who have different visions of a good life (Abu-Lughod 26). Engaging in critical feminist ethnography means responding empathetically to "messy" enactments of girlhood(s) and requires the practice of "hearing girls." The practice of "hearing girls" entails paying attention to the "seepages" of girls' voices, or that which exceeds dominant codes, that point to the complexity and multiplicity of their investments, commitments, and their own visions of a good life (Abu-Lughod 26; Jones 64; Khoja-Moolji 745). It is from this perspective that I explore the situated experiences of girlhood(s) in oil country.

2. Methods & Methodology

This study takes place in and around a city that I am calling Bordertown, Saskatchewan. Bordertown is an "energy city" hosting a boom-and-bust oil and

gas industry, open pit lignite coal mining, two coal fired power stations, and a sizeable agricultural industry. It has a fluctuating population of around 10,000 people depending on the cycle of boom-and-bust. For this paper, I am drawing on participant observation and ethnographic research methods conducted in and around Bordertown between 2021-2023. The methods and approaches used for this study include participant observation; open-ended and semi-structured interviews both in-person and virtually; and photovoice. My work also engages with feminist auto-ethnographic inquiry in the exploration of conducting ethnographic research "at home."

Participant observation for this project took place over 16 months in 12 rural communities in southeast Saskatchewan, including 1 small industrial city, 9 rural towns and villages, and 2 First Nation communities. All of the communities chosen for the study are heavily entangled with and economically reliant on both the fossil fuel industries (oil, gas or coal) and agriculture industries (crops and livestock). Participants represent a diverse range of racialized, gendered, classed and (dis)abled subjectivities.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted 25 semi-structured and open-ended interviews with rural girls between the ages of 15-18 and rural women, including some of the girl participants' mothers.[2] Participants were selected through a combination of convenience sampling (e.g., using personal networks in the region to identify potential participants) and snowball sampling following initial contacts.

Finally, I conducted a month-long photovoice project in partnership with a local youth centre in Bordertown. Photovoice is a methodology in which participants take photographs of what they feel is relevant in their lives and are provided an opportunity to discuss the images with other participants. The photovoice project for this research also included a community exhibition. In total 22 girls between the ages of 12-18 participated in the project, with 10 girls being from Bordertown and 12 girls from a First Nation community 45 minutes away from the youth centre.

Data was analyzed using open coding methods to identify major themes and concepts. I approached this research from the position that the concepts of girl and girlhood are cultural, historical, and social constructions. Given this approach, it is important to clarify that the use of the terms girl(s) and girlhood(s) throughout this paper does not suggest that the construction of "girl"

2. Given that I approach this research from the position that the concepts of girl and girlhood are a cultural, historical, and social construction, I do not rigidly define age brackets for what it means to be a girl versus a woman. Girlhood is a shifting material and discursive practice that is almost undefinable in everyday life.

is a homogenous category. Even within the context of rural working-class girls there are a variety of lived racialized, gendered and (dis)abled experiences. Throughout the paper I make note of different lived experiences as they are relevant to the discussion.

3. Zones of Entanglement: Girlhood in Oil Country

Girlhood, as Heather Switzer writes, is formed by and experienced within gendered and generational sociocultural relations of love, respect, care, authority, status, and power that configure family and community formations (91). She contends that girlhood is contingent on girls' situatedness in families, communities, and discursive economies of meaning that are continually in flux as sociocultural and political-economic material circumstances change around them and remain largely out of their control (91). Marnina Gonick argues that "girls become girls by participating within the available sets of social meanings and practices rooted in a particular place, cultural landscape, and historical moment" (5). Girlhoods in and around the resource dependent community of Bordertown Saskatchewan are composed and configured through the social, political, and economic material conditions of extractivism, as well through interdependent relations with family, educators and community members who maintain working-class values and mortalities deeply loyal to the fossil fuel industries that sustain their livelihoods.

In the working-class culture of rural Saskatchewan, economies remain embedded in the social relations of everyday institutions, and the use of a purely economic logic does not capture the importance of the family and the wider community to sustaining livelihood (Jaffe and Quark 241). It is within this cultural framework that the resource extraction industries are seen to be *part* of the community and an essential element to local stability, prosperity and growth (Boyd 85). The intense identification with resource extraction demonstrates a mutuality of interests in which community interests and industry interests are blurred to the point of being almost indistinguishable (Eaton and Enoch, "Oil's Rural Reach" 54). This blurring of interests and commitment to the maintenance of the resource extractive industries creates a sense of local belonging and solidarity. The social, political, and economic reliance on fossil fuels for growth and prosperity has resulted in an "extractive populism" in Saskatchewan, that reinforces a homogenous identity of support for the extractive industries but ignores the different social realities and experiences that living within extractive zones configures (Kossick 275). Lorenzo D'Angelo and Robert Jan Pijpers argue the political economy of resource extraction has been grossly depoliticized as many of the dynamics that inform how resource extraction is

entangled in social, political, economic, and physical environments are left unaddressed or obscured (4). Nicholas Bainton and John Owen contend that the social relations of resource extraction and the settings where these activities occur can be understood as "zones of entanglement" (767).

Engaging with the concept of entanglement draws attention to the specific historical, material, and relational dimensions of extractive contexts (Bainton and Owen 769). Entanglement points to the social worlds in which extraction is situated and which are shaped by extraction and helps to understand the process by which extraction materializes and comes to exist in these social worlds (769). Through an exploration of the way lives are entangled in extractive zones, we can ask questions about the people who inhabit and give shape to these environments. We can explore their aspirations, dreams, challenges, and fears, and come to understand how extraction, which generates both opportunities and foreclosures, affects their lives (D'Angelo and Pijpers 4). However, as Megan Boler argues, it must be acknowledged that power inequities, institutionalized through economies, gender roles, and social class, ensure that all voices within particular contexts do not carry the same weight (3). Asking, "whose story gets told and believed, and who does the telling?" (Solnit 83) is especially salient in the political economy of extractive populism.

Oil production generally takes place in geographically bounded locations such as boomtowns, encampments, and oil regions within larger geographical areas (Rogers, "Oil and Anthropology" 371). In bounded industrial zones in which the majority of peoples' lives are entangled with the extractive industries, the industrial imagination works to carve out the physical and social contours of the community, shaping workers sense of class, gender, community and belonging (Rubbers 119). With male workers accessing the majority of the wealth, and the associated power produced within extractive zones, male notions of belonging, masculinity, and membership are embedded in the local social and political institutions (Timsar 81). The overall patriarchal structure of the extractive industries in rural Saskatchewan work to reproduce heteronormative gender narratives through the normalization of the male "bread-winner" nuclear family. While rural working-class girls may embrace conservative working-class values imbued through "happiness scripts," rural girls may also demonstrate autonomy in the way they take on and negotiate these scripts by contesting the reproduction of heteronormative gender and class constructions (Riley 248).

Despite what appear to be scripts of the "good life" produced and reproduced by those living within the physical and social contours of extractive populism, Bainton and Owen argue that research focused on the social landscape of extraction demands more reflexive dialogical strategies that favor the voices of a diverse set of participants, and that avoid portraying local encounters in simple homogenous terms (771). This allows for attention to be drawn towards the ambivalences

and ambiguities that characterize these spaces (770). Emily Eaton and Abby Kinchy contend that in rural Saskatchewan, ambivalent perceptions towards the oil and gas industry, combined with a paucity of organizational capacity and political opportunities, may lead to extractive zones being viewed as sites of consent (22). However, in speaking with residents of these zones, they argue that there are residents who do have grievances with the industry, but that rather than collective mobilization, residents often act out their grievances by individually confronting the industry or maintaining a public silence on the issues they face (24). Due to the danger of speaking out against the socio-cultural implications of extractive industries, Eaton and Kinchy argue that researchers working within zones of entanglement need to "listen for the quiet voices" of dissent within these communities, which often take more of an individual rather than collective approach to protest (29). The complexity of the social landscape that are encountered when researchers become involved in research around mining and extractive operations requires researchers to move beyond binary or homogenous explorations of industrial zones and seek to better understand the ways entanglement in these zones impacts differently situated lives. By moving girls from the shadows of invisibility within extractive zones, we can come to better understand girls' own ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and desires about the so-called "good life," and the various strategies they engage to navigate the twists and turns of social acceptance and belonging within these zones of entanglement. This includes engaging in messy strategies that open them up to both opportunities and foreclosures.

Participants Ellie and Grace, both high school students with fathers working in the oil industry, described a "culture culminated" around Bordertown that generates sexist, racist, homophobic, Islamophobic and bigoted ideologies. As Ellie stated, "especially in spaces like the oil field and like shop talk and things like that. People still use fag as a slur and use gay as a slur and all that kind of stuff and it is still very anti-women and also just like anti anything liberal." Grace confirmed this assessment stating, "a lot of it has to do with the oil… because a lot of the girls I hear from, their dads are oil riggers, so they, that is the environment they have culminated down here, I guess. Like every dad works in the area, like they all talk the same, they act the same, like my boyfriends' dad is the same as my dad." Navigating through economic inequality, rigid gender norms, homophobia, racism, sexism, and misogyny in this context of extractive populism, girls demonstrate that while there is generally little room for public dissent in the process of belonging to the affective community, girls find agentic ways to challenge ideologies, loyalties, and moralities they disagree with by, as Grace describes, "picking their battles." She stated,

> I am grateful for what [living here has] taught me, which is how to deal with people like my dad, with bigots and racists, cause even though I hate it, and I have been

> growing up around it my whole life, and it has just, like every time I hear it, it is just anger and just like this pit in my stomach, I hate hearing the things I hear coming out of some people's mouths down here, this blue collar atmosphere, but it has taught me how to pick and choose my battles… so now I know like I don't have to fight everybody, even though I want to, like it gives me a fire in my belly, I can still be like reassured in myself… I think it drives me.

In her assessment of the "blue collar atmosphere" culminated in the oil industry, Grace highlights how conservative discourses are produced and reproduced in everyday institutions and interactions. For Grace, this context has taught her that it can be just as important to not speak as it can be to speak.

In the next section I will continue to explore the ways in which girls challenge expectations to instinctively invest in the moralities, ideologies, and values that the social and cultural landscape of their lives expects of them. Through silence, taking up space and care-work, girls work to develop and maintain opportunities for hope, connection, and transformation in alliances and relationships, while at times accepting dis-connection, unhappiness, and foreclosure. Engagement in these navigation strategies requires that girls pick their battles and decide how to battle when negotiating the messy enactments of girlhood in zones of entanglement.

4. Learning How to Battle

In discussing the in-betweenness of speech and silence, anthropologist Susan Gal has argued that studies acknowledging gender as a structure of social relations reproduced and challenged in everyday life must attend not only to words but to the interactional practices and the broader political and economic context of communication in order to understand the process by which women's (and girls') voices are routinely suppressed and how they manage to emerge (178). She stated, "if we understand women's everyday talk and linguistic genres as forms of resistance, we hear, in any culture, not so much a clear and heretofore neglected 'woman's voice,' or separate culture, but linguistic practices that are more ambiguous, often contradictory" (Gal 178).

The girls in my study discussed their own experiences of being in-between speech and silence and choosing various strategies at different times based on the social and political implications of their response to ideologies and moralities misaligned with their own. As Gal contends, women's (and girls') everyday use of speech and silence shows a range of responses including acceptance, resistance, subversion, and opposition to dominant, often male, discourse (193). She argues that the process by which women (and girls) are rendered

mute or manage to engage in resisting discourse requires a broader analysis of the political, economic, and institutional contexts in which this reality is negotiated. For many of the girls, institutions such as school and family structures, require a level of acceptance and learning to "just take it" to maintain interdependent relationships and access to social spaces. As Grace stated,

> like I have learned over the years with my dad, like so many opinions that I have, where I just learned to keep quiet… cause maybe that is what my mom has done too, even though she is very strong, like it is ridiculous, because she is very strong, very powerful… so seeing her just take it, maybe I internalized it and realized, ok, I got to do that too.

Ahmed argues that to avoid creating awkwardness, and being associated with bad feelings, there exists a social pressure to maintain the signs of "getting along" (*The Promise* 59). Maintaining public comfort requires that certain bodies "go along with it," to avoid creating awkwardness and to fit in (59). Ellie discussed navigating "shop talk" as the only girl in her welding class at school,

> a counsellor at my school… she told me, never let them know they upset you, don't show any emotion, don't tell anybody when you are upset because that gives them power… So, I definitely think I learned it subconsciously as a coping mechanism. To just kinda let it slide… I just had to be really chill and not bring up much of a fuss, because then people didn't like me because I was a 'problem' and because I made waves and because I screwed up their little all boys club.

The girls discussed how they learned from their mothers, and other women in their lives, that silence could be used a tool to negotiate oppressive power structures that they encountered. As Royster argues, "silence is a tool of protection, respectability, and rebellion" (176). Although the girls were aware of the contradiction between what they perceived to be women's strengths and their passive response to the power structures they encountered, they recognized that remaining silent and "just taking it" could also be an agentic strategy to maintain their relationships of care and create opportunities for them to access social spaces that they may otherwise not have had access to. It could be argued that their mothers and school counsellors coached the girls towards the agentic strategy of "getting along" as a tool of protection and resistance. As Sheena Malhorta suggests, "There are moments when speaking, speaking out, voicing one's truth, claiming the space of visibility is of greatest importance. However, there are different contexts in which silence can be an act of resistance, when silence can open up spaces that words would have closed

out" (227).[3] As social worker Andrea had encountered, speaking out could be a lonely, isolating, and demoralizing act, and it is prudent to think that mothers and women in supportive roles very likely wished to protect the girls from these forms of alienation. Despite the girls' acceptance that resisting dominate discourse necessitates a form of self-muting or agentic silencing at times, girls also discussed how this protective strategy did not always allow for the active response to power structures that they sought. As Ellie stated,

> My mom, though she is very strong and a very powerful woman, she is also very passive in a sense, like she always taught me to be like, take the high road, take the moral high road and don't cause problems… so in that moment, I took myself out of that situation cause I would be like, 'look mom I took myself out of this situation I didn't cause problems,' and she would be like, 'yeah good for you!' but then I was like, ah, I wish I had caused problems, like it was one of those things that, that I regret not trying to speak up about it or trying to say something or telling them to fuck off or something like that.

Gal argues that in their resistance to attempts to be muted or supressed, women and girls perform many different forms of resisting that are influenced by race and class (181). For working class girls in zones of entanglement, we are reminded that demonstrations of their agency and resistance should not be limited to visible public venues of activism and protest, often supported by adult leaders, but instead consider the "micro-politics" of everyday resistance that they demonstrate by taking up space in male dominated zones and by engaging in rough "masculine" language to speak back (Bae and Ivashkevich 6; Butler 178). For example, Vanessa, an Indigenous girl who had moved between her First Nation community and other small communities around Bordertown throughout her life, expressed that one of the main challenges for girls was the ability to speak out and to have their opinions taken seriously. She stated,

3. Despite attempts to remain open to the various ideas and opinions expressed by participants, I am aware of the ways in which power weaves through the research process, and how my own position as an adult woman may have caused some participants to feel social pressure to "get along" with what they perceived I was looking for in their answers. I am aware that some of the participants could have used silence in the research process as a way of avoiding awkwardness in expressing opinions and ideas that they felt differed from my own as the researcher. The way that silence was used by girls within the research process can be speculated on but not fully addressed within the scope of this paper.

> I think one of the challenges is like using your voice. Like that is the main thing cause if you are a girl, you just get shut down for your opinion. And that goes for all girls. Your opinion is irrelevant, especially when there are a lot of dudes.

Although Vanessa expressed that this was challenging for all girls, she found it particularly challenging as an Indigenous girl, even within her own family structure. In order to have her voice heard, Vanessa described learning to "not take shit" and to sometimes "be mean to get [her] point across." She stated,

> yeah, my dad is white. And my sister too. Umm, but they watched their mouths around me. They would not say anything after I told them, I will fucking fight you… And well I don't blame [them], cause sometimes you just say shit and you don't mean it… people don't really realize what they are saying until you address it. That is why I say shit.

Vanessa's forms of everyday resistance required working-class toughness to challenge the racism she experienced in her everyday life. Her willingness to speak out and "say shit" resulted in a shift in behaviour from her white family members, even if it resulted in their own silencing.

Alternatively, Kasey described that although she was both white and working-class, like her co-workers, her gender was the defining factor that limited her inclusion and acceptance at her job as a summer student working in the coal mine wash pit. Kasey described the way she attempted to demonstrate her agency through a combination of "rough" language and silence in resistance to the way men spoke about women, and how they responded to her opposition. She stated,

> So I would be the only girl in the shop… and [the guys] would talk about just vile things about women and just how men are when it is a group of men, and they think it is fine and it is not… But like, the things they would say, just like sexual things and things like that, and if I was standing there they would be like, well if you don't want to hear it, then leave. And I am like, why don't you just watch your fucking mouth. Don't talk like that. Then they would pretty much just tell me to get fucked. In those words.

In taking up the men's language, Kasey attempted to speak back and create space for herself in an environment that was being signaled as not for her, despite being white and working class like her co-workers. Although she tried engaging in class-based speech to talk back to the men, she eventually stopped fighting back after she "cried everyday and got called a piece of shit a lot." While Kasey's subversive disagreements with the men did not cause

them to stop their vile conversations, her very presence in the wash pit disrupted the "comfort" the men had taken for granted in their ability to engage in sexist and misogynistic rhetoric. Kasey's presence made her the cause for the men's unhappiness, effectively "killing their joy," and making her their "kill joy," Kasey's body in the shop became a symbol of gender trouble and disturbance (Ahmed, *The Promise* 68). As in Butler's theory of gender, the female body itself can be seen as a site of disruption. The "micro-politics" of the body to disrupt the regulating practices of cultural coherence—in this case sexist and misogynistic discourse in extractive environments—by simply being present in forbidden territories (178). In simply being present, Kasey performed a form of *lived* affective agency in which disruptions to the dominate scripts, arise from within the terms of the scripts (Bae and Ivashkevich 7).

Michelle Bae and Olga Ivashkevich have argued that public forms of resistance may be too threatening for girls in particular contexts, such as speaking out against extractive populism and anti-feminist moralities within extractive cultures, as previously discussed in this article (6). Therefore, girls learn to pick their battles and decide what is the appropriate approach to resist, dissent, to battle, and when to "get along" and just take it. This messy negotiation of agency between speech and silence requires an understanding of what is at stake for girls in resisting dominate ideologies, moralities, and loyalties, and how moving back and forth between dominate and subversive scripts may be a necessary process in maintaining the supportive and generative aspects of belonging in their families and communities.

Shenila Khoja-Moolji contends that doing the work of hearing girls requires listening for the "seepages" within their stories that reveal how they negotiate, develop, and maintain different kinds of alliances, relationships, and investments (745). This requires listening for the ways girls work to preserve relationships, while also standing in their own convictions (Cox 30). Khoja-Moolji argues that in maintaining intimate relationships and attachments, girls may engage in multiple navigation strategies simultaneously, many of which may even seem in contradiction to each other (759). In doing so, girls create space for relational tensions to exist and allow themselves opportunities to encounter and engage with others who may not hold similar values to their own. As a politics of belonging, this process acknowledges the multiplicity and situatedness of individual attachments and how these relations are re-articulated and re-negotiated in day-to-day practices (Youkhana 10). This entails understanding that the sites of belonging that girls in extractive contexts engage, can be both sites of support and opportunity, as well as sites of restriction and foreclosure. Appreciating girls' own concepts of the good life, requires exploring how girls continue to invest in, maintain and strengthen their complex relations within circles of care. In the next section I will explore the way girls engage in

care-work as a strategy to develop alliances and maintain a sense of hope and connection in their lives.

5. More Hate Only Feeds the Cycle: Choosing an Ethic of Care

Joan Tronto has stated that an ethic of care is a practice that takes place in context and location (154). Care and care relationships are located in, shaped by and shape particular spaces and places (Milligan and Wiles 736). Approaching a study of girlhood relationally means being interested in the complexity of girls' relationships within the circles of care in their lives that emphasize the multifaceted and relational nature of their dependency and agency (Meloni et al. 107). Girls' lives do not emerge in a vacuum, but from the interactional context in which they are deeply entangled including their family stories, their social landscapes, and their relationships of trust (107).

In rural Saskatchewan, social relations have historically been maintained through the paid and unpaid care work of rural women and girls. Given the traditional nuclear family structure of rural life, rural women and girls' labour is unescapably linked to their relations of kin, with their social value being assessed through their contributions to family and community (Birk 354). The strong social fabric that has historically existed among working-class rural communities in Saskatchewan, exists because of the mutual aid and volunteerism performed by women and girls to maintain community and family networks (Jaffe and Quark, 241). As a practice embedded in social life, care is shaped by other practices of social life, and points to the process by which life is sustained (Tronto 154). By taking on the life sustaining care work of maintaining family and community relationships, the girls in my study demonstrated strategies to create individual, familial, and community transformation from the inside out by using their positions within local structures and institutions to influence change. Engaging in an ethic of care created life sustaining opportunities to not only maneuver within sociocultural relations and maintain social value as a "good worker and a good citizen" (Rubbers 119), but also supported their own feminist aims of transitioning feelings of anger and hate into opportunities for connection and relationality. As Grace stated,

> Like I've heard my dad say all those things and I'm like I have no doubt their dad says the same thing… I went through a phase of all guys suck. But then I realized, ok, well more hate, as a feminist, more hate does not, it only feeds the cycle, it does not contribute to making anything better… so once I actually told some of the guys about things that I knew and whatever, then they were like oh cool, and then they would actually understand. Because that is the first time they have

> heard anything other than what their parents have to say, so I have experienced that with several of my guy friends, so, it is interesting, even with my little brother I had to do that with.

Grace's willingness to see the boys in her life as potential allies, demonstrates how girlhood is formed and experienced within gendered and generational sociocultural relations of love, care, authority, and power that configure family and community formations (Switzer 91). Girls' agency within zones of entanglement is demonstrated through the capacity to inhabit existing and constraining norms in ways that slowly shift cultural meanings and enable new possibilities within local notions of empowerment (166). In this case, through Grace's willingness to move through a "guys suck" phase and open to the possibility that she could work to raise the consciousness of her peers, even if she had to choose silence in order to "get along" with her father. Although we cannot know whether the boys' "oh cool" response signals a shift in consciousness and the forming of new sociocultural ideas about gender, what it is does highlight is how girls find micro-opportunities to work towards social change in the messy interdependences and indeterminacies of their social relations, that demonstrate positions of both agency and suppression (Bent and Switzer 134).

Jesse, a young woman in her early twenties, described how she, and others of her generation, are working to support transformative change in their communities, by acting as a cultural bridge between what she viewed as two opposing generational viewpoints,

> Like my generation is on the cusp of the millennials that know things are acceptable but also know that the older generation does not understand that they are acceptable. The people around my age are really on that edge between both of the large generations, this new 'gender openness' generation and then the older generation. So, I think it is a lot of people my age who are helping the older people to be more open, but also helping the youth to be more understanding that the older ones don't get it.

Jesse's work to create change within her community is not one of force, but instead built on sustaining and creating understanding and relationality between generations. Switzer suggests that for girls, "a fundamental element in shifting the gendered relations of power within families and communities is less the explicit rejection of conventional gender roles, rights, and responsibilities and more the manipulation of these expectations and assumptions in ways that create possibilities for localized change, even as they can also create new forms of localized exclusion" (166). Nicholas C. Burbules contends that it is not sufficient to attempt to change mistaken views simply by criticizing them as wrong,

or simply by giving counter evidence to them (xxviii). Rather, changing such attitudes and beliefs requires following the process and rationales by which they were formed in the first place, and that requires having some patience with hearing out views that one might find deeply objectionable. Furthermore, it requires an act of imagination to ponder how it might be that people who are not fundamentally wicked or hateful, people who we might care about, might come to hold such views (xxviii).

Girls in Bordertown are caught "in-between" systems for securing social legitimacy, in honoring their own personal values and beliefs, and fulfilling social obligations in the context of bigotry, racism, homophobia and sexism in their homes and communities. The girls I spoke with engaged in various tactics to navigate conventional gendered expectations and create possibilities for localized change. Small shifts in gendered power can only come from maneuvering in-between dominate and subversive scripts, and through a multiplicity of commitments, aspirations, and desires (Switzer 116). Through the process of belonging, girls acknowledge the multiplicity and situatedness of their individual attachments, and how through the re-negotiation of these relations in everyday life, they are working to create change from the inside out.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that doing the work of hearing girls in zones of entanglement helps to answer the questions posed by D'Angelo and Pijpers that call for a more attentive analysis of the people inhabiting and giving shape to extractive environments, and asking how the sociocultural implications of extraction affects their lives (4). My research with girls living in and around one extractive boomtown in Saskatchewan, suggests that the physical and social contours of the community, shaping gendered, raced, and classed notions of "the good life," are carved through an industrial imagination that works to relegate girls' thoughts, beliefs, values, and even bodies, to the shadows of industrial life. Despite their marginalization within extractive zones, girls demonstrate active resistance to the sexist, racist and bigoted effects of extractivism through negotiation strategies that allow them to maintain their relations within communities of care, while working against a culture of coherence of extractivism culture. Rather than understanding girls' resistance in binary terms, my research suggests that girls' responses are multiple, complex, and at times, contradictory.

Doing the work of hearing girls, requires that we make space for diverse ways of being a girl, that allows space for the messy enactments of girlhood that include moving back and forth between dominate and subversive scripts (Khoja-Moolji 745). For girls in Bordertown, this includes learning to pick their

battles through moving in-between speech and silence in their sociocultural relations of love, care, authority, and power. As Bae and Ivashkevich argue, being open to girls' messy enactments of agency and dependence, draws attention to our own contradictory subjectivities and daily performances of gender that do not fit the feminist agenda. We can engage in a deeper understanding of what being a female, and a feminist, actually means and how our "being a feminist" is not always rational, but engages our fantasy, desire, and pleasure, and requires us to move back and forth between dominant scripts and subversive disruptions (4). They write, "once we begin to acknowledge our own incompleteness and the affective complexity of constantly moving between our own messy femininities and feminist impulses, we become more accepting of the girl subject within ourselves, and consequently of the girls that we encounter" (Bae and Ivashkevich 4). When we really do the work of hearing the quiet voices in extractive zones, we move beyond gendered stories of victimization and oppression, and open ourselves to stories of hope, reconstruction and resourcefulness (Eaton and Kinchy 29; Khoja-Moolji 760). As we open ourselves up to conversations with girls, we open up to the full expectation that we will, at least, be changed and perhaps together develop "collective strategies for living fuller, self-defined lives" (Cox 8). Like Andrea, whose lonely "feminist agenda" resulted in the strategy of choosing her own un-happiness and un-belonging as a pathway to create social change, this might mean opening ourselves up to being known as a "fucking feminist." By demonstrating disloyalty to the happiness scripts of "the good life" through our own negotiation strategies, we allow ourselves the ability to pick our battles and respond to what moves us. For me, this means taking an interest in the spaces of meaning-making that girls enliven and create daily and working to challenge and disrupt homogenous constructions of girlhood, working-classness, rurality and extractive communities.

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