



## TEEN FEMINIST KILLJOYS?

Mapping Girls' Affective Encounters with  
Femininity, Sexuality, and Feminism at School

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International research has documented the phenomenon of contemporary young women repudiating or disinvesting from identifications with feminism (Jowett 2004: 99; Baker 2008; Scharff 2012). Indeed, feminism is frequently constituted as both abject and obsolete by a postfeminist media context that suggests women are now equal in education, the workplace, and the home (McRobbie 2008; Ringrose and Renold 2010). Most of the scholarship on the relationship between new femininities (Gill and Scharff 2011) and different forms of feminism or postfeminism (Budgeon 2011), does not, however, explicitly deal with adolescence and teen girls' relationships to feminism, although there is some writing on how the girl and associations with girlishness have historically been set in contradiction to a feminist identity, and the need to overcome this and take girls' political subjectivities seriously (Baumgardner and Richards 2004; Eisenhauer 2004).

One particularly promising area is a growing literature exploring girls' political, activist, or counter-cultural subjectivities, via girls' online identity formation (Weber and Mitchell 2008; Currie et al. 2009) through new media practices such as blogging, zines, and digital social networking (Piepmeier, 2009; Zaslow 2009; Ringrose 2011; Keller 2012; see also Keller's contribution to this volume, among others). However, there is still a limited amount of research that focuses on teenage girls explicitly taking up feminist activist identities and practices. Indeed, much research, including our own, has focused on what Currie et al. call "de facto feminism" (2008: 39) that is, discursive traces of feminist ideology or resistance in the talk and experiences of teen girls, even if they do not explicitly identify with or define themselves as feminist (Renold and Ringrose 2008, 2011). Jessica Taft's work is a notable exception; her book *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change* explores

girls taking up feminism (and other activisms), noting how “girl activists’ ideas, stories, and theoretical contributions remain largely hidden from view” (2011: 5). Taft also comments on the lack of research with younger teens, given that most empirical work has focused on older teens or college-age feminism (including Taft’s own participants, of whom only three out of eighty-four girls were under fifteen).

This chapter aims to contribute to the small but growing research literature that explores young teen girls grappling with negotiating the identity of the *feminist* and engaging in feminist practices in the institutional context of school. Drawing on qualitative research in a UK Welsh Secondary school with teens aged fourteen to sixteen, we try to engage with the complexities of what it means to be positioned, and to position oneself as feminist. We are particularly interested in foregrounding the affective dimension making feminist political subjectivities in the context of girls’ everyday lives, especially their school-based teen peer cultures.

Specifically, we explore how occupying the position of teen feminist operates in relation to the contradictory terrain of femininity and sexuality in teen girlhood (Aapola et al. 2005). As noted, mainstream postfeminist media representations tend to produce a projective figure of the abject feminist as a man-hating, anti-sex, prudish, butch, ugly, de-feminized, and almost always adult or older woman (McRobbie 2008). Attempting to occupy the position of young feminist brings contradictions to the fore for girls, since postfeminist versions of sexy femininity are constructed in opposition to feminism (Ringrose 2012). These contradictions may be intensified for the young teen feminist trying on this identity. If feminism is represented and experienced as an abject identity that produces an undesirable and unsexy (hetero)femininity, then how do girls manage or negotiate these contradictions? What is the energetic and emotional toll of these contradictory affective processes on young teen feminists?

To explore these questions we draw on Sara Ahmed’s (2010) figure of the feminist killjoy. We deploy her notion of “sticky” affects to explore how good and bad affects puncture and “grip” (Coleman 2009) the bodies of those who occupy the position of teen feminist and participate in feminist practices. We also consider how affects flow through and among local peer cultures imbued with normalized (hetero)sexism and sexual violence, considering the discursive material constraints around the young sexual girl body (Renold and Ringrose 2011). To do so, we draw on an ongoing feminist research collaboration with the school-based girl power group, organized to raise the self-esteem and achievement of girls who were disengaged from formal schooling.

## Bad Affect and Feminist Killjoys: What Can a Teen Feminist Do?

According to Taft (2011), in attempting to occupy particular versions of feminism, girls in her study had to disinvest, reject, and remake girlhood to accommodate feminism. Our interest is in micro-mapping the *affective* dimensions of this struggle to remake the parameters of girlhood sexuality vis-à-vis feminism in the context of peer relations at school. Sara Ahmed describes affect as a way of trying to explore “the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds” (2010: 30). Ahmed’s orientation is around how objects and things become imbued with positive or negative affects. To describe the affects surrounding feminism, Ahmed theorizes the “figure of the feminist killjoy” (66), whose negativity is felt to kill joy by insisting on the unpleasant truths of sexism and by challenging taken-for-granted, normal, and desired gendered and sexual power dynamics: “The feminist subject ‘in the room’ hence ‘brings others down’ not only by talking about unhappy topics such as sexism but by exposing how happiness is sustained by erasing the signs of not getting along. Feminists do kill joy in a certain sense: they disturb the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places. ... We can consider the relationship between the negativity of the figure of the feminist killjoy and how certain bodies are ‘encountered’ as being negative. ... To be recognized as a feminist is to be assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty” (66). For Ahmed, an affective approach recognizes that “feelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces and situations. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with” (39). “Affect is sticky” (29). We find this framing compelling, and our interest is in mapping out what affects surround and stick to girls and their embodied teen feminist relationships in social space. Indeed, we will explore how the luminous (Deleuze in McRobbie 2008) signifier of feminist as an affective term has immense power that can be both destructive and transformative. We are not theorizing affect, however, as *solely* subjective “felt states of emotion” (Clough 2010: 207) but also as a force that flows through and between bodies and things, which can increase or decrease capacities to act (Ringrose and Coleman 2013). We are interested in how girls are encountered (by others) and encounter (themselves) vis-à-vis what Ahmed (2010) thinks of as the difficult category of feminism. Analytically, we explore this in relation to mapping the affective encounters of a range of killjoy moments, attending to how affective flows can energize and open up or deflate and curtail girls’ ca-

capacities to survive and/or challenge subtle and overt everyday sexism and sexual harassment (such as sexual name-calling).

## Researching the Girl Power Group

Taft explores the paradoxes of the term Girl Power, which has been co-opted and commodified to the point of semiotic exhaustion to simultaneously mean “anti-feminism, postfeminism, individual power and consumer power [which] all write girls’ socio-political power out of the language of Girl Power” (2004: 75; see also Hains 2012). The girl power project under discussion in this chapter started as the result of the international charity WOMANKIND’s U.K. Education Program, Challenging Violence, Changing Lives.<sup>1</sup> This program delivered lesson plans, and trained teachers in schools in England and Wales around issues of gendered violence and sexual bullying. One vibrant, inventive, and passionate teacher, Siwan,<sup>2</sup> the director of pupil well-being, was inspired by the WOMANKIND program to set up a girl power group in her school to re-engage girls who were, in her words, underachieving and increasingly disengaging from formal schooling. In this case, the idea of girl power was adopted with good intentions by a teacher who identified as feminist and sought empowerment through the channels available to her—the pastoral school curriculum and a charitable organization’s lesson plans.

Our research involvement with the girl power group began in 2010 and has included exploratory observations, focus groups and individual interviews with four teachers and twenty-six young people (fifteen girls and eleven boys aged fourteen to sixteen), as well as ethnographic reflections upon their out of school activities. The latter included, for instance, going on a SlutWalk with them (Ringrose and Renold 2012) and hosting and organizing a Young Sexualities conference that brought academics, policy makers, teachers, and young people together. At this event, they delivered a workshop on sexual name-calling and produced their own film to problematize hyper-sexy femininities through a parody of the TV show *Snog, Marry, Avoid*. They called their version “Mutt to Slut,” which is significant because they disclosed how *slut* was a term that could not be named or addressed in their own peer-led sexuality education lessons in school.

A range of educational research shows that school space is thoroughly saturated with curricula, policy, and practice promoting what Epstein, O’Flynn, and Telford (2003) explore as desexualised or non-sexual het-

erosexualities. What this means is that in the UK, sex and relationships education (SRE) tends to be framed not only through a risk and harm paradigm that prioritizes protection, prevention, and plumbing (Carmody 2009) but specifically promotes a non-active sexuality in which the assumed underlying desire is compulsorily heterosexual (Alldred and David 2007). Working within this framework, yet supported by the Welsh guidance on sexist, sexual, and transphobic anti-bullying (Welsh Government 2011), the WOMANKIND intervention opened up further emphasis in lesson plans on gender violence and sexual bullying. WOMANKIND's lessons built on the UK's Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum guidelines, with greater focus on gender inequality in sexual relationships, including sessions on self-esteem and body image, women's rights, sexual bullying, sexual relationship education, LGBT issues, and domestic violence. The girls' group worked with the WOMANKIND curriculum, participated in local and national domestic violence and bullying conferences, and planned and delivered some of the PSHE lessons (i.e., on healthy relationships) to younger students in their school.

Despite the welcome attention to these issues, much of the pedagogic content focused on sexual risk, danger, and protection (Ringrose and Renold 2012). For instance, in our first research meeting with the girls, they delivered one of their lessons, which focused on unhealthy relationships. They drew upon the example of celebrity singer Rihanna's experience of partner-based violence to demonstrate their knowledgeability and how to recognize the abusive aspects of an intimate partner relationship. Our research encounters with the girls' group explicitly aimed to open up some of these issues and explore further what the girls in this first research session disclosed as a contradiction and tension between gaining status as *sexperts* through their theoretical knowledge about domestic violence and roles as peer mentors and student teachers alongside their struggles to manage the coercive everyday sexism and sexual harassment in their own peer cultures. Below, we draw on a single interview with two girls, Terrwyn and Carys (aged fifteen, white-Welsh). This was one of several interviews in which girls reflected on their three-year experience of participating in the girl power group. The interview narrative moves in and out of their experience and activities as members of the group and their peer relationships and cultures. Our analysis seeks to map the affective dynamics (see Ringrose and Renold 2014) of this talk about how the figure of the teen feminist killjoy traverses and surfaces in a range of contradictory ways as the girls explore their journey and everyday practices of doing femininity, sexuality, and feminism.

## Feeling Feisty: Becoming “A Bit of a Feminist”

Taft’s (2011) findings showed that girls can gain status and empowerment from developing critical agency and a shared political subjectivity. We witnessed this dynamic in the ways in which girls discussed their journey of belonging to and participating in the activities of the girl power group. Terrwyn and Carys talk about how the group disrupted their original school branding as disengaged pupils and how their engagement and passionate attachment to the group stirred a feeling of responsibility and a sense of purpose, of doing something.

Terrwyn: I am a hard worker and everything, but I am a bit naughty in school sometimes and the fact that it [the girl power group] is not there like as much anymore like scares me a bit.

ER: It keeps you focused?

Terrwyn: Yes and gave me something to do and something I liked doing and like a responsibility. Now it is not, I am just sitting in detention all the time.

ER: Are you?

Terrwyn: Yeah, because there is nothing to do.

ER: So you need somewhere for your energy to go.

Terrwyn: Because like I loved it so much like I really—people don’t understand because they think ‘Oh school work,’ like okay you like it, but I loved it. It is something I really cared about. Sort of going makes me really scared to think about that.

In the extract above we can glimpse the affective flow that seems to inflate and deflate the joy of being in and belonging to the girl power group as Terrwyn reflects on its potential demise as the girls near the end of compulsory schooling (at age sixteen in the UK), a sense of really caring about and actively doing something is set against the designation of a sedentary naughty existence, trapped in detention with nothing to do. The clear joy of loving the girl power group also surfaced, not only in terms of belonging and activity but also in the intense pride they felt in the impact of their feminist pedagogy. We see this below as one of the girls talks about parents congratulating them on the reach of their work at the school.

Terrwyn: I know like a few boys, like I know this sounds really weird, but their parents, like ... came up and said, ‘Yeah you really made him think about that.’

However, as they go on to discuss, this joy and pride is mixed with the awareness of what it means to identify and be known as girls who have feminist views.

Carys: Some people like some boys find it really good that we are doing what we do, but then other ones just like laugh about it and try to act like they don't really care and they think it is not cool at all ... but even if they do like act that we are really nerdy doing all this stuff, I really couldn't care less.

Terrwyn: I don't care. I don't have certain friends because of it, like because our views are so different, especially about like gender sort of things.

Carys: We are all known as pretty feisty, us lot.

Terrwyn: Because we stand up for what we believe in.

Becoming known as girls who challenge, in their words, "gender sort of things" nevertheless created and sustained a deep affective bond *between* the girls. We see this as a rising up of their collective energies, enabling them to stand up for what they believe in, which they express as becoming "known as pretty feisty." Feistiness is a fiery, willful affective state strongly associated with feminism, which suggests a force that radiates out into the wider peer culture—also, however, with potentially unsettling and troubling effects, as Ahmed (2010) suggests. Indeed, doing feminism at school is no easy journey to empowerment. Words become affective sticking points in the daily relations of school culture.

Carys: Loads of our friends are like really cautious on words they use around us. ...

Terrwyn: People I don't know, go 'Like I have heard about you, don't use slut in a negative context' ... like people know and things like that, like 'Oh you are a bit of a feminist,' so people know before they meet us. ...

Terrwyn: And like say they talk about a body, like 'Oh she has a bangable<sup>3</sup> body,' but they wouldn't say it in front of you.<sup>4</sup>

Carys: They wouldn't say that.

Terrwyn: And they wouldn't use certain words in front of us.

In these passages, we can see again how the girls experience themselves as known feminists in school and how others experience them as feminist figures. They talk about having a reputation that precedes them, an affectivity that follows them around; their mere presence as a collective girl power group seems to reverberate into the wider peer

culture. We also, however, see the girls' increasing awareness of their feminist killjoy reputations. We see this occurring when the girls describe the halting of normalized and sexually objectifying and abusive language, like slut and bangable happening *in their presence*. While it is possible to interpret the boys' awareness of how they "don't use slut in a negative context" as a feminist success story whereby the reputation of the girl power group is creating change and making their peers think twice about using slut *in front of* the girls, we are cautious of doing so. The signifier slut, as part of a wider discourse of objectification and sexual shaming, may be temporarily interrupted, but reading this as a straightforward positive outcome of the group's impact is complicated, as we explore below, as the girls re-invoke a slut/non-slut binary.

### Joy-full? Respectable Non-slutty Feminists

Difficulty in navigating the ambivalence of a pernicious slut/non-slut binary was a pervasive and enduring theme in the interview. As the extract below demonstrates, the girls appeared to pit being a feminist against being a slut, which in this context was being defined by the girls as sexually promiscuous or "easy."

Terrwyn: I was just thinking maybe they [boys] back off a bit because they know that we are not as easy to get as other people.

Carys: Not as easy—but then boys like that—like the fact that we are not easy. Like, they *really* like that.

Terrwyn: Most boys seem to respect it anyway.

Carys: Yeah. But most of them are really like all for it. Like most of them do think like because, I know it sounds really bad, but with the whole slut thing, people are like, 'Oh it is quite a relief to have non-slutty girls.' Some people are like, 'Oh cool. That's quite nice.'

JR: When you say "non-slutty" what do you mean?

Carys: Like I don't know. That we respect ourselves.

Here we see a range of positive affects in being positioned as non-slutty as the girls talk about being respected and *really* liked. Being known as a bit of a feminist may have encouraged the boys to back off and respect and like them. However, this positive affective flow relies on girls occupying the position of a non-slut. The girls were more than aware of this bind ("I know it sounds really bad ... but it is quite a relief to have non-slutty girls"), and indeed, they went on to discuss

their belief that they should not judge other girls who want to be slutty or easy and repeatedly invoke such sexual double standards as vastly unfair—aware, perhaps, that they too are impaled by this binary; they know that they cannot occupy one side of the binary without disturbing the underlying compulsory heterosexual regulation that gives slut its affect force (Payne 2010). The respect they feel in being known as a bit of a feminist also carries bad affect since it attaches to their judgmental feelings of bitchiness toward other girls.

### **Killjoy? Desiring Slutty, Destroying the Feminist**

While the previous section explored in part the girls' hetero-erotic power (joy) and shame (killjoy) in being positioned as non-slutty girls, this section follows this ambivalence as the girls talk about their own desire to be sexy, with their own version of slutty sartorial femininity.

Terrwyn: People would maybe have a first impression of us (as slutty) because we dress like we do.

Carys: Then they just like assume that maybe if they are wearing a short skirt or whatever, or short shorts, they just assume, 'Oh yes she is probably a slut' sort of thing, if she has got her bum hanging out.

Terrwyn: People think we are sluts because ... we always mess around like go into town, like 'Put your slutty legs on, your slutty jeans' as a joke, just because we get called a slut for no matter what, so we talk about putting your slutty legs on.

Carys: Like none of us wear inappropriate clothes. ... If a girl walks around like looking like hot, if a boy says 'Oh that girl looks hot' like I can imagine a girl just being like 'Nah she looks like a slut.' Just because boys are like—

Terrwyn: Yes that is so true. Oh she is really hot, no, she is a slut.

What we are interested in drawing attention to in this section is the ways in which the girls are simultaneously investing and disinvesting in being non-slutty, indicating the powerful affective force of this term in the peer group. Despite being called sluts for "dressing like they do" in short skirts and short shorts, the girls are aware of the ambivalent draw of the erotic capital of the word slut (Hakim 2010). Slut has the potential to signify a normative heterosexual desirability. It is a term that sits in close association with being hot, as the girls point out above ("oh she is really hot, no, she is a slut"). Indeed slutty may be one of the only positions girls can try to occupy to inhabit a recognizable hetero-

sexual desire, given that slut can also be an identity of relative power, knowledge, and sexual prowess for some girls (Lamb 2010).

A range of research has explored the peer rules around sartorial sexual display for girls (Duits and Van Zoonen 2006). The girls' acute awareness of the sexual reading of their bodies is captured in their evocative phrase "putting your slutty legs on," since they know how exposed legs in a short skirt, or wearing jeans that are too tight can render their body parts (legs) as slutty. Moreover, being called hot by a boy may call up competitive heterosexualized aggression, that is, verbal abuse from other girls who draw on the same slut/non-slut binary to police and shame those who are hot as sluts (Ringrose 2008; Ringrose and Renold 2012). Even while joking about this, however, the girls are moved to signal to us and to each other how they do not wear inappropriate clothes, to defend themselves. Appropriateness is aged, raced, classed, and bears a religious tenor as to what can be legitimately worn or not in relation to sexual regulation and control over girls' and women's bodies (Skeggs 2004; Egan 2013).

While in the previous passage they do play with the power of feeling hot with their clothes and wearing slutty jeans, the potential impacts of engaging in heterosexual activity—having sex with boys—was anticipated with palpable fear and anxiety as they reflect on a truncated (for the purposes of this chapter) but originally lengthy narrative about a friend who "did things" with two boys at a party.

Terrwyn: I don't know people just find it really hard to believe that we are not like owned sort of thing—that we don't have (a boyfriend) ... Like people are surprised that some of us haven't had sex.

Carys: No, like nearly all of us haven't.

...

Terrwyn: I think for me as well, for all of us, it is probably a bit of our reputation because I know I wouldn't go to a party and like do loads of things.

Carys: I wouldn't do it because I wouldn't want to, but your reputation would get like absolutely killed.

...

Terrwyn: I wouldn't want people to know me as a person that is easy to get with and do stuff with.

Carys: I wouldn't want to have that reputation.

Terrwyn: I wouldn't be able to live with it.

Carys: Neither would I.

Terrwyn: I would find myself—I dunno I just wouldn't like it. I know it sounds really bad but I would feel dirty.

Carys: Yeah I would feel so dirty.

Terrwyn: Because most people think of you like as something to do. ... Like they wouldn't take you serious, you think that every boy that speaks to you just wants one thing.

The girls describe the tensions between being respected and boys thinking of them as something to “do.” They discuss how feminism has created a space in which they are not owned by boys, and do not have to have sex, but they invoke sex as something dirty and indeed actually life destroying. They relate a palpable fear of sex and what would happen to their reputation, which would “get killed” if they “did something” and leave them unwilling to live. While they use words like killed figuratively, this is not just girl teen drama (Marwick and Boyd 2011), but illustrates the difficult, painful peer group contexts where girls' reputations continue to be framed through sexual (in)activity (Lamb 2010). They went on to say that it was their position as part of the girl power group that was particularly under attack.

Terrwyn: Like people—it is almost like they are waiting for something like that to happen, for one of us to do something so they can have something to talk about. So they can have that. ... Boys have said that, 'Like somebody needs to have sex with her'. ... Like it is true, if someone asks you, like 'Ah so have you had sex?' and you are like, 'No' and then they are like 'Definitely I would' and then you are like, 'Right.' Loads of boys say like 'I will destroy you.'

The girls articulate anxieties that the peer group at school will have something over them if they do not live up to their perceived feminist ideals. Sex is figuratively constructed here as a weapon by boys who desire to destroy their affective power as respectable, non-slutty girls. Returning to Ahmed (2010), we see that the affective joy being killed here is also the girls' own ability to enjoy their sexual bodies and sexual relations more widely. Again, this destruction could be possible only in a context in which girls' perceived sexual activity (of any sort) continues to be constructed as dirty and shameful and subject to “reputational risk” (Tolman 2013). In this peer context, it is *teen-girl-feminists* who become luminous targets of a deep misogyny—she must be done to, banged, and destroyed, with all of these terms being used figuratively to stand in for sex in ways that we see as reassertions of a violent, phallic masculinity (Renold and Ringrose 2011).

## Getting Real: Beyond the Feminist Killjoy

Towards the end of the interview the girls became particularly impassioned about the need to share this complex, messy terrain around being in a girl power group with other members of the school community.

Terrwyn: I would love to have something like this (referring to their own interview) ... with like the governors of our school, because I would love for them to know what actually we are faced with. ...

Carys: Say if like younger girls or boys sat in on a conversation like this, like I know if I didn't know anything about it and hearing all these opinions and all these thoughts, all these words. ...

Terrwyn: Like the school radio [points to the school's public address audio system behind them]. Like they could put the radio on now for people to hear this!

Carys: It is kind of like shockingly real!

Terrwyn: I really want to go round loads of different schools teaching people about it. ... We will have an effect ... I really want to do loads of things ... because like some of our teachers call us the underachievers. ...

Carys: 'Underachievers talking again. ...'

Terrwyn: So it would be nice to show them that actually. ... This would be a good way to just like prove them wrong. ... That is why I feel so passionate about this. We are not all stupid and idiots!

Here the girls' energies and passion intensify. Their talk quickens, their eyes widen and their bodies visibly open up and relax as they move from the fear and shame discussed above to re-igniting a more joyful vision of bringing their messy reality of growing up girl (Walkerdine et al. 2001) to a wider audience, from school governors to younger peers. We have written elsewhere about the affective intensities or glows (Ringrose and Renold 2014) that can circulate in moments like these, where ruptures to local or global gender and sexual normative cruelties (Ringrose and Renold 2010) erupt into the air and expand into the space, leaving residues of feeling strong, powerful, and capable of transformation. We see this as the girls critically rethinking and disrupting the pedagogical category of the disengaged girl as they describe their passionate refusal of the tags stupid, idiot, and underachiever. Yet as we have been suggesting, this is not an easy, straightforward journey towards feminist empowerment. Rather, the girls' desire is to find ways of communicating the *complex* and *messy* realities of their lives as girls

in the girl power group on the school radio waves, as they have done with us in the interview. They are intensely aware this might shock, trouble, and displace the everyday complacency around gender and sexual norms and categories at school. With this they envision a pedagogical girl power process that is more real, in that it can tolerate the painful and joyful experience of what girls are actually are faced with—being able to bear “hearing all these opinions, and all these thoughts, all these words.”

### **Conclusion: Working Affectively with Feminist Pedagogy**

In this chapter we have tried to think about the experiences of teenage girls who try on and live with the ambivalent process of becoming “a bit of a feminist.” Taft talks about the critical tensions at play between young teen activists and girlhood: “at the conceptual centre of this [was a] series of oppositions between ‘girl identity and activist identity’ (superficial/serious, mean/supportive, insecure/confident)” (2011: 88). Our analysis has shown the critical importance of engaging another layer of contradiction and tension around binaries organizing teen girls’ sexualities. As we have illustrated, the girls in our research experienced the girl power group as a joyful site of powerful solidarity and strength in the midst of uncertainty around their schooling, yet occupying the identity of teen feminist also brings affective difficulties. When girls challenge sexism and sexual harassment (like sexual name-calling), this can be experienced as affectively problematic: girls can be positioned as feminist killjoys when they interrupt or stand up to the normal sexualized school banter around girls’ bodies and sexual reputations (like the figure of the slut).

This chapter has helped us to reflect upon the complexities of how slut operates in peer groups, considering the multiplicity of what slut means for young people and not second-guessing what it can signify and do. In our previous research we illustrated how slut can be temporarily transformed and reclaimed by teen girls through taking up the digital usernames of “slut” and “whore” on social media platforms, for instance (Ringrose and Renold, 2014), and it was certainly experienced as a form of playful banter at points of the narratives in this chapter. However, we found that girls seemed to invoke slut/non-slut categories to stand up to slut, which set slut in opposition to a *good* feminist identity. This was complicated because being non-slutty was affectively charged for them since the boys “liked it,” so the reference point came back to whether or not they were accepted in relation to the heterosex-

ual masculine gaze of approval. The girls also desired the erotic appeal of slut, which they talk about sartorially as “putting on” at various points, as well as the problem of being slut-shamed by girls if boys found them hot. They also, however, disclosed a very palpable fear and lack of trust of boys and the potential consequences of their own sexual activity, which they felt would kill their reputations (as girls and as feminists). They discussed boys finding their good girl personas as something to take down or destroy by having sex, which continues to be constructed vis-à-vis an enduring binary between virgin and whore and as something that would soil, defile, and ruin the girl (Payne 2010).

We wish to conclude by suggesting that feminist pedagogical processes in contemporary schools (for instance starting up girl power groups) must start from the social, cultural, and affective complexities of girls’ own experiences of growing up girl, which in this case involved acknowledging the dilemmas of teen feminine sexuality (Tolman 2002, 2013). Engaging with feminism can be at the same time a radically pleasurable *and* painful set of experiences and processes of identification, contestation, and potential transformation. Ahmed suggests that part of working with the idea of the feminist killjoy is an acknowledgement that “we might need to attend to bad feelings not in order to overcome them but to learn by how we are affected by what comes near, which means achieving a different relationship to all our wanted and unwanted feelings as an ethical resource” (2010: 216). This means we need to engage with feminisms that are inclusive of and work with the complexities and affective ambivalence of teen feminine sexuality—that explore sexuality as often simultaneously pleasure *and* danger, judgmental and non-judgmental (Tolman 2013). By confronting what girls are actually faced with (such as the painful contradictions around wanting to be both a slutty and a non-slutty girl), we open up space for a more critical, inventive, and ethical feminist pedagogy capable of engaging with the complex material realities of different girls in their various specific embedded and embodied locations and relations.

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## Notes

1. The school is based in an urban city in south Wales, with a quarter of students coming from the most economically deprived area of the city and a further quarter coming from some of the most prosperous areas of the city. Around 10 percent of students are eligible for free school meals, and around 20 percent of students have been identified as needing additional special educational support.
2. We have used pseudonyms throughout this chapter.
3. "Bangable" is a colloquial expression for "fuckable."
4. This program delivered gender equality curricula in schools. Although a detailed exploration of the program is beyond the scope of this chapter, an evaluation/review can be found in the report "Freedom to Achieve: Preventing Violence Promoting Equality Starting in Schools" (Maxwell et al. 2010).

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