Since the 1990s, there has been a surge of interest in young women and “girl power” in both the popular and academic press. The popular press has documented and critiqued the purportedly powerful girl character. The academic press has challenged the idea that young women have, or are garnering access to, power in new and positive ways. Issues of power, young women and sexuality have been and are central to feminism. Despite this centrality, scant consensus has emerged among feminists from various “waves.” The debates among feminists in regard to girl power underscore the need to question and to theorize what power and sexuality mean to young women. Research that weaves lessons from both feminism and from young women’s own lived experiences can advance our understanding of young women, power and sexuality. This paper will employ an asset-based approach to describe how a sample of Canadian young women define, understand and conceptualize their power within their heterosexual relationships. An asset-based approach is conceptualized as a way to hear, document and value young women’s stated experiences of power first and foremost. This approach will prioritize their stated experiences in the context of feminist debates about girl power. This approach moves beyond the boundaries of current feminist debates about girl power and sets out new ways of thinking about young women, power and sexuality. The young women’s words will provide insight into how current feminist understandings of girl power may need to be reconsidered and adapted to explain young women’s changing realities.

Biography
Marion Doull is a Postdoctoral Fellow working with Jean Shoveller at the School of Population and Public Health (UBC). Marion has a MHSc in Health Promotion (University of Toronto) and a PhD in Population Health (University of Ottawa). Marion’s research interests include adolescent sexual health, reproductive rights, power and equity. Her doctoral thesis focused on the interplay between gendered power dynamics and positive sexual health outcomes among heterosexual adolescents. Her postdoctoral work focuses on adolescent sexual health, the meanings of power and equity to adolescents and issues of abortion rights and access in Canada.