

Their Own Voices: Vernacular Literacies in the Lives of Young People

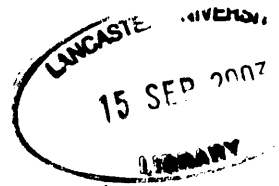
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Abstract

This research study explores the uses and meanings of vernacular literacy practices engaged in by Korean young people. Utilizing an ethnographic approach, the ways in which eleven adolescents integrate print and electronic media into their lives are demonstrated through participant observation, in-depth interview and the study of realia. In place of the traditional autonomous model of literacy conceptualising literacy as a set of decontextualised skills and competences, the central theoretical framework for this study is the ideological model of literacy, which acknowledges both the ideological nature of, as well as the power structures embedded in, literacy practices. The social approach adopted by this research is consistent with the ethos of New Literacy Studies.

The multiplicity of literacy practices and the variety of forms of interpersonal interaction exhibited by them are presented and interpreted in order to show how young people learn to use unsanctioned literacy practices as communicative, expressive, and transformative tools for shaping their social worlds, their thoughts, and their identities. The power relations embedded in literacy practices, the ways in which the power dynamic is played out in home, school and church, and how people resist, negotiate and perpetuate power structures are all subjects which are discussed. There is an exploration of the relationship between literacy and gender and how gender identity and representation is treated in textual experience, with particular emphasis on texts used by young women. The study concludes that vernacular literacy is best understood as social practice and that it deserves much greater recognition and

academic investigation in that it holds significant potential for a greater understanding of youth.

This thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Why I chose my subject for research

It is said that research is never neutral. Every instance of research is informed both by a certain view of what knowledge is (epistemological assumptions), and by the views of the world held by the researcher. Sears suggests that 'before being a researcher, a person is first a member of a particular culture. It is within that culture that the person's view of the world is constructed' (1992 quoted by Cherland, 1994: 20). In other words, a person's view of the world - her lived cultural experiences and values - mediates her choice of study subject, how she studies it and even what she discovers. This is certainly true in my case. My experience as a teacher for more than ten years in Korean schools and my role as a mother of a teenager were both strong reasons for my interest in young people's lives. Moreover, at about the same time I was starting my PhD I was experiencing life changes accelerated by my marriage to a man with a Western cultural background. Some of these changes reflected the collision which was occurring at the intersection of two different cultures: Korean culture carried by myself and my children and Western culture as reflected by my partner. What made this picture more complicated was that it was happening in Britain. I and my children were embarking on a long journey of learning about living and life in a new country. My identity as a Korean woman married to a Western man and living in Western society was being constructed and reconstructed. My children also had to face major adjustments in their lives: language learning, adjusting to new schools and education patterns and negotiating interpersonal relationships both within and without the nuclear family, and so on.

Some scholars (e.g. Bhabha, 1994; Heath, 1998 referred to by Moje, 2000) claim that identity is not a stable unitary construct but that anyone is able to construct different identities as she moves in different contexts. Because an individual may construct any number of identities, these identities may conflict with one another. Identities are not only articulated to the subject positions that people construct or have constructed for them: they are also articulated at the intersection of class, race, gender, culture, and age and are constructed at such meeting points. From this perspective it is often assumed that people from different cultures manifest different identities. Since both I and my children were in the position of configuring new identities, I wanted to know more about how identities come about: what are the processes by means of which identity is constructed in relation to beliefs, values and notions. I started to examine the cultural and social processes which result in the articulation of an individual's identity (-ies) in a specific society. I hoped that my inquiry would enable me to gain some insight into what lay ahead for me and my children as we forged new identities for ourselves.

My inquiry started out as an extension of my MA investigation of what was expected of Korean high school students in their school-based reading programmes. Analysing the contents of reading textbooks had already helped modify my mindset on reading as embracing discrete cognitive skills. I had got as far as to realise that decoding print on page not only involves getting meaning from a text but also actively requires interpretation on the part of the reader. Then an often-quoted phrase of Freire that 'reading the world always precedes reading the word' started me to reassess my understanding about reading. Freire goes on to say that 'we can decode and interpret the world in the same way that we decode and interpret written text . . . (and) . . . that critical reading can precede getting meaning from written text' (quoted by Baynham, 1995: 168). My introduction to this theoretical stance led

me to realise the limitations of perspectives on reading as dependent upon skill acquisition. Turning now to the work of New Literacy Studies, I came to the same realisation as Robinson:

It will no longer do, I think, to consider literacy as some abstract, absolute quality attainable through tutelage and the accumulation of knowledge and experience. It will no longer do to think of reading as a solitary act in which a mainly passive reader responds to cues in a text to find meaning. It will no longer do to think of writing as a mechanical manipulation of grammatical codes and formal structures leading to the production of perfect or perfectible texts. Reading and writing are not unitary skills nor are they reducible to sets of component skills falling neatly under discrete categories (linguistic, cognitive); rather, they are complex human activities taking place in complex human relationships. (Robinson, 1987 quoted by Bloome, 1998 in Foreword in Barton and Hamilton, 1998)

In order to shed light on the 'complex human activities' mediated by literacy I decided I would need to find out first-hand what people did and where their literacy took place. The people I chose to study were the same people whose formal instructional programmes in reading I had studied for my MA: Korean high school students. Next I needed to fill in my knowledge starting from my minimal preconceptions of the 'where' element. Following the tradition of ethnographic studies of literacy I aimed to make both the 'who' and the 'where' visible by providing an account of reading and writing taking place in young people's social and cultural lives. It should also be clear that my work is situated in time: at the turn of the twenty-first century. Such an approach reflecting sensitivity to time, place and practice is neatly summed up as follows by Besnier:

A practice-oriented approach is thus interested in experience, performance, and interaction . . . a focus on practice entails that close attention be paid to persons as social agents, as loci of understanding, and as intentional or (more commonly) unwitting mediators between social structure and everyday action, the macroscopic and the microscopic, and the past and the present. It is in the practice of everyday life that social structures and cultural constructs are reproduced and sometimes altered. (1995: 6)

In my research I have three aims. The first is to contribute to the theoretical understanding of literacy by attempting to integrate theory with empirical study and by adopting a social view of literacy in carrying out ethnographic work. Street argues that an ethnographic perspective on literacy assumes that an understanding of literacy requires detailed, in-depth accounts of

actual practice in different cultural settings (1993). This argument is in line with Bloome's assertion that:

... literacy needs to be understood locally and historically (both in terms of the histories of individuals and in terms of the histories of the places and the social relationships in which they find themselves). Stated in other terms, rather than focus on what is universal about literacy practices, research on literacy practices needs to focus on the particular.
(op cit in Barton and Hamilton, 1998)

As my second aim I hope to raise awareness of a largely unrecognised aspect of young people's lives. Calls for more attention to be paid to young people's cultural and social practices which are submerged by the dominant discourse have been few and far between. That vernacular practices and other non-mainstream cultural forms are to a greater or lesser degree suppressed by the educational establishment is just starting to be recognised by Korean scholars (Choe H. et al, 1992; Kim O.H., 1994; Hwang L.L., 1996; Kim M.R., 1996; An K.S., 1998; Cheong Y.S., 1998; Kwon I.N. and Park K.M., 1998; Lee D.H., 1999). Although it is not action-oriented, my study is in response to the growing interest in a neglected area, namely, everyday reading and writing.

Proceeding from the first two, my third aim is to advance the cause of the social approach to literacy in the hope that dialogue will be created among Korean academics who are not familiar with this perspective. If I manage to have any impact on even one of these three fronts, then I will consider that my work has not been in vain.

1.2 A chapter-by-chapter summary of my thesis

Following on from the present introduction (constituting Chapter 1), I go on in Chapter 2 to

describe the historical and socio-cultural context of my study. Given that Confucianism exerts a significant influence on the nation's collective mentality and by extension its educational system, I provide a brief description of the role of Confucian philosophy as it affects the literacy landscape in Korea. In order to situate the vernacular literacy which is the basis for my study I make reference to the dominant academic literacies and consider the social, cultural, political and economic forces which shape them. I conclude the second chapter with a review of the position assigned to vernacular literacies. My aim is to give readers unfamiliar with the Korean status quo a basic understanding of the positions of academic and non-academic literacies in the lives of young people.

Chapter 3 contains the theoretical framework which my work draws on. My study of the uses and meanings of literacy engaged in by teenagers requires the elaboration of a particular theoretical stance in relation to two key concepts: literacy and adolescence. By reviewing the literature of literacy and adolescence I clarify my own theoretical position. In the process I define the terms literacy event and literacy practice, which are central to an understanding of my theme.

In Chapter 4 I explain how I carried out my data collection and analysis. After clarification of the theoretical and methodological paradigms my research draws on, I discuss the two phases of my research fieldwork. This discussion includes my rationale and methods for selecting research participants and for data collection. I follow this with reflection on how the researcher's role is perceived, on the power relations between researcher and researched and on the difficulties experienced during my data collection. I then discuss my data analysis process stage by stage, with particular attention to the issues of validity and reliability.

In Chapters 5 through 8, I describe and analyse my findings from the data I collected. In Chapter 5, which is devoted to print literacies, some general patterns of print literacy practice are followed by a detailed analysis of each literacy-related activity I select for analysis. These six categories are as follows: i) reading and writing for organising daily lives; ii) reading and writing for maintaining friendship and affinity; iii) reading and writing for combatting boredom at school; iv) reading and writing for documenting life; v) reading and writing related to leisure activities; and vi) reading and writing related to membership in a consumer society. I also discuss other literacy-related issues: how language is constructed to support teenage identity, with a look at the influence of foreign languages on literacy practices; the values associated with literacy; the reading and writing facilities available to young people; the role of libraries, reading rental shops and bookshops; and the social networks which are formed through reading and writing activities.

Chapter 6 focuses on literacies which are related to the digital technologies of computer mediated communication and the cellular phone. I examine CMC-related literacy practices under four heads: i) Internet use related to academic work, in which I look at the part played in young people's literacies by publishers' websites; ii) Internet use related to leisure, where I examine the contribution to young people's leisure of Internet games, cartoons, comics, fan fiction and other online literacy phenomena; iii) Internet use related to maintaining existing social relationships, in which I show how literacies taking place in school, church and university club websites contribute to the maintenance of social networks; and iv) Internet use related to developing new relationships, where I discuss the way personal home pages and the chat room help young people to develop new contacts. As all of these discursive

practices are performed with language, I then explore some of the linguistic dimensions of CMC. Finally in Chapter 6 I describe my findings in relation to cellular telecommunication, with emphasis on the text messaging function of the mobile phone.

In Chapter 7 I explore the relationship between gender and literacy by exemplifying some of the literacy materials favoured by adolescent girls in particular. In order to show how gender is displayed in the texts and how young people interact with them, I establish four categories of analysis: i) attitudes toward physical appearance; ii) norms of sexual behaviour; iii) other aspects of male-female relationships; and iv) attitudes towards housework. First I set the textual experience of young women against the background of their attitudes towards physical appearance. I then describe my findings in respect of attitudes towards textual representations of female and male sexual behaviour. Following that I assess and attempt to interpret the girls' attraction to seemingly disempowering texts which carry traditional gender representations. Finally in Chapter 7 I look at the texts for clues to other aspects of male-female relationships, attitudes towards housework and how young people respond to both the textual and intertextual content of their reading material.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to a discussion of the power relations embedded in both print and electronic media literacies. I examine the type of texts in use at home and at school as well as website literacies for examples of the ways in which power is assigned, usurped and negotiated, by whom and with what effect.

In Chapter 9 I summarise my findings and assess the implications of my work.

Chapter 2 The ethnographic context

As sociohistorical background to my study this chapter begins with a brief overview of Korean geography, history, and language. It continues with a consideration of literacy and educational practices. I emphasise the close relationship that exists between literacies which are sanctioned by the school and those which are not. I do this in order to demonstrate in the following chapters the significant role which school-sanctioned literacies play in defining the place of non-sanctioned literacies.

2.1 Geography and History

Korea occupies a small mountainous peninsula that protrudes from the southeast Asia landmass. At 219,020 sq km Korea is very roughly the same size as Britain as well as Japan's main island, Honshu. At the northern end of the peninsula, Korea borders on two provinces of China; otherwise, it is separated from China's Shandong peninsula to the west by the 190 km width of the Yellow Sea, and from Japan's Tsushima Islands in the southeast by 55 km of the Eastern Sea or Sea of Japan.

Because of its location Korea has long served as a bridge between China and Japan. For example, before the rise in sea levels at the end of the last glacial period around 10,000 BC, people from Siberia in the north and from China in the west came to Korea, and many went on to Japan. In the 13th century, Mongols from northern Asia and China stormed southwards into Korea to invade Japan and in the 16th century the Japanese invaded the Korean

peninsula to obtain a base for northward advances to China. More importantly, Chinese cultural influences in language (texts, characters and words) and religion (Confucianism and Buddhism) proceeded to Japan after first having been absorbed by Korea.

Korean history can be traced back several thousand years to neolithic settlements. By about the 4th century BC the Han tribe established Old Chosun in northern Korea (Note: Korean Han is not the same as the Chinese Han dynasty). Chosun means "morning fresh" and is the traditional name for Korea. In 194 BC Old Chosun became Wiman Chosun when it was overthrown by the leader of a group of Chinese refugees, Wiman. In 108 BC Wiman Chosun itself was overthrown by the armies of the Chinese Han dynasty, which installed in northern Korea four administrative units or commands, one of which lasted until as late as AD 313.

Meanwhile, the deposed Korean Han tribe migrated south to the Han River basin in the middle of the peninsula and split into three federations, two of which developed into kingdoms in the first century BC: Shilla in the southeast and Paekche in the southwest. A third kingdom, Koguryo, which included part of present-day Manchuria, emerged in the north. In 668 Shilla unified the three kingdoms, but in 918 Unified Shilla itself was replaced by the Koryo kingdom, which is the source of the name *Korea*. Koryo, in turn, was replaced in 1392 by the Chosun kingdom, which ruled until Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910.

In 1945, at the end of World War II, Korea was liberated from Japanese rule. The ensuing power struggle led to the Korean War (1948-50), after which the country was divided into two along the 38th parallel: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north and the Republic of Korea in the south. In territory North Korea (120,540 sq km) is larger than South

Korea (98, 480 sq km), but in population (22.6 million) the North is only about the half the size of the South (46.4 million) (data from National Statistics 1998). Both countries are populated by the same homogeneous ethnic group, the Koreans, but the two have taken radically different political and economic paths. Yet in spite of these differences both South and North Korea not only share a common history (up to 1945) and many customs, but have achieved a high rate of mass literacy. Table 2.1 shows the important stages in the development of scripts and literacies in this shared Korean history:

Table 2.1 Scripts and Literacies in the Korean Kingdoms and Republics

Kingdom/Republic	Year	Script and/or Literacy
Wiman Chosun	194 -108 BC	A few Chinese characters arrive
Han commands	108 - AD 313	More Chinese characters adopted
Three kingdoms: Koguryo	37 BC - AD 668	Evidence of use of some Chinese from words found on a royal burial tablet
Paekche	18 BC - AD 668	Chinese characters start to be adopted in Japan
Shilla	57 BC - AD 668	More Chinese words adopted
Unified Shilla	668 - 935	Many more Chinese words adopted
Koryo	918 - 1392	Civil service examination; printing; surviving history books in Chinese
Chosun	1392 - 1910 1443	Phonetic script <i>Hangul</i> invented; use of Chinese characters persists <i>Hangul</i> invented and comes into use beside Chinese
Japanese rule	1910 - 1945	Use of <i>Hangul</i> suppressed
Republic of Korea (S. Korea)	1948 - present	Universal primary education; high rate of literacy; continued but limited use of Chinese characters
DPRK (N. Korea)	1948 - present	Universal primary education; high rate of

		literacy; continued but limited use of Chinese characters
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(referred to by Taylor and Taylor, 1995: 187)

2.2 Language

Before turning to a discussion of literacy, it might be useful first to say a few words about the Korean language itself. The origins of the language are unclear but it is probably related to both Altaic (Turtic, Mongolian, Manchu-Tungus) and to Japanese. It differs greatly from Chinese, which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language grouping, and certainly from English, a member of the Indo-European family of languages. However, geographical location has meant that Chinese political and cultural influences on Korea over the centuries have had a profound effect on both the written and spoken Korean language:

Chinese has had a special kind of influence on Korean; although the two belong to different language families, Korean has borrowed extensively from the Chinese vocabulary. Of the more than 160,000 entries in *Kun Sajeon* (The Grand Korean Dictionary), more than 59% are words of Chinese origin. Most of these words deal with abstract intellectual subjects, whereas native Korean words express most concrete or affective meanings. Koreans devised a method of writing their own language with Chinese characters, and they passed this idea on to Japan, where it was taken up enthusiastically. Writing in Chinese was simpler, and it gave them all the benefits of sharing in the Chinese cultural traditions.

(Kim 1988 quoted by Lee and Scarcella, 1992: 145)

For centuries there was no Korean writing system and so Korean could only be written using Chinese characters. The difficulty of learning these characters meant that only elite groups such as scholars and aristocrats were proficient in writing.

Before the fifteenth century, in fact, what was actually thought worth writing down and preserving was overwhelmingly written in Chinese. Then King Sejong the Great (1418-1450), the fourth monarch of the Yi Dynasty and the Chosun Kingdom, ordered his scholars to devise a simple method of writing down spoken Korean so that even the common people

would be able to express their thoughts in writing. The scholars successfully produced a set of symbols representing of eleven vowel sounds and seventeen consonant sounds. This sound/symbol system, called *Hangul*, was introduced in 1443. Centuries later, in 1933, *Hangul* was standardized to ten vowels and fourteen consonants, forming the Korean language of today. *Hangul* is considered by many the most remarkable phonetic system for its internal structure and for its graphic origin (Diringer, 1968; Martin, 1972 referred to by Taylor, 1981).

2.3 Dominant and vernacular literacies

In any study of vernacular literacy it is important that the reader should have a basic understanding of the place of the dominant literacy. In Korea, a society which is highly examination-orientated and in which the university entrance examination is the ultimate peak to conquer, school literacy takes precedence over all other forms of literacy. In consequence, the school agenda exercises a dominant power over vernacular reading and writing, a fact which is amply reflected in the literacy practices engaged in by the young people who were my research subjects. I will first discuss the underlying philosophy of, and the visible social practices which support, literacy in the nation's educational system. I will then go on to mention some of the social, cultural, political and economic forces which shape school-sanctioned literacy in Korea.

2.3.1 The role of Confucianism

Confucianism, which focuses on the manifestations of human nature and the proper arrangement of human relationships in the social order, came to Korea from China probably early in the first millennium (Yum J.O., 1987). It is worthy of note that the first significant impact of Confucianism in Korea was the establishment of higher educational systems. By 372 AD a university (*Taehak*) had been established whose curriculum included the five Confucian classics. Also at this time the equivalent of high schools (*Kyung-dang*) were operational in the outlying districts of the country and here young boys were taught the Confucian classics, horsemanship, and archery (Yum J.O., op cit). The traditional Confucian emphasis on literacy through education was reinforced by the establishment in the tenth century of a state examination system for government officers (*Kwaku*). People thought to be competent (exclusively males) were selected and appointed to government posts through examinations requiring a high level of literacy as well as a wide reading knowledge of the Confucian classics.

Confucianism was well on its way to becoming an institutionalized force as it continued to play a key role in supplying an elite to take charge of the functions of government (Yum J.O., op cit). The same examination system also promoted the diffusion of Confucian principles and values in society at large. According to Wolf and Smith (1987), until the early twentieth century there were traditionally only two classes in Korea: slave and slave owner. The sole opportunity to gain social status which was available to families who were not wealthy enough to afford slaves, was to achieve success in the examinations for government posts. As a result a new meritocracy came into being, forming a distinct power base in modern Korean social stratification. It has been argued by Kyungkun Kim (1998) that the nation's deep cultural faith in the value of education and literacy as a means to achieve status goals has its

origins in this historical context.

2. 3. 2 Some dimensions of the dominant literacy

The formal educational structure of Korea (here and hereafter referring to South Korea) consists of six years of primary school, three years of junior high school (called 'middle school') and three years of senior high school (called 'high school'). Prior to enrolling in the state school system at the age of five, most children have also had pre-school learning experiences at kindergartens or private institutes, such as those giving instruction in art or music. At pre-school children are taught basic literacy and numeracy skills since that is what parents expect and demand. There is a general belief that the teaching of literacy and numeracy from an early age is crucial for a child's later school success. As a result, primary teachers, particularly in higher socioeconomic areas, proceed on the assumption that children arrive with a reading and writing base and do not need to start learning the alphabet or do simple counting. Many parents send their children to pre-school art and music classes as well in order to give them a headstart academically, and continue to do so as their children move through the grades. Even in the densely populated inner city, it is rare to see children playing in the school playground after school hours as most are attending private institutes for extra lessons of one kind or another.

By the time children reach junior high school, the school system starts to place more and more emphasis on three specific subjects: Korean, Mathematics and English. Schools themselves provide after school supplementary classes in these subjects, while out of classes are available both in large groups at institutes and also in small group or even individual

mode by private tutors. Schools set their own internal examinations to assess students, normally four times a year, but many schools have additional exams every month for the three key subjects. After each examination a chart ranking top performers is displayed on the school bulletin board, thus reinforcing the significance of academic achievement. Chung H.S. and Jung K.A. (1996) draw attention to this pervasive feature of Korean education in their research. To the question, 'What quality do you most envy in your friends?', 74 % of the secondary students surveyed gave the answer, 'Good academic performance'; 21% answered, 'Being a leader in school activities'; and 5% responded, 'Being good at sports'. Almost every educational research study in Korea draws attention to the pressures students are under to perform well academically. (To J.S. et al, 1992; Lee S.S., 1996; Hong H.J., 1997; Kim S.I, 1997; Han S.C., 1998; Kwon I.N. and Park K.M., 1998)

Senior high school students face the ultimate test of their endurance as the university entrance examinations approach. Even during vacation times they have to cope with a full timetable of extra tuition. It is a time which is characterised by shared complaints among students of not getting enough sleep. Indeed, the catchphrase, "Success with four hours sleep, failure with five", becomes a kind of battle cry for students, teachers and parents alike, and reveals the intense pressure felt by young Koreans at this time in their school lives. Metaphors invoking military, medical and even religious images abound ('examination war'; 'examination disease'; 'examination hell') and sum up the way Koreans respond to the massively hyped buildup towards the university entrance examinations.

2. 3. 2. 1 Examination fever and its effects on families

As the major focus of my research is on senior high school students who are under the sorts of pressure to perform academically described above, I want to show how examination-centred literacy in the Korean context creates a structure around which adolescents and their families arrange their lives and relationships. For this I draw on a vignette excerpted from Cho H.J.'s work:

Sinhan is an academically-inclined, conscientious student. He was a good student in junior high school, to be sure, but ever since he started senior high school his family have seen less and less of him. Sinhan gets up at five o'clock every morning and sets off to school, carrying two packed lunches with him. After regular school hours Sinhan attends classes in his main examination subjects at a private institute. From there he moves to a purpose-built study hall to continue working. Study halls are the Korean version of public library reading rooms but the difference is that study halls are run commercially, so Sinhan pays for his study space there. Late in the evening he comes home, eats his supper and goes to bed. Bedtime might be as late as one o'clock in the morning. This type of schedule is by no means unusual for students who, like Sinhan, are in their final year of secondary school. During the school day, Sinhan is attentive only in classes which he thinks will have practical value in terms of his short-term objective to perform well in the university entrance exams. In classes he considers either ineffective or irrelevant to his examination goals, such as music or art, he turns off. His perception is that, in order to be successful in the forthcoming exams, it is crucial not to waste time on anything which does not demonstrably contribute to the knowledge 'cram' which for the time being is his number one priority.

Sinhan's mother gets up even earlier than her son in order to prepare a meal for him before he sets out, as well as to pack the two lunches he normally takes with him. In the late evening she lies down to get some rest prior to her son's arrival home as she wants to be there to greet him when he comes through the door. The late night food she has prepared for Sinhan is substantial and nutritious, and at that hour she is concerned to show her son a warm welcome home and to offer encouragement to him. Only after the boy goes to bed does the mother end her own day, knowing that it will be a mere few hours until she has to be up to repeat the cycle. The support and dedication of thousands of mothers like Sinhan's makes it possible for students to maintain the momentum, energy level and motivation required to survive this testing time, the torture of 'examination hell'. (1998: 86-87)

It can be imagined that such an exhausting routine as that just described requires drive and perseverance on the part of the student. The academic schedule of those of my informants who were nearing their final year of senior high school was very much like Sinhan's. That so many manage to cope with the pressures may be due largely to an innate belief in the power of education, but also in no small measure to the strong support they get from family members, particularly from mothers. Sinhan's mother and thousands of middle class housewives like her (including those in my study) make enormous sacrifices in the cause of

their offspring's education. Nevertheless, most perceive that their efforts are not in vain and are rewarded. For women who do not work outside the boundary of home and family this opportunity to accomplish something significant, albeit through the medium of their own children, is an achievement in itself. Their children's successful entry into well-known universities is perceived as an equivalent success for mother herself.

In a society where educational attainment is tied closely to social status, mothers enter energetically into the spirit of and espouse the values associated with 'examination hell', knowing that what they do can have repercussions for the family as a whole. Moreover, mothers do not lose in this game because their efforts are further rewarded by a level of increased loyalty on the part of their children. Yet not everything in the garden is rosy. Sadly, in a small but increasing number of cases the pressures of examination hell have unlooked for but disastrous results. It has been estimated that 90% of juvenile suicide is related to academic pressure (Lee K.H., 1990). It has also been reported (Donga, 12 November 1991) that 74% of secondary school students have at one time or another considered running away from home because of academic pressure. The following incident, reported in the Seoul press, shows how examination pressures may even lead to crime:

Two eighteen-year-old male students in their third year of high school attempted to strangle a young girl in the lift of a block of flats after their demands for money were not met. As the door of the lift opened, the two boys were caught in the act by a passer-by. The boys started to run but were quickly apprehended by the police and charged with attempted murder. Their arrest came as a complete shock to the boys' parents, who could not imagine their sons being capable of such a crime. Although the two boys were not considered good students, they had never been in any trouble before. During the police investigation which followed, some interesting facts emerged. The school the boys attended had a reputation for being strict and for forcing its students to work hard. Of course, from a parent's perspective these were desirable qualities and were widely supported. However, the boys in question were ranked bottom of their class and had given up any idea of going to university. Yet instruction at their school, as in all other secondary schools, was focused on the university entrance examination. The two had made it known that they found classes irrelevant and, after consulting with their form teachers, were advised to start making alternative plans for their future. However, their school could offer few options and their parents were opposed to the idea of their going right out to work.

The police established that on the day of the crime the boys had got up at six in that morning and had arrived at school before seven. As the day on which the attack occurred was a Saturday the two boys had come out of school in the early afternoon but had decided not to go home immediately. From past experience they knew that by doing so they would only let themselves in for an afternoon of nagging from their mothers who would be after them to study. The boys decided they would have some fun instead and thought about going to an amusement hall. However, being short of cash for this purpose, they headed over to a friend's to borrow money. The friend could not help them either and they were on their way down in the lift when they came upon their victim. Her rejection of their demands for cash led the boys to attack her, with the results already described.
(excerpted from Donga, 26 April 1992).

Viewed from one perspective there is no doubt that examination-centred literacy allows mothers to construct a pivotal role for themselves in the household at a time when otherwise they would be facing the prospect of the empty nest syndrome. They are able to put off that particular day of reckoning by immersing themselves in the frenzy of examination hell. Channelling so much of their attention and energies into their role as 'director of operations' for the examination hell leaves mothers little time to dwell on or to question their own identity. Moreover, while carrying out their special mission, mothers are accorded special status by partners and relatives, by virtue of which they are empowered to make the kinds of family decisions traditionally denied them in a patriarchal structure. For the time being the male parent subordinates his own will to that of the female, in the hope and expectation that his partner's sacrifice will lead to their child's academic success and thereby bring pride and honour to the whole family.

Throughout the long, hard grind of preparation for higher education young people are reassured of the central place they occupy in their parents' affection. In this way a traditional Korean virtue, filial piety, can be reinforced. The process, some argue, strengthens family ties. Others warn that it prevents children from learning to become more independent as they approach young adulthood. I discuss the issue of independence in more detail later. In families where there is a student working towards the university entrance exams, family

matters defer in all respects to that student's physical and mental equilibrium. Each member of the family is under implicit orders, as it were, to help maintain the desired atmosphere of calm and quiet in the house during this critical period. Raised voices and loud music are frowned upon. The exam-bound student is the centre around which the rest of the family revolves. It is not uncommon in the run-up to exams for parents, particularly mothers, to seek spiritual support from their local church or temple. Many in fact will go early in the morning or late in the evening to pray for their children's success. During the days leading up to the examinations, churches and Buddhist temples experience their busiest time in the religious calendar, often laying on extra services early in the evening and late at night.

On the day of the national university entrance examination, parents drive their children to one of the many examination centres. If the parents have no car, solicitous relatives or neighbours may offer to drive the student, for s/he must at all costs conserve vital energy for the battle ahead. The many cars arriving all at once may well cause a traffic jam outside the centre, where members of school alumni associations assemble and play music on traditional Korean instruments to encourage the arriving candidates. Often mothers can be seen openly praying for their children outside examination centres, while others head for churches or temples to do so. Cho H.J. (1998) describes the case of a mother who went to pray for her son's examination success in her local church and sat there for hours crying uncontrollably. The mother said she could not help breaking down when she recalled the family's struggle to prepare the boy for this day. She was not alone. Many other mothers there were also crying; in fact, the church was full of the sound of women moaning and weeping.

The mass media play a leading role in focusing public attention on all aspects of the

university entrance examinations. In addition, both the national and local press give information on how applications to various universities are proceeding. The day of the university entrance examination is a media circus, an event in which it seems the whole nation gets involved. There is intense national T.V. and radio coverage and multiple live spots outside many of the examination centres themselves. Media commentators interview 'experts' for their opinions on the current year's examination, in particular as to its assumed level of difficulty in comparison with past years. On the human interest side, there are interviews with taxi drivers who describe mad city centre dashes in order to deliver frantic students to the examination centres on time. Even the police have been known to provide emergency escort for exam candidates. The examination itself begins at nine o'clock. In order to ease the expected traffic congestion on the day, businesses in the big cities start their working day later than usual. The examination ends at five o'clock. At seven o'clock, the answers are already being presented on the T.V. educational channel, followed the next morning by similar coverage in the national press. Families with examination candidates typically spend the whole day glued to their T.V. sets for up-to-the-minute reports on the event. There is scarcely an event in Korea that could gain more national attention than does the annual university entrance examination.

2. 3. 2. 2 Political and economic dimensions of the dominant literacy

The effects of examination hell on the families of examination candidates may usefully be set against the backdrop of certain political and economic dimensions of Korean education at large. Cho H.J. (1992), an anthropologist who has studied the effects of examination hell on adolescents, claims that an education system which focuses on a single make or break testing

instrument such as the common university entrance examination has a means for the effective control and regulation of adolescents, a key tool for ensuring a compliant population for future generations. From a social patterning perspective, conformity to the norm comes to be accepted as not only the most efficacious strategy but also as a highly desirable personal trait. Under this system, learning is equated with the memorisation of factual information rather than with the development of critical thinking or individual creativity. What is learned represents both the process and the product of teaching; what is taught represents the 'truth' and learners are not encouraged to question the truth. Much instructional time is given over to rote learning practices which serve the purpose of fixing information in the short term memory for access at exam time but which have little longer term effect. Critics of Korean educational practice such as Cho, who as university teachers have to deal with the products of the secondary schools, complain that they are frustrated in their work by the passivity of undergraduates. The latter are so used to being told what to do that they are uncomfortable and disorientated on entering a university environment which values independent thinking. Many first year university students in fact experience severe difficulties in adapting to the requirements of autonomous learning because they have never before had to make decisions for themselves.

The strict regime represented by the university entrance examination may represent a legacy of recent Korean political history in which successive brutal and dictatorial governments imposed their will on a vocal student population. In 1958 the then Korean president had to resign from his post following the actions of a student-led movement which questioned his mandate to continue in office into a third election term. Subsequent governments, acutely aware of the power exerted by student groups, have attempted to suppress any potentially

inflammatory student activism, making regulations and imposing restrictions to discourage collective action and coalitions. In the past, military cells located on university campuses have stood ready to use force to suppress any student demonstration and this has caused great resentment and tension among academics. As a result it has been argued that the culture of the university entrance examination is a form of governmental social control designed to keep order among the nation's youth (see, for example, Kim S.I., 1997; Cho H.J., 1998). Control is further reinforced through the national curriculum, which lays down in detail the subject matter to be covered in every school, as well as through the officially authorised school textbooks, the use of which takes precedence over other pedagogical materials. In addition, inspection teams work to ensure that each school is following to the letter prescribed pedagogical and administrative policies as laid down by the central educational authority.

Lee I.H. (1990) identifies the two teacher traits which the teaching profession values most highly: capability and compliance (see also Jung H.J., 1992). According to Lee, capability is a measure of the teacher's competence in maintaining a high student success rate in examinations. High compliance ratings are accorded teachers who follow unquestioningly the orders and directions flowing down from higher administrative authorities such as school principals and inspectors. Furthermore, teachers who embrace the exam-focused system, who are uncritical of the prescribed curriculum, who teach to the textbook, whose students do well on exams, and who at the end of it all send as many students as possible to prestigious universities are the most likely to advance in their own careers. Students who are accepted by these universities bring honour to their teachers and to their schools. On a more pragmatic level, schools which are successful in the terms described above gain additional funding both

from their administration and from parents. Within this value system, those who do not perform well are branded the losers. Alternative routes for the less academically inclined are few.

The mass media, as already indicated, are active in the promotion of a high public awareness of education. By publishing examination league tables showing the relative success of each school in getting students into the top universities, the media encourage a public view of the 'good' school as one which 'scores' the highest in those terms. Additionally, the media foster an image of equality of educational opportunity, something which successive governments are very keen to promote as part of a wider doctrine of social mobility. Around exam time feature stories abound in the press of students from poor families who are successful in their bid to enter a top university, thus encouraging the belief that such cases are common when in fact they are probably exceptional. The promise of higher social status through education is a message which has strong political underpinnings. Recent governments have been anxious to keep alive the notion that the social structure is flexible enough to reward higher status to individual achievement regardless of socioeconomic background. It is somewhat ironic that this political encouragement of public faith in education as a means to remove social barriers exists alongside policies which exert such tight control over the educational process itself.

Education in Korea is big business. In 1990, 750,000 students graduated from senior high school. Of these, approximately 250,000 went on directly to higher education, 300,000 entered the job market and 200,000 enrolled in private institutes to prepare for the following year's university entrance, either because they failed the first time around or because their marks weren't high enough to get them a place in the university of their (or their parents')

choice. Thus each year there are more than 300,000 candidates for the university entrance who have studied for a year or more after finishing high school. A huge industry exists to serve the needs of these students. Publishing companies produce core textbooks, supplementary textbooks and workbooks. Batteries of tests replicating the entrance examination are administered several times during the lead up to the exam, then computer marked and result analysed. These materials are bought in enormous quantities by schools, who are then reimbursed by parents. Thousands of private institutes offer supplementary tuition. Private study halls provide facilities for study. The drug industry actively promotes products which supposedly improve alertness and memory capacity. As part of this giant enterprise, too, large numbers of tutors, many of them university students, offer private tuition. By any standards the education support industry is huge, employs thousands of people and is one in which government, schools, industry, parents and their children all participate. According to one report (Korean Educational Institute, 1990), spending on education represents 15% of GDP. The astonishing thing is that only one third of this is government spending; the other two thirds comes out of parents' pockets. The latter share of course includes the cost of stationery items and of supplementary school lessons and textbooks. But by far the biggest proportion goes on lessons at institutes and from individual tutors. Korean parents are in effect funding a massive private sector education machine (Kukmin, 1 April 1991; Kong E.B. and Paik S.J., 1994).

In recent years there have been many expressions of unease at the national preoccupation with examination results. The instrumental function of examination-centred education is alluded to by Moosup Kang (1991), who concludes that Korean public education through secondary school is largely a means of gaining access to higher education. Kang argues that it

should not be the fundamental objective of public education to prepare students for examinations and that a system which places undue emphasis on exam success is responsible for the following negative outcomes: i) there is too much emphasis on academic competition with others and not enough on the development of self; ii) the strategies for success in the system include illegitimate methods such as using delegates; iii) the examination itself is predicated on the accumulation of vast amounts of rote learning to the detriment of creative and critical thinking. Kang further argues that the ethos of competition which characterises the entrance exam infects Korean society at other levels, where questionable means are used in order to achieve desired ends.

2. 3. 3 Why vernacular literacy?

Before I proceed with my discussion of vernacular literacy, a formal definition of this term seems to be in order to make my position clear. Vernacular literacy practices have been defined as those which are 'not regulated by the formal rules and procedures of dominant social institutions and which have their origins in everyday life' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 247). Social scientists emphasise the fact that vernacular literacy practices are rooted in daily experience and serve the needs of ordinary lives. Dominant literacy practices, on the other hand, tend to be standardised and defined in terms of formal institutional purposes. As a case in point I have made reference above to the significance of exam-orientated literacy in the lives of Korean school students within its historical, social, economic and political contexts. Compared to institutionalised literacy which has high status and absolute power, vernacular literacy is relatively invisible and is treated as a poor cousin at best, a negative influence on its institutionalised counterpart at worst. In the Korean context, moreover, literate experience

based on vernacular literacy is generally regarded as unimportant and is often blamed for distracting students from what should be their prime concern: their academic work.

In the Western context much work has been done to reconceptualise the importance of adolescents' everyday literacy and integrate it with school-sanctioned literacy. The avowed aim is to alter the discourse of schooled literacy so that adolescents' non-academic literacies may find legitimacy in the classroom (Hinchman, 1998; O'Brien, 1998; Marsh and Millard, 2000; Marsh and Thompson, 2001). The need to encompass the voice and lived experience of students has been felt across the curriculum by practitioners and researchers alike. Sadly, there has to date been little corresponding interest in and research attention to vernacular literacy in Korea. The few cases in which everyday reading and writing has been the focus of research attention relate mainly to the exploration of gender issues such as the extent of female readership of magazines and comics (Kim R.A., 1995; Hong S.A., 1996; Aum Y.S., 1997; Hong H.J., 1997; Shin J.A., 1997; Jang Y.S., 1998), and surveys of reading preferences (Um H.J., 1995; Kim S.A., 1997; Lee Y.S., 1998). Lacking legitimization in its own right, vernacular literacy is tightly controlled within the formal educational agenda. School sanctioned literacy, in fact, imposes its demands upon everyday literacy. A case in point is personal journal writing in Korean schools. In the belief that literacy skills are thereby enhanced, primary school teachers across Korea compel their pupils to produce daily journal entries, which are regularly inspected. I discuss this common practice, which in many cases continues through the junior high school years, in Chapter 5. Suffice it to say here that any resistance shown by students to the practice, based either on individual doubt in its merits and/or on personal distress in having to put their personal lives on public view, is overridden by the argument that journal writing helps to develop literacy skills. Against this background

my intention is to show how in the neglected and devalued world of teenage vernacular literacy there is, contrary to many expectations and against the received wisdom, a rich body of intensely personal expression which is worthy of serious attention on the part of all who have anything to do with young people.

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework for literacy and adolescence

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, by briefly examining both the history of literacy and studies of adolescence, I will position myself explicitly in terms of the theories I am adopting in my own research. First I discuss two representative models of literacy: the autonomous and the ideological model. I follow this with comments on literacy studies of the in-school and out-of-school life of teenagers. I will also clarify the use of the two key concepts in my work: literacy event and literacy practice. As for the literature on adolescence, I will look at the theoretical definitions of adolescence both in the Western context and the Korean context. This examination is based on five different perspectives: biogenetic psychology, psychoanalytic theory, sociological theory, developmental contextualism and the anthropological perspective.

3.2 The literature on literacy

In this ethnographic work on Korean young people's everyday literacy I want to demonstrate the particularity of cultural practices. I aim to show that reading and writing occur in specific contexts and for this reason certain theoretical approaches are likely to be more appropriate than others. The literacy which occurs in the domain of everyday life, for example, is more logically approached from a social and cultural view of literacy grounded in an ideological rather than in a cognitive model since the social approach encompasses dimensions such as power relations and functions of gender. In order to justify my adoption of the approach I use, I examine the evolution of literacy theories beginning with the autonomous model and

following with the ideological model.

3. 2. 1 Different models of literacy

Perspectives on what constitutes literacy have changed dramatically in recent years. Each new definition increases expectations of what it means to be literate. Until recently the term literacy was defined within the literacy - illiteracy dichotomy. Current positions on definitions of literacy tend to cluster around two major dimensions, 'the individual dimension and the social dimension' (Green and Dixon, 1992 quoted by Pérez, 1998: 22). The individual dimension has been explored by anthropologists who consider literacy as being at the centre of their disciplinary concerns (Goody and Watt, 1963; Goody, 1977, 1986). Typical is the claim that 'the historical advent of literacy plays a crucial role in bringing about fundamental changes in the makeup of culture, society, and the person' and that 'cross-cultural differences in modes of thought can be attributed to the presence of literacy in some societies, and to its absence elsewhere' (Besnier, 1995: 2). This stance has literacy forming a cognitive skills base which contributes to the development of intellect. This is in line with the view of literacy as a set of asocial individual cognitive skills dislodged from their socio-cultural moorings in human relationships and communities of practice (Richardson, 1998; Besnier, *op cit*; Devine, 1994). By neglecting the role and constitutive influence of situation, activities and participants, literacy becomes a set of skills necessary for individuals to undertake reading and writing. Street (1984) refers to this deterministic view of literacy as the 'autonomous model of literacy'.

When literacy is regarded as a set of specific, context-free skills as in the autonomous model,

then attaining those skills can be seen as a personal achievement; and not attaining those skills must consequently be regarded as a personal failure. Literacy becomes a static quality which remains part of an individual's permanent repertoire. The implications of this model of literacy is summarised neatly by Ferdman:

[L]iteracy is experienced as a characteristic inherent in the individual. Once a person acquires the requisite skills, she also acquires the quality of mind known as literacy, and the right to be labeled a literate person. Judgements about a person's degree of literacy are not dependent on the situation. Rather, because there is wide agreement on what constitutes a literate individual, a person carries the label regardless of whether or not she continues to demonstrate the behaviours that first earned her the designation. (1990 quoted in Devine, op cit: 223)

Divorced from a social dimension, literacy is considered to produce desirable changes in people: raised cognitive skill, a rational outlook, restructured thought processes and sustained abstract thinking. Such thinking contributes to the creation of what Graff describes as 'the literacy myth' (1979), described clearly by Gee in the following way:

The 'literacy myth' is seen to have produced claims that literacy leads to, or is correlated with, logical and analytical modes of thought; general and abstract use of language; critical and rational thought; sceptical and questioning attitudes; a distinction between myth and history; the recognition of the importance of time and space; complex and modern governments; political democracy and greater social equity; economic development; wealth and productivity; political stability; urbanisation; lower birth rates; people who are achievement oriented, productive, cosmopolitan, politically aware, more globally (nationally and internationally) and less locally oriented, who have more liberal and humane social attitudes, are less likely to commit a crime; and more likely to take the rights and duties of citizenship seriously. (1990: 25)

Gee further argues that this myth of literacy either inadvertently or deliberately obscures 'literacy's connections to political power, to social identity and to ideologies' (49).

If reading and writing are defined as a set of particular decontextualisable skills or cognitive processes acquired through practice, education, or apprenticeship, then a hierarchy can be established with regard to the authority for determining the meaning of any particular text, without the need to acknowledge that the authority for that interpretation is a matter of social,

cultural, and political privilege (Bloome 2001). To get a different interpretation viewed as legitimate requires justification within the terms established by those with authority, and is difficult to do. Those justifications, despite legitimising a different interpretation, will at the same time result in legitimising the hierarchy of authority for interpretation. It is thus more likely that those who hold alternative interpretations are likely to be considered as less competent, less able and, potentially, socially deviant.

This monolithic and static approach to reading and writing has been subjected to severe critical scrutiny by researchers in a variety of fields, including social anthropology (Street, *op cit*), sociolinguistics (Heath, 1983), cultural psychology (Scribner and Cole, 1981) and folklore (Finnegan, 1988). For these critics, literacy should be considered 'not as a monolithic phenomenon but as a multi-faceted one, whose meaning, including any consequences it may have for individuals, groups, or symbolic structures, is crucially tied to the social practices that surround it and to the ideological system in which it is embedded' (Besnier, *op cit*: 3). Street (1984, 1993) refers to this view as the 'ideological model of literacy' and this perspective deals with 'the social dimension' of literacy (Green and Dixon, 1996 quoted by Pérez, 1998). Baynham defines ideology as 'a collection of ideas, beliefs and attitudes which, taken together, make up a world view or political position' (1995: 4). For Street, the term ideology refers to 'the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and individual resistance and creativity on the other' (1995: 162). This definition avoids the difficulties associated with the term as it was used in earlier times, including the Marxist connotation that unfortunately made ideology a synonym for simple-minded dogma. Thought of as the arena in which competing interests play out in a variety of social practices, including literacy, the ideological model takes on added significance for what it can help us

understand about individual agency and how it is enacted.

Graff (1979) and Stubbs (1980) make much of the social model as an alternative to the prevailing psychological models of reading and writing (referred to by Barton, 1994). In his study of the literacy acquisition of various ethnic and occupational groups in Canada in the 19th century, Graff argues that literacy, rather than broadening educational and job opportunities and bettering living conditions for members of ethnic minorities and the working class, functioned to inculcate prescribed middle-class values and to reinforce forms of social control.

Heath (1983) contributes to the social approach by conceptualising literacy events in literacy studies in her research on communities of different social and cultural backgrounds. Her work has played an important part in the shifting of interest within the field of literacy from a focus on skills to the recognition that these are always embedded in social practice. As Heath demonstrates the social and cultural dimensions of literacy in a non-pedagogical setting, her work is relevant to the non-educational contexts in which my research is conducted.

In much the same way in which Heath's ethnography makes an innovative shift away from a view of literacy as a unitary concept, Street provides significant insights into the theoretical framework of literacy studies. His anthropological work (1984) proposes the 'autonomous/ideological' model mentioned above. As he formulates it, this model focuses on 'the specific social practices of reading and writing (1984: 2) in order to:

... view literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and to recognise the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts. (1993: 7)

In an attempt to avoid any polarisation of the two models, Street offers the following synthesis:

The ideological model . . . does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In that sense the 'ideological' model *subsumes* rather than excludes the work undertaken within the 'autonomous' model.
(1993: 9, italics mine)

The social approach manifested in this model is at the centre of what has become to be known as New Literacy Studies which have produced a growing body of ethnographic work. Writings such as those collected and edited by Street (1993, 2001) and by Barton, Hamilton and Ivanić (2000) show the extent to which this theory has been taken up. They demonstrate the validity of the assertion that the ways in which literacy is learnt and used are influenced by and in turn influence the social and cultural practices within which these literacy practices are situated. Individual studies, including those by Mace (1998) on the meaning of literacy in the lives of mothers, Barton and Hamilton (1998) on everyday literacy in a local community, Baynham (1995) on relations between oral and written language use among Moroccans in London, and Taylor (1996) on bureaucratic literacies, show that literacy is closely connected with social and cultural practices and that the uses and meanings of literacy are better understood under the umbrella of multiple literacies rather than in terms of a 'single thing, with a big L and a single Y' (Street, 1993: 81).

I adopt the approach towards literacy as something embedded in social and cultural practices because it facilitates my ethnographic study of Korean literacy practices. One of the key features of this approach is that it 'pays great attention to the role of literacy practices in

reproducing and challenging structures of power and domination' (Street, 1993: 7). Indeed, I take this premise as my point of departure in my study of reading and writing in the Korean context. Through an exploration of everyday reading and writing I hope to give a comprehensive account of the formation of power structures and their influence on literacy practices, and also to show the creative ways in which my informants resist those power structures. My work will moreover identify some of the various agendas arising from societal norms, assumptions, attitudes and values which impinge on members of the society in their social relations. Finally, the findings of my research will shed light on the multi-dimensional aspects of vernacular literacies, the complexity of these literacies in terms of the power relations they display and the ways in which these literacies contribute to the construction of gender roles.

3. 2. 2 Studies of adolescent literacies

Recent ethnographic research on literacy focuses on individual settings in which literacy plays a key role and investigates the ways in which the social characteristics of context shape the nature of literacy as it is practised in those settings. The central motif of such investigations is the way in which literacy derives its meaning from the broader context in which it is practised, and how other aspects of the situation acquire meaning from acts of reading and writing (Besnier, *op cit*). As my own interest lies in the lives of young people, I have selected representative examples from this array of literacy studies of the in-school and out-of-school life of teenagers. These show how adolescents use literacy to make sense of their social and school lives and in particular how they integrate their unsanctioned literacies with their more formalised academic literacies.

Shuman's (1986) ethnography of oral and written communication in an inner-city junior high school in the Eastern United States documents the rich literacy culture that adolescents may develop more or less independently of approved school literacy. While reading and writing are the primary focus of on-stage pedagogical activities, adolescents also build a complex literate culture of their own, which is only vaguely related to official school literacy. For example, they keep diaries, write letters to one another for a variety of motivations, and forge notes to school authorities. Rather than viewing these literacy practices as poor peripheral imitations of the writing approved by and intended for adults, Shuman treats them in their own right and finds them to be governed by complex social rules of interaction. Shuman's ethnography demonstrates the potential complexity of the relationship between literacy practices and interactional norms in contexts that, at first glance, appear trivial and dismissible.

Camitta illustrates how urban adolescents use 'vernacular' literacies in and out of school to take hold of their lives - to 'write themselves into the world', as she puts it. She examines how young people living in urban Philadelphia engage in vernacular literacies which she defines as 'neither elite nor institutional . . . (but) traditional and indigenous to the diverse cultural processes of communities as distinguished from the uniform, inflexible standards of institutions' (1993: 228). The adolescents in her study choose to produce texts within the framework of adolescent culture and social organisation, a process involving concepts of 'collaboration, performance and recursiveness'. Camitta observes various functions and meanings associated with these adolescent vernacular writing practices as well as a wide range of texts such as letters, notes, entries in journals, diaries, parodies and raps which

enable the writers to change experience and to act upon it. The use of writing to fill up their free time enables teenagers to 'transform experience from empty to full, from isolated to peopled, from inactive to active'. Insofar as their writing contributes to maintaining their social relationships, literate experience is perceived by these adolescents as meaningful in that both the act and the text is related to conveying as well as creating meaning in their personal and social domains. Camitta's study is a powerful illustration of the fact that, despite the marginalised status within the school context of the local or vernacular literacy in comparison with the preeminence of officially sanctioned genres, the former is worthy of examination due to its rich complexity and its undeniably central place in the lives of adolescents.

Finders (1997) explores the role of literacy in the social development of 12- and 13-year-old girls. The subjects, five young girls of middle- and working-class and Euro-American background residing in the rural Midwest, engage in various forms of literacy practice, including signing year books, writing notes and bathroom graffiti, reading 'teen 'zines' (magazines targeted at teenagers), doing homework together, reading novels and short stories and writing in classroom response journals. The literacy world of these young girls consists of both their official classroom activities as well as a sort of 'literacy underworld' existing outside the official mandate, in which every act of reading and writing is associated with specific meanings and roles. For example, 'zine reading has an exclusively social function, that of establishing status within the group as the experiences reported in the magazines are appropriated by the girls as their own. Indeed Finders suggests that literacy is pre-eminently a social event that constructs social identities, positions girls within their peer groups, and demarcates social boundaries between adults and children and between school social groups.

Moje's (2000) study of the literacy practices of adolescent gangs also shows how literacy is related to constructing, conveying and maintaining identity, thought and power. She looks at the discursive practices of young people affiliated with street gangs and in particular at the background of four different ethnic groups in Salt Lake City, U.S.A., focusing on their unsanctioned literacies and language as well as on their body discourses. By internalising a set of very specific and sophisticated gang writing styles, spellings, rules and dress codes, these young people shape their social world and construct identities and social position for themselves. Their activities, however, are not the typical ones of a marginalised social group: underachieving at school, resisting prevailing norms and outbursts of deviant behaviour. In addition to gang literacies such as tagging, graffiti writing and hand signs, these youngsters engage in writing raps, poetry, parodies, letters and notes, activities which enable them to express their feelings and experiences, identify themselves as specific 'gangsta' types, demonstrate their commitment to gang membership and win the respect and admiration of other members and/or fear of others outside the gangs. They use each of these alternative, unsanctioned and nonschool forms of representation to make sense of their everyday lives in and out of school, to maintain group membership and to gain standing in the gang. Movement within the gang's hierarchy is made possible through the demonstration of special proficiency with the discursive tools valued in the gang. Moje's findings plainly demonstrate that, regardless of social position, people use literacies in various ways to construct their identities and that the exercise of power is always intrinsic to the process.

There have been several studies highlighting literacy practices related to curricular, pedagogical, cultural, assessment, classroom, and disciplinary contexts. Focusing on specific

pedagogical innovations, O'Brien et al (2001) examine a high school literacy lab which is designed to support at risk learners. Two under-achieving students in the study use a documentary style of composition in which the written text serves merely as background for the more engaging and emotion-filled visual images. The documentary style compensates for the adolescents' lack of technical sophistication in school writing and is evidence that literacy practices which allow for differences in language use enable even low-achieving students to exercise power in constructing fulfilling social relationships with their teachers and peers.

Hinchman and Zalewski (2001) examine the teaching of global studies from the perspective of two student subjects. The difference in behaviour and attitude between the two young people leads the researchers to conclude that language needs to be viewed as both the site of struggle and a mediator of social relations. They also show how the students' interpretation of the classroom practices they experience may be shaped by race, class or gender relations.

Oates (2001) presents case studies of students in a high school English class. He illustrates the social purposes that undergird the literacy practices of the young people and shows how various discourses are interwoven throughout their classroom literacies.

Kelly (2001) explores the intersections between a student's literacy learning across content areas in school and his learning outside of school in a church-based community Saturday school programme. The subject, a 13-year-old African-American, integrates what he absorbs about the history and culture of his race through church activities with what he learns through the power of 'the code' (print literacy) at school. Kelly shows how the church-based programme extends the learning provided in the school programme by explicitly drawing on

the subject's ethnic, cultural, and racial experiences in society and by teaching him literacies not privileged in school. Despite being labeled at risk by his school, the subject is motivated by his experiences at church to approach his school principal about the possibility of setting up a social organisation (a Black Student Union). With this example of how literacy mediates social relations between and among different races, ethnicities, and cultures, Kelly successfully demonstrates the importance of attending to differences in literacy practices and their potential for exercising power.

All the above studies show that literacy is negotiated and constructed by young people in the context of their lives both inside and outside of school. The form and content of the negotiation and construction process, moreover, will vary according to the life experiences and positionality of each individual. The ways in which people experience the world and are positioned in it shape both their access to literacy and their ways of engaging in it. Besnier (op cit) proposes that a successful ethnographic investigation of literacy must be 'comparative' in that it investigates the relation between literacy and orality. I make use of the notion 'comparative' not only in examining the intersection between literacy and orality, but also in exploring the meaning of literacy across different contexts. As Besnier points out, restricting comparison to examples from within the same society fails to constitute an adequate base for a research agenda that professes to be theoretical in scope. Although my work has a specifically Korean database, I nevertheless draw comparisons with various other local contexts and settings, including some in America and the U.K, as evidenced by my references to the studies above-cited. I hope my approach will serve to familiarise Korean academia with the social view of literacy studies - the so-called New Literacy Studies.

My study takes as its point of departure the premise that 'literacy is a fundamentally heterogeneous phenomenon, whose shape can be determined by many aspects of the sociocultural context in which it is embedded' (Besnier, op cit: 5). The first aim of the ethnographic investigation of literacy is descriptive. In order to be able to propose the general meaning of literacy for a particular social group, it is first necessary to identify the range and diversity of literacy experiences and contextualise each one of them against its historical backdrop, its contemporary associations and its links to other forms of literacy. The above requirement should include answers to the question of who has access to what type of literacy, in what social context each literacy activity is learned and used, and what social values are foregrounded in the social context in which acts of reading and writing take place. In addition to delivering descriptive accounts of how literacy is used by Korean young people, my study will eventually seek to articulate a general meaning of literacy for them by addressing each of the above questions.

3. 2. 3 Definition of terms

Two analytical concepts emerge as particularly important tools for the ethnographically informed approach to literacy, namely literacy event and literacy practice. I will accordingly clarify the use of these concepts as they apply to my work.

3. 2. 3. 1 Literacy event

According to Heath a literacy event is 'any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretative processes' (1982 quoted in Hamilton, 2000: 16). The concept of literacy event refers to a strip of social life in which

literacy plays a central role, which can be broken down into its various components, such as settings, participants, and genres (Heath, 1983: 386). Hamilton (2000) points out that 'interaction' needs to be reconsidered in that the notion is not straightforward in her study of media images of literacy, thus raising the question: How central to an event does literacy have to be for it to be called a 'literacy' event? (Tusting et al, 2000: 214). Street (1993) also alludes to the limitation that 'the notion of a literacy event . . . signal[s] mainly the behaviour'. Wilson (1999: 51) argues that 'event' is 'rather static - constrained to staged, repeatable and predictable occurrences . . . within a performative framework'. She further claims that, in order to recognise 'the wider concepts of emotionality, the value of portability, the relevance of visibility and the recognition of subversion embedded within such activities', the term should be expanded to 'literacy-related activity'. I myself support Wilson's point of view and favour the term 'literacy-related activity' over 'literacy event' in my work.

3. 2. 3. 2 Literacy practice

Defining the term 'practice' as 'what people do' encompasses recurrent, socially patterned, culturally informed ways of acting as well as thinking. Wenger defines the term thus:

The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing it and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense, practice is always social practice. Such a concept of practice includes both the explicit and the tacit. It includes what is said and what is left unsaid, what is represented and what is assumed. It includes the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes the implicit relations, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and a shared world-view. (1998: 47)

The literacy application of practice has been approached in different ways. Street, who uses 'literacy practices' to expand the notion of 'event', describes the former as a broader concept 'pitched at a higher level of abstraction and referring to both behaviour and conceptualisation

related to the use of reading and/ or writing' (1993: 12).

Ivanić et al are more specific:

The term is used in two ways: (a) to refer to observable, photographable, collectible and/or documentable specific ethnographic details of situated literacy events, involving real people, relationships, purposes, actions, places, times, circumstances, feelings, words, tools and resources; and (b) as culturally recognisable patterns of behaviour, which can be generalised from the observation of these specifics. The process of identifying the 'literacy practices' in the sense (b) involves identifying the values, beliefs and power relations which sustain them . . . However, it is potentially confusing because it is often used in both sense (a) and sense (b) indiscriminately. (2000: 213)

The same difficulty in being able to separate (a) from (b) is echoed in Wilson's expressed inability to determine 'where the observable and recordable ends and abstract values, cultural beliefs and power relations begin' (op cit: 53).

Barton summarises more succinctly the relationship between literacy event and literacy practice:

Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilising literacy that people draw upon in a literacy event (1991:5, 1994: 33-52).

Both concepts are obviously rather broad but according to Besnier this inevitably reflects the diversity of the phenomena they are aimed to identify. He ends on a pragmatic note, one which perhaps allows me the luxury of occupying more than one camp in my subsequent argument:

In developing a conceptual vocabulary for an analysis of social life, what one loses in precision, one gains in flexibility, malleability, and descriptive power. (op cit: 6)

3.3 The literature on adolescence

Adolescence is generally understood as a prolonged transition period between childhood and

adulthood, one which prepares a young person for occupation, marriage, and mature social roles. The popular, widely used term 'teenager' refers more specifically to the years thirteen through nineteen. However, it may also mean different years across different countries and different historical periods and currently is undergoing change in relation to consumer culture. Korean law defines adolescence according to the following categories:

Table 3.1 Laws defining adolescence

Pre-Adult Protection Act	Adolescents under the age of 20 are prohibited from smoking and drinking
Child Welfare Act	Adolescents under the age of 18 are minors entitled to the protection of the state
Employment Standard Act	Adolescents under the age of 18 are restricted as to the kinds of employment they may engage in
Youth Act	Adolescents between the ages of 14 and 20 who commit an offence are to be identified as adolescent offenders
Civil Act	Adolescents under the age of 20 are not eligible to vote

(after Sim Y.H., 1994: 311-312)

As the above shows, Korean law recognises no precise age boundaries for either the onset or the termination of adolescence. Academic literature also lacks any consensus on the issue, there being a range of views depending on discipline. For clarification I look first at Western child development theory, then at its Korean counterpart, and finally in my cross-cultural disciplinary examination discuss my own research findings related to this issue. I use the three terms - adolescent, teenager and young people - interchangeably throughout my work.

3. 3. 1 Theoretical definitions of adolescence in the Western context

3. 3. 1. 1 Biogenetic psychology of adolescence

American psychologist G. Stanley Hall is usually credited with the specific identification of the term 'adolescence', and the first to advance a psychology of adolescence in its own right and to use scientific methods in its study. Expanding Darwin's concept of biological evolution into a psychological theory of recapitulation, Hall viewed adolescence as a time when the human race was in a turbulent, transitional stage, describing it as a new birth (1916 referred to by Muuss, 1996). Hall and his peers defined adolescence as a physiological stage triggered by the onset of puberty and existing until full adult status is attained. The origin of puberty can be found in inherited biological impulses which initiate a period of 'storm and stress', characterised by alternating and opposing emotions. Adolescence, according to this theory, is a stressful and distressing time for everyone, and this hormonal turmoil sets adolescents apart from the stasis of the 'mature' adult world.

3. 3. 1. 2 Psychoanalytic theory

The upsurge of instincts occurring as a result of puberty is the starting point for the psychoanalytic view of adolescence. This increase in instinctual life, it is suggested, upsets the psychic balance which has been achieved by the end of childhood, causing internal emotional upheaval and leading to a greatly increased vulnerability of the personality (Freud, 1937 referred to by Coleman and Hendry, 1990). Blos, a prominent writer in this field, has defined adolescence as a 'second individuation process', the first having been completed

towards the end of the third year of life (quoted by Muuss, 1988). Blos argues that during this period the individual's awakening sexuality leads him/her to search for new love objects in the outside world, resulting in the severing of emotional ties with parents. This process of disengagement results in two representative behavioural patterns, regression and ambivalence. Regressive behaviours may include the adolescent's idolisation of famous people and his/her submergence in abstract ideas or political ideals. Ambivalent behaviours may encompass extreme fluctuations of mood, inconsistency in relationships, depression and nonconformity. Nonconformist behaviour and rebellion in particular are construed as an aid to the disengagement process.

The experience of separation and loss caused by the severance of the emotional ties with family is also strongly stressed in the psychoanalytic view. This inner emptiness has been described as the state of 'object and affect hunger' by Blos, who claims that the adolescent is involved in both of these intense emotional states, which may lead to delinquent activities, even drug and mystical experiences, often as a means of combatting the emotional flatness, depression and loneliness which he/she feels. Like the biogenetic, the psychoanalytical perspective associates the period of adolescence with difficulty and disturbance. According to this perspective, the source of such turmoil and the means of dealing with it are to be located in the individual adolescent and his/her family.

3.3.1.3 Sociological theory

The sociological view of adolescence takes a very different perspective from that of psychoanalytic theory. While there is no disagreement between the two approaches concerning the importance of the transitional process, it is on the causes of this process that

the two viewpoints take different positions. Whereas psychoanalytic theory concentrates on internal factors, the sociological focuses on society and events outside the individual. The two key concepts for the sociologist and the social psychologist here are 'socialisation' and 'role' (Coleman and Hendry, 1990). The process of socialisation is bound up with the values, standards, and beliefs inherent in a society. These values, standards and beliefs are in turn interconnected with positions and roles in that society, and it is these that sociological theory concerns itself with, in particular with the role changes exhibited in the process of socialisation.

It is the belief of most sociologists that a large proportion of an individual's life is characterised by an engagement in a series of roles, the so-called role repertoire. The period of adolescence, a time of emerging identity, is seen as particularly relevant to the construction of this role repertoire for two major reasons: i) certain characteristics of adolescence such as growing independence from authority figures, involvement with peer groups and an unusual sensitivity to the evaluations of others, all involve role transitions and discontinuity as functions of both the social and cultural contexts; and ii) any inner change or uncertainty has the effect of increasing the individual's dependence on others, and this applies particularly to the need for reassurance and support for one's view of oneself. The effects of major environmental changes related to move of school, home and job are also relevant in this context (Coleman and Hendry, 1990).

Elder (1968) identifies two types of role change: intra-role change and change to completely new roles. She argues that the acquisition of new roles is coupled with gradual change of an intra-role nature. The two may at times facilitate but at other times may hinder each other,

thus making adaptation more complex.

Thomas (1968) also sees the process of socialisation in adolescence as frequently problematic. Role conflict and role discontinuity are two types of role behaviour creating potential stress for young people. This comes about because adolescents are exposed to a wide variety of competing socialisation agencies: the demands of educational institutions, peer group pressures, mass media influences and the agenda of political institutions, all of which engender a wide range of potential conflicts in values and ideals.

According to Coleman and Hendry (1990), the psychoanalytic and the sociological perspectives are essentially different in their view of the adolescent transitional process but mutually complementary, while at the same time being united in their view of adolescence as a time of stress in the process of human development. More recently, however, the view of the teenage years as a problem stage in human development has been gradually supplanted by a perspective called developmental contextualism, which I will discuss next.

3. 3. 1. 4 Developmental contextualism

Developmental contextualism grew out of lifespan developmental psychology, which gives due recognition both to the adolescent's resources and potential for resilience as well as to the possible circumstances in which an individual may become vulnerable. This approach, which focuses on individual differences in context and whose key proponents are John Hill, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Paul Bates and Richard Lerner, has been termed one of the most useful theoretical positions in the study of adolescence of the past two decades (Coleman and Hendry, 1999). According to Adam et al (1996) and Bronfenbrenner and Lerner (referred to

by Muuss 1996), the strands of the approach can be summarised as follows:

i) There is an ecology, or context, of human development.

This first principle underlines the importance of the environment in a broad sense, referring to the geographical, historical, social and political settings in which the adolescent is living.

ii) There is a continuity in human development.

This principle draws attention to similarities and differences between developmental stages so that the stage of adolescence may be compared with any other transition in the individual's lifespan. This principle also highlights the interrelationship between childhood and adolescence by considering the adolescent stage as a continuation of childhood development.

iii) Individuals and their families exert a reciprocal influence upon each other.

This principle refers to the fact that neither a child nor its family is a static entity. Each grows, develops and changes and, most importantly, influences the other at all times.

iv) A multi-disciplinary approach should be taken to studying human development.

Developmental contextualists place particular stress on this principle and bring together specialists such as biologists, paediatricians, sociologists, ecologists, educationalists and psychiatrists in cooperative projects on human development.

v) Individuals are producers of their own development.

While recognising that human development is subject to a variety of influences, developmental contextualists subscribe to the idea that the individual young person is an 'active agent' in shaping or determining his/her own development.

vi) When studying person-context interaction, the notion of goodness of fit needs to be considered.

The goodness of fit concept takes into account the relationship between the individual and his/her environment and considers to what extent the needs and goals of the person are congruent with the context. The adaptiveness of a developmental outcome does not only rely on the characteristics of the person or on the nature of the social environment. The outcome depends on whether these two aspects fit together, and the study of adolescence should consider both characteristics and the extent to which they are congruent (Coleman and Hendry, 1999).

It should of course be acknowledged that the emerging 'Sociology of Childhood' tradition also treats children and adolescents as active social agents within their families and communities. Researchers such as Allison James, Berry Mayll and Barrie Thomas take the position that children are not merely adults-in-making, the largely passive object of parental concern. Rather, young people should be understood as 'social actors shaping as well as shaped by their circumstances' (James et al, 1998: 6).

3.3.1.5 The anthropological perspective

A wide range of empirical and general descriptive cross-cultural research by anthropologists on adolescent development has significantly increased our overall knowledge of adolescence. This anthropological perspective has foregrounded the significant issues of both diversity and commonality, particularly ethnic and cross-cultural. The representative proponents of this perspective, Schlegel and Barry (1991), have provided an arena for the consideration of the importance of cultural diversity and the role that cultural context plays in the emergence of individual and group differences and universalities. In their terms, social adolescence begins with puberty (menarche, semenarche) and is a time for learning not only new adult roles but also one's situational needs in society. The psychoanalytic perspective views adolescence from a child development perspective, emphasising the psychogenic causes of change. The sociological portrays adolescence as a training period leading to adult social roles and functions and focuses on the external environment, especially on sociogenic causes of behaviour. In contrast, the anthropological approach considers adolescence a crucial time in its own right, with its own significance and meaning and best characterised as a period of 'unlearning and relearning' (Schlegel and Barry, op cit: 8).

Whereas the sociological definition implies that adolescence is a time for learning new social roles in order to extend the repertoire acquired during childhood, the anthropologists emphasise that adolescent development is more than a continuation of the kind of learning begun in childhood. They suggest that adolescence includes the necessary unlearning of some of the attitudinal and behavioural patterns acquired during childhood, since unlearning is crucial if the individual is to move toward independence, autonomy and socialised

sexuality, and is to establish patterns of thought and behaviour consistent with adult roles. As a result of this unlearning, the concomitant processes of reorganisation begin in this period and continue well into adulthood, long after the termination of social adolescence. The stress involved in the reorganising of major attributes and social roles is intensified by major psychological adjustments and the tensions which accompany the physical changes at puberty, making it likely that some social awkwardness and intrafamilial conflict may occur, regardless of national and cultural background. The anthropologists maintain, however, that it is rare for adolescent conflict to escalate into emotional trauma or pathology. Even the nature, duration and intensity of such conflict is variable, depending on the sociocultural context. Significantly, there is no evidence of an inevitable period of 'storm and stress'.

Another major tenet of this approach is the concept of human universals according to which the period of adolescence, specifically referred to as social adolescence, constitutes a universal or near universal stage in the human life cycle. Adolescence is one of four major demarcations (infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) in the human life cycle no matter where in the world it is encountered. The treatment and status of the individual in the community and even within the family changes in identifiable ways for each of these four basically different social stages. Brown (1991) makes a convincing argument for a great number of human universal patterns across different cultures. He claims that all societies recognise a period of social adolescence as a distinct stage which confers a unique status on boys. Most but not all societies also do this for adolescent girls. Social adolescence divides childhood from the full recognition of an individual as an adult by the respective social-cultural criteria for adulthood, e.g. ability to self-support, marriageability, eligibility to take up arms for one's country, etc. The criteria for social adolescence vary for different

cultural groups but their actual existence appears to be universal. As well as universal characteristics, this approach also recognises variations in the specifics of adolescent behaviour in that various social-cultural factors such as social organisation, family structure, economic mode and technology, to name a few, determine adolescent behaviours and values. In all, the importance of cultural context for understanding adolescence is stressed over biological and maturational forces.

3. 2. 2 Reflection of these theories in the Korean context

Korean academic disciplines have approached the definition of adolescence in different ways. Certain Korean scholars associated with the psychoanalytic perspective (Kwon Y.J., 1996: 75; Kwon I.N., 1998: 7) see adolescence as a time for resolving childhood conflicts, learning to control aggressive and sexual impulses and achieving affective detachment from parents. This perspective, often referred to as the 'individuation process', is reflected in Anna Freud's oft-quoted dictum, 'To be normal during the adolescent period is by itself abnormal' (1958 referred to by Muuss, 1996: 368). Conflict with authority figures, especially parents, is considered the norm and unpredictable and anti-social behaviour often a precursor to out-and-out juvenile delinquency. This perspective also reflects that of Griffin in her study of a group of North American young people:

(They) were seen as simultaneously malleable and obstinate, a danger both to themselves and to others. Individual adolescents or specific groups of young people were presented as social problems, and as either actually or potentially capable of terrible upheaval and trauma for 'society'. (1993: 23)

The Korean psychoanalytic position views the decline of adult involvement and the increasing importance of the adolescent peer group as stages in the individuation process. The peer group is thought more likely to encourage antisocial behaviour than to act as a

civilising agent. It is reasoned that when young people spend a considerable amount of time with individuals of their own age more harm than good is likely to come of it. As an aside, I myself found no evidence of anti-social behaviour among the young people who were my informants, certainly nothing which could be described as a 'terrible upheaval and trauma for society'.

Korean academics taking the sociological perspective, in contrast, see adolescence as a period of anticipatory socialisation for adult roles and statuses (Kim U.I., 1995; Park S.H., 1997; Cheong Y.S., 1998). This approach is closely linked to the view that adolescence is dedicated to preparation for adulthood in terms of prospective occupation, marriage and other social roles. This view is implicit in the so-called Korean Youth Charter of 1990 in which adolescents are held up as the promise for the future and subject to protection and regulation (referred to by Cheong Y.S., 1998: 33). It is in line with the position taken by Pearson:

'Youth' is still treated as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself: it is expected to reflect the cycle of booms and troughs in economy; shifts in cultural values over sexuality, morality and family life; and changes in class relations, concepts of nationhood, and in occupational structures. Young people are assumed to hold the key to the nation's future, and the treatment and management of 'youth' is expected to provide the solution to a nation's 'problems', from 'drug abuse', 'hooliganism' and 'teenage pregnancy' to inner city 'riots'. . . The young are assumed to hold the key to the nation's future: if official levels of unemployment rise or the incidence of violent crime increases, this can be attributed to 'problem youth', and a whole series of 'respectable fears' have been dealt with in this way. (1983 referred to by Griffin, op cit: 10).

The parents of my young informants seem to support the idea of an adolescent socialisation process aimed at securing the nation's future, although it is clear that the benefits of the process to their offsprings' own future is of more immediate concern to them. Conceiving of adolescence as a period during which their children prepare themselves for an occupational future and develop into fully-fledged members of society, Korean parents naturally expect

their teenager offspring to relinquish their natural impulses towards hedonistic behaviour in exchange for society's willingness to invest heavily in their future. Indeed this expectation and the set of future-oriented values and assumptions it contains constitute a continuous pressure which weighs heavily on the young people in my study, and is a source of friction between them and their parents.

Yet the turmoil and trauma predicted by the psychoanalytic and sociological perspectives seems conspicuous by its absence, failing to support the notion that adolescence necessarily initiates a period of conflict and crisis. Research, too, provides little support for psychoanalytic and sociological theories. While there may be fluctuations in self-concept during adolescence, there is no evidence to show that any but a small minority of young people experience a serious identity crisis (Bandura, 1972; Siddique and D'Arcy, 1984; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). In most cases relationships with parents are positive and constructive and young people, by and large, do not replace adult values with those espoused by the peer group. In fact, in most situations peer group values appear to be consistent with those of important adults, rather than in conflict with them. Offer (1969, 1975) contends that the period of adolescence is no more stressful, no more conflictual, and no more turbulent than any other period of development and that, if conflicts do arise, they result from external, situational factors. Although a small minority may succumb to disturbance, the great majority of teenagers seem to cope well and show no undue signs of turmoil or stress.

As I will show from my analysis of youthful literacy in Korea, this is also the case in the Korean context. The young people I met in the course of my field studies appeared to be well-adjusted and stable, generally enjoyed good relationships with other family members

and acted in accordance with values and beliefs embraced and supported by adults. While there is clearly some logic in the view that an adolescent who is deprived of adult influence is at a disadvantage in the transition towards maturity (Apter, 1990; Comer, 1993), research evidence simply does not support the myth of the all-powerful peer group and it is still very much an open question as to what effect increasing age segregation has on the socialising process (Coleman and Hendry, 1990: 12).

Diverse perspectives on the storm-and-stress model, including that of biological determinism, have been questioned for failing to bear out the social reality of the majority of adolescents. Although my research is more concerned with the question of what literacy means for adolescents than with the ways in which adolescence is viewed, it is impossible in a study of this kind to ignore the implications which the latter holds for the former. In attempting to conceptualise adolescence it is difficult therefore to avoid the conclusion that the developmental contextualism and anthropological perspectives have more to offer than the psychoanalytic or sociological since they involve a full awareness of the interaction between the adolescent and his/her cultural, historical and social context. Recent social and academic discourse formed around adolescence in Korea, moreover, supports the perspective of adolescent as 'active agent' in shaping his/her own development (see especially the cultural studies of Yun J., 1992; Han S.C., 1998). Indeed, criticism of the limited vision implicit in the original Youth Charter of 1990 led to revisions in October, 1998 acknowledging the right of young people to a defined level of autonomy:

Young people have the right to take control of their own lives and to be respected as human beings and citizens who determine their own future. They shall be respected as autonomous agents, thinking, making decisions and acting of their own free will, and shall be offered the opportunity to participate in the affairs of the nation. They in turn will be expected to acknowledge and respect the value of other lives and to act responsibly as members of their community. Home, school, society and nation shall

provide both the circumstances and an environment which contribute to their well-being and happiness. (cited in Jung Y.S., 1998: 33)

While my research findings support the developmental contextualism and anthropological conceptualisations of adolescence, it should nevertheless be acknowledged that other perspectives are reflected in certain values, assumptions and beliefs upheld by 'interest-holding' adults like teachers and parents. What these are and the extent to which they influence adolescents will be discussed in the relevant chapters.

3.4 Conclusion

As I have tried to show, the underlying theoretical base for my study is the social approach to literacy, which is very much the multi-faceted social dimension of literacy described by Barton and Hamilton:

Literacy is primarily something people do; it is an activity located in the space between thought and text. Literacy does not just reside in people's heads as a set of skills to be learned, and it does not just reside on paper, captured as texts to be analysed. Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people. (1998: 3)

This view of literacy is consistent with the conception of adolescence as socially situated rather than biologically driven. Such a perspective allows for a full consideration of the social and cultural components constituting the literate world of Korean young people and provides the main theoretical framework for my research.

Chapter 4 The methodology underpinning my research

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss my approach to data collection and analysis as well as deal with certain other methodological considerations. As the aim of my research is to explore the literacy practices of young people, I decided that the quantitative approach favoured by survey, dominant in Korean inquiry into reading behaviour (Um H.J., 1995; Kim S.A., 1997; Lee Y.S., 1998), would be inadequate for my purposes. I agree with Cresswell (1998: 17) that a qualitative approach is called for when the nature of the research question is such that: i) a topic needs to be explored; ii) a detailed view of the topic is required in that the wide-angle lens or the distant panoramic shot will not suffice to present answers to the problem, or the close-up view does not exist; and iii) the research question involves studying individuals in their natural setting. My research question, 'What does literacy mean to Korean teenagers?', indeed presumes an in-depth exploration of the literacy taking place in everyday lives. Furthermore, as far as I am aware, this line of inquiry has not been followed to any extent previously in a Korean context.

Having established a qualitative framework for my research inquiry, I draw extensively on the ethnographic mode among qualitative traditions despite a lack of consensus on definition (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). Having its origins in anthropology and in widespread use across various disciplines during the last two decades, ethnography exhibits the following characteristics: i) a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena,

rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them; ii) a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured' data; iii) an investigation of a small number of cases; and iv) an analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions (Atkinson and Hammersley, op cit: 248). In my own research, without attempting to test out any presupposition, I explore various dimensions of literacy as they are experienced by Korean teenagers in their daily lives. This exploration relies primarily on data collected through unstructured interviewing, with the data then being analysed to identify roles and meanings attached to or assigned to literacy practices. This kind of ethnographic study is characterised by Toren as 'the comparative, descriptive analysis of the everyday, of what is taken for granted' (1996: 102).

Insofar as my ethnographic study examines a group's 'observable and learned patterns of behaviour, customs and ways of life' as these are evidenced in its vernacular reading and writing (Harris, 1968 referred to by Creswell, op cit: 58), it can be thought of as a series of case studies. These case studies investigate the literacy-related interactions of a culture-specific group with the object of discerning pervasive patterns. Smith defines a case study as the investigation of a 'bounded system' or case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (1978 quoted in Stake, 1994: 236). The 'boundedness' of my own research reflects the dimension of time (cumulatively four months) and that of number (eleven young people participated in my data collection). My fieldwork in Korea was done in two phases over the two consecutive years of 1999 and 2000 in Kwangju, Korea's fifth largest city with a population of 1.3 million (1997 census).

4. 2 First phase of research fieldwork

4. 2. 1 Criteria for participant selection

In order to gain a preliminary understanding of the vernacular literacy practices engaged in by Koreans I carried out the first phase of my fieldwork in January 1999. This initial fieldwork aimed to establish issues and to give me a general picture to supplement my own experience of the kinds of reading and writing engaged in by parents and their teenage children. Because of the limited time at my disposal, I sought out subjects who would allow me easy access to their lives. From previous experience with Korean residents in the U.K., I had learned that the most effective way to establish contact for such an investigation would be through personal contact and connections. Although my own experience as a school teacher would no doubt facilitate such contact, I decided not to seek informants using my school connections. My reasoning here was that there would be a risk of my being seen as a representative of the educational system, thus making 'biased' data more likely and reducing the opportunity for a closer examination of my subjects' everyday life outside the school context. I felt that locating potential subjects through non-school channels would serve my purposes better.

One of my relatives had teenage boys herself and through her own social network I was able to make contact with other parents who had teenage children. For my selection, age, gender and socio-economic background were all considerations. I favoured teenagers who were still in high school or who were about to start university (ages 16-19), aiming for a balanced gender mix as well as a representative selection from the social spectrum in terms of family

income. In the event, I was forced to compromise on the latter criterion in view of my overarching need to gain unfettered access to a reasonable number of informants within the time frame at my disposal. My research participants came largely from middle-class business and professional family background. I chose three families, namely Chun, Lee and Jang (for details of my informants please refer to Appendix 1). All the Chun and Lee family members participated, but in the Jang family only the children were involved. I conducted eleven interviews with the children both individually and jointly with siblings together. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and half and was audio-tape recorded. I had chosen January to conduct my fieldwork on the assumption that the Korean school winter holiday would make my young informants more available. Fortunately, this did indeed prove to be the case.

4. 2. 2 Approach to data collection

4. 2. 2. 1 Ethnographic interviews

As already indicated, time constraints and the nature of my inquiry led to my choice of the interview as the main vehicle for collecting data. In this section I will explain how I went about these interviews. As contact with my young subjects was initially through their parents, I thought it appropriate to offer some inducement for them to participate. I therefore proposed to give free English instruction in return for their permission to conduct interviews. This seemed to meet with everyone's approval and so my sessions began with a 'lesson' and continued with the interview. As the offer of lessons was made more in deference to parental interests than to those of the children, I decided that the lesson content should as far as possible be chosen by the students themselves so as to ensure a positive atmosphere in the

succeeding interviews. If, as was the case with some of them, they seemed to prefer to leave content decisions to me, I tried to choose pop culture themes likely to be of intrinsic interest to young people of their age. In the event I was pleasantly surprised that our conversations led further afield than I had expected. In particular, there were many questions about various aspects of my life in Britain and I was able to make comparisons with Korea which my informants seemed to find of great interest. The informal and friendly atmosphere generated by the preliminary English 'lesson' served as a very helpful ice-breaker at the beginning of each meeting and seemed to make the interview itself much more relaxed and spontaneous. Indeed, Spradley's comments on ethnographic interviews draw attention to the researcher's need to maintain rapport with her informants:

It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants. Exclusive use of these new ethnographic elements, or introducing them too quickly, will make interviews become like a formal interrogation. Rapport will evaporate, and informants may discontinue their cooperation.

(1979 quoted in Flick, 1998: 93)

Visiting my informants in their own homes provided me with numerous opportunities to see at firsthand aspects of their literacy interests which would have been denied me in other settings. I was thus enabled to formulate questions about what my subjects read and wrote, at least in the preliminary stages, by reference to the literacy materials displayed in the interview venues - sitting room and bedroom for the most part. Typically, I gained acceptance from the young people after the first session with them, to the extent that they allowed me free access to all the spaces containing their literacy-related materials, including bookshelves, cupboards and desk drawers. Going through those spaces facilitated the interview process of questioning when, how, with whom and why the reading and writing activities of my informants took place and having access to the wide range of artefacts used

by my informants in their literacy activities meant that we could refer to relevant material firsthand as the need arose. Often this instant access enabled me to establish further lines of inquiry about something specific or to extend the discussion to other areas signalled by my informants as significant to their literacies. Inevitably, this kind of free-ranging spontaneity meant that my interviews ended up being very unstructured. The original plan was to ask my informants a list of sequential questions about their literacy history, for example when they started to read and write, who helped them, and what kinds of reading or writing they had done since they were very young. In fact I had planned to use a list of themes from Barton and Hamilton (1998) to give structure to my inquiry (see Appendix 2). I started off with some of these questions but quickly found that the interview flowed better if I allowed other topics of my informants' choosing to intrude and take the interview wherever they led. I referred to my original list between interviews, of course, comparing and contrasting the interview contents across all my informants and reinstating any significant omission at a subsequent session. This method had the effect of uncovering a vast range of unexpected data across an enormous variety of literacy domains.

When it came time to interview the parents, I had already visited their homes several times for meetings with their children and had had opportunities to observe the display of literacy material there. This helped me to formulate relevant questions concerning the older generation's literacies. I had to do these two-hour interviews at weekends, the only time these busy parents could spare me. Again I used the literacy related questionnaire produced by Barton and Hamilton in their study of a British local community (op cit) as the basis for my interview, but I was able to supplement this from my own observations of the contents of my informants' homes. Despite the structure I had planned for these interviews, they also ran off

on side tracks which I had not bargained for. At this point I still had a cross-generational approach in mind for my research, a plan that was maintained until the second stage of my fieldwork.

4. 2. 2. 2 Other data collection methods

Wolcott has identified three major modes through which qualitative researchers gather their data: participant observation (experiencing), interviewing (enquiring), and studying materials prepared by others (examining) (1994: 10). Apart from interviewing I also undertook participant observation with the Chuns since I stayed with the family during the fieldwork period. Although one view of participant observation holds that 'because we cannot study the social world without being a part of it, all social research is a form of participant observation' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, quoted in Tedlock, 2000), I use the term more narrowly. I see participant observation as one particular variant among various qualitative approaches. I need to stress that my observation included literacy-related activities themselves as well as the products of literacy. Any individual elements derived from either of them, once observed, were further studied by subsequent interviewing. Observation to a certain extent was a means to provide me with themes or issues of literacy to pursue by direct questioning. My rationale for making such extended use of direct enquiry was based not only on the time factor but also on the nature of everyday literacy. The actual moment at which a personal literacy activity occurred was not observable most of the time. For example, personal writing (the writing of letters and journals) was typically done when the writer was alone in his/her bedroom. Unless the moment was intentionally interrupted, the literacy activity would not be observable. Asking permission to observe in this case would be contrary to the ethos of 'naturalistic observation' recognised by social scientists

(Angrosino and Perez, 2000: 673). Thus participant observation, while a prototypical orientation for ethnographic studies (Wolcott, 2001), played a secondary role in the investigation of my research topic.

I did, however, accompany two of my informants, Wooil and Jin, to a community and a university library respectively, places which were significant to the two young people in the provision of both recreational reading materials and reading space. As a result of my role there as silent observer doing 'focused observation' on the library users in general, I later explored with my informants such issues as what they read when they visited public libraries, how often they would visit them, who they would come with, the reasons for their visit, and so on. In such settings observation initiated by the researcher's role as 'complete observer' (Gold, 1958 referred to by Angrosino and Perez, op cit: 677) extended to interviews at the location at which the respective literacy took place. As Lofland points out (1971 referred to by Fontana and Frey, 2000), in-depth interviewing and participant observation go hand in hand. My observation in this case provided first-hand experience about the kinds of literacy resources used by my informants and resulted in either a reinforcement or modification of my own cultural awareness.

In accordance with Wolcott's recommendations (2001: 88), I gathered together various literacy materials from diverse archival sources. These included copies of magazines and comic books, samples of artefacts such as sticker photos, catalogue letters and notes given to my informants by their friends - items which my young subjects were willing to let me have. For future reference and analysis I also photographed other materials, including publications in their entirety and individual pages of specific artefacts such as diary entries and magazine

and newspaper clippings. Analysis of this initial data enabled me to form an overall picture of the literacy practices engaged in by my informants and to note issues deserving further exploration and investigation.

4. 2. 3 Explaining research purpose

Spradley recommends that researchers begin their ethnographic interviews with 'ethnographic explanations' in which:

. . .the interviewer explains the project (why an interview at all) or the noting of certain statements (why he or she notes what); these are completed by everyday language explanations (with the aim that the informants present relations in their language), interview explanations (making clear why this specific form of talking is chosen, with the aim that the informant get involved) and explanations for certain (types of) questions, introducing the way of asking explicitly. . .
(1979 quoted in Flick, op cit: 93)

In my own case this approach proved insufficient. Before I began my interviews, I tried to give my informants a bird's eye view of what I was undertaking in my research. At first it seemed that my explanation was only partly successful in getting them to make sense of my research purpose. During the interviews themselves and in follow-up discussions with my informants, I began to realise that part of my lack of success had to do with their perceptions of the nature of academic inquiry. It was difficult for my informants, the adults in particular, to fathom why anyone would be interested in their everyday literacy, let alone choose it as a study for post-graduate degree purposes. This did not fit with their generalised notions that academics focused on abstract ideas and that academics in my own field would somehow have an educational value orientation; that we would be interested in ways of improving school reading instruction, for example, rather than concentrating on such trivial questions as what people read and wrote in their free time. As a result my informants tended to 'make

sense' of what they obviously felt was lacking in my account of my research purposes by placing their own interpretation on my work. For my part, my informants' reactions to my studies and their perceptions of what constituted fit and proper subjects for academic research gave me a heightened awareness of the low esteem in which vernacular literacy is held, at least in a Korean context. This awareness confronted me with a sense of the discrepancy between my own burgeoning conceptualisation of literacy and the dominant norms constructed in Korea, and had the unfortunate effect of sowing doubts in my own mind concerning the value of what I was doing. I will discuss in a subsequent section the discomfort I experienced in my later fieldwork as a result of this mismatch between reality and expectation.

4.3 Second phase of research fieldwork

4.3.1 Selection of participants

After analysing the data collected during the first phase of my fieldwork, I realised that it was essential for me to go back and do a more in-depth study. I returned to Korea to carry out this second and longer phase of fieldwork a year after my first. I did interviews on a regular basis during March, April and May of 2000, all the while gathering relevant Korean academic literature. Although I had hoped to re-establish contact with all the young people who had participated in my earlier fieldwork, this proved impossible for one reason or another. Only two of my original informants in fact, Jin and Heesoo, could spare the time from their studies, so I had to look for new informants. Again age, gender and socio-economic background were taken into account as in the earlier phase. The relative who had assisted me in my original

search for research participants helped put me in touch with two more teenagers, Aeran and Jongwon, through whom I was able to contact a further three, a girl (Aeran's friend Yuni) and two boys (Jongwon's friends Dan and Hwa). This process is similar to 'network sampling' in that nominated individuals are asked to identify further sample members (Arber, 2001: 63). It can also be viewed as the 'theoretical sampling' of grounded theory in that the intention of further sampling aims at the elaboration of a conceptually rich, dense and contextually grounded account (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Pigeon, 1996). However, meeting these young people was not easy because their first semester was already in progress and they had limited time available. Fortunately my female informants had not yet signed up for after school private lessons in English (very much the norm among seniors), so the arrangement whereby I offered them free English lessons in return for their help in my research met with ready approval. For the next three months I met Aeran and Yuni twice a week, once for an individual session with each and once for a joint session. The joint sessions provided opportunities for joint interviewing which turned up a useful and unlooked for bonus. As the two girls were good friends, they were each able to jog one another's memory concerning the details of particular literacy events or experiences. I also resumed my regular meetings with Jin.

Unfortunately, my new male informants proved very difficult to pin down. On weekdays their private lessons after school meant that they came home after ten o'clock at night. The only free time they had was on Saturday afternoons (school is in session on Saturday mornings) and on Sundays, and naturally enough there was a certain amount of resistance on their part to becoming involved with one more 'academic' claim on their precious free time. In fact I managed only three meetings with them and after fruitless follow-up attempts finally

had to give up. With my previous informant Heesoo, too, I managed only three interviews since he had moved away to university and came home only once or twice a month. The lack of male participation in my research meant that my exploration of gender issues in particular was primarily focused on female literacies. Although I have tried to identify causes for the disappointing lack of response from my male informants, including speculating on whether it had anything to do with my own gender or even with the nature of my inquiry itself, it seems abundantly clear that the boys' preoccupation with their studies both during and after regular school hours was a contributing factor. Perhaps if I had been able to establish a greater rapport with the boys through having known them longer, I would have been more successful in keeping them as 'clients'. Despite this, however, I managed during the second phase of my research to conduct a total of twenty-six interviews with my young informants and an interview each with two parents, Mrs Kim (Aeran's mother) and Mrs Park (Yuni's mother).

4. 3. 2 Approach to data collection (second phase)

As in the first phase of my fieldwork, I used the ethnographic interview as my main method of gathering data. With the experience I had already gained I felt confident about exploring issues with my young informants in a much more systematic way. In the process of analysing the data from my earlier fieldwork I had established several categories of inquiry around which I structured my interviews. That is not to say that my investigation was bounded by a fixed format. As the approach of my inquiry was to accommodate any and all components of everyday literacy, I did not set out with a predetermined list of questions. But by using my own short notes as a jumping-off point I initiated the interview and then let my informants

come up with the issues they thought relevant. In this way it was possible for my interviews to explore both pre-established and new themes. Moreover, in this phase of my fieldwork, my plan to examine significant literacy activities in depth required me to carry out data analysis while the collection process was in full swing. Wiseman refers to these concomitant strands as the 'constant interplay of data gathering and analysis . . . at the heart of qualitative research' (1974 quoted in Bryman and Burgess, 1994: 217). While the initial stages of this second phase of fieldwork were devoted to a fuller examination of themes uncovered in the earlier phase, several literacy practices not formerly addressed - electronic literacies related to computer-mediated communication and mobile phone interaction among these - also formed part of this second phase. As new themes emerged from the process of data collection, a further exploration of themes derived from prior data became inevitable. This process continued until I began to realise that my database on teenage literacy alone was substantial enough to warrant its own exclusive research study. At some point during my second phase of fieldwork, therefore, I made a decision to make the literacy of my young informants the central focus of my research and to use that of their parents only where it contributed to a better understanding of the young people.

I transcribed the interviews as I went along in order to do a preliminary analysis, while planning to do a fuller analysis on completion of data collection. Typically I would spend up to three hours transcribing one hour of interview and then do a careful examination of the transcript for items requiring further investigation. This would sometimes involve equipping myself with additional knowledge in order to take a line of inquiry to the next stage. For example, when I discovered that several of my female informants were avid readers of romance comics I wanted to know why. However, that simple question in itself failed to elicit

clues to the importance teenage girls appeared to attach to that medium. I felt, therefore, that I should read some romance comics myself in order to be able to talk intelligently about their contents and to formulate an approach which would draw out my young informants and help me understand what features of romance comics attracted young girls to them. This was no simple task. In the process of reading sample comics of the genre, I felt I should do a certain amount of textual analysis. Although I was then in a position to formulate issues for discussion, I still had to decide how to conduct my inquiry. For example should I use leading questions or should I employ a more open approach which demonstrated my familiarity with the content of the comics, but left the actual direction of the discussion to my informant? I spent a week with several volumes of comics borrowed from a local reading rental shop in order to complete what I felt was a basic minimum of three stories, since each story would run in instalments over several volumes. This procedure, coupled with the three or four interviews I conducted in the interim, made for a busy work week. Although I tried to maintain a healthy scepticism towards my data gathering in order not to end up with a body of work which supported a preconceived framework for the inquiry I was engaged in, at times I found it difficult to bear in mind the question posed by Wolcott, "Am I attending as carefully to what *is* going on as I am attending to what I *think* is going on?" (1994: italics in original, 21).

4. 3. 3 Other aspects of data collection

4. 3. 3. 1 Participant observation

Realising early on that many of my informants' literacies were played out against backdrops

other than home and school, I made a conscious effort to visit a selection of these locations in order to gain the perspective needed to study literacy in its broader context. In the discussion of my first research phase I have already referred to my role as silent observer in the libraries frequented by two of my informants. My informants were also regular customers of commercial PC rooms where a computer-mediated communication facility is provided for a small fee, so I accompanied my young friends to some of their favorite venues to find out how they made use of such facilities. I also visited these PC rooms alone to observe how other young people used them. I then began to access some of the websites I had seen young people using in order to gain a better understanding of the appeal they held for the young. I explored not only commercial websites but also those of school, university and church. This helped me to formulate themes for discussion when I met my informants, to get their feedback on chatroom topics and to find out what they felt about these new modes of interaction. It became apparent that electronic literacies played such a significant role in the lives of my informants that a quantum leap on my part would be necessary if I were to even scratch the surface of their involvement.

My informants were also regular customers of reading rental shops, so I visited the outlet where Yuni, Aeran and her sister Serim would often go to take out books. Comic books were the stock in trade of this particular shop but it is also from here that Aeran would borrow romantic fiction titles. I will discuss my particular experiences in a subsequent section but here it will suffice to mention that my visits gave me a much clearer picture of the development of the rather unique medium which is the comic book and what young people look for in it. I also formed some useful 'demographic' impressions of the shop's clientele and their reading preferences.

In addition I visited some of the bookshops which my informants frequented. Even in the short time that I had been abroad studying, certain noticeable changes had taken place in the culture of these bookshops. No longer were chairs and stools provided for browsers, although I noticed that their absence did not discourage young people from their former habit of using such shops for extended reading and as a place to meet friends. Now youngsters sat around on the floor among the stacks and it needed careful attention to avoid stepping on them!

4. 4 Role of researcher

4. 4. 1 Perceptions of researcher's role

I have already described how I initially gained access to my informants, presenting myself as a researcher of young people's reading and writing practices who was willing to offer English 'lessons' in return for their time and effort. Nevertheless in the eyes of my informants I was someone of their parents' generation and thus faced the challenge of establishing rapport with these young people and gaining their trust. Since our meetings had been arranged for the most part through their mothers, I could predict that I would have to go through some sort of assessment or weighing-up period before my informants would feel comfortable about letting me into their lives to any extent, let alone revealing to me what they normally would not involve their parents in. For example, the passing of notes in class may well constitute a literacy activity of more than passing interest to the researcher, yet it is a practice which lacks legitimacy in the eyes of the educational establishment and often results both in disciplinary action at school and censure at home. In order to discuss such a subject with me openly, and

certainly in terms of their own participation in it, my informants would need to assure themselves that I would not be judgemental about what constituted appropriate or inappropriate behaviour. Indeed, during a discussion of student life in Britain my group of three male informants 'tested' my intentions by bringing up the subject of smoking, presumably to see how I would react to an issue which usually arouses strong feelings. I responded as objectively as I could, telling them as much as I knew about the prevalence of smoking among British young people and the prevailing social norms surrounding the practice. My account seemed to satisfy the boys that I did not embrace the authoritarian attitude in the matter that they would have come to expect from their parents and school authorities, and as a result I found them gradually more willing to open up to me about their literacy activities.

An exploration of sexual issues with my young female informants required a similar sensitive approach since I was keen to avoid the risk of causing embarrassment on a subject which young females are unlikely to discuss outside their peer group. It is a fact that in many Korean families there is scant discussion between mother and daughter of the physical and psychological changes which take place at puberty. Knowing this, I expected my informants to be reluctant to express their views on sexual issues, for example what they thought about the sexual activity depicted in romance comics and in fan fiction. I decided, therefore, to adopt an open and liberal stance in the hope that this would allay their anxiety that any 'frank' comments they made would reflect negatively on their own sexual image. In this I was guided by the philosophy of the so-called 'reflexive approach' to interviews (Dingwall, 1997 quoted in Fontana and Frey, 2000: 664) which postulates that:

. . . if the interview is a social encounter, then, logically, it must be analyzed in the same way as any

other social encounter. The products of an interview are the outcome of a socially situated activity where the responses are passed through the role-playing and impression management of both the interviewer and the respondent.

Indeed, my interviews proceeded along with my growing realisation that interviewers are not the mythical, neutral tools envisioned by survey research, but rather increasingly active participants in interactions with respondents. These interviews, moreover, are the negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents, shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place. As Schwandt (1997) notes, 'it has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent' (quoted in Fontana and Frey, *op cit*: 663). Assumptions and notions were attached to the interaction between myself and my interviewees and these underwent a process of modification as we negotiated our identities. Yet in the process of eliciting information about the literacy worlds of my young informants, it is not absolutely clear to me how successful I was at avoiding 'impression management' and the creating of 'an essentially monologic view of reality' (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997 quoted in Fontana and Frey, *op cit*: 664), since I could not invest sufficient time to create the 'we-relationship' which Seidman (1997) and others recommend.

4. 4. 2 Power relations between researcher and research informants

The power dynamic between researcher and informants, often considered a significant factor in a research study, revealed itself in an unusual way in my interviews. Much of the time my quest placed me in the role of 'novice' and my young informants as 'experts'. This was particularly true in the case of digital technologies. As an observer of the facility with which these young people interacted with those technologies and of the extent to which they

integrated them into their lives, I realised from the beginning that I would be subjected to a very steep learning curve. I could see that a strong correlation existed between age and participation in the technological revolution. The fact that I was positioned as learner and relied on the feedback I received from my informants on my efforts to master what to them was a familiar medium helped to balance the power dynamic between us. I was as gratified as perhaps any learner may be when one of the youngsters told me that my 'surfing' attempts were coming along very well - considering my age, of course!

I was aware, however, of an asymmetrical power relationship between me and my informants' parents. Originally I had planned to interview some of them in order to further explore to what extent parental and societal attitudes, values and beliefs impinged upon the literacy practices of their offspring. Then I learned from her children that one of the mothers was nervous about meeting me for this purpose, despite my earlier explanation of the objectives of my research. It seemed that she felt she would be being assessed on her ability as a parent to provide a nurturing literacy environment for her children. Although I think I managed to dispel some of the mother's initial nervousness on this point, she nevertheless made it clear during our conversation that she felt the presence of a power differential between herself as housewife and me as researcher from a British university. Indeed, my academic 'identity' had a marked effect on my relationship with the parents in general. They obviously felt that I, as someone with expertise in education, and by extension in the upbringing of children, would be the ideal person to consult on their offspring's 'problem' behaviour: What could be done about a daughter's excessive interest in romance comics? What steps should be taken to get a child to keep her room tidy? I was even considered a fount of knowledge on the subject of the best Western universities to send their children.

While I was flattered by the respect they accorded my position, I ultimately found it difficult to achieve the 'closeness' necessary to get the parents to confide in me on more personal matters.

4.5 Difficulties experienced during data collection

I have already mentioned how I had to contend with a lack of understanding and even puzzlement concerning the nature of my research on the part of the parents, who had their own perceptions of what constituted appropriate themes for academic inquiry. I encountered similar puzzled, at times suspicious, reactions in the reading rental shops I visited, where it obviously seemed odd that a woman of my age should be interested in borrowing titles aimed at teenagers. Comics, particularly those aimed at a young male readership which tend to feature copious amounts of violence and sex, have received rather a bad press in Korea of late, so as someone old enough to have teenage children herself my own apparent interest in the genre would understandably make people curious. They might even - horror of horrors - suspect that I was borrowing titles for my own children to read, a reaction that would certainly raise questions concerning my fitness to be a parent in the first place! Thus it was that I decided to 'come clean' with the owner of one such shop by revealing my research interest in the comics. I am not sure that even this clarification made complete sense to the shop owner, but in any event it made her more receptive to my enquiries concerning the reading interests of her young clientele and her experience helped me gain some helpful insights. As someone who had been in the business for more than ten years, this woman had made her own observations on the issue of gender-related reading interests and confirmed that there was a strict gender division at work in the selection of material. She was also adamant that, despite the general belief to the contrary, there was no correlation between the

regular reading of comics and low academic performance. Indeed her experience was quite the reverse: abler students tended to be her best customers! Intriguingly, one of the mothers I interviewed had said the same thing.

The photocopying of comic books for my own reference purposes also posed its own problems. Being without a work 'base' where I could make photocopies undisturbed, I took my bookmarked comic books to a stationery shop which had a photocopy machine. Such shops are a mecca for school children, so the first time I started to photocopy I was surrounded by youngsters, some of whom made scathing remarks at the sight of a grown woman actually making photocopies of a comic book. I realised that if I wanted to escape this unwanted attention I would have to time my photocopy visits to avoid school breaks! The shop owner was hardly less encouraging. I could feel the disapproval he felt of this woman who was copying even the pages containing artwork of a frankly sexual nature. My attempts to clarify my intent were largely to no avail as the owner was obviously unable to comprehend why a post-graduate student would want to research such a banal theme as the comic book. These rather uncomfortable experiences led me to take my photocopying to a print shop, where I was determined to ignore any and all reactions to what I was doing! The incidents I have described nevertheless do demonstrate commonly-held perceptions of what is appropriate reading for whom within the larger purview of social and cultural values and assumptions. It seemed totally improbable to a layperson that what I was doing could be dignified with the label 'academic research'. Perceptions of appropriacy in this respect apparently encompass a limited degree of disciplinary diversity and range of topics outside which the concerns of a lone researcher like myself simply defy rational explanation.

4. 6 Analysing the data

Before I explain how I analysed my data, I will briefly describe the database I set up and the ways in which I handled it. As I have already mentioned, my primary data consisted of interview transcripts. I transcribed these tape-recorded interviews in longhand as I did not have access to a Korean word-processing programme. Besides, it would have taken me just as long to type the material as it took me to write everything out in longhand (My typing speed in Korean is not wonderful). There were forty-four interviews - sixteen from my first phase of fieldwork and twenty-eight from my second - each on average consisting of five thousand words. In addition to the interview transcripts, I kept a file of field notes containing observations, impressions and reactions which I wrote immediately following each interview, and during or after each observation - those at PC rooms, reading rental shops and libraries, for example - when my memory was fresh. My research diary also forms part of my database. Here I kept notes of the discussion themes and questions I would use with my informants at each interview, as well as other details such as website addresses and examples of text messages given to me by my informants. As already mentioned, I also kept a collection of artefacts and documents relating to the content of interviews. Sometimes it made sense to photograph the bulkier of these for ease of transport and future access. Finally, there is a body of data of the type noted by Sanjek (1990), and described by Barton and Hamilton (op cit) as:

... headnotes - the memories and interpretations which remain in our [*the researcher's*] heads and which never reach the written form.
(the latter: p. 68: italics inserted by me)

4. 6. 1 Analytical methods

I had originally planned to use one of the qualitative analysis software packages such as

Atlas-Ti to aid in the process of analysing my data. Unfortunately at the time I was doing my analysis, programmes of this kind were not available in the Korean language. However, in order to explore the potential of this kind of software, I translated several of my interview transcripts from Korean into English on the computer. I quickly discovered that the translation itself involved a tremendous amount of interpretation and was enormously time-consuming. Apart from the painstaking process of identifying literacy related issues, making sense in English of the interviews themselves required a great deal of time and focussed concentration. Even though I knew I would need to translate extracts from my data for the final writing product, until I produced that final account I wanted to keep everything in its original state. I realised that to translate the interview transcripts in their entirety was beyond a single researcher's ability within the time limit imposed for the completion of the dissertation. I therefore decided to give up the idea of facilitating my research process with a computer-assisted programme and to stay in manual mode. As it turned out, the translation experience was helpful in showing me how transferral across languages complicates the interpretation process.

As far as its approach to data analysis and collection is concerned, my research owes its elaboration to the grounded theory method. Although there are differences in the epistemological stance among proponents of this method, reflected in early positivism (represented by Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and constructivism (represented by Charmaz, 2000), it is generally agreed that 'grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analysing data to build middle range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data' (Charmaz, op cit: 509). Specified as analytical strategies, not data collection methods, grounded theory methods include (a) a simultaneous collection and

analysis of data; (b) a two-step data coding process; (c) comparative methods; (d) sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas; and (e) integration of the theoretical framework (Charmaz, op cit: 511). In terms of overall structure I decided not to adopt aspects of grounded theory procedure such as axial and selective coding, nor the detailed memoing which is a prior stage of the final account. Nevertheless, by describing how I processed my data I hope to show that grounded theory clearly underpins my data analysis procedures.

I have mentioned that my data collection was based on a constant interplay between data analysis and collection: the criterion of constant comparison which is in accordance with grounded theory. My initial analysis in situ in Korea preceded a major analysis on my return to Britain and was carried out following several practical strategies.

1. In the first stage I read and re-read the transcripts while making notes, an activity Barton and Hamilton (1998: 69) call 'memoing'. As my research examines many of the same literacy themes across a broad range of literacy activities engaged in by my informants, I was able to identify themes I had already been aware of, as well as new ones which surfaced through my fieldwork.

2. In order to get a better understanding of each individual's literacy world, I then coded and re-coded my data. As Bryman and Burgess note, coding is considered 'a key process since it serves to organize the copious notes, transcripts or documents that have been collected and also represents the first step in the conceptualization of the data' (1994: 218). Richards and Richards refer to two kinds of coding: 'coding for retrieval of text segments' and 'open coding for theory generation' (1994: 157). Using software support (NUDIST), these researchers

further describe the former as indexing for retrieval purposes. Since my own analysis was manually generated, open coding was more relevant for my purposes. According to grounded theorists (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser, 1978), open coding represents the gradual building up of categories out of data, also characterised as 'the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 61)

Although coding is associated with the cutting and pasting of chunks of transcript to fit preconceived categories (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994), such was not the case with my own coding procedure. Since I had decided to do my analysis without the aid of software, my interview transcripts retained their moorings by remaining in their original context. This openness facilitated the process of continuous review and expansion of the codes so as to develop a conceptual framework. I arrived at this in several stages. First I made a literacy matrix, with the names of my informants listed vertically and the relevant literacy aspects of each listed on the horizontal axis. To further flesh out this matrix along its horizontal axis I added simplified coded descriptions for each aspect under each informant, together with accompanying references to the dates and pages in the interview transcripts to which the descriptions applied. Consisting of ten A3 sheets attached together, this matrix was helpful in providing a literacy overview covering all my informants. Through a process of synthesis between my preconceived notions of patterning and the evidence presented by my data, I assigned each of the literacy aspects thus identified into one of four umbrella categories: gender, power relations, digital technologies, general patterns of literacy and other issues. These categories were further elaborated as required. Glasser and Strauss note the way in which data comparison leads to an emergent category which shortly starts to generate theoretical properties of the category:

The analyst starts thinking in terms of the full range of types or continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, its relation to other categories, and its other properties. (op cit: 106)

This is an interpretational process which is both the starting point and the culmination of qualitative inquiry (Wolcott, 1994) and involves constant travel between data and theory or speculation. Through my successive reviews of the coded interview transcripts the categories gradually grew in size. Under general patterns of literacy, for example, I identified six major themes, each of which occupied up to two sheets containing an account of literacy activities pertinent to that theme and indicating who was involved in the activities. I then added brief notes to each activity with the intention of drawing attention to any similarities and differences across informants, and, in order to facilitate subsequent referencing, I inserted the dates and page numbers of relevant information next to the name to which they applied. I further coded and numbered the data from other sources under the relevant categories and added them with different colour pens. Since some of the secondary source data was substantial, however, it needed separate coding and sorting and in such cases I made separate sub-charts.

3. Selection is a crucial process along the way towards rendering the final account. In order to choose the most significant features of a literacy phenomenon, I repeatedly reviewed that phenomenon across the interview transcripts and other sourced data. At the same time I looked for artefacts or documents which afforded the greatest insight into the phenomenon, a process which Wolcott describes as follows:

The critical task in qualitative research is . . . to 'can' (i.e. get rid of) most of the data you accumulate. That requires constant winnowing, including decisions about data not worth entering in the first place, regardless of how easy that might be to do. The trick is to discover essences and then to reveal those essences with sufficient context, yet not become mired in trying to include everything that might possibly be described. . . (2001: 44)

There were indeed many such decisions of the kind that Wolcott refers to since I often had a range of exemplifying data on the same phenomenon and making a choice among them was not always straightforward. I had continually to bear in mind Wolcott's dictum concerning the impossibility of telling the whole story and the need for 'creating a story-within-a-story in which the essence (but not the detail) of the whole is revealed or reflected in microcosm.' (1994: 19)

The fact that I was doing my analysis manually, and there was a limit to the amount of data processable in my head at any one time, meant that I could not afford to wait until the completion of my analysis before I began writing. Thus, once I had completed my preliminary categorisation, I focused on a single category to work on in depth, constructing the subsequent detailed charts. Then I would write up the chapter on my findings in that category and the writing process continued the process of interpretation already begun. At times I had to attempt to conceptualise themes about which I had little theoretical knowledge. My exploration of gender and of digital technology, for example, demanded more background information than I possessed in order for me to interpret the data covering these themes in a satisfactory manner. In such cases, after doing my initial analysis, I familiarised myself with the relevant literature on the subject before once again going back to my data.

My approach of moving to and fro between data and theory, which facilitated the structuring of my data and enabled me to expand on my themes, had the effect described by Bulmer (1979) in that:

... what appears to be the 'discovery' or 'emergence' of concepts and theory is in reality the result of a

constant interplay between data and the researcher's developing conceptualizations, a 'flip-flop' between ideas and the research experience.
(referred to by Pigeon, 1996: 82)

The ideas in my case were developed by my increasing theoretical knowledge facilitating the interpretation of my research experience; theory provided the framework for analysis and interpretation by contextualising the themes examined in my research and linking them up to broader issues. Thus, data analysis, writing and theory are not linear and discrete: analysis is entwined with writing and theory and results in further acts of interpretation.

4. 6. 2 Validity and reliability

There are multiple perspectives regarding the definition of verification in qualitative research. Researchers who oppose the continued use of positivist terms such as validity and reliability propose alternative terms. Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, contend that 'trustworthiness' can be established by adhering more to naturalistic axioms and adopting terms such as 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability'. Eisner (1991) also addresses the 'credibility' of qualitative research by constructing standards such as structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy. Creswell argues that the term 'verification' is more adequate than 'validity' in that 'verification underscores qualitative research as a distinct approach, a legitimate mode of inquiry in its own right.' (1998: 201). Other authors (Silverman, 2000; Altheide and Johnson, 1994; Wolcott, 1990) favour conventional terms. As my concern lies in establishing procedural thoroughness in my research rather than discussing concepts (although I am fully aware that the two are linked to philosophical stance), I will follow terminological convention by using 'validity' and 'reliability'.

It has been argued that validity in a qualitative study is a function of the authenticity of the research findings:

Truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomenon to which it refers. (Hammersley, 1990 quoted by Silverman, 2000: 175).

Validity is clearly formulated in the following question: 'Are these findings sufficiently authentic (isomorphic to some reality, trustworthy, related to the way others construct their social worlds) that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?' (Guba and Lincoln, 2000: 178)

In order to advance a convincing claim that my findings are genuinely based on a critical investigation of all my data and are not dependent on a few well-chosen examples, I subjected my research data to the process of triangulation, described by Stake as follows:

Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But, acknowledging that no observation or interpretation are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen. (2000: 444)

In order to 'identify different ways' I collected data from a variety of sources. As I have mentioned elsewhere, my datasets derive from various methods such as interviewing and participant observation and contain a range of different data, including artefacts and documents in both print and electronic mode. As already described, I made additional efforts to ensure validity by employing the constant comparative method in much the same way as grounded theorists do, namely: i) by comparing different people; ii) by comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time; iii) by comparing incident with incident; and iv) by comparing data with category (Charmaz, 1983, 2000; Glaser, 1978, 1992). For Silverman this method entails 'moving from small to larger datasets' (2000: 179),

the movement to and fro between different parts of my data, between data and categories and between data and exemplars resulting in 'comprehensive data treatment' (Silverman, op cit: 180).

Although respondent validation has been suggested as an important stage in confirming the validity of research findings, practical considerations made it impossible for me to go through this stage. Not only were my informants difficult of access in terms of distance but there is also the complicating factor that my findings are in English. Even if it was possible to make a Korean back-translation available to them (and it is debatable that such a rendering would be worth the effort), I would hesitate to intrude further on my informants' goodwill and time.

The issue of reliability in qualitative research is related to both the data collected and any succeeding interpretations placed on it by the researcher. These interpretations depend to a great degree on the accuracy with which the transcribing of the recording and the documenting of data were carried out in the first place. Concerning note-taking during observation, Kirk and Miller (1986) and Silverman (1993) have suggested the use of certain conventions, for which Flick provides the rationale that:

... the genesis of the data needs to be explicated in a way that makes it possible to check what is a statement of the subject on the one hand and where the researcher's interpretation begins on the other.
.. (1998: 224)

In my own observations I followed Silverman's precepts (op cit) to the extent of attempting to separate emic (my informants') utterances or concepts from etic (my own) in my fieldnotes. The fact that my recording equipment was sensitive and precise made me confident that my

transcriptions were accurate. As might have been expected, of course, the presence of recording equipment caused my informants some initial nervousness but they seemed to get over this as our interviews progressed. Each time I tried to position the equipment as unobtrusively as possible; its small size and flexibility helped in this respect.

Hammersley provides some further criteria of reliability:

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions.
(Hammersley, 1992 quoted by Silverman, 2000: 175)

As a sole researcher I was unable to provide the conditions for fulfilling the first of these criteria but I attempted through repeated reviews of the data to satisfy the second.

Some critics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Erlandson et al., 1993) suggest that rich, thick description allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability. Detailed descriptions of participants and settings help the reader to determine whether the findings can be transferred to other settings and by so doing to ascertain the reliability of interpretation. In my case, I try to provide detailed descriptions of the phenomena under study, together with contextual information and extracts of my informants' accounts. Yet I cannot be fully confident in the matter of transferability for the very reason that I present my findings in a language other than that from which they derive.

As I have already indicated, and as is widely known, language-to-language transfer is fraught with difficulty. During the 'translation' process I was constantly faced with the question of how best to present excerpts, for example from my informants' words or from documents

provided by them, so that the effect achieved would be as faithful as possible to what was originally recorded. I came to the task with three appreciations based on prior experience:

- i) that a one-to-one correspondence between individual lexical items is rarely achievable;
- ii) that the meaning of a sentence or text is usually much more than the sum of the meanings of its constituent lexical items;
- iii) that the sentence structure of Korean is substantially different from that of English.

In discussing translation technique, Nida (1964) distinguishes between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, viewing these as basic orientations rather than as a binary choice. An orientation towards the former focuses on the closest possible match of form and content between source text and target text by providing some degree of insight into the lexical, grammatical or structural form of a source text. An orientation towards the latter stresses the principle of equivalence of effect on the reader of the target text.

Newmark (1981) argues for semantic and communicative translation. Semantic translation, which 'attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original' (ibid: 39), is perhaps less extreme than Nida's formal equivalence.

However, the terms 'equivalence' and 'communicative translation' are judged inadequate by Hatim and Mason (1990) on the grounds that the actual effects on receivers of texts are difficult to gauge and that all translation, in a sense, is communicative. While accepting that translation might aim for an equivalence of *intended* effects, Hatim and Mason propose that the concept of 'adequacy' in translation is more useful than 'equivalence', since the latter

carries the assumption that complete equivalence is an achievable goal, as if there is such a thing as a formally or dynamically equivalent target-language (TL) version of a source-language (SL) text.

With these considerations in mind I produced more than one version of many of the excerpts in my data, ranging from a 'weak' transfer (which involved a more or less direct translation from Korean to English with minimal consideration of the role of meaning) to a 'strong' transfer (in which a much greater effort was made to achieve semantic coherence). Subsequently, I gave my 'translations' to a native speaker of English who was not involved in my disciplinary interest but who was sufficiently familiar with academic discourse to provide reliable feedback. To my consternation, many parts of my first draft translation proved incomprehensible to this native speaker. That a version which 'made sense' could often only be arrived at through a lengthy negotiation of meaning between myself and native speaker made me fear for my goal of retaining the original in as pure a form as possible. Despite my fear, the process of reaching an acceptable translation product brought home to me the truth of Hatim and Mason's assertion that translation is a communicative process which takes place within a social context:

In creating a new act of communication out of a previously existing one, translators are inevitably acting under the pressure of their own social conditioning while at the same time trying to assist in the negotiation of meaning between the producer of the source-language text and the reader of the target-language text, both of whom exist within their own, different social frameworks. (op cit: 1)

This perspective is in line with the recognition that text cannot be treated merely as a self-contained and self-generating entity, but rather as something which requires the negotiation of meaning between producer and receiver. A translated text needs to be seen as evidence of a transaction, a means of retracing the pathways of the translator's

decision-making procedures. According to this perspective, a translation is the outcome of motivated choices between those of the producer of the source text and those of the translator. Thus, any translation to some extent inevitably reflects the translator's own mental and cultural outlook, despite the best of impartial intentions. Although the translator's task should be to preserve, as far as possible, the range of possible responses (so as not to reduce the dynamic role of the reader), the translator's knowledge and understanding of discursive practices inevitably impinges on the translated outcome.

This was certainly the case with my translation experience. Whereas I initiated the process via a text-centred translating approach, producing target-text with weak transfer, I and my native speaker informant subsequently agreed on the necessity of adopting a reader-centred translating approach, using strong transfer in order to convey the meaning of the source text. This process involved a twofold interpretation: my own interpretation of source text and my native informant's interpretation of my translation. As to the vexed question of rendering the 'truth and tone' of youth discourse in translation, suffice it to say that both I and my informant have had broad exposure to youth culture: I as a teacher in the Korean context and my informant as a teacher in Canada, the UK and elsewhere. Despite our concern to project an equivalence of intended effect, however, we were both aware that some readers might respond critically to both the intended and, indeed, possible unintended effects of the rendering. The youthful idiom is both notoriously ephemeral and highly contextually determined. Nuance is extremely difficult to convey through the original printed word, let alone in translation.

Decisions on what to select from the English language repertoire were ultimately measured

against the rationale that the rendering should not project a monocultural bias but rather that the overriding priority should be clarification of utterance. The justification for this rationale resides in my ultimate motivation that, although my work is presented in order to fulfil the requirements of my submission to a British university, it will hopefully gain a wider readership, thus enhancing the international debate on literacy.

My concern that the process of interpretation and re-interpretation which translation entails would result in a rendering which would be in conflict with most considerations of reliability has resonance in House:

It seems to be unlikely that translation quality assessment can ever be completely objectified in the manner of the results of natural science subjects.
(1976, referred to by Hatim and Mason, op cit: 5)

I could not help reflecting that the best way to resolve the issue of reliability in the matter of fieldwork done in one language but written up in another (but one that would for obvious reasons be difficult if not impossible to organise) would be to review translations with someone who both shares the researcher's linguistic and cultural background and who is proficient in both languages. Although there is a need to elaborate a set of parameters which aim to promote consistency and precision in the discussion of translating and translations, the wider issue of conjugating the concept of reliability and that of translation requires and deserves further study.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have described the data I collected and showed the ways in which I did so, as well as the process involved in analysing and interpreting that data. Hopefully it has become

clear that my research circumstances - a data-gathering setting at a distance from where the main analysis and interpretation were carried out and involving a dual language interface - placed substantial constraints upon actions and decisions taken during the life of this research project. Nevertheless, I would like to think that the results of my ethnographic study are viewable in the context suggested by Marcus as:

. . . never reducible to a form of knowledge that can be packaged in the monologic voice of the ethnographer alone.

(Marcus, 1997 quoted in Angrosino and Perez, 2000: 675)

That theory is at the centre of various decisions I took relating to methodology I can perhaps best illustrate with reference to the following questions formulated by Skeggs:

Why choose ethnography in the first place? Which methods are combined? Who are the participants? What is your relationship to them? Where to do the research? How to make sense of what is happening? How to represent the researched? What writing strategies to use? Who are perceived to be the audience? (1994: 32)

It is my belief that my ethnographic study is based on the theoretical position I adopted which constructs a discursive representation of the world of others through the 'discursively constructed concepts' that were available to me (Skeggs, op cit).

Chapter 5 General patterns of literacy observed

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I aim to provide an overall understanding of what my teenage informants read and write in their daily lives by examining a range of the literacy practices they engage in. I will also discuss certain other literacy-related issues which seem to me to be relevant to my theme. I categorise the literacy practices of my informants into six general areas and discuss my findings according to those areas. These are: reading and writing for organising daily life; reading and writing for maintaining friendship and affinity; reading and writing for combatting boredom at school; reading and writing for documenting life; reading and writing related to leisure activities; and reading and writing related to membership in a consumer society.

One item of terminology needs clarification to begin with. In my discussion I use the term 'diary', but I have found that this means different things to different people. Literacy researchers often refer to personal writing in general as diary writing (Camitta, 1993; Rogers, 1994; Shuman, 1986; Sugimoto and Levin, 2000). Outside academic circles, however, the word diary often conjures up an actual printed and bound book(let), used for the purpose of recording the notes, thoughts, reminders, etc. of its owner and keeper. Interestingly, Korean teenagers use a Korean word for personal writing (*il-gi*) and the English word 'diary' (albeit with Korean inflection) when referring to the bound artefact. For clarity throughout my thesis therefore I use the term personal journal for the former, while I reserve the term diary to refer

to the (usually) bound book(let) with space allotted for entries covering (usually) a period of one year.

5. 2 The general patterns

5. 2. 1 Reading and writing for organising daily life

Teenagers make use of a wide range of literacies, a phenomenon underscored by Barton and Hamilton in their study of literacy practices of a U.K community (1998). Like British adults in that study, Korean young people rely heavily on literacy for organising their everyday life. The fact that my informants are students means of course that a major portion of their organising is related to school matters. For this purpose they keep calendars, diaries, small notebooks, adhesive notelets and address books. As I will show, while my informants use reading and writing as an aid to memory and for planning purposes, the medium of choice tends to change over time. Before starting to use a diary as a planner most of my informants had kept small blank notebooks, a more traditional type of writing tool whose popularity seems to have been overtaken by the diary, which provides a specific format. For four of the six teenagers who participated in the first phase of my research, the diary they were keeping at the time of my interview was the first one they had ever kept. On the other hand, the girls who participated in my later research phase had fully integrated the use of a diary into their daily lives.

Wooil and Heesoo kept notes on calendars in their bedroom as memory joggers for birthdays of family and friends, as well as for appointments with friends. Heesoo also kept a small

notebook in which he recorded notes to do with school and which he consulted every day: homework deadlines, revision timetables for school tests, educational equipment to be readied for specific class activities, his school timetable, etc. He also kept a thin address book containing friends' phone numbers, which he took out only on the way to meeting any of those friends. He explained that he carried it with him in order to be able to contact them in case they failed to turn up as arranged. In addition to a calendar, Heesoo used his diary to remind himself of special occasions such as birthdays and planned trips with friends. The diary would also contain plans for such trips: how to get there, what to take and what to do when they arrived. Before he started keeping the diary he had made use of a blank spiral bound notebook in which he mostly recorded things related to school.

Jin, Sumi, Kiho, Min, Aeran and Yuni also kept diaries in which they filled in the formatted daily and monthly planning sections provided. Like Heesoo most of them recorded birthdays and school-related matters in the monthly section. Jin's diary, though, tended to contain items of a more personal nature, such as descriptions of herself and friends. She recorded school-related matters in another small notebook. Min and Sumi kept their school timetable in their desk for reference. Min also wrote reminders to himself on adhesive notelets which he then stuck onto the top of his pencil case. Kiho seemed to be the most organised diary user. He told me that he had begun to record school-related items with much more enthusiasm during the final year of high school than at any other time in his school life:

All my classmates seemed to make full use of their diaries during this period because we had to organise ourselves for the university entrance exam.

Yet despite his claim I saw no evidence of it in Jin's case, even though she had been through the same exam preparation process. My tentative conclusion is that there are periods in their

lives when some people feel a need to organise themselves more carefully than usual by means of thorough recording, a point also made by Barton and Hamilton (op cit: 152). By looking through Kiho's diary with its detailed planning and self evaluation, I could get a clear picture of his life as a student preparing for the university entrance exam. The diary was divided into sections, of which the following are representative:

Daily plans for schoolwork

These were detailed and rigorous and included a timetable plan which was self-evaluated after the event using a system of circles, triangles and 'x's. A circle meant Kiho judged the work he had done to be excellent, a triangle that he considered it satisfactory and an x he put beside anything he thought needed further revision, for example in cases where he remembered little or nothing about a topic despite having studied it. Kiho kept this system faithfully for the eight months from March until November when the entrance exam took place. Interestingly, even after the exam had taken place, Kiho continued his system by adding plans for daily physical exercise. He had been told that his university department of physical education was likely to require various kinds of athletic skill so he wanted to prepare himself for that likelihood.

Key learning points

In this section Kiho drew up a list of the crucial bits of information for each of his school subjects, items such as math formulae and difficult English words and expressions. His plan here was to subject the list to systematic and concentrated memorisation.

Things to revise for school tests and the test results themselves

Here were entered detailed revision timetables for each school test. Kiho also kept records of all his test results, enabling him to trace how well he had been doing over time.

Records of supplementary textbooks

Here Kiho wrote down the titles of all the books which he bought for the purpose of supplementing his schoolwork.

A Miscellaneous section included a financial record - money lent to friends, expenses for school activities, and so on. There were also reminders of school-related books to buy. Once an item had been completed, Kiho crossed it out with a red pen and added a tick. His system was easy to follow and showed at a glance what had been done and what needed to be done. While Kiho was explaining his diary and its contents to me, he showed more enthusiasm for them than for any other aspect of his writing. His diary portrayed him as a well-organised person and expressed other aspects of his identity, particularly his creativity of method for maintaining his study goals.

Yuni too showed creativity in the organisation of her diary. Here she explains her reasons for using a particular symbol:

In this weekly planning section I put this mark (pointing to a black dot in the same font as the rest of the text) on things once they have been done. I invented this system when I was in junior high school because I would often forget to bring my homework or whatever to school and the last minute rush was so stressful. It really takes the strain off me.

In this section of her diary Yuni kept a programme timetable for the Korean educational TV channel as a reminder to herself to record certain programmes which she felt would help her in her study. There was also a record of the books she borrowed and of those she lent to

others. Yuni was one of those people who let friends borrow her library card to take out books and so she felt she needed a system to keep tabs on who had what. That the system worked I was able to verify for myself as, glancing over the list, I was immediately able to identify my own name. I had earlier borrowed a magazine from Yuni and there in black and white was my own name and beside it the title and issue of the magazine. It seemed clear that with her system Yuni would have no problem in keeping track of her lending and borrowing.

The recording formats which the teenagers kept for the purpose of organising their daily lives applied to both school and non-school activities, with emphasis on school needs. School and non-school entries, however, are interwoven in the artefacts rather than being separated into distinctive domains. Indeed, I came to realise that my informants carried their diaries and notebooks everywhere they went during the day so that they were immediately available for use when needed: at school, at home, and everywhere in between, even in the coffee shop on the way to and from school. As Barton and Hamilton (1998: 10) point out, it is not appropriate to assign particular types of literacy practice to discrete domains such as home or school since, as my young research participants demonstrated, literacy practices cut across different domains.

5. 2. 2 Reading and writing for maintaining friendships and affinities

My informants' literacies in this category included the reading of different types of magazine, fiction, comics, the sharing of diary entries, and the keeping of exchange journals, all of which may be classified as vernacular and linked to adolescent culture. The reading and writing categorised in this section include activities of the type identified by Barton and

Padmore (1991) and Rogers (1994) as personal reading and writing. As most of the personal reading and writing I examine here was done in interaction with friends, I put this type of literacy in the same category. By doing so I intend to stress the interpersonal aspects as these social elements are of great significance to the adolescents. As well as practising this type of reading and writing at home, the teenagers also carried it over into school time. They exchanged different kinds of reading materials and circulated them across their friendship group. They engaged in collaborative writing as well as exchanged written messages. By participating in these literacy practices, the teenagers maintained social relationships, constructed their identity as adolescents and generated the solidarity required to build up group affinity. I will begin by describing the types of reading they engaged in, and afterwards discuss certain noteworthy aspects of their writing practices.

5. 2. 2. 1 Reading

Magazines

My informants read a wide range of magazines: teen fashion, TV, games, film, science, comic and others. Some they pay for at the stands, others are distributed free of charge mainly by cosmetics companies.

Teen fashion and cosmetics magazines

I found these to be very popular among the girls: Jin and her sister Sumi, Aeran and her sister Serim, and also Yuni. A friend in junior high school introduced Jin to one particular teen fashion magazine and later she brought home a copy of it which caught her sister Sumi's attention. Since then both of them had been buying this magazine on a regular basis and

considered it their favourite. After reading each issue the girls brought them to school and swapped them with friends. They also cut photos and articles out of the magazines and each kept a ring binder of the cuttings. They had built up their collection over some six years and at the time of my interviews their collection filled two thick ring binders. They also allowed their friends to take pieces they were interested in. It was common practice for the girls to look at friends' collections on visits to their homes and vice versa. Photos they had clipped out of the magazines - favourite fashion models, for example - were inserted under the transparent covers used to cover school text and supplementary books.

As someone whose personal appearance meant a great deal to her, Sumi spent much of her free time leafing through magazines for tips from beauty specialists on make-up, dress sense, hair-styling modes and even (since she had a bee in her bonnet about this) ways to gain height. At cosmetics shops she picked up the free beauty magazines issued by the cosmetics companies to promote their own products. I discovered that when the girls brought to school specific fashion matching accessories such as make-up and lipstick other girls would want to try them out too, imagining themselves to be the models featured in the ads. Sumi prided herself on keeping abreast of new styles of make-up and fashion trends generally and shared her knowledge with her schoolfriends, taking cuttings to school, lending magazines and swapping the latest tips with others. Apparently, teen fashion and cosmetics magazines are widely circulated in school classrooms. According to my informants they serve various functions apart from that of promoting fashion ideas, for example for making covers for school books and for pasting in diaries. I noticed that girls would even use magazine pages for writing letters on. I will go further into some of the different uses made of these cuttings in a later section.

Magazines such as those described above obviously contribute to the construction of the gendered subjectivity of girls as proposed by Christian-Smith (1993). Yet they are not read only by girls. Two of the boys in my informant group, Wooil and Heesoo, were also fashion magazine readers, albeit not on a regular basis. Wooil, a student at the art school of a local university, used the magazines for study purposes. While preparing for university by having art lessons at a private institute, he used the magazines as a source of useful photos. As these magazines were not available at school, he scanned them whenever he happened to be in a bookshop for the kind of fashion statements which were of particular interest to him. He continued the habit long after graduating from high school, reasoning, "As there isn't a male fashion magazine I don't have any choice but to use girls' magazines. You know, they include tips on male fashion there too." Heesoo was another who consulted fashion magazines aimed primarily at the young female reader. Unable to find them at school, where boys would not bring them anyway, he found copies in fast food outlets whose main customers tend to be teenagers. From this type of magazine he was able to get ideas about teen male fashion trends and used these ideas to guide him in his own clothes shopping. In addition, he admitted to sometimes reading the stories in the magazines.

Although these two boys accessed teen fashion magazines for their own purposes, they said they had never bought copies themselves and claimed never to have seen any of their male friends reading them at school. For boys to be seen buying 'girls' magazines, reading them or passing them around in school would in any case be taboo. I will discuss this issue in greater depth in the chapter on gender differences in literacy. Suffice it to say for the moment that for the boys the 'zines' served as windows on current fashion and dress styles for teen males, a

way to increase their standing in the community of adolescent males. The reading and swapping of zines provided an important way for the girls to maintain relationships with their teenage female friends. Their mutual engagement in aspects of popular culture was a means of reinforcing teenage affinity.

Teen magazines also feature in Finders' study of white American girls' literacy practices (1997). Finders studied two groups of girls of contrasting socio-economic background who were in transition between childhood and early adolescence. The higher socio-economic group in particular made use of teen fashion magazines as their guide to acceptable behaviour, hairstyles, clothing, and body image. By sharing and acting upon the experiences gained through their reading the girls maintained status in their social group. Although it would not appear that status-seeking is a prime motivator among the young Korean females in my study, the opportunity which cooperative magazine reading offers for increasing group affinity is consistent with the findings of the American researcher.

TV fan magazines

TV fan magazines (fanzines) are regularly read by my informants of both sexes, yet with the exception of Min none would actually go out and buy them. Instead they borrowed them from friends at school who would allow them to cut out photos or articles. Jin and Sumi had a bulky collection of such cuttings taken from friends' fanzines. Again the sharing of popular reading material seems to reinforce group solidarity among young adolescents, strengthen adolescent affinity and help in the construction of teenage identity (Choi W.S., 1999; Hong H.J., 1997). Perhaps this was Min's motivation for going out and buying this non-school

reading material, one of the few types of print material he would actually admit to reading. As he explained, "I keep it for a couple of weeks and then take it to school. Kids pass it around and take all the bits they want to keep. I don't mind." All the teenagers questioned said they cut out photos of singers, soap and film stars and sport stars. As already mentioned, a common practice was to insert such photos under the transparent covers of their schoolbooks. Questioned about how many girls in her classroom would do this, Sumi replied without hesitation, "All of us!", whereas from the boys I got an estimate of some 25 per cent. Although this shows a different level of enthusiasm between girls and boys, it is obviously something teenagers do a lot. Moreover, the practice of circulating and cutting up fanzines seems to go beyond the boundary of close friendship groups.

While the carrying of images of celebrities on their schoolbooks may be a way for young people to show affiliation to a general teen culture, individual preference within the collective identity is asserted as each teenager chooses his or her personal favourites. Almost all carried photos of their favourite singer, their selection constituting a visual statement of individual preference. This was demonstrated unusually in the case of Kiho, who chose sports figures in preference to media stars.

Miscellaneous magazines

There are several other types of magazine which my informants regularly read at home and at school, especially computer game publications. Home computers having been available to them since early elementary school, the boys had done more reading of computer game magazines than any of the girls except Aeran, whose father was an avid computer game buff. In general my male informants acquired this kind of magazine from friends. Heesoo,

however, preferred to buy them himself. Both he and Wooil read the magazines as much for maintaining peer group relationships as to increase their knowledge of the various games. The boys told me of their interest in learning the 'cheating' skills suggested by the magazines because these made games more exciting.

Wooil in particular enjoyed playing games collaboratively with a group of his friends, telling me that doing so increased the bonds of friendship within the group. While he was in senior high school, he and about ten of his friends would make regular visits to game shops as part of a contest among themselves to nominate a 'game fighter'. This person would receive a sum of money bet by the group out of individual pocket money on the results. For several months the group of friends read game magazines avidly to discover the key skills and strategies needed to be a winner. Each new issue of a magazine contained the latest tips, so they had to read each one if they wanted to stay in the contest. If Wooil could not find anyone who had the latest issue of a magazine he would go to a bookshop to find what he needed but, as he explains, without necessarily buying it:

Sometimes I went to a bookshop to check out the latest game magazine and make a quick note of new strategies on scrap paper. I always chose the same game character so I could easily find the relevant information in the magazine since it usually only involved consulting one page. It was simple enough to copy down what I needed without having to buy the magazine.

Wooil then took his written notes to the game shops and referred to them while he played without his friends' noticing, thus ensuring that nobody was able to beat him. After completing high school he kept in close touch with the friends he made this way and even now meets them on a regular basis through group reunions.

Kiho's social relationships were also mediated by game magazines. He was able to obtain

game information from the booklets which typically accompany each issue of game magazines. Most of these were given him by friends; he claimed never to have bought any of them himself. He was not able to understand and so did not even try to read through all the materials but it did not matter to him. Asked whether he planned to return a booklet to its owner, he responded:

No, I don't have to. The guy is such a good friend that he doesn't mind if I keep it. I've only read part of it anyway.

What was significant for Kiho was the fact that a friend would allow him to take something which belonged to him. For these teenagers, the act of taking over the ownership of reading materials from others demonstrates that close bonds of friendship exist between the original and the new owner.

Film magazines serve similar functions to those which I have been describing above. Wooil was the only one among my respondents who bought film magazines on a regular basis. He had a collection of photos of stars of TV and film which he had cut out of the magazines and which he sometimes took to school to show to friends. He also used some of the photos to decorate his schoolbooks. I construe these activities as Wooil's chosen way of expressing his identity which at the same time drawing on forms of popular culture.

Comics

There was practically total consensus among my teenage informants that comics were the type of reading material they liked best. Indeed, Kim S.A. (1997: 48) found that 90% of Korean senior high school students read comics to a greater or lesser extent. Korean comics are published in two formats. A4 format comics are published to a regular schedule, most of

them either weekly or monthly, each issue containing a single episode of several stories which run concurrently. Once a particular story has run its course, that complete story is issued in an omnibus edition in A5 format. If the story is lengthy it may run to several volumes of this size. It is then available in reading rental shops (of which more later). Different comics are aimed at different age groups. As a child Jin, for example, had subscribed to a comic aimed at primary school pupils; later, on reaching junior high school, she switched to a companion publication aimed at a more sophisticated readership. Around the time of my later interviews with her, I found that Jin had started to subscribe to an adult comic. The significance of her comics in Jin's life can perhaps best be judged by the fact that she still keeps all her back issues underneath her desk and has stopped lending them to friends after an occasion on which some were returned to her in less than mint condition.

It is nevertheless usual for friends to swap comics since to do so is a sign of friendship and contributes to the construction of a shared identity. Both Aeran and her sister, for example, share an interest in romance comics and the two of them swap examples of this genre. As Aeran explained to me, she and her sister had been going through a period in which their personal differences had been so great that the two of them seemed to be constantly at each others' throats. But their shared interest in the romance comic meant that the two sisters had at least something to talk about with each other and this served to keep their relationship from going completely sour.

The reading of comics seems to be a peculiarly adolescent phenomenon which contributes to the spread of a teenage sub-culture and to the forming of a collective adolescent identity. Moreover, it links up with other forms of adolescent popular culture. Comics of course form

part of a giant industry which turns out writing paper, notebooks, posters and other stationery items featuring the images of popular comic characters.

Two of the boys among my research participants had large posters of comic characters on their bedroom walls which had been given them as birthday gifts. 'Unplugged Boys', as the cartoon heroes were called, were, according to my informants, immensely popular with young readers because they embodied the slightly rebellious behaviour which teenagers could relate to, including an exaggerated dress sense and a predilection for the current pop music stylings. Although the male protagonist is not enrolled in school, he nevertheless seems to support the idea of education in that he encourages his girlfriend to stay in school, even to the extent of helping her out with her homework when she is tired. If the stylised fashions displayed by the cartoon characters and their taste in music correspond to current trends then they are likely to be judged as expressing the voice of young people and hence popularity among a young readership is assured. The reading of comics is thus one of several representative adolescent literacy practices which plays a crucial role in the construction and reproduction of adolescent culture (Yun H.J., 1994).

Other reading material

Like magazines and comics, the reading of fiction also creates a bond between teenagers and their peers. The peer group functions as a sort of jungle telegraph in making its members aware of new titles. Jin's interest in teen romances, for example, started when friends lent her copies of their books. Wooil got his first introduction to his favourite genre, Chinese warrior tales, through a friend in junior high school. His enthusiasm for the genre can be gauged by the fact that he claimed to have read over a thousand of the tales. Indeed this is one of the

most popular genres among boys (Kim S.A., 1997). Friends introduced best sellers to Kiho too. During his final year of high school, however, his commitment to his studies meant that he could not find the time to read the books which his friends found interesting - something he expressed regret about. Yuni and Aeran also found out about books from friends who had already read them. It is clear that friends' recommendations were instrumental in motivating my informants to pursue reading. Shared reading experiences are invitations to participate in the social life of the adolescent community to which these young people belong.

5. 2. 2. 2 Writing

Keeping a diary

Keeping a diary was a common practice among my teenage informants. As well as being an expression of individuality, this activity provided opportunities for building solidarity with friends. In a formatted diary some of the young people would confine their entries to the publisher's defined sections - daily, weekly or monthly as the case might be. However, their own needs often transformed and further articulated some of the diary functions. In the weekly planning section of her diary, for example, Sumi, rather than using it as intended, entered what happened to her in the course of each day. Her appropriation of space in this way may be attributable to her need for self-expression or merely illustrate how people adapt things to serve a specific purpose. Kiho used space in his memorandum section for song lyrics - Korean as well as English. He let friends make copies of these.

Teenagers treat their diaries as artefacts for expressing their identity, a fact which commercial forces are often quick to take advantage of. I noticed that one of the teen fashion

magazines was running a competition among its readers for the best diary, readers themselves being invited to take part in making the selection (*Céci*, August 1998). In the final round ten diaries were selected for their originality and creativity, a photo of each appearing alongside that of their owner. Running such an event in connection with popular reading material would obviously encourage adolescents to associate diary keeping with their adolescent identity.

The establishing of an individual persona by means of 'customising' the diary's appearance is common. Jin's diary, for example, had a leather covering and a passport size photo of herself on the cover of the diary itself. The first several pages of her diary contained a brief self introduction, which ranged from facts such as her birthdate and those of other members of the family to her leisure activities. She also noted what she wanted to do after the university entrance exam. What was particularly interesting about the detailed self-description was its expectation of a reader audience. After writing about some of her pet peeves Jin had commented in parenthesis, "Funny, right?". Her comment was obviously aimed at peers, inviting them to participate in her reflections, and thus forming a dialogue between herself and them.

Jin's self-introduction was followed by another by and about one of her friends and dedicated to Jin, which bore the title "A thirty second snapshot of Minjeong". In her own composition, after first providing some brief factual information about herself such as her birthdate, height and weight, Minjeong went on to describe the qualities she would look for in a boyfriend. She concluded with comments expressing her friendly feelings towards Jin and referring to the positive impression her friend had made on her at their first meeting.

Another participatory feature was to be found in the personal messages left by 'visitors' to the diaries of friends. By and large these were messages of praise and encouragement. In Heesoo's diary, for example, a friend had written, 'Keep at it and you'll surely get the place you want at X University.' I found it somewhat ironic that at the same time young people are resisting society's pressures to conform, they themselves are reinforcing societal norms of conformity by participating in such collaborative writing activities.

In other diaries I was allowed to examine I found examples of collaborative writing in such diverse locations as the address section and the calendar. The exchange of addresses and birthdates constituted a visual token of the friendship the teenagers felt for each other. According to Kiho and Min, friends knew implicitly that they could enter such information into one another's diaries even without being expressly invited to do so. In addition to addresses and phone numbers the address section would typically contain personal information on individuals such as their blood type, Zodiac sign and nickname. This was often the place for affixing small photos of the diary's owner and his or her friends. The exchange of these 'photo stickers' is a practice I refer to in more detail below.

What especially impressed me about this collaborative writing was the plethora of ways in which individuals expressed their own personality. In the limited space available these young people displayed great creativity in portraying themselves as unique individuals, often combining brilliant doodles in coloured pen with their names inscribed flamboyantly in Chinese and English as well as Korean. Their diaries, one imagined, became the location of a point in time in the lives of their owners, to be held onto and cherished for later recall and to

provide a visual record of moments enjoyed with friends.

I mentioned above the youthful practice of exchanging photo stickers. These postage stamp size photos are produced in batches to order at purpose-built outlets to be found in both residential and commercial areas of Korean towns and cities. Although I found no general agreement on the exact date this fad began, it has been around for a few years and has expanded substantially since its introduction. Indeed, as often happens with trends begun by the younger generation, the use of photo stickers has now spread to practically all segments of the population and there are numerous outlets which exist to serve the demand.

The exchange of photo stickers for display in diaries and the like is interpreted as a sign of friendship among adolescents. In the space surrounding the actual photo, it is possible to choose from an array of designs in order to customise the stickers to one's personal preference, designs which can incorporate cartoon characters as well as short phrases in Korean or English. As the fad has gained ground, more and more design options have become available. Min was fairly typical of my informants in having around forty different photo stickers in his diary. Young people keep these stickers elsewhere too - in personal journals, in letters and even on telephone cards - and are continually inventing new uses for them. Heesoo, for example, had acquired photo stickers of several of his friends and had stuck them, along with their respective pager numbers, onto the telephone card he used to call them from public telephones. This saved him the trouble of looking up a pager number in his address book each time he needed one. Here was a practical purpose for the photo sticker, then, as well as a discreet yet constant reminder of friendship.

Young people will often opt for a group pose for a new batch of photo stickers. Having a photo taken together with friends is considered to be a sign of youthful solidarity. The friendship factor is borne out by the poses in the photo - everyone standing close together, often affecting additional closeness by entwining arms and putting faces as close together as possible. Heesoo told me that having your photo taken with someone of the opposite sex was seen as going public on a close friendship, similar perhaps to the going steady announcement of an earlier generation. One of his photo stickers pictures him on the point of planting a kiss on a girl's cheek. Considering the fact that displays of public affection among people of school age are still relatively rare in Korea, such a photographic pose would seem to challenge conventional norms, thereby suggesting the seriousness with which those involved take the relationship.

Keeping an exchange journal

Another writing activity which is connected with the management of social relationships between young people is the exchange journal. All my female informants had maintained an exchange journal with close friends at least once during their junior or senior high school years. Although I was not able to determine how and when this cooperative writing form originated in Korea, Honda provides an account of the same practice by school girls in Japan:

Two or three persons share a note in which they take turns making entries to describe daily happenings, thoughts, and so on. This is a diary in the sense that they write about daily activities and ideas, but it is different from a diary in the ordinary sense in that it is not written by a single person, but instead is exchanged and shared. In these "exchange diaries", young Japanese girls create literacy forms quite different from the school-taught authoritative literacy.
(1996 referred to by Sugimoto and Levin, 2000: 150)

At the time of my interviews Yuni told me she was on the way to finishing her fifth exchange journal over a two-year period. And despite a lack of confidence in her own writing which

led her eventually to stop the practice, Aeran had mostly positive things to say about her involvement in exchange journal keeping:

Aeran: Two or three people can keep a journal together. I kept one with a friend whose name was the same as mine. We completed two journals but then I had to go into hospital for an operation and somehow we never got going again after that. My friend hung on to the first journal we did and I still have the later one we did. I think it really helped us to get to know each other much better.

Researcher: Did you guys write down what was actually on your mind, even the things you wouldn't normally tell others about?

Aeran: Oh yes. I remember my friend told me she had once stolen a pen from a shop. She hadn't planned to, the idea just came to her. See, here [pointing to a pencilled diagram of the interior of a shop], this is where the owner and the other customers were standing and this is where my friend was in relation to them.

...

Researcher: Can you remember what you most enjoyed about keeping the journal?

Aeran: When there were things bothering me the journal was really helpful. I could write them down and share them with my friend and we tried to work them out together. After that I always felt much better. It was a nice feeling to sort things out together. At one time I was interested in a boy and we wrote to each other about how to attract his attention. Lots of giggles when we came up with funny ideas, of course. Even when I read this journal today it makes me feel good.

Aeran's experiences with her journal has resonance in Rogers' (1994) study of four 15 year old British teenagers, whose sharing of personal journal entries with friends helped them work through their feelings and thus solve personal problems. Rogers' teenagers differed from the Korean girls in that they 'shared' by letting their peers read what they had written. The sharing in both cases however had the same effect of 'working things out' together.

Girls especially are prone to decorate and otherwise enliven the appearance of their journals with photos of their favourite comic characters and TV stars and by the generous use of coloured pens. Awareness of the other participant(s) as reader audience as well as co-writer(s) is apparently the motivation for taking this extra trouble. Yuni told me that for a while she and a friend would buy oversized notebooks so as to have enough room to

accommodate all the illustrations which each thought would amuse the other. They soon discovered that they were sending each other far more pictorial matter than running text! Time pressures eventually forced them to return to a smaller format in order to focus on the written word.

While the exchange journal figured significantly in the girls' social relationships, I could not find anyone among my male informants who had taken part in this kind of collaborative writing. I can only conclude that this is a further indication of gender preferences at work in communication styles.

5. 2. 3 Reading and writing for combatting boredom in school

Mandatory attendance in regular classes and additional pre- and after-school study periods make for a long school day, so it is perhaps not surprising that young people look for ways to ease their academic burden. Like their counterparts elsewhere, Korean youth displays a high level of ingenuity in its bid to reduce the restraints it feels an authoritative regime imposes upon it. Naturally, whether they are sending notes and letters to one another or playing surreptitious games of bingo or a popular Korean game which translates as riding ladders, it is essential that students avoid detection by those in authority. Finders refers to this dimension of literacy practice as 'literate underlife' in which students 'refuse to accept the official view . . . (and engage in) practices designed and enacted to challenge and disrupt the official expectations' (1997: 24). I will examine some of the ways in which by engaging in literate underlife students are successful in lessening the boredom in school which even the most dedicated of them must feel from time to time.

5. 2. 3. 1 Letter and note writing

Though some gender differences do exist, the practice of writing to others during school hours, which Camitta (1993) refers to as dialogue-note writing, is engaged in by students of both sexes. My informants variously call this in-school social writing note-writing and letter-writing. On checking I found that there seems to be no clearcut distinction between 'note' and 'letter'. To Yuni, messages written on scraps of paper of less than A4 size were notes; those of A4 size and above were letters, regardless of other defining features. Aeran's perception of the difference lay in the fact that letters were written communications to be enclosed in envelopes. In a Korean context, moreover, Aeran argued that to be worthy of the name a letter should exhibit accepted stylistic norms, including the mandatory reference to the weather at the time of writing which is a typically Korean feature.

Reference sources are equally at odds over the difference. According to the Korean Dictionary (accessed on website <http://kr.kordic.yahoo.com> on 12 June 2001), a note is a short message written on a small piece of paper. A letter (one infers that length is immaterial) should comply with certain format norms. Moreover, a letter informs at a distance (the inference being that an envelope is used to enable mailing). The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a letter as a 'fairly long' handwritten or typed message, addressed to a person or organisation and usually sent by post or messenger. A note is defined as a short or informal letter. Merriam-Webster agrees with Oxford that a letter is a written or typed message addressed to a person or organization, but makes no reference to length. Merriam-Webster's 'note' is a brief informal letter (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary accessed on

<http://www.m-w.com> on 21 June 2001). Indeed, Barton and Hall (2000) admit that a letter is a 'difficult text to define' since 'almost anything can be put in the form of letter': a written text enclosed in an envelope, a postcard, an e-mail, even a memo. Without differentiating materiality they designate the activity itself as letter writing. In my subsequent discussion I will take a modified perspective on the difference between a note and a letter, merely calling something a note if it is relatively short and a letter if it is relatively long.

The girls I interviewed were in the habit of exchanging letters with their same sex friends in school on a regular basis, the purpose being to tell their friends what was happening or what they were feeling. To my surprise, I discovered that the composing of such letters was mostly carried out in class or during independent study time. Jin explained why:

It's those times when I tend to feel sleepy and writing letters keeps me awake. Also, when I'm fed up with a teacher or a class I might start to write a letter.

It might be supposed that Jin was a student with attention problems but actually her parents considered her a conscientious student. It would therefore seem that she composed letters because she was bored with what was going on in class and writing letters helped her to alleviate the boredom she felt. I was also allowed to read some of the letters composed by Jin's and Sumi's friends and could see that they too were composed in those hours during which they were supposed to be following lessons or studying by themselves. In their letters the girls talked about their school life in general - what they had done that day or what they were doing in that class.

Although I myself taught in high schools for more than ten years, I had never once during that time registered this vernacular writing practice. I did, however, notice students reading

non-school materials in class. After all, I had done this myself as a student! When I discovered that the type of letter writing I will describe was mostly carried out in class time, at first I could not understand how that was possible. How could the teacher not notice what was going on? It was Jin who first opened my eyes. She demonstrated the skill that she had developed with years of practice - that of being able to feign attention to teacher instruction while actually in the process of composing a letter. I could then understand how capable practitioners of the skill (like herself) were usually able to fool teachers (like myself!). It was a chastening realisation. In her own study of the writing practices of teenagers living in Philadelphia, Camitta (1993) found that the classroom was alive with surreptitious writing activities and that the subjects of her study 'actively seek to change experience through writing, to act upon it by creating alternative realms through their texts.' (ibid: 240). Like their American counterparts, Korean young people also seek relief from the tedium of obligatory school attendance by constructing their own 'alternative realm' via unauthorised writing.

Whereas the girls exchanged letters amongst themselves with great frequency, the boys said they did so far less and some hardly at all unless it was to mark a special occasion such as a birthday or a special achievement. Wooil and Heesoo would, however, write to friends of the opposite sex, penpals for example, composing such letters both in class and at home. In general, Kiho and Min sent or received letters to same sex friends only on birthdays or at Christmas, though they admitted to the occasional exchange between themselves on important topics. Nevertheless, such exchanges obviously occurred with less frequency than was the case with the girls, and in most cases the boys' preferred medium appeared to be notes rather than letters.

Insofar as my limited findings permit of making conclusions, it seems that there is a definite gender difference in the matter of writing notes and letters to friends. It might be an interesting line of enquiry to look at what causes these differences and in what ways the consequences of cross-sex differences relate, for example, to gender identity. Tannen (1991) identifies different conversational styles across genders, proposing that men and women use language differently with women aiming at connections and intimacy, men at independence and status. However, such a proposal has been criticised by other feminist scholars (Cameron, 1996; Talbot, 1998; Uchida, 1998) for its lack of a broader social consideration in that it focuses on individuals and disregards social structure and power asymmetries. Any further exploration of difference across sexes relating to note and letter writing would need to avoid a monolithic view of gender and be carried out with the aim of revealing the social and cultural components embedded in this vernacular literacy.

To return to the features of letter writing as practised by my informants, aspects of identity projection are revealed in the various ways these young people fold their letters for subsequent delivery to their correspondent. Aeran's comments give some indication of how she and her friends were able to express themselves as individuals by mastering the art of paper folding:

Aeran: We have about six different folding methods but I especially like this one [picking out rather a complicated design].

Researcher: How do you open it?

Aeran: [pointing to one edge] Pull that part.

Researcher: Aha, like that! Is that one you can make yourself?

Aeran: Yes. I learned it from a friend when I was in the second year of junior high school.

Researcher: How about this one?

Aeran: I learned how to do that in senior high school. Have you seen it before?

Researcher: No, I don't think I have.

Aeran: It takes the longest time to do. Choosing a design may depend on your mood although some kids stick to one specific design. Yuni always does her letters this way [picking out a letter] and I like it because it is such fun to open. Another girl I know always uses this design [picking out another letter].

Researcher: How about you? Have you got your own tried and true way?

Aeran: Sure [demonstrating what appeared to me to be a complicated folding arrangement]. There, that's how I do it. It's actually quite simple.

I could see that within the shared practice of letter folding these girls were nevertheless able to assert their individual identity by virtue of the design each created for herself as a sort of personal 'trademark'. They had become so adept at forming their trademark design that even the most complicated of these required of them no more than a few seconds' production time. But when Aeran took pains to show me how she did it, I needed five attempts to reproduce her design and now, a year later, I doubt frankly that I would be able to do it again!

The letter writing material used by my young informants deserves comment. In addition to commercially designed and produced writing paper, they made use of a wide variety of media to demonstrate their creativity. Clothing catalogues, distributed widely in city centre streets, are a good example. These catalogues, usually A4 size, tend to be illustrative rather than textual. Soft backgrounds and uncluttered spaces provide the ideal medium for letters. My girl informants had large collections of catalogues from which they selected the 'best' photos featuring their favourite models and TV stars on which to superimpose their letters to friends. Catalogue letters do not need an envelope because they can be transformed into a mailing piece by the kind of ingenious folding I have already described, so all that is required

is to address them and stick on a stamp. A catalogue page, appropriately folded, might even be made into an envelope. This appropriation of commercial material is typical of the way these adolescents create personal artefacts bearing the stamp of their own ingenuity. The keynote is creativity and convenience. Yet boys seemed far less involved than girls in this particular activity and made much less use of printed commercial material as a writing medium.

That such innovative mail is delivered at all is perhaps remarkable. Post Office regulations officially proscribe any but standard sized envelopes (accessed from <http://www.koreapost.go.kr>, 12 June 2001) and campaigns are mounted encouraging customers to follow standard practice. The use by young people of non-standard creations of their own, and more importantly the tacit acceptance of these by a bureaucratic organisation (letters formed in the way I have described are, in fact, delivered by the post office, according to my informants) appears to be a case of authority's norms being undermined. A further example of the undermining of authority appears in another type of literacy practice which I will discuss in Chapter 8.

Certain other features of the letters my informants wrote to one another are noteworthy. It was common for them to mix different languages - English, German, Korean - which they said made writing 'more fun'. Similar activities have been noted in a British context (Rampton, 1999). My informants also invented abbreviations ('tr' for 'teacher' for example), codes ('man-na-9-10-ta' might be written in place of 'man-na-ku-ship-ta', as in Korean the

numerals 9 and 10 sound the same as the syllables 'ku' and 'ship')¹, and alternate spellings ('Suk-hwan' for 'Su-khwan'). Sumi was of the opinion that playing games this way felt 'more friendly'. Certainly it would seem that, by articulating the function of the medium used and by creating novel language forms, my informants increased their affinity to the group they were part of. 'Insider' knowledge sharing of this kind may contribute to the creation of a community spirit among teens and to the construction of their adolescent identity. In a subsequent section I will look at other insider systems which adopt different languages. In the letters I was shown, my informants had also made extensive use of colour and elements of design around words they wanted to emphasise. This artistic work could be found on letters and post cards written by both girls and boys. I should add here that there is a post box actually located inside secondary schools in Korean cities and towns, put there by the post office in order to encourage students' letter writing and to make it easy for them to post their mail.

Like letters, notes get passed in order to while away the boredom of class or mandatory study periods. The 'dialogue notes' which the American teenagers in Camitta's study produced contained 'short queries or statements requiring an answer' (op cit: 234). The dialogue note as quick communication fix is a convenient medium in cases where oral conversation is restricted, as it typically is during classes. In my informants' classrooms notes were written on any available scrap of paper - generally adhesive notelets of the 'Post-it' variety or pieces torn from a notebook. Kiho told me he might even use gum wrapping paper if there was one in his pocket. Once a message is written on it, the scrap of paper is screwed up into a ball or

¹ For further examples of using numerals as syllables, see Sugimoto and Levin, 2000. They have examined how the Japanese use a similar system.

folded. Then it is thrown to its intended recipient or passed to that person by classmates. In boxes which Sumi and Aeran had I found notes folded into various elaborate shapes. The boys, though, told me they would never go to such trouble but would simply screw the paper up into a ball. There was an obvious gender difference here.

The way in which notes are actually exchanged in class was another surprising discovery for me. Once the teacher turns her back - to write on the board, for example - the room behind her turns into a web of conspiracy against classroom norms. Screwed-up messages start flying around the class and usually the teacher is unaware of this unstaged behaviour. The conspiracy amounts to a defiance of authority as an antidote to the boredom students feel in class, a way to undermine the authority which restrains them in the form of mandatory school attendance. It has the effect of bonding group members into a community of like values, thus helping to create an adolescent identity resulting from shared experience. The sense of community existing around this shared literacy activity was confirmed by Aeran and Yuni, but with some interesting riders:

Aeran: Most of us are quite happy to pass notes for others in class but some kids go too far. They are constantly asking you to pass notes for them. Sometimes I'm afraid the teacher is going to catch on to what's going on and then how can I say to her that it wasn't my note?

Researcher: Why can't you?

Aeran: Because that would be like grassing.

Researcher: You might warn the person that next time you won't get involved.

Aeran: I couldn't do that. I just complain to myself.

Yuni: Once I complained to someone in a humorous way and they apologised. But I didn't get anywhere because they just carried on doing it. I couldn't think of any other way to get the message across.

The girls' passive approach towards their dilemma might be thought to reflect their

personality. Yet on other issues both of them demonstrated quite a firm and determined stance. Aeran's mother in particular drew a picture of her daughter as a girl who stood up to her convictions. Therefore I can only interpret her indecision in the matter of classroom note passing as reflecting the significance of a communal norm residing in this writing practice. Unless the girls were prepared to risk social exclusion from the peer group, they would be reluctant to take action against group norms.

Another kind of note is the 'written conversation' which takes place via the looseleaf notebook commonly referred to in Korea as 'exercise notebook', a spiral-bound book which is an essential stationery item for all Korean students. Various methods are recommended to increase the effectiveness of rote learning, the dominant learning style in Korea. Jotting things down in this notebook is considered one such method and a useful memory aid. Indeed, most teachers oblige their students to do this. Just about all Korean teenagers have at one time or another been made to fill their exercise notebook with notes on material they have studied. This same notebook, however, is also an instrument of classroom anarchy, being particularly well-suited to the exchange of personal messages between students at adjacent desks, although too obtrusive to pass to people who are some distance away. The following is an example of one such notebook conversation between Heesoo and a friend:

Heesoo: What's up?

Friend: My parents are going out this evening, so how about coming over to the house?

Heesoo: Right after school you mean? Are we going to watch videos?

Friend: Right. And I'm thinking of asking some of the other guys . . .

Another note on the same page contains an enquiry:

Heesoo: I need a new bag. What's a good make to buy do you think?

Friend: Hoofers are cool! I've seen them on sale at Shinsegae Department Store. I can go there with you. When's a good time?

Thus Heesoo made shopping arrangements, as well as asked his friend's advice on what to buy, via the medium of the exercise notebook. It was as if, by involving his friend in his own decision making, Heesoo was demonstrating the importance he attached to his friend's views, thus fostering their teenage affinity. Other researchers have also noted this phenomenon. Both Shuman (1993) in analysing the writing of 11-14 years old black, white and Puerto Rican adolescents in the U.S.A., and Maybin (1992) studying 10-12 year olds in the U.K., noted the role interactive writing plays in managing relations among young people (referred to by Rogers: op cit).

The exercise notebooks which Heesoo and Kiho used were distributed free of charge by a textbook publishing company. It is a recognised commercial practice for textbook publishers to make the rounds of the schools distributing gratis to students items such as notebooks, adhesive notelets and calendars. Needless to say there is promotional mileage to be gained from this practice by publishers, who have over time managed to convince even teachers of the value to students of using the exercise notebook. As we see here, however, students have learned how to appropriate its intended function for their own purposes.

5. 2. 3. 2 Games played in writing

Even given my teaching background it came as something of a surprise to me in my role as researcher to discover the wide range of unauthorised activities in which students take part during school hours, most without the knowledge of school staff. Among these is a range of writing games, the most popular of which have names like Bingo, Riding Ladders, Five Dots and Baseball.

Bingo in its Korean form, unlike its western counterpart, is a game of chance with a strong brainstorming component and probably the most popular of the surreptitious activities which students take part in. As a game for two participants it is admirably suited to being played by students who sit in close proximity to each other. The players choose a theme, often one which reflects popular culture, such as pop or soap stars or chart hits. Without referring to their partner's, each player makes a list of items under the theme heading (usually around 30). They then go through their respective lists calling out each item in turn. If on A's turn the item she has written differs from B's, she crosses it out. The same happens on B's turn. The player with more crossings-out at the end is the winner. Not only does this game take longer and involve more writing than the others, it is also clear that it reinforces young people's engagement with popular culture. Aeran told me that three or four themes would typically be dealt with in one session of play.

Riding Ladders is played with up to five participants. A grid consisting of long vertical lines with short horizontal lines joined to the vertical ones (the ladders) is drawn in someone's notebook. Each ladder is labelled with a player's name and a linemaster chosen. Bets are placed on the direction in which the linemaster will draw lines on the ladders, the so-called ladder 'riding'. Bets ranging from a pack of chewing gum to small amounts of cash are kept secret until the outcome is clear, at which point a note is passed round the players letting them know the result. The winner pays nothing and all the others forfeit their bets. Thus for a small entry 'fee' a group can amuse itself during recess time. A high level of merriment can be generated by this game, with the feting of the winner and the camaraderie of the rest all contributing to group bonding.

Games of this kind have runs of popularity and what is at the height of popularity in one school may not be in another. In some cases individuals can have an influence on what is currently the rage in a particular school, as Aeran explained:

In our class there is a girl called Nami who is obsessed with Bingo. Up until the exams she would play Bingo during practically every class. Her enthusiasm was so catching that everyone in the class was getting into the act. It got to the point where a couple of teachers twigged to what was going on and issued a warning as soon as they came into the room.

When I wondered out loud how the kids were able to keep the game hidden from so many of the teachers, Aeran went on:

You learn skills. But perhaps I shouldn't be telling you this! Here's what happens. We have two notebooks on our desks, one for the lesson and the other for the game. They both look the same. If the teacher gets close, we quickly cover the game notebook with the other one. If we are asked what we are doing we say that we are writing notes in the lesson notebook and point to it. Teachers usually take our word for it.

The same subterfuge is no doubt practised in Five Dots (similar to Noughts and Crosses). Again this is a game for two but a class tournament can be arranged if desired. A girl in Aeran's class had the distinction of only ever having lost twice during months of stiff competition.

Finally there is Baseball. This incorporates the elements of 'ball' and 'strike' but otherwise is played in a notebook and uses numbers. Two players write down three numbers without looking at what the other is writing. They then compare results. If they have the same numbers but in a different sequence, it is a 'ball'. If they have written the same sequence, it is a 'strike'. As might be imagined, this game requires a lot of repeat attempts and can easily distract the players for the whole of a tedious lesson!

5. 2. 4 Reading and writing for documenting life

In a further literacy practice I think is worthy of mention, my teenage informants document their lives by keeping personal journals. This practice, one which has been in effect for generations of students, is introduced at the very beginning of their school careers through a national pedagogical policy institutionalising personal record keeping. As a young pupil in elementary school I too was encouraged to keep a personal journal. The activity constituted obligatory homework, the entries being checked regularly by teachers and good work reinforced by a reward system. In my day, pupils with poor literacy skills were allowed to keep pictorial journals, but as soon as they had acquired the requisite skills they had to switch to a textual format.

The majority of my informants referred somewhat disparagingly to the journals they had kept in elementary school. However, their comments on the journals they had kept from junior high school onwards were more positive since in those they were able to write more openly as teachers did not as a rule inspect them. About the journals he had kept during his elementary school years, Min commented:

They aren't real journals, are they? You just keep them because you have to. You don't write about things you really want to talk about. I don't even remember where they ended up and frankly I don't care.

I could see the effect of the same attitude towards imposed writing tasks in Heesoo's decision to throw away his early journals once he had left school. He did not consider the journals which had been checked by his teachers as an authentic personal record. Tellingly, whereas none of the boys had bothered to hold on to the journals they had written in elementary school, all of them had retained those which they had composed of their own free will. With

the exception of Aeran, on the other hand, the girls had held on to *all* the journals they had kept over the years, keeping the old ones in storage and the current ones in desk drawers.

Why was Aeran the exception? Apparently, she felt she had good reason *not* to hold on to at least one of her journals:

Aeran: I had a lot of mood swings during puberty. I would suddenly get mad at anyone and anything with no apparent reason. Well, I kept up my journal through those times and one day I read it and felt ashamed of the stuff I had written while in one of my foul moods. I was afraid of others getting hold of it and reading it – my mum, dad, sister or even a friend when she came over to my house. So one day I tore it up and binned it.

Researcher: Where did you use to keep your journal?

Aeran: Usually on the bookshelf. But even if I put it away in a desk drawer you never know who might get hold of it and I worried about that possibility. I just felt the best thing was to get rid of it, so I did. Of course in a way I felt bad about losing it but not as bad as I would feel if someone read it.

Indeed Aeran's mother confirmed that her daughter had gone through a bad patch during junior high school. Here then was a case of the literacy which documented life being eliminated in order to preserve a reconstructed self image.

Finally, I observed some interesting residual effects of the obligatory writing represented by the keeping of journals. The practice seems to some extent to have been ritualised in the teenagers' own acceptance of life documentation, journal-style, even to this day. Kiho, for example, continued to keep a journal after he started junior high school, even though it was not officially required of him to do so. He reasoned that it had become 'a sort of habit' ever since elementary school although admittedly his journal entries had become shorter and the interval between entries greater over the years. Perhaps the reason he continued the practice can be found in his comment that he found it interesting to recall the past through reading his entries.

Sumi and Wooil were convinced of the value of personal journals for the same reason. This was Sumi on both her diaries and personal journals:

I re-read my journals, both old and current, when I have nothing to do and feel like recalling past moments . . . I keep them because after a while you tend to forget all the little things that happened to you, but as long as you have a written record of them you can go back to the past any time you want . . . I also write things in my diary - about anything which has left strong images in my head and also about the most interesting things which have happened to me during the day.

Although she used both diary and journal to document her life, Sumi distinguished between them in terms of what went into each. Rogers (op cit) identifies a key function of personal journal writing as helping young women sort out their problems through the sharing of entries with friends. But for my female informants, who had never shared their personal journals with anyone, this function apparently played no part. Indeed, all the girls reacted negatively to the very idea of sharing journal entries with others, claiming that the content was too personal. Yet diaries and exchange journals were apparently another matter. All of my informants were prepared to share the contents of these with friends even though they would sometimes contain entries of a personal nature.

I gained the impression that, whereas the core of my young informants' uncensored and unfiltered private performance made its way into their personal journals, their 'staged' public face was reserved for their diaries and exchange journals. Although the act of separating private and public faces seems to reveal a striving for identity, this differentiation takes the opposite form in gender terms to that which I had presupposed. I had assumed that girls would be more likely than boys to share their written reflections on the dual grounds that the former would be more pro-active in building intimacy within the peer group and that they

engage in written communication with their network of friends far more than boys do. However, my findings led me to reconsider my assumptions. As I have mentioned, my female informants claimed never to have shared the content of their personal journals. In contrast, two of the males, Wooil and Heesoo, confirmed that they had on occasion read the personal writing of others. When a friend who was visiting his home suggested that they both take a look at each other's journals, Heesoo told me he had agreed without hesitation. Kiho and Min remained adamant, on the other hand, that they would never share their journal entries with friends.

As my assumptions relating to gender and the sharing of 'private' writing were in the event not borne out, I have to conclude that there is no straightforward correlation to be made, at least with the limited sampling at my disposal. As well as requiring a broader informant base, I realise that I would need to take deeper soundings of the content of the entries themselves in both personal and exchange journals. Whether this would be feasible is an open question as it would presuppose sufficient rapport between me and my informants to permit what would undoubtedly constitute an intrusion into their private lives. Until such time neither can I make any conclusions about the extent to which young people reveal their innermost selves in their journal entries. Camitta (op cit) and Rogers (op cit) found that the sharing of personal writing was instrumental in 'shaping social relationships' in that it opened up the possibility of dialogue between friends about mutual problems and subsequently led to greater intimacy in their relationships. I can hypothesise that that would also be the case with my Korean male informants but I did not have an opportunity to follow up my hypothesis.

5. 2. 5 Reading and writing related to leisure activities

In their leisure time my informants engaged in several different literacy practices involving reading and writing and because music is such an integral part of young people's lives, it took up the greatest amount of this time. Although for my informants generally this meant pop music, Kiho was in certain respects outside the mainstream in preferring musical styles associated with an older generation. These young people kept up to date with new releases through their peer group network and by listening to the radio, which they tended to have on while studying. They also swapped music on tape with each other. Familiarity with the most popular foreign songs is a characteristic of this age group. Nevertheless, their listening repertoire was bilingual in the sense that they seemed as much at home with Korean lyrics as with English. They were not, however, always able to understand the latter unless, as frequently happens, these were transcribed and included with the recordings they bought. While song melody was a critical factor in my informants' preference for foreign pop music, lyrics played a stronger role in the case of the indigenous product. I will look further at the relationship between adolescent identity and foreign language in the next section.

Karaoke also featured prominently in the lives of my young informants.² Most of them had paid their first visit to a karaoke (in transcription: 'no-re-bang' - literally, 'singing room') when they were in elementary school and now went there on a regular basis, this being one of the few leisure activities available to young people. Karaoke establishments contain several rooms with seating for up to a dozen people, each with a music system and a video monitor

² According to Yu K.A. (1998), Karaoke was first introduced to the southern Korean city of Pusan from Japan in summer 1991, Pusan being geographically close and having traditional trading links with Japan. For the social origins of Karaoke in Japan refer to Lum (1996: 8).

displaying the song lyrics. Yu K.A. (1998) found that 97% of his sample group of 300 visited a Karaoke at least once a month, a frequency which was replicated in the habits of my own informants. Reasons for this may be found in the fact that Karaoke is an affordable recreation for young people and that the group dynamic engendered by singing along to the displayed lyrics reconstructs and reinforces the adolescent culture's strong associations with popular music.

The group dynamic referred to has a variable dimension related to gender, there being a marked contrast between single sex and mixed participation, as Aeran explained:

Aeran: When we girls go [to a Karaoke], all of us get up to dance, clapping and waving our arms to the music. But if we are with boys we tend to choose quieter songs and we don't move.

Researcher: Any idea why that is so?

Aeran: [laughs] Well, I'm not sure but maybe it's got something to do with the image we want to project!

My male informants conceded she had a point. A tendency to tone down ebullient behaviour in the presence of the opposite sex may reflect behavioural norms relating to the performing arts. Until well into the twentieth century performers of song and dance were considered to belong to the lowest stratum of Korean society. Hence even today displays of performing virtuosity are somehow considered to be in bad taste. Indeed, they are often interpreted as a sign of academic failure and to be thought lacking in that respect is a fate almost worse than death in this highly competitive society. While there exists a certain licence for spontaneous outbursts of group merriment among members of the same sex, young people have been conditioned to control their emotions in the presence of the opposite sex. According to Coates (1998), enacting femininity and masculinity do not entail an unitary and unified experience, as different situation and audience require different performances. Since culture

offers members a wide range of ways of being, playing out various femininities or masculinities is possible.

The Karaoke 'culture' also tends to reinforce other gender roles, such as that which decrees that the male is responsible for finance and the female for hospitality. Aeran explained how such traditional norms were displayed in relation to Karaoke visits:

Aeran: When we go [to the Karaoke] with boys, they always pay. Even when the group consists of close friends, the boys don't want the girls to pay.

Researcher: Why is that? Would the boys worry about their image?

Aeran: I think so. Even boys from our church are more or less the same. We girls suggest going Dutch but the boys always say, "Don't worry. We've got enough money!"

Researcher: Couldn't you girls insist on divvying up the cost?

Aeran: Not really. We wouldn't want to because it would upset the boys. So what we do is to try to even things up. We bring snacks to the church for everyone to share or invite the boys home for food after the Karaoke.

The representation of the male as economic provider seems engraved on the Korean mentality. Examining its effect on Korean immigrants to the U.S whose economic circumstances forced both partners to go out to work, Lim I.S. (1997) noted the extreme conflict which was set up in the male partner by this challenge to his long-held role as economic provider. Often the result was a dramatic change in the power dynamic between partners, the male no longer feeling 'master of his own house'. In the Karaoke situation the same role patterning is played out among groups of young people who adhere to and perpetuate the norms of their elders. I will examine certain other entrenched attitudes in my discussion of literacy practices related to consumerism in the next section.

Another leisure venue for young people is the 'game room', where electronic games are set up

in one part of a shop, a karaoke system in another. Here teenagers have the opportunity to do two activities on the same premises at a reasonable cost. I referred earlier to reading and writing practices associated with game use, but I think it is also worth mentioning the evolving opportunities which technology provides for reading and writing. Whereas earlier generations of electronic game functioned in a largely 'literacy-free' environment, recent advances in technology have led to the establishment of personal computer game rooms, cyber cafes, and the like. These new kinds of entertainment venue increasingly involve patrons in reading and writing. Wooil and Heesoo, for example, were learning new computer literacy skills here. At first, they needed the assistance of staff but as time went on they gained confidence and became increasingly expert in using the programmes. Their experience suggests that technology opens up opportunities for the practice of new literacies. I will look further at technology-related literacy practices in Chapter 6.

All the young people I interviewed had studied a musical instrument at one time or another, the piano and the cello in particular. Enrolling their children in music lessons generally reflects parental aspirations for their offspring and I believe is a clear reflection of cultural norms. There were pianos in Jin and Sumi's home and at Wooil and Heesoo's. When both sets of siblings were younger their parents had enrolled them in piano lessons. Not having had this opportunity in their own childhood, the parents felt it was important to offer it to their children (whether they wanted it or not!). However, lacking the motivation and interest to put in the effort that mastery of a musical instrument demands, the children gradually stopped going to their music lessons. Apart from Sumi none of them continues to play the piano or read music. However, Kiho expressed an intention to study the cello once he started university, implying that higher socio-economic status is connected with the ability to play

certain types of musical instrument. His aunt, who had always been an influence on him in his choice of reading material, both providing him with and advising him on what books to get, made him a gift of a cello and encouraged him to take up the instrument. The instrument and the reading associated with learning to play it seem to frame the learner as someone who aspires to a higher socio-economic position.

As a coda to this musical theme, I will mention that Jin and Sumi live near a multi-purpose performing arts centre and auditorium where pop music concerts are often held. The sisters have often gone to these concerts together and purchased tapes there. This experience of being part of a group of young people at concerts may lead them to read further about the singers - articles in the press and in periodicals. They told me they were once motivated in this way to buy a singer's autobiography, for example.

Now I turn to a further type of leisure activity which involves different literacies - the practice of origami. Before my study of literacy practices began, I had assumed that origami was essentially a female activity because as a teacher I had observed many girls practising the craft, but few boys. Both Jin and Sumi did origami, Jin even borrowing origami books from a friend whose mother was an origami instructor. When I questioned Kiho about the craft, his response forced me to re-examine my earlier assumptions of gender specificity. He explained that the making of certain origami designs is considered a basic skill for teenage boys, although he admitted that he himself could only manage to produce one or two examples. He insisted that a number of his male classmates did origami and felt certain they would not identify origami as predominantly a female activity. He said his brother Min in fact owned an origami book. Of course it must be admitted that whereas some people do

learn origami by reading 'how to' books, many more develop their skills from peer teaching. From my own experience as a teacher I also imagined that origami was done both during and out of school hours. In school there is no doubt that the practice is a way to combat boredom, pure and simple. However, I discovered that the exchange of origami designs assumes additional significance in the context of interpersonal relationships. Aeran explained:

Aeran: Someone will ask you to help her out with origami pieces she wants to do for a friend and in that case everyone pitches in and does what she asks. As you can imagine, if you've got a thousand pieces to do by yourself it'll take forever, but if you've got other people to help it's done in no time.

Researcher: Uh huh. I've heard that you assign some meaning to the number of pieces. How does it work?

Aeran: Well, for example you might give a friend of the same sex a present of fifty, seventy, or a hundred pieces. Or for your boyfriend you might make 100 pieces in celebration of the first 100 days of knowing each other - things like that. A thousand pieces means a thousand days of being together. It could also say to him that you want the thing to last a long time.

My assumption from past experience that origami was solely a female practice had, therefore, been proven incorrect. Moreover, cooperative production methods endowed the skill with a social dimension I had never before realised was part of the origami 'experience'. Yet it was evident that a sort of generation gap now prevailed. Upon discovering two of my young male informants doing origami in school, male teachers had cast aspersions on the 'maleness' of the activity. To conclude then, it would be interesting to discover how and when a practice which a generation before had been exclusively female had become at least to some extent free of gender attachment. However, I did not explore this theme with my informants.

Finally, a few words about the reading and writing activities associated with cooking and food preparation. Both the boys and the girls said they consulted cookery books at home from time to time and made notes while watching T.V. cookery shows. However, on further

questioning it became apparent that none of them ever tried out any of the recipes they collected, neither did they keep any of the notes they made, although Jin did put the recipes she collected in a box she used for storing letters. It was evident that the adolescents' interest in food preparation went little further than collecting recipe ideas. Although they did reading and writing on the subject, the main outcome of these literacy practices was that of asking their mothers to try out the recipes rather than of doing it themselves. Other possible factors such as time and cost naturally have to be considered but the basic assumption seems to be that food preparation is the adult female's job. Set in its cultural context, this assumption appears to reflect young people's dependence on their parents as well as a society which discourages young people from questioning either their own role as a dependent or challenging culturally normed gender roles.

My examples so far have for the most part been of literacy practices related to leisure and recreational pursuits, in which reading and writing construct and reconstruct teenage identity. Furthermore this identity is situated in a Korean context and therefore reflects the norms of that particular culture. Like other social practices, the reading and writing done in connection with a person's free time are influenced by a multitude of social factors, not least by the various agenda of the society's power bases. One of the most pervasive of these, the market forces within a consumer society, suggests another aspect of literacy, which I turn to next.

5. 2. 6 Reading and writing related to membership in a consumer society

To live in an industrialised society in the twenty-first century is ipso facto to be a consumer.

This holds for Korea as for much as for any other developed nation. In contemporary society numerous literacy practices are associated with consumption, a phenomenon noted in the British context by Maybin (op cit). It is arguable that all the aspects of reading and writing that I examine in this study could be considered to a greater or lesser extent to be consumption-related since written texts mediate the consumption of practically every product. As my focus is on literacies which were significant to my young informants in their daily lives, however, I am inevitably led to be selective.

My informants' consumer armoury included numerous coupons and vouchers entitling the bearer to free or price-discounted merchandise and services. Heesoo showed me some of the many coupons and vouchers he had received from merchants, who hand such material out to students at the school gate or in city centre shopping areas. There were a dozen or more of these in his wallet, valid for a wide variety of consumer products and services - hairstyling, clothing, footwear, food, and so on. Heesoo told me that he and his friends would often swap coupons in order to get those each could make most use of. As a university student Wooil had several vouchers for free drinks, redeemable with the purchase of a more expensive item at local bars.

Wallets - their appearance and make - were items of importance in the male community, as

Aeran explained to me:

In much the same way I might ask a female friend to show me her diary, a boy will be curious about a friend's wallet and ask to see it. He wants to find out how the wallet looks and whether it bears a popular brand name. I think it's true to say that we girls don't worry much about that kind of thing.

My male informants confirmed that Aeran's observation was indeed correct. Heesoo's and

Min's wallets had the outward appearance of the adult version with the one difference - only apparent on closer inspection - that none contained actual credit, debit or store charge cards! There were, however, rather grand collections of store membership, bonus point and other kinds of business affinity cards. Heesoo explained:

Heesoo: You see this card here? A friend of mine found it in the street and gave it to me because he thought I didn't have enough cards. You know, it doesn't look good if your wallet doesn't have many cards in it.

Researcher: Do all the kids have this many cards in their wallets?

Heesoo: Sure.

The specific card which Heesoo referred to was issued by a company which is a division of one of Korea's biggest conglomerates, a card which is typically issued on a customer's first transaction at one of the company's retail outlets. Heesoo was not sure what he was going to do with it but he was keeping it because that was what teenagers did. Both Heesoo and Woil also had membership cards issued by a clothing store and a leisure park respectively. Jongwon's wallet contained a bonus points card issued to his father by a petroleum company. Subsequently I learned that a friend of Dan's carried twenty used telephone cards in his wallet, a practice which Dan assured me was by no means uncommon. Plastic cards with their intimations of affluence are obviously a 'must-have' item in the wallet of any self-respecting male teenager.

All these coupons, vouchers, membership cards and the like form transactional texts whose purpose is to bind the user to the consumer community and position him or her as an active participant in the world of commerce. It is perhaps relevant to note here that until quite recently Korea was a cash-only society; credit and charge cards are a relatively recent phenomenon. In order to encourage people to become card users it was necessary to create a

mystique in which cards were associated with higher socio-economic status. The status so ascribed to those possessing bank or store cards is replicated in the make-believe world of adolescence. Moreover, by emulating adult behaviour male teenagers may feel they enact the authority represented by adults and so imagine they belong to the adult world.

As Aeran had suggested, fancy wallets and make-believe wads of plastic were apparently preoccupations of the males only. The girls' wallets and purses were uniformly chunky and utilitarian. None of the girls seemed to be carrying cards which had any but a strictly functional purpose. Such differences are further evidence of gender representation in Korean society. Here we have examples of social practice being mediated by literacy, the means by which social beliefs and attitudes are passed on from one generation to another.

The girls' own engagement with consumerism took rather different forms. One current popular manifestation is the use of commercially designed and produced stickers featuring both Korean and American cartoon characters. These tiny thumbnail-sized stickers are sold in packs containing anything from a dozen to several dozen. Stickers containing new characters, designs and lettering are constantly being added by an industry bent on capitalising on the young female's desire for novelty. Most relevant to my own research interests were those which bore textual messages, usually relating to the diverse aspects of a young person's life. A themed pack on school, for example, included stickers with the names of school subjects, as well as 'recess', 'lunch break', 'homework', etc. A leisure activity pack had stickers saying 'sing', 'movie', 'baseball game', 'party', and so on. As I looked through her collection of literally hundreds of stickers, Jin's comments showed how creative she and her friends could be in their appropriation of the stickers to serve individual need:

Researcher: How do you use them?

Jin: I use them in my diary, personal journal and in my letters. For example, the day I went to a Karaoke I stuck this 'sing' sticker in my diary. Some of us even write letters mainly using stickers. For example, if you wanted to say, "I was tired in school today", you might choose the 'I', 'tired', 'school' and 'today' stickers, or something like that.

Researcher: I see. [pointing to some other stickers] When would you use these - 'start' and 'end' ?

Jin: Well, I use them to keep a record of my period. I stick them onto the calendar in my diary. That way nobody has to know what it means.

Researcher: Brilliant. How would you use this 'point' sticker then?

Jin: For studying. I put the 'point' stickers on key learning points in my textbook to remind me to pay special attention to them.

Jin told me that, as well as communicating among themselves using the stickers, she and her friends would often exchange unused stickers and sticker packs with each other in order to bring a new and different dimension to their collection. Some stickers bore slogans such as 'I love you' and 'You're the best' and these would obviously play a part in building and maintaining social relations among these teenagers. It was apparent in fact that, much as coupons and cards provided a focal point for social interchange among the young males, transactions involving stickers formed the basis of a great deal of interpersonal activity among young Korean females.

One further literacy related to consumerism is that of reading commercial advertising material. There are many kinds of advertising texts and formats which mediate teenage consumption: press advertising, store flyers, product brochures, shop stickers (a form of advertising which is very common in Korea) - to name a few. For example, all of my informants to a greater or lesser degree read the newspaper which their family subscribed to. In it each found items of particular interest to them which formed their idiosyncratic reading path (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996 quoted in Barton and Hamilton, 1998): ads for movies,

books and magazines, articles about new products, and so on. This is consistent with one of Um H.J.'s (1995) findings in her study of Korean adolescents' reading purposes: that young people tended to choose reading material on the basis of newspaper advertising. Sumi explained her own *modus operandi*:

I always read the ads for magazines and that way decide which ones to buy. Those which offer the most exciting free gifts with their magazine grab my attention first. Look [pointing to the newspaper], this ad says they're giving away free lipstick. As soon as I come across such an offer I go to the bookshop and buy that magazine. That's the way I choose magazines.

Like Sumi, my adolescent informants read these advertising texts in order to find out about special deals and to help them make decisions on what to purchase. Similarly, Jin and Kiho checked out the newspaper adverts for newly published books and bought or borrowed books on that basis. Some of my informants kept booklets in which they stuck advertising cuttings for future reference. Sumi told me she occasionally entered promotional competitions, but so far at least without much success.

Finally, young people's growing engagement with computer-mediated communication has made possible new forms of participation in consumer society. Although online transactions are out of the question as most have no access to credit cards, commercial websites do allow young people to access online shopping where the practice of website referrals offers the possibility of earning prizes. In this practice young people 'spread the word' on particular companies to others by 'dropping' the company's name or the name of its product via the online message facilities of other organisations. This might seem a profitable sideline to be engaged in but apparently it isn't always as easy as it looks. After spending 'hours and hours' on the Internet Jin complained to me that she had only received a telephone card worth a few pounds for all her effort.

5.3 Other literacy-related issues

In this section I will examine other aspects of the literacies drawn from my data which seem to me to deserve mention. As literacy practices are embedded in the wider context of social and cultural practice, a knowledge of the situatedness of reading and writing in Korea will help to clarify the role of foreign languages as well as the values imbued in literary practices. I will start with a discussion of language as it relates to vernacular reading and writing.

5.3.1 Adolescents and language

As already indicated, my young informants are exposed to at least one foreign language in the course of their secondary school education. Chinese used to be considered a language of higher status by intellectuals and older Koreans. Among Kiho's father's collection of books, for example, I noticed many Chinese titles. Nowadays however Western languages, in particular English, have overtaken Chinese as languages which bear ascribed status for the present generation (Yun H.J., 1994: 39). English is used in Korea, often indiscriminately and inaccurately, in everything from product labels to magazine titles.

Fashion magazine titles aimed at the younger woman reader, for example, typically bear English or English-sounding titles: *Let's*, *Céci*, *Duo*, *Figaro*, *Kiki*, *Cindy Perky*, *Lunch Box*. Most carry advertising for clothes and cosmetics aimed at the teenage reader and these also bear brand names which are either English or which have an anglicised ring to them. One manufacturer of female clothing uses the brand name 'Zizibe', a word which looks English but which in fact corresponds to the Korean phonemes representing 'girl'. A brief

examination of a single issue of one such fashion magazine (*Céci* 1998) produced the following data for the clothing products advertised therein:

English or anglicised brand names (wholly or in conjunction with Korean words): 98%

Chinese brand names: 2%

Not a single item bore a Korean-only label. Manufacturers, it seems, take pains to avoid Korean labelling on their products. However, the English used often sounds idiosyncratic to English native ears. It is 'language reduced to decoration, removed from any context or meaning' (Ferguson, 1998: 297): Yello for 5th Generation; Own Zone Original Comfort; Kistic (possibly representing a fusion of 'kid' and 'cosmetic'). Other European languages are subjected to the same sort of cavalier treatment: a snack drink, for example, bears the name 'Lait Thé'. The dominant use of English also extends to the titles of comics. Here again, many of these sound odd to the native English ear: *Unplugged Boys*, *Orange Boy*, *Hotel Africa*, *Crazy Love Story*, *Red Moon*, *Princess*, *Full House*. Sometimes English and Korean script are combined in titles. The creative juxtapositioning of different languages seems to be designed to add a touch of the exotic to product image. Whether it extends the influence of or has a beneficial effect on the use of English among young consumers is another question.

The adaptation of language to serve commercial ends is also observed in the photo stickers referred to earlier. These often contain messages in English which to the native ear sound eccentric or bizarre. 'Choi love Yun' read a line on one of Heesoo's photo stickers dedicated to his male friend Yun which, its odd grammar apart, seemed an unusual observation to make about a friend of the same sex. Also questionable contextually was the word

'Congratulations' on a photo sticker Wooil gave to his brother Heesoo on the latter's birthday. The same Korean word can be translated as either 'Congratulations' or 'Happy Birthday', depending on context. Young people who have had a limited exposure to English would probably fail to register such anomalies.

The younger generation's attachment to English is also evident in their personal writing. A diary composition Jin wrote, for example, contained English as well as Korean, her title being in English ('My favourite colour') and the text in Korean. As I have already mentioned, all my teenage informants tended to use English words in their letter writing. They would replace Korean words with the equivalent English or other language from their active repertoire. A letter Jin received from a friend contained several basic German expressions in addition to English. Both languages were school subjects for the two girls. Jin told me that it was fun for the girls to play with language in this way. Kiho had copied English pop song lyrics into his diary which he allowed his friends to reproduce. In her study of British teenagers' literacy practices, Rogers (op cit) also found that young people use more than one language in their written communication with friends: in this case French as well as English were used.

As can be seen, literacy practices in the social context construct and reconstruct a close relation between adolescents and foreign languages, in particular English but also to a lesser extent the other modern languages commonly studied in secondary school. I consider the reflection of social context in reading and writing in the following section.

5.3.2 Values imbued in literacy practices

As literacy is situated in the wider context of social practices, it is only to be expected that literacy practices should reflect the values of the host culture. Reading and writing in particular are strongly emphasised in Korean society and thus logically play a central role in the school system. As already discussed, the importance attached to writing is underscored by the fact that the schools require students to keep a personal journal. Similar emphasis is placed on reading. Students are provided with lists of 'must read' and 'should read' books compiled and distributed by the central education authority (Lee and Scarcella, 1992), whose policy on reading is revealed in the following summary:

The rationale behind the emphasis on reading lies in society's need to nurture its young people in their growth towards maturity and responsibility. Reading not only provides knowledge and information but also opportunities to broaden the reader's understanding of the world through an engagement with various experiences in the text. Furthermore it enables the reader to develop higher cognitive abilities such as logical and analytical thinking skills. Another benefit of reading is linked to the consequences of emotional roundedness in that literary and pleasure reading contribute to refining the reader's emotions and assist in the formulation of appropriate personal values. In sum, reading makes a significant contribution towards the formation of the ideal human being. (Um H.J., 1995: 9)

The effects of literacy on the cognitive processes have been explored by numerous scholars. Goody and Watt (1963) claim that the development of literacy, in particular writing, in ancient Greece became the cornerstone of the philosophy of the rational human being, a person able to think for himself logically and analytically (referred to in Mahiri and Godley, 1998). Holdaway (1986) also supports the view that writing led to the development of abstract analytical thought, the linearity of print predisposing the literate person to think sequentially, rationally and logically. However, these views are not supported by those who are critical of the autonomous model of literacy (e.g. Street, 1984; Besnier, 1995), as I have already indicated in Chapter 3.

A Korean scholarly perspective embraces the effects of literacy beyond the cognitive to include its contribution towards nurturing human virtue. In the context of a well-known Korean academic discourse, that of ongoing research into the reading habits of Korean high school students, survey questionnaires typically contain references to this nurturing aspect. To the question, 'What is your purpose in reading?', two of the seven responses in a multiple choice construct were as follows:

i) in order to become a socially well-adjusted person

ii) in order to make good use of my time

(Kim S.A., 1997 and Lee Y.S., 1998)

Sharing the values inherent in this academic discourse, the parents of my informants encouraged their children to read from a very young age. Moreover, there is a recurring pattern to the reading material parents provide for their children. It includes a broad range of children's world literature, Korean folk tales and reference volumes covering the natural and physical world. Publishers offer package deals on the titles which make up these home libraries; hence the children's books in one household will often be identical to those in another. Yuni's mother, who is representative of the vast majority of Korean parents who firmly believe in the beneficial effects that reading these books has on their children's educational development (Lee and Scarcella, op cit), explained these beliefs to me and how they applied to her own family:

Reading is good for children and that's why I tell my own kids to read whenever they get the chance. They can experience the world indirectly by reading and can learn lots of things which school doesn't teach them. But it isn't always easy. Take my son for instance. Unlike his sister he will hardly ever pick up a book of his own free will. And you know what I think? Children who lack interest in reading produce writing of a much inferior quality to that of children who read a lot. Compared to my daughter's, my son's writing is full of grammar mistakes and his spelling is really poor. His class had to write a letter for Parents' Day recently and if you look at that you can see how weak his grammar is. And his understanding of the world generally is much more limited than my daughter's. It all results

from his lack of interest in books, of that I'm sure.

Like most of her generation Mrs Park would have had limited access to reading resources during her own childhood and adolescence, yet as an adult experienced no particular reading or writing problems. Therefore she may simply be interpreting her son's lack of writing ability from the generally held view which she herself plainly subscribes to.

Certain remarks made to me by Aeran's mother, Mrs Kim, demonstrate that she too was influenced by popular perceptions of literacy practices. At the same time as insisting she had an open mind to all forms of reading material, she showed her obvious disquiet concerning her own daughter's interest in romance comics, an interest which she labelled 'obsessive':

My younger daughter is giving me a hard time at present and I'm not sure what I ought to do - ignore it or intervene. You see, she is crazy about romance comics. She has registered herself in all the reading rental shops around here and even where we used to live. She spends at least two hours in those shops whenever she goes out and there's always a pile of comics in her room. I asked her what she saw in them and her answer was like, "Mum, reading comics isn't just fun. It actually makes me happy!"

Mrs Kim's concern reflects the Korean value distinction between pedagogic and vernacular reading. What Korean parents and educators invariably have in mind when they talk up the value of reading is reading which has assumed pedagogic as opposed to entertainment or recreational value. Young people's attitudes to reading cannot help but be affected by the emphasis placed both at home and in school on reading material which is seen as contributing to educational progress. Although it was perfectly clear to me they do indeed read widely and enjoy what they read, neither Jin nor Kiho identified reading as one of their favourite activities. Reading for them meant what others required them to read, the choice of which was outside their control. Theirs is a popular perception, one which reflects the fact that Koreans are brought up to believe that reading is a fundamental obligation of daily life. The

power of institutionalised literacy affects the attitudes held by adolescents towards their own vernacular reading. According to Jin a good reader was someone who was able to apply the sorts of text analysing skills which are taught in school. By the same token she labelled 'good' those books which she found 'difficult' or 'boring' or which had won literary awards, since in her mind such books helped readers develop skills. Kiho expressed a similar attitude but in different words. 'Good' books were 'helpful' and 'useful', and the examples he gave me were all academic textbooks. There was thus a clear correlation between Kiho's perceptions of what constituted a 'good' book and the kinds of books his parents and relatives bought for him to read.

This distinction between reading for instruction and reading for fun had some odd side-effects. Kiho, for example, subscribed to a science periodical which he told me he would lend to friends but only if he could count on getting the copies back in mint condition. A computer game enthusiast, he himself often borrowed game magazines which by his own admission he felt no compunction in treating in a casual way, cutting pieces out of them or even failing to return them to their rightful owner. He thus invested his own science magazines with a higher worth than the game magazines he borrowed from friends. The science magazines, he reasoned, could be used for homework purposes but not so the game magazines. He too had taken on board the dictum that school-related reading was inherently more valuable than any reading done out of personal interest or for relaxation. His attitude is reflected in a survey among her senior high school students carried out by Lee Y.S. (op cit), in which most said they read to facilitate their academic progress and only a small number mentioned that they read for pleasure.

If ever any stigma attaches itself to reading material which has no overt pedagogic purpose, the harshest disapproval is reserved for comics. Like Mrs Kim, most parents are opposed to their children reading comics. Pedagogic opinion of comics ranges from their being considered a time-waster all the way through to their being thought to corrupt the juvenile mind and being evil incarnate³. Consequently, young people have traditionally had to find time and place to read their favourite comics surreptitiously. Woolil was typical:

My parents didn't like to see me reading them, so I couldn't ask them for money to buy them. They thought I should spend all my time with school books instead of wasting time reading 'junk'.

The other teenagers told of similar parental opposition. It was not until comics began to deal with recognisably 'educational' topics that the genre began to gain a measure of acceptance. Nowadays a gap has gradually become evident between those comics which are acknowledged to have some redeeming pedagogic value and those which are considered to be utterly beyond the pale.

5. 3. 3 Reading and writing facilities: libraries, reading rental shops and bookshops

This section examines the role in literacy of reading facilities which are available at no charge or for a modest fee: libraries, bookshops and reading rental shops. First I look at how teenagers use school and public libraries and what these facilities mean to them. Then I move on to private sector initiatives to provide reading facilities which play a significant role in young people's literacy practices.

³ This was also the case in the U.K. until the 1970s and a detailed discussion of how comics were perceived in British society can be found in Marsh and Millard (2000: 101-103). This issue is discussed in depth in a forum published in *New Education* (October 1997).

According to the 1998 population census there are six public libraries in the city where my informants live, yet less than half of my young informants were aware of their existence, let alone made use of them. Historically Korean public libraries exist as places for private study rather than as places to borrow books (Kim S.A, 1997). More recently city public libraries have started to fulfil the latter function, but the perception of many young people is still that a library is a place for study.

A friend had introduced Jin to a public library called 'Keumho Education and Cultural Centre' about a year before my interviews took place. She had gone there to borrow books as well as to study. Jin made use of a range of fiction and non-fiction books, especially science reference titles which she used in her homework. Wooil would go to another public library located in a nearby senior high school because it was closer and more convenient to his own school. He usually took out Chinese warrior tales which were his favourite kind of reading material. According to the 1993 Census on Reading Preferences, warrior tales represented one of the two most circulated genres among high school boys; the other was detective stories (quoted in Kim S.A., op cit: 47). During his second and final years of senior high school Wooil went to that library every weekend to study or to read for pleasure.

Sumi, on the other hand, had never borrowed books from the public libraries she went to. It was not even clear to her that she could. To her a library was a place for study. Space allocation in Korean public libraries reflects their primary function as study centres. For example, in the library Jin went to there were study areas and the stacks themselves, in quite separate parts of the library, roughly three times as many of the former as of the latter. This finds resonance in Lee Y.S.'s (op cit: 52) findings that only 11.4 % of her informants obtained

reading material from public libraries, whether a regular or a mobile facility, while 41.5 % borrowed either from friends or reading rental shops.

My other informants (Heesoo, Kiho and Min) had little experience of public libraries. Their lack of knowledge may be attributed to a general shortage of information for the public, something I experienced myself. Keumho Education and Cultural Centre, for example, was opened in 1994 but I knew nothing of it until Jin told me of its existence, nor could I find any listing for it. My curiosity piqued, I decided to accompany Jin in order to find out exactly where the library was, while at the same time observing her literacy practices. When we got to the library, I was at first unable to find anyone who could give me information; in fact, the staff were generally unhelpful. Finally a staff member found a leaflet stored at the back of a cupboard in one of the offices. This incident helps explain, I thought to myself, why so few people in Korea know about the availability of public services.

My visits during the first phase of my research fieldwork had left me with the impression that libraries functioned mainly as places to study and that they were therefore frequented predominantly by young people. I noticed very few people of other age groups. Students were also in the majority in the resources section. In their study of a British community, Barton and Hamilton (1998) found that young people tended to use libraries less and less as they progressed through their teens. Korean teenagers, however, remain active library users statistically; perhaps this is due to the fact that they are expected to spend most of their time studying! During the second phase of my research fieldwork a year later I had occasion to revise my earlier impressions to a certain extent. It was apparent that, in some libraries at least, efforts were being made to increase the available reading resources. Although my

young informants continued to use the libraries as places to study in, there was evidence too that they were borrowing books from library collections that were in the process of expansion.

Like public libraries, school libraries provide study space but very limited reading resources. Lee Y.S. (op cit) reveals that 66.7 % of senior high school students never use their school libraries, either because they cannot find what they need or because access is restricted. The classroom library, often containing books donated by the students themselves, usually fulfils this function. Traditional organisational practice in the schools makes this feasible in that students tend to stay in one room - their home room - while teachers do the moving, unlike the Western method of moving classes from subject teacher to subject teacher. The home room library, limited in scope though it may be, is thus the primary source of reading materials within the school.

Commercial interests provide another reading resource for young people: the so-called 'reading rental shops', similar in concept to the commercial lending libraries of pre-war Britain. Here it is possible to borrow popular recreational reading materials at a reasonable cost. The reading rental business came into being sometime after the Korean War (1950-53) and really started to come into its own with comics in the 1960s, the shops being popularly named 'comic shops' (Yun H.J., op cit: 45). Their success with young people was such that by the 1990s they stocked not only comics but a wide range of light reading material, including fiction titles, magazines and periodicals. Comics, however, remain their main stock in trade because of their continuing popularity with young people. All my young informants were regular patrons of the reading rental shops. Some of them borrowed comics only, others read

more widely. Reading rental shops obviously play an important role in the reading habits of the young and the kinds of reading material they offer are deeply rooted in teenagers' vernacular literacy.

The more traditional kind of bookshop also figures prominently in young people's lives. Observers note that teenagers are spending more of their disposable income on books than ever before (Yun H.J., 1994; Kim S.A., 1997; Lee Y.S., 1998). Importantly, however, bookshops are where young people meet their friends. The bigger bookshops to be found in city centres are favourite meeting points due to their convenient location in shopping and entertainment areas. Bookshops are such a magnet for young people, in fact, that they might seem to be victims of their own popularity. Some of them seem to recognise their role as social focal point by making seats available. Sitting without buying, even reading without buying, is accepted practice in Korean bookshops. When I was in one of the busiest bookshops in the city center, I observed many people reading while standing and some even sitting on the floor in corners surrounded by piles of books. Jin recalled that she had once finished reading a whole novel in a bookshop. There is, however, an unwritten rule which frowns on the practice of doing the same with comics. One assumes it would be all too easy to finish several of these at one sitting, thereby depriving the shop of potential revenue.

The bookshop also serves as an important source for information gathering. Jin did not hesitate to go there to look up information in encyclopaedias. Wooil, as I mentioned earlier, was in the habit of consulting game magazines in bookshops in order to jot down secret codes or the latest cheating strategy on a piece of scrap paper. Sumi would take a poetry book off the shelf and copy poems from it into her diary. A Korean cultural norm that knowledge is

there to be shared seems to be in evidence here. As an old Korean saying goes, 'Stealing books is not theft'.

5.3.4 Social networks formed around reading and writing

There was a great deal of evidence that networks form in the everyday life of young people from which they receive help in their reading and writing activities. At various times all my informants experienced difficulty of one kind or another in their reading and writing. Wooil met words which he did not know the meaning of and asked his mother for help. Younger siblings went to older ones for assistance with literacy problems. Min received help from his brother Kiho with the English word puzzles he was doing, as well as with his Korean grammar and spelling. However, none of them appeared to have serious problems in their literacy.

The networks related to reading and writing are enacted for the purpose of getting advice on and obtaining literacy materials. Parents and siblings are first-hand providers of reading materials. They give books and book tokens to their teenage children on their birthdays. Outside the nuclear family the network circle expands to include relatives, friends of the parents and the young person's own friends. From his aunt, a teacher, Kiho acquired a large collection of educational books. On their high school graduation Kiho and Min were each given book tokens from friends of their parents. Jin and Sumi also received books from cousins, aunts and friends of their parents to mark special occasions. According to Kim S.A. (op cit: 19), secondary students make most of their choices of recreational reading material on the basis of information received through their social network, which includes parents, siblings, relatives and friends. Other sources play a relatively minor role in influencing their

choice.

Within a particular network the roles of giver and receiver may on occasion be reversed. Young people may sometimes be in the position of offering their elders help with their reading and writing. Jin helps her mother with English words when she asks for it. Sumi gives books she no longer needs to her cousins. Min lets younger friends have his old supplementary textbooks when he is finished with them. However, in matters relating to Korean literacy it tends to be a one-way street: parents are invariably the providers of assistance to offspring, and not the other way round. None of my informants could recall an occasion on which they helped their parents with Korean reading and writing. This may indicate that parents rarely need help (or if they do are reluctant to acknowledge the fact) or it may reflect the prevalent social and cultural norm that parents should appear more knowledgeable and expert than their children. By being framed as providers rather than as receivers, parents thus resist any challenge to their authority and thereby reinforce the traditional family power structure.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to provide an account of the many and varied literacy practices Korean young people engage in, to show how their literacy is situated in specific local contexts and to demonstrate the roles taken on by their literacy. By setting literacy against the backdrop of broader social practice, I have tried to make it clear that social and cultural values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions underlie and are encompassed in most reading and

writing activities. I hope that my exploration of these literacy practices reveal how different identities of the literacy users themselves are interwoven in their reading and writing habits. It should also be apparent that these identities are reflected at both a personal and a social level and that social relations are maintained through the mediation of literacy.

Even though I identify six categories, in fact, as Barton and Hamilton (1998: 252) rightly point out, some literacies cut across categories and there is overlap between categories. To take one small example, keeping a diary may serve not only to organise a young person's daily life, but also to maintain his/her friendships and affinities and furthermore to link that individual with the consumer society of which he/she is a member. Although it is not necessarily the end goal of any activity it mediates, literacy obviously serves multiple purposes for young people and enriches their lives.

Chapter 6 Literacy practices related to digital communication and information technologies

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the literacy practices which young Koreans engage in via digital communication technologies, with specific reference to computer mediated communication (CMC) and cellular telecommunications (the mobile phone). The massive popularity of these two technologies is changing the way individuals interact with each other worldwide and it is probably safe to say that Korea is in the vanguard of developments in both. An account of young people's literacy practices at the start of the new millennium would be incomplete without a consideration of how such technologies help to reconstruct reading and writing habits.

6.2 Computer mediated communication

Korean national newspaper articles speak of the N-generation (Net-generation), which they define as follows:

Although proficient computer users of any age may be considered members, the N-generation consists mainly of young people born after 1979 who have sufficient knowledge and skills to master the Internet and consider it their natural element.
(Donga, 22 December 1999)

As my informants showed themselves to be at home with digital technologies, as well as active participants in their use, by definition they belong to the N-generation. Although many of them had started to use a computer as early as their primary school years, it was initially only for word-processing and playing single-user games. People had started using the

Internet earlier in the large cities of Seoul and Pusan but in smaller cities such as Kwangju, where my research was largely carried out, widespread Internet use arrived at or near the end of the 1990s.

On my research visits to Kwangju during 1999 and 2000 it was noticeable that the number of commercial computer outlets (so-called PC Rooms) had mushroomed, providing online computer facilities for a fee. My male informants told me they were attracted to these venues by the prospect of being able to play 'Star Craft', a so-called MUD (multi-user dimension) computer game which had become all the rage among young males. MUDs were originally designed as text-based interactive games similar to the text-based adventure games played on personal computers. When someone first connects to the MUD, they are asked to create the 'character' who for the purposes of the game is their alter ego. The genre of the game will establish what kinds of characters are available and what powers and characteristics they will have in the game. For example, a game might include Wizards, Dragons or Swordsmen. The MUD will include many 'virtual places' such as rooms, roads and countryside each containing numerous 'virtual objects'. None of these exist in any real sense: they are fictional environments in which players can carry out certain actions, limited by the attributes of the characters they are playing and by the actions of other players (Yates, 1996: 127). Through their interest in playing the MUDs, young people typically become regular patrons of PC rooms.

As my male informants began to explore the digital media in greater depth they made other interesting discoveries, for example the existence of entertainment sites which provide free access to the latest pop music. Almost overnight it seemed, local use of the new

communication technologies was catching up with a nation-wide explosion of interest in the Internet generally. My female informants entered this cyberworld some months later than my male informants, but they too quickly became familiar with CMC. In the summer of 1999 my female informants attended a basic school course on the uses of the Internet, followed by a web-editing course during which they had the opportunity to design their own home page on the school website. Indeed, while on this course, Aeran and fully a quarter of her classmates had created their own homepages. It was obvious that these activities had spurred the interest of these young people in digital technology and confirmed them in their enthusiasm for the Internet. Although levels of participation among school staff and students vary, most secondary school websites contain home pages for each student. I discuss some of the characteristics of these home pages below.

Generally speaking, the institutions my informants attend provide sufficient online facilities to ensure ease of access for their students at most times. My high school informants are perhaps typical in that they visit the school computer lab in their lunch breaks, for example to log on to the Internet in order to check for or send e-mail messages. Outside school they have further access to networked computers in places such as public libraries and of course in commercial PC Rooms, which are to be found in most city blocks. All my informants have home computers with 24 hour ADSL⁴ connection to the Internet, although their parents may place restrictions on the amount of time their offspring are permitted to be online.

⁴ ADSL stands for Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. According to a definition given in the Dictionary of Computer and Internet Terms (1998), it is a type of high-speed digital telephone connection used mainly for systems that involve digital video. It supports data rates of 6 million bits per second in one direction and 576 kilobits per second in the other direction.

The Internet plays a major function in both the academic and the social lives of young people.

I examine its use under four heads:

- i) Internet use related to academic work
- ii) Internet use related to leisure
- iii) Internet use related to maintaining existing social relationships
- iv) Internet use related to developing new relationships.

6. 2. 1 Internet use related to academic work

The senior high school girls I interviewed all had their introduction to the Internet in connection with homework assignments, as Yuni explained:

We were all used to going to a public library close to our school whenever we needed reference materials for our homework assignments. Because there was a very limited range of materials there, the work each of us handed in tended to be more or less the same. But once we got the hang of looking for stuff on the Internet, we found we got quite different results. Moreover, the presentation was neat and colourful and seemed to get better grades. Of course in the beginning there were a few teachers who weren't happy with what we were doing. They turned up their noses at our computer-processed assignments, saying it couldn't be our own work. But that was then. You'd be hard-pressed to find any teacher saying that nowadays. On the contrary, now it's handwritten work which tends to be suspect; you know, like it could be a case of copying your friends' answers at the last minute because you didn't find time at home! So yes, we all use the computer to do our homework.

Not only do students feel they get better marks from submitting printed assignments, but often teachers specify that certain homework assignments should involve digital 'research'.

Aeran's mother summed up what led her to get an Internet connection for the household:

My children badly needed the Internet because of their homework. For example, in order to complete a homework assignment my younger daughter had no alternative but to access the Internet because one of her teachers left his homework instructions on his home page! We weren't online at that time, so both of my daughters were having to rush off to a commercial PC room. This state of affairs more or less forced us to get our computer connected up before we had planned to do so.

Yuni's parents gave me similar reasons for connecting up to the Internet and, indeed, for installing a more up-to-date model of computer with faster Internet connection at the same time. School assignments have been a significant contributing factor to the expanding use of the Internet among young people and have resulted in a dramatic increase in subscriptions to Internet access via home computers. Although Yuni's mother was not as wholehearted in her support of IT for academic purposes as Aeran's, it was nevertheless obvious that there was no question for her that familiarity with the computer was an essential requirement in Korean society. Both mothers compared the expanding use of data technology to the introduction of TV in their own childhood, with its attendant implication that if you did not have the equipment you would be considered illiterate.

There is of course abundant information available on the Internet to help schoolchildren with their studies, but as a former teacher I was particularly interested in examining the websites of some of the textbook publishers whose names I was familiar with. Although having some features in common, these vary greatly in both scope and quality. As well as concentrating on the university entrance examination and providing strategies for improving student performance thereon, most feature discussions of the latest government examination policies. There are also batteries of tests covering many of the entrance exam topics which students can do online and have marked immediately, with their achievement ranked against national scales.

Understandably, publishers on their websites are also interested in promoting their own products targeted at the specific needs of testees. One publisher's site, *Didimdol*, provides a service for parents seeking private tutors for their children, to which both students and

prospective tutors may register free of charge. Tutors are typically university students enrolled at Korea's prestigious universities. Another publisher's site, *Blackbox*, features an advisory service in which secondary school students can voice their academic concerns to university students who achieved success in the university entrance examination, ostensibly by using that particular publisher's study aids. The heart of this service is called 'Q & A Room', where brief personal details on the consultants are given, as well as information on which university they are studying at, what their specialist area is, etc. This personalised service addresses prospective high school users in a quite informal way. Students are encouraged to contact one of the seniors about any problems or concerns they may have with their schoolwork without having to feel beholden to the advisor or to worry about the impression they are making, as might be the case if they were to consult their own teachers or peers.

My informants told me of their own experience of using publishers' websites. For certain school assignments, for example, Aeran was able to get replies to her questions simply by typing these on the relevant website. She had not completely stopped using public library resources but enjoyed the opportunity to combine conventional library research with computer network usage. Yuni had adopted a more cyber-intensive approach. She had gone so far as to take out a subscription to an online lecture series covering various subjects, although she admitted that despite the cost she had not made the most of the learning opportunities thus provided. In her free time Yuni also browsed the contents of student-publisher consultations. She told me, however, that she did not necessarily apply the advice which was given there to her own study problems. In certain ways her attitude to these resources remained rather conventional since she seemed to prefer discussing her study

problems with her friends rather than posting them into an anonymous cyberspace. It was almost as if the sheer volume of correspondence to be found on publishers' websites, far from giving her encouragement, actually overwhelmed her, confirming her in the belief that the difficulties to be faced in the runup to the entrance examination were insurmountable. Ironically the websites, it seemed, only increased her feelings of anxiety, worsening the pressures she felt rather than easing them and indeed causing her to feel ambivalent about using them.

Some further examples of ways in which my informants have harnessed the Internet to their own study purposes are instructive. Aeran was in the habit of logging on to the website of the university which she hoped to enter in the future because, as she explained, reminding herself frequently of her goals for the future kept her motivated and determined to keep up her work pace in order that her place at the university might be secured. As she was particularly interested in science, she liked to surf the net for sites dealing with scientific issues. In this way she had visited the websites of numerous government-funded organisations and journal publishers. On one of these she came across an important new advance in treating acne, something which she herself had suffered from for some time. A cousin who is a pharmacist was eventually able to get hold of the product incorporating the advance, with the result that Aeran got positive relief from her problem. This incident further confirmed Aeran in her enthusiasm for digital information technologies.

Jin too told me about her own positive experiences using the Internet. In her case, she was required by her university teachers to do research on the Net. One particular assignment brought her into contact with relevant departments in American universities. This experience

not only opened her eyes to the wealth of data waiting to be tapped in cyberspace, but also impressed her with the ease with which she could reach out to other cultures at the click of the mouse. Through this and other experiences Jin's interest in studying abroad appeared to have been greatly stimulated.

I turn now to a consideration of the dominant discourses to be found on the Internet relating to parental roles in the development of their children's academic performance. I will take as a representative example a publisher's website known as *Dig*, whose website - <http://www.dig2.co.kr> - I accessed on 12 December, 2000. This website, as well as catering to students and teachers, dedicates substantial space to parents in an obvious attempt to convince the latter that the publisher has their interests at heart and considers their participation important. There is, for example, a counselling service for which goes beyond typical educational concerns into discussions of family relationships, children's social life, discipline, sexuality, career options and even personality issues. A whole spectrum of other topics which have no apparent connection with family relationships are also included: health, food, etiquette, interior decoration, fashion and beauty, to name a few.

The dominant discourse of this particular website leaves no doubt that the parents being addressed are mothers rather than fathers, that it is the former who are assumed to be in charge of their children's education. There are several pointers that mothers are the intended readers. First, the moving image which forms the website's welcome sign is a woman's beckoning hand. Secondly, the sample letters posted on the site invariably begin with such words as, "As the mother of a student aged. . ." Fathers come into the picture almost as an afterthought in connection with educational visits. "Dad, how about taking the family to a

museum?" even seems to imply that the paternal role is limited to that of chauffeur. There is also an underlying assumption that mothers are themselves studying in order to tutor their children, as the following extract from the website implies:

As you equip yourself to better help your children to use the Internet, you may be overwhelmed by the number of educational websites there are to choose from. The experts tell us that we can expect many more in the future, so you should be prepared. Here are seven criteria to use in your selection of appropriate sites for yourself and your children.

The metaphor of childbirth in the admonition below seems to be directed to an exclusively female audience and implies that it is mothers who are expected to carry out the societally-constructed role of manager of their children's educational development:

A painting can be reworked by the artist, but not so a child. There is no room for error or complacency where the young are concerned. In order to set them on the right track you need to develop your own capacity to support them in all they do . . . When you become a parent, not only do you bear a child but you yourself are also reborn. Our aim here is to help you through this painful [*sic*] process.

Publishers' websites such as these tend to perpetuate the notion of gender-bound roles at work in the educational development of children and may play a part in reconstructing such a belief among website visitors. Indeed I was aware of a striking consistency between this type of website discourse and the perceptions of many Korean mothers. All the mothers I interviewed seemed to be deeply involved in their children's education. It is not that fathers have no role, but mothers certainly do seem to shoulder most of the leadership and decision-making in this area. When private lessons for children have to be found, it is normally the mothers who make all the enquiries and organise the lessons. None of the mothers I talked to doubted that it was their maternal duty to place first priority on their children's educational needs, whatever the cost in effort, time or money (see Kim S.J., 1996 and Chu D.B., 1998).

Nevertheless, it is also true that in the face of a growing 'backlash' from their own offspring, some mothers are starting to question their own expenditure of time and effort. Many students, particularly those in high school, are resisting the constant pressure to attend after-school tutoring sessions and are subtly undermining their mothers' assumed right to decide when and where they should be enrolled. As a result some mothers are taking a less pro-active stance in the matter, realising that their zeal may be counter-productive with children who, as they grow older, resist being pushed in directions they do not wish to go in. The resulting ambivalence mothers feel is described by Yuni's mother:

I sometimes feel I'm not doing enough for them [her children] because I don't push them to take private lessons. If they come to me and say they're interested in such and such a class, I'll go along with them and give them the money they need. On the other hand if they say they're fed up with a class and want to quit, I will of course chivvy them along to keep at it but I don't force them. But when I look at some other mothers, it's a whole different story. For example, the women down our hall try to get their kids into everything going and even ferry them back and forth to their classes.

Yuni's mother obviously felt she was not typical of the majority of mothers in her neighbourhood, who she saw as taking an unduly firm stance on matters relating to their children's education. It seemed to bother her that she often had to talk to her children about getting down to their regular school studies, especially at weekends and during vacations. I found that other mothers I questioned felt much the same way.

6. 2. 1. 1 A critical perspective on schoolwork and the Internet

During my interviews I became aware that certain aspects of Internet use for schoolwork purposes caused disquiet among some of my informants, who had reservations about the value of some of the homework they were assigned. There was a general requirement to use the Internet four times a year for specific homework assignments, but apparently these times might be inconveniently scheduled. Aeran and Yuni voiced the displeasure they and many of

their classmates felt about getting homework assignments requiring Net access:

Aeran: At least the Internet homework we get should be given to us after term exams. I mean, I'm not a particularly good student but I feel I need to get down to revision in the weeks before exams. Yet it is in that very period that we get those Internet assignments, which means that instead of revising I have to surf the web. For example, today I've got Art homework and tomorrow Korean literature and the day after that I have to get another assignment done. I don't have enough time for all that. It's not as if they really look at what we hand in. People just copy any old stuff they can find and it seems to be good enough.

Yuni: Last year we asked the teachers to think about how bad their timing was but we got nowhere. They just replied, if the stuff's not in on time, then no grade.

Considering that the normal academic workload at this level runs to ten subjects, it is perhaps understandable that my informants felt aggrieved by what they saw as thoughtless scheduling. The girls also admitted that their forays into the Web sometimes produced information that was beyond their comprehension level, but that they submitted it anyway because it looked 'academic'. On inquiry, I learned that many teachers in this situation were happy enough to get the work handed in on time and would probably not notice if the submission was unsuitable. Despite their complaints, students too seem to be aware of the source of the problem. Aeran herself reflected that inordinately heavy workloads (each teacher has to deal with ten or more classes of 45 students each) might be responsible for their teachers' lack of concern about the effect that assigned Internet homework had on their students. I will discuss these problems in more detail in the chapter on power relations and literacy practices (see Phil Agre, 1997, on the relationship between the Internet and institutional culture).

The present culture of Internet use in academic study has not convinced all young people that information technology inevitably enhances their learning. More than once I heard the comment that print sources were often just as useful as electronic for locating information for

assignments. Nevertheless it could be argued that, by being required to access electronic sources, students do get a valuable insight into how vast a database exists in cyberspace. Perhaps more needs to be done to equip both teachers and students with skills for the effective educational use of the Internet. This would include familiarity with and skill in using the growing range and sophistication of search engines. Indeed, some organisational theorists propose that network proficiency will become a new yardstick of occupational skill (Reinhardt, 1995 quoted in Smith and Curtin, 1998). Lemke (1998) proposes that the generic literacies of the information age are multimedia authoring skills, critical analysis, cyberspace exploration and navigation skills, thus reinforcing the sense that education is moving into a different kind of intellectual environment.

6. 2. 2 Use of the Internet for leisure purposes

6. 2. 2. 1 Games and the Internet

As might be expected, young people engage in various literacy practices while pursuing their own leisure activities. I have mentioned that one of the most common ways in which young people, especially males, make use of the Internet is for playing multi-user (MUD) computer games. Although it is possible to access game sites on their own home computers, many prefer the social environment of commercial PC Rooms. Here they can participate in multi-user games synchronously with as many of eight of their friends since, in contrast to other forms of electronic game which accommodate a very limited number of players, these allow the formation of teams to play in contest conditions. Some indication of the explosive popularity of MUD games among young males can be gained from a recent report published

in the journal 'Korean Youth' (quoted on Internet site <http://www.ncykr.or.kr>, visited on 29 April 2000). 25.2% of the adolescents interviewed said they were in the habit of visiting a commercial PC Room because of its multi-play possibilities. In the same report much is made of the achievement of a Korean youth called Ju-young Shin, acclaimed world championship winner of Star Craft (a popular MUD game) in 1998. Ever since that time, according to the report, the career of professional gamer has been recognised by Korean young people and even many parents, leading to a massive surge of interest in gaming as a career aspiration. By the end of 2000, MUD games produced in Korea and incorporating Korean cultural references had become available, ensuring that interest in the sport is kept alive.

While my male informants had no aspirations to become professional gamers themselves, they were certainly keen to hone their game skills for recreational purposes. To this end, Jongwon would ask a senior who had greater experience than he for useful tips and would practise at every opportunity on his home computer with other players he met online. Dan would trawl through computer game magazines and comb Internet sites for the latest cheats (techniques for circumventing the normal game parameters) to improve his scores. The fact that computer networked games continuously incorporate fresh competitive elements, which are of course designed to keep users hooked on them, means that young males of my informants' age never lack for motivation to play. Side bets - loser pays for the game, for example - help increase participation levels. A youth culture has developed around MUD game playing, one with which participants feel a strong identification and which bonds players in a common cause. The digital technology environment is thus instrumental in constructing identity for youthful game players, distinguishing them from an older

generation which has never experienced such a world. Dan hinted at this technology-inspired generational divide:

Playing the game with friends is so cool. You feel very close to your friends because you share a common interest. While we're on the game we talk together a great deal but I'll bet adults wouldn't be able to understand what we are on about!

Smith and Curtin characterise 'the game's' attraction in the following way:

... winning and beating the machine and the game are crucial elements of self-construction - elements in which human characteristics merge with the technological. It is not too difficult to appreciate that as children operate a computer game they try out hunches about how to apply their skills and knowledge. Such characteristics reinforce the very elements of an emergent subjectivity and the notion of 'cyborg'. (1998: 221)

6. 2. 2. 2 Cartoons and comics on 'the Net'

Apart from providing a platform for playing games, which are mainly a male preserve, the Internet is a rich source of comic and cartoon characters. All my female informants, for example, kept illustrations of their favourite cartoon characters in their home computers and regularly downloaded new images. Jin, who was very keen on children's characters such as Winnie the Pooh and Teletubbies, actively searched websites for fresh material of this kind. She joined free sites run by fan clubs and made dozens of files of the illustrations she collected. She sometimes printed these out in black and white for later colouring by her friends and herself when lectures got boring. Jin would send her illustrations to friends by e-mail if they asked and sometimes she would send them unsolicited as an expression of friendship.

6. 2. 2. 3 The Internet as information source

The Internet offers practically unlimited access to news and information on aspects of

popular culture. For example, my informants are able to regularly check the pop music charts from home and abroad and listen to recently released songs. Downloading songs makes it possible for them to replay them in their free time. In order to find out about films Aeran logged on to the websites of TV stations where she was able to access their film archives. Even if she missed a particular film on TV or at the cinema she could at least read the reviews. On other websites my informants found photos of their favourite stars which could be downloaded. As a favour, young people will look out for images of each other's favourite stars and transfer them to diskette for their friends.

6. 2. 2. 4 The Internet and fan fiction

Possibly the most active literacy experiences I encountered are played out on the websites created by pop music fan clubs. Curiously, while my female informants were habitual visitors to these fan club websites, none of the males, with the exception of Yuni's brother, expressed much interest in them. Perhaps their lack of interest would explain why the boys seemed oblivious to the current craze among the girls for so-called 'fan fiction'. As fan fiction appears to be having a significant impact on the leisure-related Internet activities of young Korean females, I think it is appropriate to examine the phenomenon in depth. Before I do so, however, I would like to give a brief general description of fan club websites.

According to my female informants, most fan club websites are maintained by senior secondary school students. Website components vary: some use a preponderance of visual images of the celebrity while others are based on text, which includes anecdotal detail and fiction. The fiction category is located in a space called 'Fiction Room'. This room is divided

into two sub-categories: relay and complete. The former contains the ongoing stories of fans who regularly post the latest episode of their work-in-progress, while the latter contains finished 'manuscripts'. These are further subdivided into short and long stories. There is normally no problem fitting a complete work onto a 3.25 inch floppy disk having a capacity of 2.0 MB. One has to be a member of the fan club in order to participate as an author, but no fee is involved in being an ordinary member. A 'management' membership, which allows participation in decision-making for the site and for which an annual membership fee is payable, is also available but competition for this prestigious type of membership is fierce and few qualify. Both Aeran and Yuni told me that they are registered as ordinary members on the websites of several pop music fan clubs.

In addition to Fiction Room, most fan club websites provide a message board or guest book where anyone may leave messages for others to read. Neither Yuni nor Aeran had used this facility but told me that friends of theirs had obtained photos of pop stars through it. The board also serves as an auction room. On one club board, for example, I found one well-known pop star's military call up notice at auction (taken from <http://www.crazyboard2000> on 22 April 2000). According to Aeran and Yuni, messages are sometimes posted here announcing a chat session between the star and his/her fans. Despite their eagerness to participate in these sessions, none of my informants or their friends had yet been selected. They had to be satisfied either with following the text of the chat on their computer screens in real time or with reading the conversation later. Nevertheless, even at this remove such chat sessions obviously hold great excitement for these young people, and contribute to making the Internet a major player in their leisure time activities.

I have referred to the significant role played by fan fiction among the literacy practices of my informants. I was intrigued by their claim that fan fiction is by far the most popular feature of fan club websites and hoped that the phenomenon of online fiction writing would give me further insight into the ways in which young people appropriate digital technology to serve their own interests and construct youth identity. In order to participate, it is necessary to visit the space on fan club websites known as Fiction Room. I have selected three websites which are representative of those regularly visited by my informants. The first is dedicated to a five-man male pop group called HOT (<http://members.tripod.co.kr>). The second is maintained by fans of a young male singer called Sung-mo Jo (<http://josungmo.applesoda.com>). The third supports a female trio called Finkle (<http://www.finkle.pe.kr>). In Fiction Room on all three sites there are several command functions which visitors who are members can use to interact with texts, typically 'Vote', 'Modify', 'Delete', 'Reply' and 'Forward'. 'Vote', 'Reply' and 'Forward' are accessible to ordinary members, while 'Modify' and 'Delete' are reserved for the use of authors and fan club management. A click on the 'Vote' button registers the reader's positive response to the text they have just read. 'Reply' allows readers to send a personal e-mail response to the author. 'Forward' permits transfer of a selected text or part thereof to a designated other. I was told that there tends to be a regular group of contributors but there is no bar to anyone taking part, be they expert or novice in story construction. Aeran and Yuni in fact knew of girls in their own school who had posted their short fiction to the sites.

Fiction Room text and the written exchanges which develop around it have developed - indeed as a very fluid medium continue to develop - a symbolic language which draws on many of the already established syntactical and orthographic conventions of Internet Relay

Chat in general. These include abbreviation, condensation, syntactical reduction, the use of acronyms and a range of symbols called emoticons. I discuss these more fully in the fourth section of this chapter dealing with chat room discourse, but for now will only comment on the last-mentioned. According to Sdorow (1990 quoted in Argyle and Shields, 1996: 60), emotions are expressed through behaviour such as 'vocal qualities, body movements, and facial expressions.' However, the 'intonation, pauses, gesture and gaze' which in spoken language convey emotion are absent in the written language which is the medium for online computer conversation (Coulthard, 1985). Rice and Love describe what happens next:

These restrictions present a dilemma to the users of a system that must be overcome. Communication researchers looking at computer mediated communication (CMC), have noted that users have adapted to the medium. It has been described as an altered state of communication . . . CMC may change the psychology and sociology of the communication process itself . . . CMC may very well be neither conversational nor written, but a 'new linguistic entity with its own vocabulary, syntax and pragmatics'. (1987: 86)

To meet their need for a symbolic representation of emotions CMC users began to adapt the graphic possibilities of the QWERTY keyboard and the result was the emoticon:

An emoticon is an emotional icon, or a pictorial expression of the emotions of the moment. These are most commonly created on online using the symbols on the keyboard. (Fudpucker, 1992 referred to in Argyle and Shields, 1996: 65)

Emoticons are graphic representations of facial expressions designed to indicate the speaker's tone, attitude or emotional state. While emoticons which are read sideways have achieved almost universal acceptance (e.g. :> represents a smile), Korean chat rooms have spawned a series of indigenous emoticons., of which a few examples follow⁵:

^_^ (smile)

⁵ The cultural dimension of emoticons is identified by Sugimoto and Levin (2000) in their comparative study of Japanese and American use of semiotic symbols. The Japanese emoticon range approximates the Korean. Please refer to Appendix 3 for additional examples.

* _ ^ (smile with a wink)

^O^ (laughter)

* ^ _ ^ * (blush)

T.T (tears)

- _ -;;; (embarrassment)

p_q (suspicious look)

Punctuation marks such as the repeated full stop and the tilde also serve as emoticons. One of my informants explained how the use of these symbols developed:

Aeran: During the initial year of electronic writing the tilde was used a lot and since then the large scale and, I would have to say, indiscriminate use of the full stop and exclamation mark has come into fashion.

Researcher: Any idea why young people have adopted these symbols?

Aeran: Look at this letter [pointing to an e-mail message from a friend]. For example, they've written: "See you Bye..... Bye" They've opted for the repeated full stop out of the available options. I myself would use the exclamation mark and the tilde, like this [typing as we spoke] "Bye ~!~!~!~!~!~!~!~!~!". It doesn't matter which one you go for because both convey the same sort of message, which is something like: "I have to go now although I know there are still lots of things we could talk about." Using those symbols gives the mail a more friendly feeling than simply ending it with a plain "Bye".

The use of emoticons in fan fiction enables both writers and their readers to participate in a textual practice which contributes to the construction of youthful identity. The following is an example of text and emoticon functioning together:

Both men [referring to two members of the pop group HOT] felt hungry and Jun's stomach started to rumble audibly ...
At this Jun blushed and Seungho started to chuckle. Jun murmured,
"Seu.....Seung.....Seungho~~~~ ** ^ ^ ***"
While they were talking, the lunch bell rang ^.^
(Taken from HOT Fiction Room)

As well as continuously expanding semiotic frontiers, young people have adapted the fiction form itself to their own purposes, in the process bending the 'rules' to create novel effects. An

Communication between author and reader often takes an intensely interactive form. Many authors urge their readers to respond directly to their fiction efforts by posting their comments. Authors reply in turn in public space. Much importance is attached to the straw poll of reader response, which is gauged both from the number of site hits received by a particular fiction piece as well as by the number of times the 'Vote' button is used. In personal notes attached to her main narrative (in Finkle Fiction Room), one author expresses her gratitude to her readers for their comments:

I want to say thanks to everyone who posted comments on my story. I couldn't help smiling while I was reading them and my sister was looking at me weirdly because she couldn't figure out why I was smiling. But that didn't bother me. I was just so happy to get responses from so many people. Thanks again!
(written on 18 December 1999)

First of all I want to thank you Hana/JURY [*the second name is the pseudonymic ID of reader*] for being so engrossed in my humble story that you put off going to the bathroom until you had finished it. Now that's what I call real support! And you Suk/REAL, thanks for your constant encouragement. I see I'm going to have to work a lot harder if I want to write as well as you do. I was especially delighted to read your second comment. And, wow, you even recommended my story! [*she is referring to the fact that this reader clicked on 'Vote'*] What an honour!
(written on 15 November 1999)

In the example above the use of given name as well as ID tag makes it clear that both author and reader have already forged a relationship out of their shared literacy practices. The important point here is that no role division exists because each has played both roles at different times. In Fiction Room evidence for this is ubiquitous. JURY and REAL of the exchange above have not only posted their own episodes to the ongoing narrative but have also responded to the compliments of the first writer. Some Fiction Room users though prefer to post their reactions and opinions in public space rather than to address an author directly:

Phew ~~~^^ ^ That's so cool ~~~ [*reference to a piece of writing*]
I just happened to visit Fiction Room and found your story again.
It's a long time since you posted your last piece *^^^*
I'm very interested in the way it's developing. I can't wait to see where it goes next ^^
To be honest with you, I felt that the first few episodes were a bit clumsy ...
But I want to tell you, dear author, that your latest episode was excellent.

Have you noticed that I'm a fan of yours? * ^ ^ * ~~~
Keep up the good work ~~
Bye Bye ...
PS Author, have a good day. You too [*name of pop star*] ~~~
PPS You other readers out there, how about some more positive feedback for this author ~~
Cheers.
(Taken from Finkle Fiction Room, op cit)

Another message compliments the author on her work so far and begs her to let her know how one of her stories ends:

I'm an enthusiastic fan of your stories and I'm dying to find out how [*title of piece*] ends.....
I've been having sleepless nights, tossing and turning thinking about your story...T.T. [*Researcher's note: This symbol denotes crying*]
I'm begging you to let me know how your story ends... In return I promise to make my own story more exciting (I realize that may not matter much to you, though!). I still need to develop my writing skills a lot more, I know. Some day maybe my work will be as popular as yours, who knows? Anyway I can dream. Am I being too ambitious?.....
I would be really grateful if you could reply . . . (- -) (_) [*Researcher's note: These symbols indicate a polite bow*]
(Taken from Finkle Fiction Room, op cit)

Encouragement of and praise for peer group writing occurs frequently in Fiction Room and no doubt spurs young participants to continue with their writing efforts. The Fiction Room phenomenon thus creates a fan club within a fan club, a club whose members know each other through the medium of their writing and which fosters a sense of community of literary purpose. According to Yates (1996), Goody and Watt propose that literacy aids the development of 'organic solidarity', a term used by the sociolinguist Emile Durkheim in his classical studies of the composition of modern industrialised society (Durkheim, 1964)

In his study of pop star fan club members, Jaeyoung Yang (1994) notes that, through communal fandom-related activities and their own interaction, Korean teenagers tend to assign greater significance to group affiliation than to the star who is the reason for the group's existence in the first place. Others have specifically drawn attention to the ability of

electronic communication to create the illusion of an intimate and private conversation. Selfe and Meyer (1991), Chesebro and Bonsall (1989) and Harriet Wilkins (1991) use the terms 'companionship', 'a sense of belonging', 'a close-knit group' and 'intimacy' to describe the relationship among participants of electronic exchanges. Rheingold (1993) argues that CMC liberates interpersonal relations from the confines of physical locality and thus creates opportunities for new, but genuine, personal relationships and communities. Clerc (2000: 216) argues that 'fandom is a community, a social network of small groups and individuals . . . created and maintained through overlapping, conflicting, complex ties to each other. Fannish activities are the ties that bind the community together. Though the activities are diverse, many are discursive.'

Fan fiction themes

I now turn to some of the themes of fan fiction. In their storylines pop star fans generally cast their idols as school students, notwithstanding the fact that many are in reality full-grown adults. Perhaps by way of wish-fulfillment on the part of the writers these student heroes and heroines are shown as straight A performers in school with conventional good looks and well-to-do family backgrounds. Romance is a key ingredient of the stories. As I point out in Chapter 7 on gendered literacy practices, romance fiction figures high on the reading preferences of my female informants and their friends, one through which they construct their gender identity. Of the three sites, HOT's Fiction Room is the only one to incorporate explicit sexual content. Despite there being no apparent substance in fact to the storylines, HOT group members are portrayed as active participants in steamy homosexual relationships. Indeed this particular Fiction Room has gained a certain notoriety for the sexual content of its material and (consequently?) is a favorite among my female informants

and their friends. A friend had brought this material to Yuni's attention, and now Yuni often downloaded episodes for her own friends, including Aeran. I could see that a lot of this material was being surreptitiously circulated among the girls, much as comics were in an earlier generation. At first I was puzzled that such material was being written by and for teenage girls who had up until now seemed to have no special interest in sexually explicit description. Up to this point I had noted only that the literacy diet of teenage girls projected its protagonists as asexual beings, holding up chastity and premarital purity as ultimate values. When I talked to the girls about these texts they seemed uneasy and somewhat nervous. I asked Aeran who wrote them and her response surprised me at first:

Aeran: Teenage girls like us of course.

Researcher: Are you absolutely sure?

Aeran: Uh huh. You know, girls are writing raunchier stuff than boys these days. It used to be that only boys could write like that and get away with it. Some girls might have tried to but they would be few and far between and they would raise eyebrows. But on the Internet nobody knows who you are, so you can say whatever you want.

Despite my initial surprise I began to realise that the Fiction Room might actually be one of those rare forums in which girls are able to express their interest in sexual matters quite openly. While boys have for long had relatively easy access to literacy materials in various media which contain explicit sexual content, girls have not. According to Ko J.B. (1997), boys satisfy their interest in sex through pornographic materials (magazines, videotapes, etc.), but girls mainly do so from talking to others in their peer group. The anonymity provided by the Internet enables girls too to have a voice on 'forbidden' subjects (Wilson, 2000) and it is understandable that they should seize the opportunity afforded by digital technology to assert their right to a fuller sexual agenda. Access to sexually explicit texts is available even to ordinary fan club members such as my informants while management

membership apparently qualifies one for access to, in Aeran's words, the 'really raunchy stuff'.

Clerc (2000) notes in her experience with American media fandom on the Net that the phenomenon of online fan fiction (in which women express overtly lustful thoughts) is most noticeable in 'slash', the genre of fan fiction based on homosexual relationships between male characters. According to her slash, more than any other kind of fan fiction, is written almost exclusively by and for women with an eye to feminine sensibilities. Whether the new online 'permissiveness' will help reduce gender discrimination, as Wilson (2000) speculates, is open to question. Significantly, my informants and their friends seem at present to be surreptitious participants in the process, as their evident embarrassment in the face of my questioning shows.

If homosexuality as a theme is no stranger to Fiction Rooms, there is gender discrimination in its presentation. While the Fiction Room of HOT, an all-male group, features homosexuality, that of Finkle, an all-female group, does not. To my question as to whether other female group Fiction Rooms were any different, Aeran replied:

Not to my knowledge, and anyway I'm sure a female star wouldn't want to be linked to homosexuality in any way. If a male star is gay, nobody thinks much about it, but for a woman it could spell the end of her career. The slightest hint of sexual scandal could ruin a female star's career.

If Aeran's perception is shared by her peers it may well account for the complete absence of homosexual themes in female group Fiction Rooms. It appears then that Internet literacy practices all too easily assimilate the gender-biased sexual representations of the real world. That fan fiction texts are posted from one Internet site to another may contribute to

maintaining the ideology of gender differentiation as a stronger force than the newly created opportunities for sexual self-expression afforded teenaged girls by digital technologies.

6. 2. 3 Use of the Internet for maintaining existing social relationships

In order to keep in contact with friends within their various social networks such as school, university, church and club, my informants and their friends use electronic mail. This facility is readily available through local Internet providers and university club websites. All my informants have at least one e-mail address on some of the larger Internet providers' websites. The level of dependence on e-mail, however, seems to vary along gender lines. Girls write to their friends more frequently than do boys and are more avid e-mail users, especially during school vacations. During term time girls prefer to deliver letters to friends in person and their use of e-mail is less active. In contrast the boys seem much less interested in written communication and make only occasional use of e-mail. This general picture has its exceptions. While still in high school Heesoo, for example, was in the habit of delivering mail to his friends in person. Now that the latter are scattered around the country attending various universities, Heesoo told me he has come to rely on e-mail exclusively. He extolled the virtues of e-mail, noting that it is economical and prompt and makes it easy to keep in touch with friends he cannot see every day.

In order to maintain contact with fellow members, Jin logs on to the websites of her university clubs, where there are various facilities available for both members and non-members. Jin makes particular use of the message bulletin board to get up to date news

on club members' activities between meetings. I sampled the messages on one such bulletin board and was struck by how many of them expressed quite personal thoughts and feelings. No-one hid their identity; all signed their names openly. Reflecting on the approach of the end of term one female had written:

What a relief. I've done all my coursework assignments and have just finished my final exam. Now I'm totally relaxed. Yippee! And I suddenly feel hungry because I came to school early this morning for the exam without first having breakfast. Why do we humans have to eat three times a day? Couldn't we survive otherwise? If we could, we wouldn't need to worry about gaining weight, would we? I can see some of you agreeing with me! Anyway, now I'm going out to gorge myself! Aren't we university students a privileged bunch? We can enjoy ourselves whenever we want and don't have to feel too responsible for what we do! It's great!!!

(Taken from [http:// altair.chonnam.ac.kr/~yhoste](http://altair.chonnam.ac.kr/~yhoste) on 30 April 2000)

Another female had expressed her feelings about a 'diet' she had decided to follow:

I've started on my diet and I'm starving. I skipped supper and am feeling faint. A terrific home-made meal was placed in front of me but I didn't dare touch it. What made the situation even harder to bear was having to resist the pizza Dad brought home for the family, T.T. It's killing me but I'm going to stick to my decision. Even if I manage only one day I'll hang in there until the end of it. BUT I'M STARVING!!

(op cit)

By posting messages on their university club websites young people share everyday events in their lives in a public forum, thus fostering a spirit of community. Community affinity is further strengthened through the expression of the emotions users feel, particularly those of missing one another and expressing a wish to be together again. I saw that Jin, for example, had posted a message which spoke of her longing to see a senior member who had graduated. Messages posted by other members expressed similar sentiments. It is interesting to note that male members, in defiance of cultural conventions which discourage outward expressions of male emotion, also get involved, as the following posting reveals:

Miss you guys something fierce. [*Name of the club*] has me hooked. Though it has been only two weeks since our last meeting, I miss you guys so much! I had a fantastic time even though I know I'm crap at billiards and deserved to lose my shirt. Wait till next time, I'm coming back to get my revenge!! Are you ready for me? Don't let me down. . . See y'all soon. Bye.

(op cit)

University club websites are also a forum for the exchange of questions and answers on members' problems. I read one such posting in which a member was requesting help with the graphics on his home page. Another posting answered the first with suggestions that would prove useful not only to him but presumably to others.

The online Internet 'cafe' is another venue for social interaction. Aeran, for example, often logs on to a cafe which was set up through an Internet service provider by a friend of hers to serve the members of their church network. Users must have a password to access the site for posting messages. Without it users are restricted to the passive role of reader. Contact in cyberspace in this instance lends new meaning to the word 'congregation', enabling like-minded members of a church community to maintain contact with one another at all times. Especially for younger students who have restrictions on their freedom to move outside the confines of home and school, such venues offer exciting opportunities for peer interaction hitherto unavailable to them.

The advent of computer greeting cards has added a further dimension to web-mediated interpersonal communication with the addition of animated and audio elements. Young people can choose from a variety of multimedia cards to send to friends to mark special events both in the calendar and in their own lives. New websites offering this greeting card service are springing up all the time, and whenever they come across a new site young people send e-cards from it to let their friends know of its existence. Certain special occasions, some of which have for long been celebrated in the Western context, have only recently begun to be celebrated by Korean youth. On Valentine's Day, for example, a female may express her romantic feelings towards a favoured male by sending him an e-card and perhaps presenting

him with a box of chocolates. White Day is when the male is allowed to show his romantic feelings towards the female of his choice. Black Day is when friends send same-sex friends who are not romantically attached an e-card of 'commiseration'.

Although both girls and boys send e-cards, there appear to be gender differences in relation to their use. My female informants send cards to friends of both sexes almost on a whim but according to Aeran it is unusual for males to do so:

Aeran: One day at church I was thanking a male friend for the birthday e-card he had sent me. Another boy overheard us and started to tease my friend. I gather that the other boy felt that sending e-cards was something only girls did.

Researcher: So what was your friend's reaction?

Aeran: He just shrugged it off. You know what boys are like.

My male informants partially corroborated this point of view when I met the three of them together and this issue came up. Each said they would rarely send e-cards apart from on certain special occasions such as a birthday or at Christmas, and then only to close personal friends.

Apart from on New Year's Day, the sending of occasion-specific cards has no roots in Korean folk culture but, although cynics might view the practice as yet another demonstration of Korea's capitulation to the forces of commercialism, it is undeniable that young people have embraced the practice with relish. Jin told me, for example, that getting a card on Black Day raises her spirits and makes her feel good. Within a short space of time Valentine's, White and Black days have become a permanent feature of the social landscape of Korean youth. The exchange of cards and messages to mark these occasions forms a literacy practice specific to the young in which their parents' generation plays little or no part.

Computer-mediated communication does have a place in the lives of this older generation, but on a much smaller scale than for young people. Among the parents of my informants, only Aeran's seemed to have much to do with the family computer. Aeran's father likes to play computer games on the family's home computer when he gets home from work. Recently, too, Aeran's mother had been attending an Internet course for housewives, although at the time of my interviews she had had little occasion to put her new knowledge into practice. She confessed that, apart from the lack of time, she did not have much motivation to e-mail her friends since, despite the availability of computers in their homes, so few of them actually used them. Even so, Aeran had taken the initiative to sign her mother up for e-mail and if only for that reason mother had made the effort to reply to daughter's occasional e-cards. It seems as if there is potential for the old adage to be reworked into 'The family that computes together stays together' but for now, if my informants' households are anything to go by, this is still a dream for the future.

The electronic media revolution may be having other unforeseen effects on communication and literacy practices. For example, two of my female informants acknowledged technology's part in helping them overcome a lack of confidence in their own handwriting. Aeran in particular discovered that word processing her written work enabled her for the first time to feel pleasure in the writing act:

When I was in junior high school I was given the responsibility of keeping the class lesson record. When my form teacher saw my notes the first time his comment that I should write more neatly made me feel really depressed. I mean, I did try hard to write neatly but it still ended up looking like a boy's handwriting, if you know what I mean. Even boys have commented negatively about my handwriting! So I used to try and avoid writing altogether. I'd even go so far as to reply to other people's notes in person. My friends came to realise my problem so, bless them, they helped me avoid writing whenever they could, even when we were supposed to be doing a diary exchange. And that took some doing, believe me! Anyway with e-mail, handwriting isn't an issue so I find it very pleasant to write on the

computer. Nowadays I write to friends quite often by e-mail. And that's the big change which has occurred in my life since I started going online.

According to a recent educational report, online computer technology is singlehandedly reviving 'the culture of letter writing' (accessed from <http://www.nuri21.co.kr/Hinex/>, 18 June 2000). The report comments in particularly glowing terms on the phenomenon of formerly passive young people engaging enthusiastically in communication with others in their age group. Electronic communication is undoubtedly having an enormous effect on the social interaction of Korean youth.

6. 2. 4 The use of the Internet for developing new relationships

As an accessible and flexible tool for communication the Internet, as we have already seen, is having a great impact on the lives of Korean youth. In this section I will examine how the Internet helps young people form new relationships.

6. 2. 4. 1 Personal web pages

The major channels through which person-to-person communication takes place are chat rooms, which I discuss in more detail below. But even closer to home young people have the opportunity to widen their social circle by establishing a personal home page on their school or university website or, as some of them do, through their Internet service provider. These first two options are generally free of charge. A third option - setting up a home page on a commercial website - usually requires a subscription fee.

My informants had all elected to place their home page on their school or university website after first taking a web design course. As this course follows a standard pattern wherever it is offered, these home pages tend to have a common format and the student profiles to exhibit certain common features: name, date of birth, height, weight, personal interests and family members (although many girls omit their weight and height). Despite the resulting rather bland and uninspiring impression these home pages make on the observer, many of them do display some noteworthy aspect of their subject's persona. On a visit to Aeran and Yuni's school website I was able to see for myself some of the ways in which personality is displayed. Aeran, for example, had adorned her own home page with photos of herself, including one taken on her first birthday. Someone else had made a montage of their favourite cartoon characters. Another had done the same with photos of their favourite TV stars. Many home pages reflected their subject's specific interests, usually in graphic form and often animated.

The home page not only introduces its subject to visitors but provides written access to him/her by means of a guestbook in which visitors may post messages. According to my informants and their friends, the exchanges which take place there often lead to new friendships, some of them with the opposite sex. The latter would be unlikely to occur outside cyberspace since the majority of Korean students attend single sex senior high schools and have few opportunities to meet the opposite sex outside of organized school activities. According to my informants, it is nowadays quite common for girls to log on to the websites maintained by boys' schools in order to visit the home pages there, and vice versa. Cyberspace is thus helping to break down culturally-normed sex divisions, with the personal home page playing a major role in this revolution.

These new opportunities for self-expression also bring with them new concerns. Aeran spoke of the anxiety she and her friends feel on reflecting that the content of their home pages, including any exchanges which happen to be in the guestbook, are open to public view:

When I found messages in the guestbook it was weird at first. I felt like I was showing myself to the world. I'll have to admit, though, it was exciting as well!

There is also the judgement of those in authority to reckon with. According to Aeran, teachers are quick to react to what they consider excessive contact between girls and boys via their home pages:

Aeran: You know what teachers are like. They think that a girl who meets too many boys has a problem, even if the 'meetings' are only on computer. So if you're getting a lot of messages from boys you don't know, teachers start getting suspicious.

Researcher: Do they ever punish girls they find with a guestbook full of messages from boys?

Aeran: No, they don't go that far but I would be anxious that their opinion of me would suffer if I was in that situation so I regularly check my guestbook and take out messages from boys. I just keep the 'safe' messages!

Aeran's comments show that digital technology, while breaking down some barriers, still faces resistance to change from deeply-engrained societal norms. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that this same technology has made it easier than ever before for young people to communicate with the opposite sex.

6. 2. 4. 2 Chat rooms

A major forum for the literacy practices of young Koreans is the chat room. Chat room websites on the Internet are continuously evolving in both design and content in their bid to attract as many users as possible. Today the conventional chat room format allows text-based

interchange only, but the wave of the future is F2F (face-to-face) on the screen using digital camera and microphone (similar to video conferencing with users being able to see themselves while conversing). At the time of my interviews none of my informants had yet had experience with the latter mode. The discussion which follows is based largely on my examination of three chat sites which were frequently used by my informants: www.skylove.co.kr; www.loveyou.co.kr; and www.sayclub.co.kr.

The procedure for using chat is relatively straightforward. New members are required to register, to do which they must supply personal details such as national ID number (which all Koreans are required to have), sex and current address. Although this requirement is designed to control anti-social behaviour on chat websites, there is at present no foolproof way to tell whether the details given are true or not. The new member chooses a nickname ID and on some sites is assigned a visual ID, typically an animated cartoon representation. The cartoon ID undergoes physical changes (to hair colour, clothing, etc) as the member accumulates points for using the site. The whole process is a reminder that chat rooms are primarily a medium for youth interchange. Each of my informants was registered on at least two chat websites.

Once registered, the new member selects from a menu an appropriate user category, theme and geographical region. User categories include primary, junior secondary and senior secondary school, university, employed, housewife, etc. (Some sites use other groupings such as teenagers, young adults, etc.) Under theme there are diverse discussion topics such as film, music, TV, books - to name a few. The new chat room member also indicates the area of the country he lives in; this is a particularly relevant detail for users who come to the chat

room in order to increase their chances of meeting someone from their own region. The reasons for which young people are motivated to visit chat rooms appear to be many and varied. Individuals' appropriation of this digital conversation facility is neither monolithic nor straightforward in its intent. The significance of online chat in the lives of my informants is multi-faceted and I will examine some of these facets below.

Appropriation of other people's chat room IDs

In accordance with common practice my informants had all chosen chatroom IDs reflecting their gender. Many girls favour IDs incorporating the word 'love' (e.g. s.k.love) or which projects a feminine image (e.g. malgeumi - meaning 'pure mind' in Korean; yumdoongi - meaning 'cute'). Boys seem to go for IDs which project a strong male image (e.g. power-sound, street-power, black-horse). A closer look at the issue of ID gives an insight into the extent to which chat rooms are an integral part of young people's communication and social networks. Aeran's observations are instructive:

Aeran: There are actually two different types of user. The first sees online chat as an important and serious way to make friends with the opposite sex. People in this first group won't let friends use their ID. The second group doesn't take chat room meetings seriously and these are the people who will do things like swapping IDs, even for long periods of time.

Researcher: I'd be interested to know which group you belong to!

Aeran: Actually, what me and my friends do is swap IDs for a few days. Even when someone I don't feel that close to asks for my ID, I don't mind typing it and my password in for her to use right then and there. But that's all I'll do. I don't go in for lending for long stretches.

Researcher: What do you think makes young people go around swapping IDs and passwords with friends?

Aeran: Well, once you've been coming to the same chat room for a while, let's say for a week, you get to know everyone else who comes in. So it's fun to pretend you're a newcomer by using another person's ID.

My male informants also confessed to ID swapping and on a larger scale than the girls. As

soon as I brought up the subject with my informant group of three, two of them pointed a finger in mock accusation at Hwa. It turned out that Hwa had used their IDs without permission to visit numerous chat rooms, gaining the two boys a certain notoriety in the process! At one stage the two had changed their user ID and password in an attempt to foil their friend, but to no avail. Armed with his friends' national ID numbers, Hwa had each time managed to access anew their user IDs and passwords and continued his renegade behaviour. This blatant appropriation on the part of Hwa did not, however, seem to unduly upset the other two, who reported the incidents to me in a light-hearted way and obviously bore Hwa no grudge. Their attitude said that ID appropriation was part and parcel of Internet youth culture and, far from being considered an invasion of privacy, had rather the effect of reinforcing group affiliation.

ID swapping as I have described it above may be part of a phenomenon discussed by Turkle (1995) relating to the construction of multiple identities. Sejung Yoon's (1998) inquiry into young Korean females' online chat room experience also refers to this phenomenon. Her informants often admitted that the anonymity afforded by chat rooms allowed them to construct the kind of persona and self image they aspired to. Thus Aeran's wanting to be taken for a newcomer in her chat room may allude to the possibilities inherent in taking on more than one identity in cyberspace. Although I did not explore this issue with my informants, it suggests a fruitful line of inquiry which might reveal how young people use digital technology to explore personal identity and with what results. (For self-presentation and identity manipulation related to CMC refer to Lea and Spears, 1995; Parks, 1996.)

The chat room as a platform for romantic encounters

The question of identity may have a bearing on what appears to be the salient purpose of visiting chat rooms: to meet new people. A survey done by Kun Lee (1996 referred to in Yoon S.J., 1998) found that 90% of young people used online chat for encounter purposes. Moreover, all of my male informants acknowledged that one of the main attractions of online communication for them lay in the titillating possibility they might meet someone interesting of the opposite sex, first online and then if things went well, face-to-face. The rise of the chat room as a launch pad for actual meetings is reflected in the current jargon of young people, who call the process 'lightning', a word which reflects both its speed and unpredictability.

My male informants described a typical lightning process. A boy who has made online contact with a girl may inveigle another more forward friend into meeting and evaluating the female at a pre-arranged rendezvous. This 'checking out' tends to be based very much on a judgement of physical appearance, a girl who fails to 'make the grade' in this respect being labelled a 'bomb'. Bombs, my male informants told me rather cynically, need to use chat rooms to find potential boyfriends.

The chat room as forum for asking for and giving advice

Whereas the boys openly admitted that their main reason for visiting chat rooms was with the prospect of lightning, my female informants told a somewhat different story. Yuni, for example, claimed to take her chat room visits more seriously, not as opportunities for lightning but rather to find like-minded individuals with whom she could develop an online friendship. She described one such encounter which had obviously made a positive impression on her:

Yuni: One day I felt so down and depressed because I had had some sort of row with my mum and

brother. That day in a chat room I told a guy that I wanted just to run away from home and never see my family again.

Researcher: What was his reaction?

Yuni: He said I shouldn't do it and that occasionally he felt the same way, but that running away wouldn't solve any problems. He tried to calm me down and advised me not to make any hasty decisions. While I was talking to him I started feeling better and got over my bad patch. Talking to him about my negative feelings actually helped. Oh yes, I remember another time a chat friend helped me feel better. That day I was really sad and down so I asked the guy to cheer me up. He said some nice things and as a result I went back up again.

Some research findings shed light on Yuni's anecdotal experiences. Sejung Yoon found that online communication affords an environment in which complete strangers can approach each other in a relaxed way free from the anxiety of self-disclosure, openly speaking of their personal thoughts and feelings, something which they normally would not do, at least to the same extent, in face-to-face interaction (1998: op cit). Perhaps a 'chatter' self-discloses simply because the chance of actually meeting a 'chattee' is minimal, so there is little risk involved. While the worry-free aspect of synchronous CMC may facilitate interpersonal understanding, there is one dimension which deserves some attention. In studying e-mail correspondence between his American and East-Asian students, Ma noted what he termed 'self-disclosure without serious commitment' (1996: 184). According to him participants in CMC do not seem to have as high a commitment as when they engage in FTF communication and he questions whether self-disclosure without serious commitment is likely to promote close relationships between communication users. Moran and Hawisher also draw attention to the fact that new communication technologies foster a new kind of relationship with 'overtones of the postmodern - uncommitted intimacy' (1998: 90). I discuss these and related issues more fully in the section on the chat room as medium for the clarification of values and gendered roles (6:2:4:2).

Aeran revealed other motivations for chat room participation. On one occasion during her senior secondary school years she came into contact with a boy who, like her sister, was attending junior secondary school. Her initial chat encounter with this boy gradually developed into a sustained e-mail correspondence, in the course of which she found herself gaining greater insight into the needs and problems of people his age. She described a particular incident in which she played the role of agony aunt to her young male friend:

One day I got an e-mail from him asking for my opinion. He found himself very attracted to a girl his age but didn't know how to proceed. I advised him, instead of thinking romance right off, to start by treating her as a friend just as if she was one of his own male mates. It must have worked for him because some time later I got another mail message thanking me for my advice. He said he'd found it very useful and that things were going well with him and the girl.

One of the positive spinoffs from Aeran's friendship with this boy was that it helped her improve her relationship with her own younger sister, who she said she could now understand better.

The example Jin gave of how a chat room had benefited her was more mundane, but for her it had a nonetheless useful outcome. She met someone of the opposite sex who shared her interest in music and musicians and through their correspondence Jin was able to obtain useful tips about Internet music sites and other web sources of information. As a result her musical knowledge increased in leaps and bounds.

To my surprise (because I had a preconceived notion that chat rooms were places you went to meet the opposite sex), these online encounters are as much about developing and cementing same sex friendships as they are about budding romances between sexes. Aeran told this story:

Aeran: Last year in a chat room I met a girl one year my senior and we've kept in touch with each other

now for about a year. At the moment she is very busy with university exam preparation, so we can't talk as much as we used to [she meant e-mail correspondence]. Anyway, up until this winter she helped me a lot - giving me lots of good tips about many things including schoolwork. At one point I was stuck on a decision about school subject selection and there she really helped me. Her advice was based on her own first hand experience because only a year before she was in the same situation. My parents had tried to help but their experience was not as useful as hers because they went to school in a different era. There have been so many changes since their time, you couldn't really expect them to have a clear idea of the way things are today, could you? There were many other times I got help from her, too. Even on trivial things I felt her advice was always sound. One time I was dead keen on buying this outfit but I didn't have enough money so I asked her what I should do: get part-time work to earn the money, beg my parents to give me the money or wait until I'd saved up enough to buy it.

Researcher: What was her advice?

Aeran: She said I should put off a decision until the following day. The next day I put off it for another day, and then another, and so on. I continued putting off the decision and eventually got rid of the idea of buying the outfit. That was such a great suggestion of hers because otherwise I would have wasted quite a lot of money on something which I didn't really need in the first place.

The chat room as discussion forum

In the foregoing I have attempted to point out some of the many and varied motives for young people to visit chat rooms. However, I sensed that for some of my informants the mere fact of being online and being able to interact with others was in itself sufficient reason for visiting a chat room, hence the title of this section. Many chatters are obviously not in it to develop a relationship but rather to exchange views and opinions with others of their age group. Heesoo describes one of his own experiences:

I had just watched a Korean film called Tell Me Something, but I couldn't make sense of much of it. A friend of mine who had watched it twice had warned me that I would find it hard to understand and he was quite right. So that evening I visited a chat room hoping to talk about the film with others and get some clues to what was going on. For example, in the film there was a murder but I couldn't figure out the motivation for the killing. A few people came into my chat room and I talked to some of them who had seen the film. There were all kinds of theories about why the director had done such and such and what it symbolised and some of these ideas I had already thought about but others were new and struck me as really good. I tell you, that was the most exciting online chat experience I've ever had. Later on I read a movie magazine which said that the director had set out to get different kinds of reactions among filmgoers and by golly he was right! No two people in my chat room had the same opinion about the film and I could see that one person's interpretation could be just as valid as the next. That was an eye-opener for me!

While for Heesoo the group discussion experience had been a positive one, Aeran told me

about one of her own chat room encounters that had been less so:

One day I went to a chat room to talk about a film starring Brad Pitt which had really impressed me. But then I got talking to a boy who was very critical of Brad Pitt's acting in that film and who went on and on about how disappointed he had been and how he would never watch another film with Brad Pitt in it as long as he lived. Well, Brad Pitt is one of my favourite film stars, so let me tell you that boy really pissed me off. After that chat I was ready to kill!

In my discussion of values clarification which follows I will be mentioning certain other negative features of chat room participation as perceived by my informants.

The chat room as medium for the clarification of values and gendered roles

As well as having the potential to transcend the physical limitations of time and space, a key attribute of digital technology is that it affords its users a high degree of anonymity. Chat room participants need only identify themselves by pseudonym and password, e-mail correspondents by nickname, even companies can hide behind a trading name.⁶ Yet anonymity is sometimes a cloak behind which people perform deeds they would not think of doing if their true identity was public knowledge. Being aware of the potential for subterfuge in anonymity, others may in turn feel reluctant to disclose their full persona with the result that relationships do not progress beyond the mundane and superficial. Jin was not the only one of my informants to comment on this:

OK, online chat is great for meeting people all across the country. Afterwards I keep in touch with some of them by e-mail and they seem like old friends. Yet I still can't help feeling that these friendships aren't going to be the long-lasting kind. Your friendship network gets bigger but at the same time it becomes shallower, if you know what I mean.

Voicing similar sentiments, my male informants maintained that it felt more personal and friendly, once an interesting chat room contact had been made, to continue that contact by

⁶ How many people in the U.K., for example, are aware that the online banking service known as Egg is but the digital spawn of the mighty Abbey National!

telephone rather than online. This is in keeping with a U.S.A. research finding that boys often used the telephone to supplement CMC, whose value as a communicative tool was assigned rather a low rating (Ogan, 1993). While digital technology promotes the virtues of interactional choice, its users may ultimately opt for the medium which serves their personal and psychological needs for closer personal ties. Indeed, interpersonal relationships which are formed 'on the hoof' come under critical scrutiny by Wilson:

One wonders whether we are becoming sensory junkies perpetually in search of new experiences; that is, whether this searching for constant yet apparently superficial stimulation is leading to the promotion of instant gratification at the expense of more involved, complex, meaningful investigation and understanding. (2000: 649)

Perhaps it is this same superficiality that my male informants alluded to in discussing their motives for going online. While admitting that they visited chat rooms in order to 'bump into' the girls they had already talked to online, they could not readily identify anyone they had met in this way as someone they would consider a close friend. Instead they pointed out the drawbacks of the online contacts they made. Hwa referred, perhaps only half-jokingly, to the fact that his phone bills had increased dramatically. The other two echoed Jin on the aspect of online shallowness:

Dan: Online chat's OK but when all's said and done you don't really get to know the other person except on a surface level.

Jongwon: Yeah, it's sort of easy come, easy go, isn't it? You don't take it seriously and neither does the other person most of the time. Good friendships don't happen that way. That's why I sometimes feel online chat isn't really worth the time and expense.

Aeran also reflected on the issue of chat room anonymity:

In chat rooms you learn so many things. For example, I never realised before how many boys out there smoke. I used to believe that only boys with behaviour problems smoked but I learned from my chat room conversations that in schools [she meant boys' senior high schools] the smoking areas are used by 80-90 % of boys. In fact, there's not a single one of them who hasn't smoked at one time or another! Now that was a real shock to me. Of course, we don't know if all of them are telling the truth or not. Some of them may be saying they smoke just to look cool . . .

Obviously Aeran's views on smoking were her own, but her penultimate comment querying interlocutor reliability is evidence that she too was aware that any information from an anonymous source is open to question as to its authenticity.

In the discussion above I have tried to make it clear that my informants bring their own values and attitudes to chat room exchanges and that societal norms and received ideologies play a role in the discourse. Yuni's comments are an indication of the underlying tensions chat room use set up in her. On the one hand she obviously enjoyed the time spent actively online but on the other she admitted to a feeling that her time could be better spent on more worthwhile pursuits:

While I'm on the chat [sic] I enjoy myself but afterwards I don't feel so good. Do you know what I mean? I don't feel good about myself because here am I wasting time on the computer while other kids are studying. I should be working rather than playing. That's the feeling I often get.

Despite the undeniable fact that her online chats were emotionally satisfying to her, Yuni nevertheless judged them a poor use of her time when set against the greater social imperative of study needs.

The values reflected by my informants in distinguishing between 'time-worthy' and 'time-wasting' activities find further application in their portrayals of the typical chat room user. Aeran, for example, proposed a dual typology according to attitude:

Aeran: There are two kinds of chat room kid: those who come with good intentions and those who couldn't care less. The first group work hard and do well academically. The second I would call troublemakers.

Researcher: Could you explain what you mean by troublemaker?

Aeran: Well, I mean kids who couldn't care less about what people think of them. They don't take their schoolwork seriously, they go out drinking at night, they work in bars, stuff like that. You get to sense who these bad ones are when you've been in chat rooms for a while. They might seem quite OK to begin with but somehow over time a person's real personality comes out no matter how hard they try to

cover it up and have you believe they're different. Sometimes it takes just one little comment to show up a baddy, maybe something like 'when I was skiving off school the other day . . .' Then I can tell that this person is not a good student. I have to admit that academic performance affects my opinion of people. Even if it's only an online friendship I'd rather it was with someone with the right attitude to school at least.

Aeran's remarks show how a dominant discourse may impinge on the value system of young people. The gender related behaviours and assumptions of my young informants point to the extent to which the prevalent social ideology informs their attitudes. When I contrast the awkward, even slightly embarrassed, response of my female informants on the subject of chat room romance with the typical male bravura on the same theme, I can only conclude that different norms of behaviour are in operation for females than for males. Specifically, although they said they had accompanied friends who had arranged a 'lightning' meeting, my female informants were adamant in denying ever having themselves initiated such a meeting with a member of the opposite sex. Jin, however, confessed that she had thought she would like to initiate a 'lightning' but that so far she hadn't been able to get up the nerve to do so. Her explanation provides a hint as to why she has held back:

When I'm on the chat, I try not to give too much personal information about myself. Of course, you usually say how old you are and which university you're at, otherwise the conversation isn't going to go anywhere, is it? But I never say which department I'm in. You know, [name of her city] is such a small place you need to keep a low profile. Once your name gets bandied about too much, your reputation suffers and I wouldn't want that to happen to me.

Jin's comments prompted me to further explore with my informants the gendered dimension of chat room exchanges, in particular regarding which gender tended to take the initiative in suggesting a one-to-one conversation, which was more likely to make the first move in a lightning sequence and whether it was possible to identify gender differences in online language. Responding to my questions my informants of both sexes were of one mind:

Aeran: It's hard to say which gender is more likely to take the initiative. I know some girls who don't hesitate to make the first move in lightning, that's for sure. You'd think they were boys, they're so aggressive! And the language! You wouldn't believe they were girls to hear some of the stuff they come

out with. We [apparently speaking for her friends as well] haven't noticed much of a difference between girls and boys in that sense.

Dan: Girls have just as foul mouths as we guys do! You'd better believe it! And some of them come on just as strong when it comes to lightning, too.

Yuni, Jongwon and Hwa agreed that it would be difficult to make a case for gendered role-taking. When I confronted Jin with the observations of her co-informants as in some sense in conflict with her own beliefs, she had a ready explanation:

Jin: I know what you're saying. Some junior high school girls are really quite forward. They even take the initiative in lightning rather than waiting for the boys to do so. It probably has something to do with age. They are much younger than us so they haven't had as much guidance from their parents as we [girls of Jin's age] have.

Researcher: You're saying that when these kids are your age they're going to use less aggressive tactics?

Jin: Yes, that's right. By then they'll have had drummed into them what is proper female behaviour.

The comments made by my informants may be viewed against two contrasting positions taken with respect to CMC: one which suggests that the reduction of social cues inherent in CMC permits anti-social and convention-breaking behaviour; and a second which argues that the reduction of social cues forces CMC participants back on more stereotypical roles. The first position, the so-called 'reduced social cues hypothesis', is proposed as explanation for what has been termed 'anti-social online behaviour' (see for example Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). The latter is based on recent research findings that without powerful social cues CMC participants become 'hyper-social' rather than anti-social (Spears and Lea, 1992; Hall, 1996; Herring, 1996). Paradoxically, CMC may represent a more intrinsically 'social' medium of communication than the apparently 'richer' context of face-to-face interaction, and one that gives fuller rein to fundamentally social psychological factors (Spears and Lea, *ibid*: 31). Following the same line of reasoning, Hall argues that:

... rather than neutralising gender, the electronic medium encourages its intensification. In the absence

of the physical, network users exaggerate societal notions of femininity and masculinity in an attempt to gender themselves. (1996: 167).

Research conducted in the Korean context echoes the arguments above. Yoon S.J. (1998) found that in chat room exchanges typical gendered speech behaviour was strongly reinforced rather than reduced or eliminated. In her study, female online chat users in their twenties told her about their lived experiences with online language. They made the point that, if in a chat exchange they used the same style of language or themes as in face-to-face conversation, their behaviour was likely to be considered 'inappropriate'. It could even be construed as the attempts of a male to impersonate a female (so-called 'male doing female' behaviour). Yoon argues that, due to the lack of clues to gender identity in cyberspace, conventional notions of femininity or masculinity tend to be fortified rather than weakened.⁷

The relevance of the foregoing findings concerning the gender attitudes of young people to my own research is in its suggestion of an intersection of conflicting values. The young girls who are observed to be assertive, even aggressive, in their CMC exchanges and who as a result break with conventional gender roles in their chat room discourse, may be taking the opportunity afforded by the reduction of social cues inherent in digital communication to assume persona which subvert gender stereotypes. Evidence for the opposing viewpoint is found in the case of Jin, constrained by her gender bound attitudes. Here we can postulate the role of CMC in reinforcing conventional notions which contribute to the reconstruction of Jin's belief and value system. Although, as Jin herself suggested, the age factor may have something to do with decisions made by chat room users in this respect, when we look at

⁷ See also Savicki (2000) and Steward et al (1999) for gender dimensions of language style in Internet discussion groups and Squires (2000) for a feminist view of cyberculture.

Yuni we see that it may not be as simple as that. Yuni is not as hesitant as Jin in disclosing her identity online but by her regulatory behaviour she places restrictions on the way in which her cyber encounters proceed:

On chat I normally tell things about myself - my real name and where I live - to people I feel I can trust. I only do this when I believe they are being honest with me. If I find someone interesting on chat, I might let the person have my e-mail address. But since I got to know them online, it has to continue as online correspondence. Once in a chat room I met a boy who gave me his phone number and asked me to ring him and that one time I made an exception and rang him up. [Researcher's note: It might have been interesting to know the results of that call, but I did not want to invade her privacy.] I don't want to get in touch by telephone. I prefer e-mail contact and I don't go any further than that. I wouldn't want to have an actual meeting. That's not what chat room friends are all about as far as I'm concerned.

From my examination of their involvement in online chat exchanges, I conclude that my informants use CMC technology in accordance with the values, assumptions and attitudes embedded in the wider society. Whereas the technology's intrinsic properties afford a platform from which attempts are made to break with convention, CMC may also be a medium in which societal and cultural norms are sustained. Thus CMC permits conflicting values and expectations to be both challenged and perpetuated. Gender roles in particular are portrayed in complex ways, allowing for subversion as well as perpetuation of stereotypes. Undoubtedly, the diversity and complexity of the ideological dimensions of literacy practices are heightened by this new communication technology.

6. 2. 5 Linguistic dimensions of computer mediated communication

Sunhee Lee (2000), Dongwoo Lee (1998), Yeonjin Kwon (1998) and others have noted the unique quality of CMC and some of the ways in which it differs from both traditional print-based and spoken forms. I refer to these Korean research findings in order to supplement my own personal observations of the creativity and inventiveness inherent in

chat room language. Throughout its very short history, users and researchers have felt the language of CMC to be something of a hybrid, a mixture of elements from the written and spoken language (Spitzer, 1986). Some would argue that digital communication has the spontaneity and informality of speech but insofar as it is 'written down' it carries with it aspects of the written language (Kenner, 1989).

Collot and Belmore have analysed a substantial corpus of the language used on Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) and have called this new variety of language electronic language:

Electronic Language is characterised by a set of situational constraints which set it apart from other varieties of English. Messages delivered electronically are neither 'spoken' nor 'written' in the conventional sense of these words. There is an easy interaction of participants and alternation of topics typical of some varieties of spoken English. However, they cannot be strictly labelled as spoken messages since the participants neither see nor hear each other. Nor can they be considered strictly written since many of them are composed directly on-line, thereby ruling out the use of planning and editing strategies which are at the disposal of even the most informal writer. (1996: 13)

Although the reference is to English, chat room language in a Korean context shares the same situational constraints.

In his study of the language of Internet Relay Chat (IRC), Werry (1996) notes that synchronous computer-mediated communication can involve people from all over the world communicating in sophisticated and highly conventionalised ways within electronic zones that can be said to constitute what Rheingold (1993) calls 'virtual communities'. Synchronous textual written dialogue produced online Werry labels 'interactive written discourse' and identifies the value of such communication as follows:

It provides fertile ground for analysis since it makes possible interesting forms of social and linguistic interaction, brings into play a unique set of temporal, spatial and social dimensions, reconfigures many of the parameters that determine important aspects of how communicative acts are structured, and provides a clear instance of how forms of writing made possible by the computer exhibit properties that converge with those typically associated with spoken discourse. (1996: 47)

In the Internet chat room, a combination of spatial, temporal and social constraints act as important limiting conditions that influence the size and shape of communication in roughly analogous ways. Factors such as screen size, average typing speed, minimal response times, competition for attention, room population and the pace of conversations all contribute to the emergence of certain characteristic properties. One of the most obvious of these is a tendency towards brevity which manifests itself in speaking turns of very short length, as well as various forms of abbreviation. Abbreviation is a central and intrinsic property of synchronous communication technology. Commonly it is seen in syntactically-reduced forms, the use of contraction, the clipping of words, and various other strategies which function to reduce the time and effort necessary to communicate. The examples which follow are presented in romanised script corresponding to Korean phonemes.

Syntactically-reduced forms frequently involve the omission of verbs. A question like 'Myut-sal i-se-yo?' (How old are you?) is written 'Myut-sal?' (How old?) with the verb 'i-se-yo' left out. Similarly, the full form of 'Seoul sap-ni-da' (I live in Seoul) is reduced to 'Seoul'. A prominent linguistic feature of the Korean language, honorifics, receives special treatment. These normally function as age and/or status markers between interlocutors. With insufficient clues to interlocutor identity chat room users have sought out neutral linguistic forms to avoid the issue entirely. In Korean the verb normally comes at the end of a sentence with added verb particles being honorific-denoting. Chat room writing typically omits these particles, thus leaving a plain noun form which is honorific-free. 'U-di sa-se-yo?', for example, would be the appropriate linguistic form to express the question 'Where do you live?' The chat room version becomes 'U-di sa-nam?' 'U-ryup-sum-ni-da' (It is difficult)

becomes 'U-ryup-tang'. These new forms are often purpose-created; they would not normally be used either in speech or writing. Sentences are stripped down to the fewest possible words required for recognition. Contractions are common, e.g. 'jung-gi mo-im' is reduced to 'jung-mo' (regular meeting); 'te-hwa pang je-mok' is reduced to 'pang-je' (the name of the chat room); 'computer' and 'animation' become 'com' and 'ani' respectively.

Although established English computer acronyms such as ROFL (Rolling On the Floor Laughing), LOL (Laughing out Loud) and IMHO (In My Humble Opinion) are not in common use, other English abbreviations are. For example, 'Rehi' (hello again) is used to greet someone for a second time, for example after they have recently left a chat room and then rejoined it. The word 'rehi' is written in Korean script which approximates the English sounds. 'Me too' is reduced to 'me 2' and 'I envy you' to 'I-n-v-u'. The latter has had wide currency among Internet users since it was adopted as a brand name by a well-known clothing manufacturer (Dongwoo Lee, op cit: 26).

In their drive to reduce to the absolute minimum the number of keystrokes required, chat room users have developed a range of symbol-sound correspondences. The Korean pronunciation of the numbers '1004', for example, resembles a Korean word meaning 'angle'; '002' sounds like a Korean slang word meaning 'to play truant'. Orthographic reduction often accompanies phonological reduction and ellipsis in rapid, informal exchanges, rendering chatroom discourse speech-like. 'Ta-u-me' (next time), pronounced 'ta-me' in rapid speech, is written in its shortened form. 'Chu-u-me' (at the beginning) is rendered 'chu-me'. Phonological reduction also appears in combination with regional accent. Non-standard spellings and colloquialisms reflecting regional varieties of spoken language are often

consciously selected in preference to standard forms. Sunhee Lee (2000: 43) makes the point that non-standard usage is employed to create a reader-friendly effect rather than with the overt intention of asserting regional identity.

In addition to adopting varieties of regional speech, chat room language may mimic that of particular discourse communities. Children's speech patterns are often used in order to give an impression of informality and friendliness. As Dongwoo Lee points out (op cit) chat room users tend to play with language, to produce hybrid, heteroglossic forms that incorporate all manner of communicative styles rather than staying in one form or register for long. Werry (op cit) makes much the same observation in a study of IRC language in the U.S.A. context, noting that a salient property of IRC discourse involves what can be considered the written equivalent of speaking in tongues. The chat room users he observed produced a bricolage of discursive fragments drawn from songs, TV characters, and a variety of different social speech types - for example, certain speech habits associated with Australian speakers of English. The examples below are taken from Werry (op cit: 58):

```
<Alvin> bubi: wotz da question?  
<Keels> ari...how ya doon?  
...  
<ari> whuttap dok?  
<ari> hewwo!  
<bomber> Lilus: No worries... ;-)  
<ari> vewy interestin  
<bomber> ari ????  
<ari> yup yup?  
<ari> <-- in a goofy mood  
<bomber> ari: do wou haf any pwoblems?  
<ari> nup nup!!!. . .
```

Korean chat room language exhibits a similar range of influences. For example, '*pu*' in 'Na-do racer de-ko-si-*puh*' (I want to be a racer) is written as '*poh*' which is typically a young child's pronunciation. In the same way 'Jun-bi hal-*gu*-da' (I am preparing to do something) becomes

"Jun-bi hal-*kko*-da'.

As might be expected, Korean chat room discourse, like its English language counterpart, also uses specialised jargon created or appropriated specifically for online purposes. Much of this jargon is lifted as is from English, although there are indigenous forms as well. 'Com-mang' (computer-illiterate), for example, is a combination of 'computer' and 'mun-mang' (meaning 'illiterate'). In a quiz chat room 'gogo' is used to give a signal to go onto the next quiz. 'XT' means a person who is not very intelligent. 'Cho-ding' (from 'cho-dung-hak-sang') refers to primary school children, while 'de-ding' (from 'de-hak-sang') refers to university students. Certain expressions only have specific meaning in an online context. Korean 'too-bae' (English: 'wall-papering') refers to the practice of filling the computer screen up with words or characters. 'Jam-su' (English: diving) is when two chat participants communicate using specific function keys, a sort of secret code which renders their conversation inaccessible to others. 'Dok-su-ri' (English: eagle) describes a person who is not good at typing and 'yu-ryung' (English: ghost) a person who is in the chatroom reading chat conversation between others without contributing to or participating in the session. (I believe the English net expression for such behaviour is 'lurking'.)

6. 2. 6 Dominant discourses and computer mediated communication

The creativity inherent in the language of CMC is not always recognised as such and is certainly not without its critics. A number of Korean academics have warned that the speech-like quality of online written discourse is having a negative effect on the quality of

young people's literacy, Academic articles call for CMC to respect the linguistic purity of the Korean language:

Secondary school students are immersing themselves in [CMC] before they have developed basic writing skills. Teachers are complaining that their students' ill-formed online writing has a negative transfer effect on their school writing and even on their speech. The aim of effective language education is for students to be able to use language knowledgeably and correctly. [CMC] users should be aware of the dangers of ungrammatical exchanges and the cultivation of non-standard forms. (Sunhee Lee, 2000: 52)

Ungrammaticality will lead to linguistic chaos. Abandoning honorifics will contribute to the breakdown of interpersonal relationships. Greater efforts should be made to control and regulate young people's use of [CMC] language. (Dongwoo Lee, 1998: 41)

The theme has been much taken up of late by the mass media. Articles abound in the press which attack CMC's 'contaminating' and 'corrupting' influence on the language of young people. Reporting on a conference convened to explore ways of 'purifying' the Korean language in a digital era, a national newspaper carries the headline 'CMC pollutes our national language' and goes on to say:

Scholars and researchers at the conference were unanimous that the [CMC] practices of borrowing from foreign languages and using excessive abbreviation is doing great harm to our national language. They predict that, unless action is taken to stop this linguistic pollution, the purity of our language will suffer. ('Chosun', 14 December 1997)

Although peripheral discourse exists which takes a more detached view of online chat language (Iksup Lee, 1986; Bongseob Kim, 1998), the dominant discourse has yet to come to terms with what it sees as the liberties taken with language use in digital communication (Jungpok Lee, 1997; Taehang Kim, 1998).

Even if any of them were aware of the furore surrounding their online practices, my informants would probably not take this kind of talk seriously. For them, experimenting with and creating new language forms for their online communication purposes is a way for them

to identify with youth culture, a phenomenon associated with growing up. Aeran expressed how she felt:

The other day I watched a TV programme which dealt with this issue and the scholars and other experts on the show were all too serious. They were saying chat language is a social problem. But for us the whole thing is a storm in a teacup. Even though we use this kind of language online it doesn't mean we don't know how to use language properly. No way! Chat language is just for fun and when we grow up and go out to work we won't continue writing that way. It's just a stage you go through as you're growing up.

My other informants agreed with Aeran. The boys in particular stressed that the mastery of online language is a prerequisite for fuller integration into the powerful and demanding culture of youth. The pressure to conform to online community group norms is also noted by Abbott (1998). His study of young people's web home pages in American and British contexts identifies an online community:

... which is rule-governed, uses gatekeeping language and welcomes newcomers only if they conform to the orthodoxies of the group, a concept for which the term 'netiquette' is only partially appropriate. (p. 103)

The learning involved could be likened to a rite of passage:

Hwa: Before I started to use chat rooms I didn't have any clue what chat language was all about.

Dan: Same here. It took me a while to get used to chat language at the beginning.

Jongwon: Even [mentioning a particular word] can be said in various ways. [The three boys all poured out several words at once in support of Jongwon's point.] But once you know chat language you know exactly which word is the right one to use at the right time.

That chat language involves the learning and practising of some fundamental skills was brought home to me as I observed one of my informants in a chat room session. I was hard-pressed to follow the frantic pace at which she read incoming text and processed her replies. Before I had finished reading a line, the next line was already coming through. It made me almost dizzy to watch! A few times I had to ask her to slow down or to scroll back. I have also tried on more than one occasion to participate in a chat room conversation myself,

but due to my lack of familiarity with chat language have given up in frustration each time. Using my own standard language forms made me feel too awkward to continue the exchange for long.

The post-interview e-mails I received from my informants gave me some idea of the extent to which online language has become integrated into communication habits generally. Although in their communications to me my informants used convention-breaking forms relatively modestly (no doubt out of deference to their not very expert elderly correspondent!), many of the characteristics already described, including emoticons, featured in their mail. There was carryover too in other domains of their literacy practices, as handwritten letters exchanged by my informants and their friends confirmed. As if to underscore the fears expressed by the academics, online language has obviously become such a significant part of young people's daily literacy practices that it is in the process of becoming linguistic capital. A Korean national newspaper recently issued warnings about this:

Ms Kim [*schoolteacher*] has expressed concern that her students' excessive use of cyber language may lead to the widening of an already noticeable generation gap and a lessening of interest in studying the Korean language. Professor Lee of [*the name of his university is given*] has observed that even adult chat room participants seem to accept that cyber language is the right form for online chat. (Accessed from <http://www.kukminilbo.co.kr>, 24 November 2000)

It seems that online language forms, so wholeheartedly embraced by the younger generation, may be gaining wider currency and may eventually assume a dominant position in the landscape of digital communication. The new digital literacies which are being incorporated into young people's daily communication practices may even be seen as a resistance movement against the attempts of dominant discourses to extend their power base. The

implications of such a power struggle are discussed further in Chapter 8.

6.3 Cellular telecommunications (the mobile telephone)

In this section I will look briefly at another major digital communication technology which has come to play a significant role in the lives of young people: the mobile phone. By mid-1999 in Korea one out of every three school age children was reported to have a mobile phone ('Tomorrow's Paper', referred to on web page: <http://www.nuri21.co.kr> accessed on 18 June 2000). Estimates today put mobile phone possession by Korean young people at closer to two out of three. The case of my own informants reflected these statistics, two of the three girls and three of the four boys being in possession of a mobile phone at the time of our interviews. Moreover, according to Aeran, of the 45 students in her class 35 possessed a mobile.

Such a high user rate, however, needs to be looked at in its cultural and social contexts. In most cases the mobile is provided for children by their parents, who are motivated to do so not so much by the popular perception that it is a 'must have' item for young people but rather by the potential the mobile affords them of monitoring the movements of their offspring. A Korean national newspaper, reporting on the popularity of the mobile among the young, tells how one model caught on like wildfire because it had a tracking device which enabled parents to pinpoint their children's whereabouts. There was a further advantage to the parent in that this particular mobile was programmable to make calls to a maximum of nine destinations. Ten thousand of these phones were sold within a month of launch despite a high

price tag: a handset costing 100 pounds, 40 pounds for contract processing and another 100 pounds for compulsory insurance ('Tomorrow's Paper', referred to on web page: <http://www.nuri21.co.kr> accessed on 18 June 2000).

That teenagers, however, may be willing to live with the fact that, in return for the convenience of having their own mobile, they pay a price in lost freedom is evident from the following comments in an online forum on the subject:

I really think the mobile phone is a good idea and I'm a good case in point. I used to get in trouble with my parents by coming home late and not letting them know where I was. But once they bought me a mobile I had to change my ways. They made me promise to leave the phone on all the time otherwise I wouldn't be allowed to keep it, and without a mobile you're nowhere. The problem was that whenever I was out with my friends my parents kept phoning to remind me to come home. They're not so bad now but at first they bugged me something terrible. Anyway, I think it's worked out OK. Now I usually tell them where I am and I've got my mobile if they want to check, so everyone's happy!
(accessed from <http://www2.dig.co.kr/parents/discussion>, 24 November 1999)

Whether all such stories have happy endings I do not know. Yet my impression is that parents do use the opportunities provided by mobile communications technology to monitor their children's comings and goings. My informants' parents, for example, all admitted that a key advantage of equipping their offspring with a mobile phone lay in being able to rein them in whenever they overstepped their time limits.

As with any new technology there have been numerous cases of mobile phone abuse, in the main related to excessive and unauthorised use by teenagers, most of whom are not wage earners and who therefore are not in a position to finance their mobiles. This has been a thorny issue with parents around the world who have received inflated phone bills and are legally responsible for paying them. Telecommunications companies have been inundated by complaints and refusals by parents to pay exorbitant phone bills not of their own making.

With several cases going to court and fearing a consumer backlash, telecoms companies have started to develop products with built-in restrictions ('Tomorrow's Paper', referred to on web page: <http://www.nuri21.co.kr> accessed on 18 June 2000). For example, Dan's mobile phone was programmed to make a maximum of fifteen pounds' worth of calls monthly; after that limit is reached Dan can only receive incoming calls.

As well as being subject to refinements driven by the imperatives of cultural perception and assumption, technology is also accessed in different ways according to social context. In his comparative study of cellular phone use among the Germans and the Chinese, Honold (1999) noted that there was a cultural difference in attitudes towards learning how to operate a mobile phone. German users tended to consult the user manual and follow it in detail for the specific information they needed. Chinese users were more likely to get basic instruction from either the salesperson or their friends and supplement this as necessary with trial and error experimentation. The cultural learning tradition each nationality brought to the task determined their learning strategies and led each to process the searched information in a culture-specific way.

No consideration of literacy practices in the context of mobile phone use would be complete without an examination of the use of the text messaging feature of today's generation of mobile phones. As text messaging is inherently more affordable than voice calls there is strong motivation for mobile phone users to use this function. Some mobile phone companies further encourage text messaging by providing free of charge a batch of the most frequently sent messages. Approximately twenty syllables are contained in each message, thus ensuring that text is short and concentrated. Due to the spatial limitations imposed by the tiny screen

on the mobile, punctuation and spaces between words are normally ignored. Creative graphics using ASCII characters⁸ are another popular medium for phone messaging.

Any text or graphic which does not fit the first screen display is automatically carried over onto the one following. This intrinsic attribute offers rich ground for creativity, especially in the form of word play. For example, text is entered on the first display which piques the reader's interest or causes her surprise. When the second display is clicked, however, the text takes an unexpected new direction, producing an entirely different message from the one begun on the first display. An example follows (please note that it and the succeeding examples contain punctuation and normal spacing in order to facilitate reading):

First display: *I love nu . . .*
Second display: *. . . gu-ri noodles.*
(extracted from Jun's phone messages received from her friends)

As 'nu' in Korean means 'you', the first display appears to contain a declaration of love for someone. However, the second display makes it clear that the object of love is actually a brand of noodles ('Nu-gu-ri'). The effect is similar to that achieved by the type of greetings card in which a message is begun on the front and completed in an unexpected way when the recipient opens it up.

Double entendre of a sexually connotative kind is frequently encountered, as in the following text (in Korean shelling beans is slang for making love):

First display: *Wanna shell beans with me . . .*

⁸ ASCII stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange. It is a standard code for representing characters as numbers that is used on most microcomputers, computer terminals, and printers: Dictionary of Computer and Internet Terms (1998).

Second display: . . . *then we can make bean curd.*
(sourced from the Internet cafe visited by Aeran and Yuni)

Messages in puzzle format are also common. Jin received the following from a friend:

Fill in the blanks.

Then say each word:

Ka-wi Pa-wi _____
Ka Kya Ku Kyu _____ Kyo
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 _____
Ka Na _____

That's how I feel!

The first blank calls for 'Po', which then completes a well-known piece of children's doggerel. The second needs 'Ko' as part of a logical sound sequence. The third requires the Korean number '10' (pronounced 'ship'). The final blank needs 'Ta' as the next sound in the Korean alphabet. Putting the four words together ('Po-Ko-Ship-Ta') creates the Korean for 'I Miss You'.

Although at the time of my interviews words were the favoured medium in my informants' mobile exchanges, the graphics display potential of mobile phones is increasingly being explored. Typically, girls get ideas for new graphic designs from arts and crafts publications. Certain designs tend to be in vogue for a while until they are superseded by new ones. Aeran received one such picture message from a friend she was arranging to meet at a nearby church:

* ", * " * " < [□ □]
", * , * + < [□ □ □]
* ", * " * " < [□ □]

This is a church on a snowy day. See ya there in a while.

When the message is viewed sideways the outline is discernible of a stylised church (Korean-style) with snowflakes falling on top of it (unfortunately my computer is unable to achieve the full effect created by the mobile graphics).

A greeting Yuni had received made use of a snowman symbol:

```
* * _mmm_ * * *
* * ( . . ) * *
* * ( : ) * *
```

The snow made me think of you. Hope ya like this.

Graphics are often culture-specific in their references. Food is a popular theme for graphic treatment and my informants tend to use Korean menu favourites in their designs:

Hungry? Here, have some kim-pap.
@)))))))

[Kim-pap consists of rice and other ingredients rolled into dried seaweed 'tubes'. Before being served the tubes are cut into slices, much as the image suggests.]

Let's go out for some noodles, OK?
====))))))) =====
(((((((
)))))
(((((((

[Here the graphic suggests noodles wound round a pair of chopsticks.]

It is very often the case that trends and fads which start in Japan soon find their way to Korea. The mobile phone craze is probably no exception. There is frequent evidence of new Japanese technology as well as the influence of Japanese popular culture in much of current Korean youth culture. I learned from my informants, for example, that Pokemon graphics like the following were widely circulated:

/)_____/)
/ 0 _ 0/
(@ 0 @)

The release of the Pokemon film apparently boosted the popularity of these images at all age levels.

Some measure of the popularity of text messaging can be formed from a trawl through the web sites most used by my young informants: Internet cafes, university clubs and textbook publishers all provide ideas for text- and graphics-based messages. Even on a cookery web page aimed at housewives I found a list of text messages - though I thought it rather unlikely that housewives would use their mobiles for text messaging. In fact, there was an obvious generation gap relating to the mode of use of mobiles. Whereas my informants seemed to be fully at ease with and fluent in the use of text messaging, their parents, even if they owned a mobile, appeared not to use this inbuilt function or even be aware of its existence.

Text messages may perform functions which are more appropriate to print than to speech. Jin told me of an occasion when a friend of hers who had upset her sent her a text message to apologise and seek a reconciliation. Jin told me that when she received her friend's apology in this form she felt relieved and happy. It was, she felt, a most effective way for the two of them to close the chapter on their disagreement and take up their friendship again. Jin equated the text message with a written note of apology, which she valued more highly than mere 'talk on the phone' because to her it was stronger evidence of her friend's sincerity.

High school students are not allowed to use the mobile phone in class, but Jin and Heesoo

told me that as university students they and their friends often while away boring lectures by sending each other text messages. (Could this be the cyber age equivalent of the hand-written notes we oldies used to send whizzing across to our friends when the teacher's back was turned!) The mobile phone has been embraced wholeheartedly by the young as an integral part of their communications network. Mobile phone literacies serve to establish and maintain the social networks of young people, affording them the constant promise of connectedness with their peers either through voice or written mode. In fact, mobile phone literacy practices may be associated with a process Sefton-Green (1998) calls 'juvenilisation'. By relegating the literacy to the domain of the young, the association of text messaging and youth is firmly cemented.

I'll let Aeran have the final word here as she sums up the value of her mobile, especially its text message function, to her:

Aeran: What is too short to be said tends to be text messaged. Just before I go to bed, for example, I send or receive messages such as 'Sleep well!' or 'Sweet dreams!'.

Researcher: Do you tend to get more messages at certain times than at others?

Aeran: I can't say that I do. Messages can come in at any time. Of course, a bunch may come in during class time when my mobile is switched off and then I could have several to deal with at once.

Researcher: How many messages do you get a day?

Aeran: Quite a few. On certain days I may get more than fifteen but usually I'd say that I get between five and ten.

Researcher: Apart from cost, is there any other reason why you would use text messaging in preference to voice?

Aeran: Text messaging is quite different from voice. It's much more fun. When you get them you feel good!

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to give an account of the multi-dimensional experience which lies at the interface of young people's daily lives with the digital communication technologies inherent in computer and cellular phone use. As Korean young people live in an 'all-encompassing electronic habitat' (Smith and Curtin, 1998), their everyday literacy practices are deeply interwoven with these technologies. My informants are representative of a generation which makes use of computer mediated communication and cellular telecommunications for its own benefit and interest: as an aid to academic studies, in leisure activities and for interpersonal engagement and participation. Shields gives us a unique perspective on this all-embracing use:

It is essential to treat telecommunications and computer mediated communications networks as *local* phenomena, as well as global networks. Embedded within locally specific routines of daily schedules and the 'place-ballets' of individuals, the Internet has been shaped by its users.
(italics in original text, 1996: 3)

Written communications mediated by the online computer and the mobile phone are at the centre of young people's social relations and play a significant role in the construction of their various identities. These young people actively use cyberspace and telephony in order to maintain existing relationships and to pursue new ones. It has been observed that Korean teenagers face numerous constraints in their daily lives, such as the pressure of time, gendering norms and external academic expectations. As a result their socialising needs, their need to mix with peers, often take second place. The potential which modern digital technologies afford for transcending the spatial limitations of 'meeting' is a strong motivational factor for young people, as one of my informants, Jin, explained:

I personally do not believe in cyber relationships but I still go to the Internet chat rooms. I find it quite exciting to imagine the people I meet on the chat - what they look like and what kind of personality they have, things like that. For me that is the biggest attraction of the chat.

The complexity of interpersonal relationships exhibited by users of digital communicative

modalities mirrors the broader social context, as Marc Smith reminds us:

Despite the unique qualities of the social spaces to be found in virtual worlds, people do not enter new terrains empty-handed. We carry with us the sum-total of our experiences and expectations generated in more familiar social spaces.
(quoted in Willson, 2000: 654)

Young people's lived experience embraces a 'discursive knowledge of the specific contexts in which they operate as well as their interaction with the wider social world' (Giddens, 1984 quoted in Naz Rassool, 1999:2). As Korean youth demonstrates, a multiplicity and fluidity of experience and identity is further cultivated by the new modes of communication. Young people's use of technology is a crucial feature in the construction of their assigned or ascribed identities with all their concomitant values, assumptions and attitudes. I close this chapter with an observation of Nguyen and Alexander in reference to the effects of digital communications and information technologies:

. . . a clearer case can be made for the claim that as a populist media, the Net is a microcosm of social reality and that Net relations imitate and intimate real life. . . The structure of the technology and the content are altogether indissociable from the broader cultural context. . . In this sense, the Net paradoxically works both to reproduce and reinforce existing 'hegemonic' structures as well as enabling new forms of interactivity.
(1996: 126-127)

Chapter 7 The function of gender in literacy practices

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the gender dimensions of literacy practices in depth, focusing on how gender is enacted through reading and writing and how young people situate themselves in the gender construction mediated by reading and writing. I show how young people learn what is appropriate gender behaviour for each sex as regards both the selection and the uses made of text. Gendered literacy practices seem to foster gender-related values or attitudes in participants as well as to provide them with opportunities to sustain, resist, and even to negotiate gender specific roles and identities. I start by examining the ways in which certain types of reading or writing are viewed and how they are integrated into the world of Korean teenagers. As I have already explained in Chapter 4, my discussion is primarily based on an observation of the literacy practices engaged in by the girls in my informant group.

7.2 Gender-specific preferences shown in reading and writing

When they choose literacy materials, Korean young people demonstrate that they are consciously or unconsciously influenced by gender roles. Boys typically select reading materials centred on 'male' concerns such as sports or action, while the girls seem to prefer romance (Chung Y.S., 1996; Kim R.A., 1995). In any discussion of gendered choice among Korean youth, comics are frequently cited as a good example of the correlation between sex and reading material. Korean comics can be divided into two representative categories: 'Kukhwa' and 'Soonjung'. According to Inhwa Park (1995: 211), the term 'Kukhwa' is of

Japanese origin and is used to denote a style of comic which male illustrators produce mainly for the tastes of male readers. 'Soonjung' comics, on the other hand, are a largely female phenomenon, drawn by females and read by females. One dictionary definition of 'Soonjung' is 'pure and innocent love affair' (Donga Korean Dictionary, 1996). Scholars define the term in various ways: 'drama enacted between two attractive people of the opposite sex' (Jaedong Park, 1995: 147); 'comics based on love affairs and read by females' (Shin J.A., 1997: 20); 'comic containing glamorous characters and featuring a relationship between a man and a woman' (Hong S.A., 1996: 2). In any event, the common elements in all these definitions of 'Soonjung' are romance and a young female readership for whom romance has strong appeal.

These definitions of the Soonjung comic are indeed very similar to John Cawelti's definition of romance fiction, the key points of which are that: a) the central narrative concerns a love relationship; b) the central relationship is between a hero and heroine; c) most romances have a female protagonist; and d) the reader readily identifies with the protagonist (quoted in Radford, 1986: 8). Luke (in Series Editor's Introduction in Christian-Smith, 1993) suggests that romance fiction in a Western context spawned variations on the genre, including that of the romance comic book in Asian countries, but that the main features are broadly-speaking international. As I examine the ways in which the ideology of Soonjung comics is integrated into the lives of young Korean women of school and university age, I will therefore be making reference to research findings concerning romance fiction in general.

For many, 'Soonjung' has become a generic term embracing all comics illustrated and read by females. Some Korean feminist critics (Cho H.J., 1992; Lim J.I., 1996; Myungji Comic Association, 1997) however, challenge this generic use. According to them, the term fails to

recognise the existence of other comic types illustrated by female artists in which the love affair is not a staple ingredient. They therefore insist that the broader definition 'female comic' is more appropriate. While there may be a difference of opinion in terms of categorisation, it is certainly true that there is a perceived association of comic types with gendered readership. In subsequent examples I will show how this fact is demonstrated in young people's daily lives. As a postscript to this part of the discussion, it is interesting to note that over time Kukhwa seems to have gained a certain status as a recognised art form and for this reason each new issue is eagerly pored over by self-styled comic critics who pronounce on its merits or otherwise. Soonjung, on the other hand, rarely rates a mention in the critical press, according to Chang Y.S. (1998) because as a form which is targeted at a female audience it is not considered worthy of serious artistic evaluation. This attitude hints at the role of power and politics in the relationship between gender and reading. The stance taken in poststructuralist literary studies is that male-authored forms of literature are assigned a privileged position by social ideologies and by particular hegemonic interests (Williams, 1977; Eagleton, 1983).

While I was exploring the theme of comics with my male informants, I found some distinct attitudes towards the genre. To my question of whether they had ever read a romance comic (of the 'Soonjung' variety), my informant group of three boys reacted by bursting into laughter, indicating that as far as they were concerned the question was absurd. They claimed they would never read that kind of comic because to them reading about love affairs was boring. They maintained that the plots of such comics all followed a similar pattern: boy meets girl, a romance begins, a relationship ensues and later the couple either marry or separate. According to them, this basic storyline never varied. No self-respecting boy would

be seen dead reading what was so obviously girls' reading material. To illustrate their point, they told me what happened when a classmate of theirs had brought such 'girls' stuff' to school:

*Hwa: Jaesoo was a strange guy. He actually read romance comics during class.
[The others giggle]*

Researcher: Did you tease him about it?

Dan: No, we didn't. We just told him he should go and get some proper comics.

Jongwon: We advised him not to bring the stuff to school but to read it at home by himself because reading it in public made him look like an idiot . . .

In other words, a boy who would bring what is considered girls' reading material to school is thought socially inept and deserves to become the target of his classmates' ridicule. By their reaction the boys displayed their own attitude towards Soonjung comics. The girls I spoke to, on the other hand, felt quite differently. Their comic reading focused almost exclusively on Soonjung, although Yuni's tastes encompassed comics outside this category as she admitted to occasional forays into the world of Kukhwa.

Their strong preference for romantic themes in the comics they read is mirrored in the girls' other daily reading and writing activities. At Aeran and Yuni's school it was common for classmates to circulate and read one another's attempts at writing their own romance fiction. Aeran told me that the stories of one of their classmates called Kieun were particularly popular. It seemed that Kieun's stories contained many of the romantic ingredients the girls found most appealing and seemed to speak directly to their hopes and dreams. According to Aeran, each of Kieun's stories ranged in length from several dozen sides of A4 to several hundred. She normally wrote in pencilled longhand in school notebooks and often encouraged her classmates to participate in her writing. Aeran said it did not seem to bother

Kieun if others made comments to improve the coherence of one of her stories; in fact she was usually willing to make changes following their suggestions. In addition, she regularly incorporated the names and personality characteristics of her classmates in her fiction. As a result, Aeran told me, her classmates vied with each other to be featured as the romantic heroine in Kieun's latest magnum opus .

Although in varying degrees, their diary entries also spoke of the girls' interest in romantic themes, something that was entirely absent in the boys' diaries. Aeran's diary, for example, was profusely illustrated with photos of her favourite TV stars, lyrics of pop songs, film script excerpts, love poems and texts from various sources. As she showed me examples, Aeran explained how she got some of them:

I copied these two down from my friend's diary and sometimes when I write to friends I use them in letters. This one is from a Japanese film, 'Love Letter'. And this script I found in a free movie magazine . . . One of my friends wrote this love parody but I found it didn't make much sense . . . A friend gave me this but we don't know who wrote it. My mum told me that even in her day they passed round these things . . . These I copied from a book of romantic poetry.

Although the practice of circulating texts among young females evidently crosses generation boundaries, neither Aeran nor her mother actually knew who the authors were. One short text in Aeran's diary shows how central the love theme is in the life of young females, Aeran's mother identifying it as one that had also circulated during her youth:

The Legend of the Silver Rings

If I get three silver rings from my beloved, I will give one to the person who gave me the rings, the second to my husband and the third to the man who will stand by me until the last day of my life. If all the three rings are worn by the same man, I will be the happiest woman in the world.

By implying that a woman may find happiness only within a romantic relationship, this text

and others like it may be encouraging successive generations of young girls to seek meaning for their lives in storybook visions of eternally happy marriages.

A romanticised view of marriage surfaced elsewhere. While I was looking through some letters from friends of Yuni's, in one I noticed after the name of the writer the word 'wife' in Korean ('ma-nu-ra'), followed by a phonetic stab at the English pronunciation ('wa-i-f'). Yuni explained its significance:

Yuni: This girl fancies this singer, so she calls herself his wife. That's what girls do with their favourite TV stars. On top of classroom desks with ballpoint or correction pens they write that they are the stars' wives.

Researcher: Do they use any expressions other than 'wife' - 'girlfriend' or 'lover', for example?

Yuni: No, only 'wife' ['ma-nu-ra']

Researcher: Why do you think they choose that particular word?

Yuni: It signifies that the girl belongs to the star, so she is saying that nobody else should have anything to do with him.

Researcher: What if there is more than one person in a class who fancies the same TV star?

Yuni: That doesn't really matter. In a pop star band, for instance, there is a guy called Hyuck. In my class last year there were two girls claiming "I am Hyuck's" and signing "his wife" along with their own names for all to see. There wasn't any problem.

Jin mentioned this same phenomenon in connection with a friend who styled herself 'wife' to her boyfriend. Although neither had made any formal commitment to each other, the girl used the words 'wife' and 'husband' in the address lists on their mobile phones. In his she accompanied her own name and phone number with the words 'my wife'. In hers she included the words 'my husband' with his name and phone number. As far as I could tell, this practice was limited to girls. Boys seemed not to have taken it up, as none of my male informants was able to recall any such incident involving a boy.

Although I have tried to show that gender is strongly identifiable in young people's reading and writing, my intent in doing so is not to contribute to the construction of differences along gender lines. Linguistic studies claiming that language reflects already existing social identities have been criticised by anthropological and constructivist critics who reject the biological determinism viewpoint. According to them gender is not inherent in the individual but constructed in a culture when a collection of symbols are invested with meanings that define what it is to be male or female (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Cherland, 1994; Romaine, 1999). West and Zimmerman maintain that gender is 'a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment' and that it is 'the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category' (1987: 126-7). The corollary to this is summed up by West and Zimmerman as follows:

[A] person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one *is*, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one *does*, and does recurrently, in interaction with others'.
(italics in original, op cit: 140)

According to this viewpoint gender is a dynamic concept which responds to cultural and historical forces. This represents my own perspective. Rather than merely reflecting gender differences, reading and writing processes construct and reconstruct them. Through the processes which in one case lead to one boy's interest in romance being ridiculed by his peers and in another result in the girl's interest in a wide range of romance discourse, gendered roles are constructed which result in the 'reproduction of the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category' (West and Zimmerman, op cit: 146).

With particular emphasis on the ways in which gender is displayed in texts and how young people internalise or reject such discourse in relation to their lived experiences, I will discuss

the following themes:

- i) Attitudes towards physical appearance
- ii) Norms of sexual behaviour
- iii) Other aspects of male-female relationships
- iv) Attitudes towards housework.

7.3 Attitudes towards physical appearance

7.3.1 The norming process

Perhaps a relevant starting point for discussing the mediation of literacy in attitudes towards physical appearance is with an examination of socially constructed norms for the latter and how young people locate these norms in their lives. The achievement or maintenance of certain standards of physical appearance is for young people of my informants' age a crucial factor in their social lives. To look good is to feel good and to feel good is to be attractive to members of the opposite sex. To begin with, all my male informants had taken part in martial arts classes (Taekwondo, Karate, etc.) at private institutes, especially when they were in primary school and had more free time. Yet, while aspiring to project the image of physically strong males, none of them felt it necessary or even desirable to build their bodies in terms of muscle development. Instead they believed that good looks, a certain height and a slim body are the important elements in 'looking good' and hence of being of potential 'interest' to girls. Height in particular is judged a very important standard for measuring attractiveness. Yuni's brother, Kil, was shorter than average for his age and suffered continuing anxiety about his height. He had even stopped lifting weights as a way to increase his arm strength on the basis

of a comment from a friend to the effect that such exercise was said to impede upward growth. (Kil's mother told me she was sceptical about the truth of this). Heesoo, who was also on the short side, told me how he felt about his own height:

Heesoo: When I choose [sic] a girl, height is important to me. I'm a short guy so I avoid going out with girls who are taller than me.

Researcher: Why is that?

Heesoo: I don't want them to look down on me. You know, girls like tall guys but look at me. If I go out with a tall girl I don't feel confident. If the girl is shorter than me I don't feel so much pressure.

It was apparent that Heesoo felt height to be a factor in achieving a position of superiority and power. As already mentioned, physical strength is also valued and for the same reason. Heesoo and my other male informants read Kukhwa comics, which often feature fights among high school boys. In these the strong male is seen to be defending the weak female (Heesoo: "You've got to be strong enough to guard your woman".) While I did not get the impression that any of these boys would be prepared to take the kind of violent defensive action depicted in the Kukhwa comics, it was clear that both sexes believe in the ideal of the strong male acting the role of protector for the weak female.

While to be physically strong is important for a boy, girls apparently feel no such necessity. None of my female informants had taken any private classes to build up their physical strength. Instead they were concerned, indeed in some cases obsessed, with losing weight. Starting with Aeran's acknowledgement that body size was one of the most acute and sensitive issues for girls of her age, each of the girls in turn confessed to collecting abundant information and advice on diet and exercise. To my request that she describe the ideal physical appearance sought by her and her friends, Aeran replied:

Girls want to look thin and pale because boys love that look. There is a belief that boys hate fat girls. It

is also said that the fragile looking woman gets a man's attention since she touches his innate male protective instinct, right? I want to have that fragile look, but obviously I've got a long way to go. My cheeks are plump and the lower half of my body weighs too much, although the upper half looks fine. With this much flesh I can't look weak and helpless.

Although I agreed with Aeran that she did not look 'fragile', I nevertheless thought she was relatively slim. In fact I later found out that she was 158cm (approximately five feet, three inches) and weighed only 48kg (around 7 1/2 stone). Aeran's self-critical standards were shared by Yuni. Although she was envied by her friends for her delicate features, Yuni herself was far from satisfied with her appearance. I found Yuni's harsh self-assessment difficult to understand because I did not see any reason for her to feel the way she did. Yet dissatisfaction with their body shape is very prevalent among young Korean females. Statistics included in a study of nutrition among Korean youth show that girls have lower self-confidence in their body shape than boys. Following are some of the data gathered in the study:

Table 7.1 Correlation between self-evaluation of weight and the Body Mass Index found in senior secondary school students

	Male (81)			Female (79)		
BMI (Total no)	Underweight	Normal	Overweight	Underweight	Normal	Overweight
	24	45	12	34	37	8
<u>Self - evaluation</u> Obese	0	13	10	15	34	8
Appropriate	4	26	2	17	3	0
Thin	19	4	0	2	0	0
No answer	1	2	0	0	0	0

(quoted in a study in National Nutrition Development, Korean Diet Development Institute: December, 1995, accessed from <http://www.youthnet.re.kr> on 29 April 2000)

Of the boys questioned, 13 out of 45 (28%) of normal weight according to the index considered themselves overweight. On the other hand, 34 out of 37 girls (92%) in the normal group perceived themselves to be heavier than they actually were. This striking contrast between male and female was further reflected in the responses from the underweight group. While none of the boys in this group considered themselves obese, 15 out of 34 girls (44%) perceived themselves as such. As such statistics show, girls seem to have a distorted view of their own bodies (see also Mun B.Y., 1996; Kim, K.H., 1999).

In fact, the girls I interviewed had been trying various combinations of diet and exercise to achieve the desired proportions, recommendations of which are readily available in fashion magazines and similar publications. Some of the girls even go so far as to invent ways to reduce weight, like Aeran who discovered that dancing to fast pop music while watching TV was successful in achieving some weight loss. However, when on her friend's recommendation Yuni tried the same method, she found it had absolutely no effect. Another practice I noticed among my informants was the clipping of instructions in magazines dealing with slimming methods. They then sent their friends these clippings with messages written in longhand on the clippings themselves. Occasionally, such information was for products or services to be used in conjunction with exercise programmes to help reduce fat on stomach and legs. Practices such as these, I felt, could only serve to reinforce the ideology of 'thin is beautiful'.

7.3.2 Mediation of norms through reading and writing

In exploring some of the ways in which their reading and writing reflect young people's views of gender identities, I will look specifically at comics, diaries and fashion magazines which commonly form part of young people's literacy interests.

Soonjung comics play a key role in encouraging young girls to prioritise physical attractiveness as the key element in their femininity and to believe that it can be achieved through their own efforts. (Examples of themes contained in such comics are to be found in Appendix 4.) In a comic entitled *Full House*, for example, the female protagonist is depicted as plain-featured and wearing nondescript clothes. Later in the story the same character has been turned by the artists into a stunning beauty who becomes the life and soul of the party and who draws admiring looks from the male characters. Another comic, *Orange Boy*, features a young girl who, with the aid of beauticians and fashion designers, is transported from humble origins to a beauty contest stage where she walks away with an award.

These and countless similar scenarios may be contributing to the myth that physical attractiveness is paramount and is within every girl's reach solely through the consumption and application of consumer beauty products and services. The further subliminal message of such comics is that an attractive female always pulls the men and is on her way to romantic adventures. Social pressures to conform to such stereotypes may only increase teenage girls' preoccupation with their physical appearance, as the following conversations illustrate:

Researcher: What do you think? Do people base their judgements on appearance alone?

Jin: Sure, they do. I mean, if someone pretty has done something special nobody stops talking about it. But all a plain girl gets are sarcastic comments like, "Amazing! I never believed she had it in her!"

Asked the same question, Aeran agreed:

Being pretty has got many benefits. For example, if a pretty girl gets herself into trouble she can get out of it much more easily. You can say things are changing but it is still important for a woman to find a good husband to make her happy. And the pretty face is going to get one much more easily than the plain Jane.

The perceived privileges bestowed on and the advantages to be gained from a 'pretty' face are indeed well documented by Ros Coward, a British feminist critic and scholar:

Most women know to their cost that appearance is perhaps the crucial way by which men form opinions of women. For that reason, feelings about self-image get mixed up with feelings about security and comfort. Self-image in this society is enmeshed with judgements about desirability. And because desirability has been elevated to being the crucial reason for sexual relations, it sometimes appears to women that the whole possibility of being loved and comforted hangs on how their appearance will be received. (1984: 78)

The preoccupation of my female informants with physical attractiveness as a be-all and end-all is further evidenced in the criteria they use in choosing their comic reading material:

Yuni: If the characters aren't good-looking I'm disappointed. I tend to go for comics in which the girls wear stylish clothes and fancy hair styles.

Jin: [pointing at female characters in a comic] See these? Now to me they are attractive. They should be fashion-conscious and have hair styles which are a bit different, not just the run-of-the-mill kind you see in the street.

Aeran: [pointing to a copy of Full House] This illustrator is especially good at clothes so she is more popular with girls than some of the others.

In her diary Aeran kept several enlarged portrait-style photos of glamorous female TV stars.

I asked her why she chose these in preference to full-length shots:

Well, there's a theory that just looking at photos of pretty faces will help to make you prettier. I don't know whether it's true but that's what I've heard some of the senior year students say, so I thought, why not, it's worth a shot. I'm pretty sure that all the girls in my school keep at least one such photo in their diaries.

The fashion magazines read by my young women informants place great emphasis on the advantages of a pretty face, both in their features and in their advertising. The winter issues of

the magazines in particular tell readers where to go for cosmetic surgery during the traditional six week winter vacation, which is long enough for someone to have surgery done as well as to recover from its visible after-effects. The following, for example, is a summary of the types and numbers of cosmetic surgery advertisements run in one issue (January 2000) of the popular *Cindy the Perky* magazine:

Nose surgery: 7

Eye enlargement: 5

Face reshaping (in particular, restructuring of jawbones and cheekbones): 3

Skin surgery (eliminating acne and other blemishes, moles and body hair): 2

Breast surgery: 1

Perceived as an effective method of beauty enhancement, cosmetic surgery is within the financial means of many young Korean females. All my young female informants told me of friends, classmates or fellow youth club members who had undergone cosmetic surgical treatment. As Yuni implied, it is a quite common occurrence in her age group:

Researcher: What sort of cosmetic surgery do girls your age think of first?

Yuni: Well, girls without lined eyelids often want to get their eyes enlarged, and many are interested in having work done on their nose bone to make it more prominent.

Researcher: Do you know anyone personally who has gone ahead and done this?

Yuni: Sure, I know quite a few girls in my school who have. Particularly after the winter vacation you see girls who have been through it. The most common operation is on the eyes and that's quite noticeable. Nose surgery doesn't show so much so you can't always tell, but I do know some girls at my school have had it done.

Yuni's experience was backed up by the other girls who each gave similar accounts of people they knew. Medical advances in this sphere are so taken for granted in Korea that questioning Korean females concerning what they think of cosmetic surgery and whether they

themselves would ever contemplate it is not considered too personal a line of enquiry at all, nor does it imply any negative reflection on their appearance. Indeed, showing an interest in another's appearance and the steps she has taken to improve it is considered a valid topic of conversation because it is viewed as an issue of common concern. When I asked my young woman informants about cosmetic surgery, they cheerfully told me their own and their parents' views on the subject:

Aeran: During the two months break before I started senior secondary school, my parents said they would pay for me to have eye surgery in order to get lined eyelids. I said no because I thought my eyes were already distinctive enough. But the two of them kept at me and even told me that if I didn't take up their offer I would never have another opportunity as far as they were concerned. But I don't care. Actually, I'd like to get a nose job, but they wouldn't go for that.

Although Aeran and her parents were at odds over which area to have it performed on, there was no argument about the desirability of having cosmetic surgery done in the first place. However, different perceptions exist from generation to generation. Eyelid surgery used to be all the rage but more recently teenage fashion magazines have started to feature teenage models who have had cosmetic surgery done on various other parts of the body. According to Yuni, she and her parents had similar differences of opinion on the subject. While Yuni wanted to have her jawbone altered, her parents thought she should just have her eyes and facial moles worked on. For them the idea of a jaw operation seemed too major an undertaking as well as to involve an element of risk.

A girl's success in attracting males is seen to depend on her efforts to achieve what one advertisement for cosmetic surgery calls 'looks which will make your boyfriend proud of you'. Thus these operations are considered a passport to success in finding a better partner as well as, in Aeran's words, 'a way to boost self-confidence'. Parents are as active as their

daughters in the lengths they will go to see that the latter reap the potential rewards which ascribed beauty brings, even to the extent of paying for the operations which either they or their daughters think necessary.

Korean girls seem to become fashion conscious at progressively younger age levels. Yuni's mother told me about the first time she realised that her own daughter was starting to show an interest in fashion:

When I first came across some fashion magazines in Yuni's room, it came as a bit of a shock because now I could see that my girl was really growing up. In one sense though I was glad to see that she was not lagging behind in that area because I wouldn't want to think any of my children were out of step with their peers.

Although Mrs Park placed a higher value on her daughter's school-related reading than on her reading of fashion magazines, she was nevertheless delighted to know that her daughter was looking after her physical appearance. For Mrs Park an essential part of womanhood was to take an interest in looking as good as you could. The boys I interviewed also showed themselves to have internalised the norms emphasizing the importance of physical attractiveness in women. Without exception, their ideal woman was one who fulfilled those norms.

As we have seen, ideals of femininity are shaped by fashion and beauty practices which are mediated by mass media discourse. The reading materials of popular culture are in the business of manufacturing fantasy, which in turn channels young women's desires towards consumption and positions them as 'material girls in a material world'. Christian-Smith points out that this world of popular text is built upon 'commercial femininity' (1993), a phenomenon also referred to by Talbot:

Femininity spans institutions, discursively organising women's lives. We can consider it as a particular structuring of social space. As such it is a conglomeration of concepts, themes and images, and of social relations and social practices. Femininity is articulated in and through commercial and mass media discourses, especially in the magazine industry and in the fashion industries of clothing and cosmetics. But most of all, it is articulated on women's bodies, by women themselves. (1998: 171)

7.4 Norms of sexual behaviour

Just as societal views on physical appearance are reflected in and constructed by what people read, so norms of sexual behaviour in the context of romantic relationships may also be transmitted through literacy practices. In this section I will examine the way sexual roles are constructed in reading materials and how readers interpret them for themselves.

7.4.1 The portrayal of female sexuality

I will begin by examining the treatment of female sexuality in romantic reading materials and its effect on young females in Korean society. The available genre include fiction and comics. Many of the Harlequin romance fiction titles are also available in Korean translation but their explicit sexual description does not seem to appeal to my informants. Jin and Aeran had read one or two, but Aeran especially was scathing of their 'rubbishy' content and felt she had wasted her money. Although Jin had not bought any of the Harlequins she had been able to look at them in her class, where copies circulated surreptitiously with pages turned down at the 'juicy bits'. She told me that the titles she had seen had not impressed her and that she had no intention of returning to them in the future.

It seemed then that my informants' interest in romantic themes did not extend to explicitly sexual material, and I came to realise that to show an interest in sex is considered

inappropriate. Indeed an almost Victorian ethos prevails in which no 'good' girl is supposed to be interested in sex (Aum Y.S., 1997). The explicit language to be found in fictionalised sexual encounters a la Harlequin was thought by my informants to border on the obscene; they actually seemed embarrassed to talk about such books. This attitude towards explicit sex seems to reflect social expectations that, as an interest in sex is inappropriate, girls should be ignorant of it in order to retain their purity. This has resonance with Greer's finding that 'romance is compulsorily sexless' (1970 referred to by Hollows, 2000).

I made a similar striking discovery in connection with young people's fashion magazines and Soonjung comics. The young women featured therein are portrayed both in text and in illustration as essentially asexual and childlike, something I found surprising in view of the intended readership. According to my informants, readers of these materials range in age from their late teens to well into their twenties. The practice of eschewing sexual imagery is also apparent in the advertising policies of the materials. Advertisements for women's underwear, for example, which are common in magazines aimed at married women, are conspicuous by their absence in these magazines. I saw only one such advertisement in the four magazines I examined and even this was low-key and innocuous.

The romance comic genre, on the other hand, plays a more important part in constructing young women's attitudes towards their sexual feelings, as the following example shows. The author of one of these comics became very popular for her portrayal of young couples in relationships in which the female takes the initiative. One storyline has a girl in her first year of senior high school developing a romantic feeling for a boy of her own age, in the course of which she is overwhelmed by a desire to have closer physical contact with the boy, albeit not

beyond the stage of holding hands and kissing him. The girl, however, is held back from taking this kind of initiative through some inner conviction that what she wants to do is unnatural and sordid. In one scene she compares her own impure feelings to what she sees as the pure feelings of the boy, who so far has shown no sexual interest in her. As the two sit on a park bench, the girl is shown saying to herself:

Why am I having such dirty thoughts while he sits there so pure and innocent? Why oh why?

Towards the end of this particular story, however, the boy is finally seen to start to take some of the initiative in the budding romance. Yet the author includes no introspective behaviour on the part of the boy of the sort she attributes to and so comprehensively develops in the girl protagonist.

Similar representations of young women repressing their basic urges abound. While I was flipping through Aeran's diary, I found a bookmark containing messages proclaiming the advantages of remaining a virgin. The bookmark was in the shape of a dagger, an object of cultural significance in that the dagger is an historical icon, kept by Korean women for committing suicide in the face of threatened sexual assault. The bookmark was issued by an organisation for promoting chastity among young women and contained the following inscription:

I am determined to be a virgin until marriage. Chastity is my pride and happiness.

Aeran told me how she felt about the bookmark and the message it promulgated:

I got this bookmark after a school assembly on the importance of chastity in my final junior high school year. I don't think any of us were really paying attention because, you know, it was one of those lecture caravans that come round to schools at least a couple of times a year. Actually they still come now that I'm in senior high school and we all have to attend, but none of us tries to follow what's going on because the message is always the same. I may be the only one who still has this bookmark! I quite liked it. Look at its shape and the words on it. It's so funny! I mean, imagine: 'Chastity is my pride and

happiness.' Did you ever hear anything so corny?

Aeran's comments should probably not be construed as a challenge to the norm of chastity nor to traditional perceptions of virtue held by an older generation. As already indicated, there is obviously a widespread belief among my female informants that young women should refrain from premarital sex. Aeran herself returned to this theme in subsequent comments:

Aeran: You shouldn't get involved in a sexual relationship until you get married because early sexual experience can cause problems. You may get pregnant or your past may come back to haunt you and jeopardise your marriage if your partner finds out that . . .

Yuni: Once your hymen is broken, well . . . there goes your reputation. Women always lose out once they allow themselves to have sexual experiences before marriage. I want to be a virgin until I get married.

Aeran: So do I. All the girls I know believe in keeping their virginity.

This belief in the potential hazards of prenuptial sex is shared by other young women. An issue of a fashion magazine called *Popular Communication* (December 1999) contains the results of a survey of the attitudes of a sample group of young people in their early twenties. 98 out of 153 (64%) of the females questioned answered that sexual experience before marriage would negatively affect a woman's marital prospects. Significantly, none of the 147 men questioned in the same survey had the perception that premarital sex would hurt *their* chances! In the construction of these strongly-held attitudes towards chastity, parents also play a significant role. The parents of all my female informants are very strict, for example, about where their daughters may stay overnight. Aeran's mother, Mrs Kim, had this to say:

If my daughter wants to sleep over at her [girl]friend's place, I and my husband must know the parents well. Otherwise she knows better than to ask us in the first place.

Such parental restrictions have meant that Aeran has rarely been allowed to stay overnight outside her own home. Mrs Kim went on:

I don't think it is a good idea for Aeran to have a boyfriend until she finishes high school. [In fact Aeran has no boyfriend and neither do the other girls] It would distract her from her studies. Of course, once she's an adult I would probably accept her having a sexual relationship with someone she really loves on the basis that they plan to marry sooner or later. However, I always remind both my daughters that having sex means they risk getting pregnant.

Although Mrs Kim's professed acceptance of a premarital sexual relationship for her daughter seems to be more flexible than her daughter's own stand in the matter, this acceptance is nevertheless posited on a belief that sex belongs to the world of adults who are on the threshold of marriage.

Research by Yeansoo Aum (1997: op cit) supports my more informal findings. She found a positive correlation between reading materials and the construction of gender identity in Korean senior high school girls. In wide-ranging interviews with girls who had consenting sexual experiences she learned that, like their fictional counterparts in the romantic print culture, none of them had been the initiator. Rather, the girls agreed to have sex at the suggestion of their partners. The girls convinced themselves (or were convinced) that 'offering their body' would prove their love to the boy. However, without exception, all of them felt fearful and apprehensive about the outcome of their behaviour (see also Sim Y.H., 1992).

7.4.2 The portrayal of male sexual behaviour

In contrast to that of girls, the behaviour of boys is much more assertive in sexual terms, at times even aggressive. Soonjung comics portray females who are receptive to male advances but who never take the initiative, whereas males are shown as proactive in expressing their

romantic interest in the female. The comic *Full House* portrays a heroine who is independent and assertive in every other way but sexual while her male partner is constantly making advances towards her. The male will at times resort to physical strength to get his way, but this is implicitly seen merely to add to his sexual attraction. When another male shows an interest in the heroine, the male protagonist typically becomes extremely aggressive towards the interloper while denying, albeit unconvincingly, that his aggression is fuelled by jealousy. The resulting scenes of passion and melodrama seem to be key factors in the attraction to romantic comics felt by my female informants.

In *Orange Boy*, an even more violent series which was apparently enormously popular among young girls, a tall, well-built schoolboy from a privileged background goes about 'proving his love' for a rather ordinary-looking schoolgirl from a poor family in an extremely aggressive way. In one issue he breaks another boy's neck for no other reason than that the second boy had been seen talking to the girl. The girl, who incidentally feels no romantic attachment to the protagonist, protests at his brutal assault on the second boy and rejects his advances. Stung by her rejection, the protagonist subsequently makes numerous attempts to prove his love for the girl, culminating in a brave attempt to save her life. I felt uncomfortable with the subliminal textual message that the protagonist's later bravery in some way compensated for his earlier aggressive and anti-social behaviour. Indeed, on querying my female informants on this issue it became clear that they had taken this message on board themselves since they seemed quite prepared to overlook the boy's brutality in the earlier sequences of the story.

The heroine in *Orange Boy*, like that in *Full House*, is also portrayed as independent and

assertive. She breaks with conventional female behaviour and transcends her lowly socio-economic status. In some scenes she confronts males who are intent on brutal behaviour and fights back with her own female friends. One of my informants, Yuni, admired the female protagonist because by taking a stand against the unfair use of force the heroine was challenging traditional norms. I asked Yuni whether she thought the portrayal of the girl was at all realistic:

Yuni: I like Myung-sook because she is not weak or passive. When she wants to be she can be quite strong and assertive, even aggressive.

Researcher: What would you say about her behaviour if it happened in the real world? Do you think a girl would act like that in real life, I mean, combining assertiveness with outright aggression?

Yuni: I guess not. If she did she would be considered badly behaved. People don't approve of girls' using force.

As Yuni pointed out, if a female shows too much assertiveness in real life, even in the cause of the underdog, society deems it inappropriate. Despite her professed admiration for the heroine, Yuni's own experience and values coincide with traditional gender views. This finds resonance in comparisons made by Christian-Smith (1990) between young girls' reading preferences and their own behaviour. It was clear that the girls she interviewed were immensely attracted by a heroine's assertiveness. Their personal conception of romantic relationships in everyday life, however, was bound up with conventional notions of femininity: that is, a fear of projecting too assertive an image for fear of alienating boys and destroying any possibility of a romantic attachment. My own female informants did not view the heroine's assertive behaviour as contributing to her sexual attractiveness as they did in the case of the male protagonists, whose actions they found neither irrational nor dangerous. Indeed, they showed by their remarks their belief that the use of physical force properly belongs in the male domain and that its exercise upon the female in the interests of

demonstrating romantic feeling is legitimate:

Jin: [Talking about the hero in one of the comics] *It would be great to have a boy like that fall for me. I'd love it!*

Yuni: [Referring to the male protagonist] *The way he expresses his passion for the girl is so cool. When his own family tries to stop him going out with her, he's even ready to cut them out of the picture. That kind of devotion is so appealing. I dream about having a love affair like that. I can't wait to read the next issue!*

Jin's interest in this kind of comic led her to frequent an Internet site for its fans from which she downloaded illustrations to send to friends she knew were just as keen fans as she. Thus young girls are able to fantasise about romantic love with peer group support and consequently gendered roles in romantic relationships may to an extent be internalised: a dominant, strong male; a submissive, weak female; and the legitimisation of the use of male force for the achievement of romantic ends. Cherland draws attention to the resulting reinforcement of male power:

Physical aggression is accepted as an expression of masculinity and by the legitimised masculinity allows the male to hold a psychological edge over the female. (1994: 45)

Feminist scholars (e.g. Millett, 1977; Firestone, 1979), examining the reproduction of stereotypical femininity and masculinity and its resulting perpetuation of patriarchal values, have criticised this very dimension of romantic fiction ideology.

7. 4. 3 Reading preferences and sexuality

Up to this point I have tried to make it clear that discrete sexual behaviour may be enacted in or perpetuated by texts embedded in a patriarchal framework. The connection between gender and reading, however, is neither straightforward nor monolithic. As I will show, readers are not necessarily blank canvases, passively absorbing conventional attitudes. The

prototypical male who is supposed to take the initiative in a sexual setting is a case in point. When I raised this issue with my female informants they dismissed it, saying that "all Soonjung comics are like that." It was evident that they did not internalise male sexual dominance without a certain amount of resistance. I asked Aeran and Yuni how they felt about this matter:

Researcher: In Orange Boy the male protagonist always seems to take the initiative in making an approach to the opposite sex. Do you think that's how it is in the real world?

Aeran: No, not necessarily. Women can approach men as well as the other way round.

Yuni: I agree. Women can take the lead in sexual encounters just as easily as men.

The girls' recognition of role reversal possibilities suggests that there is potential for resisting patriarchal discourse and demonstrates that readers are not always prepared to passively accept the sort of fixed gender roles often found in their reading material. Researching the causes of women's attraction to romance fiction, Radway (1991) also identified such resistance. In her ethnographic study of a group of housewives who were avid readers of romance fiction, Radway found that the act of reading represented an escape from external demands. She concluded that their reading preferences were a form of resistance to the social and material restraints placed on them by their patriarchal environment. She further noted that her subjects reacted against the prevalent notion that romance fiction is trivial and formulaic and insisted that their reading had transformed them, encouraging them to think of themselves as independent and intelligent beings and causing them to re-evaluate their relationships. Radway's demonstration of how her housewives used romance novels in empowering ways rather defuses any assumptions that might initially be made concerning female subjugation.

Christian-Smith's ethnographic work earlier referred to also uncovered a similar resistance movement. By reading romance fiction the girls in her study, all of whom were considered reluctant readers in school, refuted in their own minds negative judgements of their competence by school personnel. Their continued reading of the genre was fuelled by a desire to be as capable as the heroines in the stories they read and provided the girls with a temporary escape from the problems and unhappiness associated with school and their lives in general. Christian-Smith concluded that romance fiction not only satisfied the girls' longing for romance, but also gave them a sense of importance and the feeling of being cared for in the absence of nurturing romantic relationships and warm home and school environments. Thinking of the enjoyment my young female informants obviously derived from reading romance comics, I could identify similar reference points.

As I have tried to show, the girls represented by my female informants are encouraged to curb their sexual interests. One of the ways they can explore these suppressed interests without causing alarm may be through reading romance comics in which sexual encounters take place. By identifying with the romantic heroines, the girls are able to vicariously satisfy their own longing for a taste of the 'forbidden fruit'. That they are conscious of the dividing line which exists between the fantasy of the comic world and the reality of their own is evident from their repeated mantra, "It's something you can't imagine happening in the real world". In other words, the girls' motivation for reading the comics seems to be related to the role of romance as fantasy which allows 'the explorations and productions of desires which may be in excess of the socially possible or acceptable' (Hollows, 2000: 73). Further evidence can be found in the scenes the girls cut out of the comics and send to their friends. Most of these scenes depicted physical contact between the heroine and the hero in the form

of hugging or kissing.

Numerous feminist critics have pointed to the connection between young women's reading of romance novels and their enjoyment of 'romanticised sexuality' (e.g. Douglas, 1980; Snitow, 1983; Jones, 1986; Thurston, 1987). Could it be that, by identifying themselves with characters in the fictional romances they read, young women are satisfying (sublimating?) their interest in sex? Indeed such books may play a useful mediation role by allowing the girls' resistance to external social pressures to be played out underground, as it were, rather than in the open. I liken this to a kind of guerilla warfare by means of which girls can undermine the attempts of a dominant discourse to impose its own sexual ideology upon them. By confining the theatre of war to their textual experience, young females are able to avoid any potential inner conflict they might otherwise feel between their natural curiosity about sex and their internalised acceptance of the norms of chastity.⁹

7. 4. 4 Reading preferences and romantic idealisation

Romance comics do not merely supply their readers with 'mass produced fantasies' as Modleski (1984) suggests. Although fantasies may well be articulated through such reading,

⁹ Greater restrictions on their romantic relationships are placed by both home and school on high school girls than on their older university compatriots. As we have seen in the case of Aeran and Yuni, parents strongly oppose the idea of their daughters having boyfriends on the basis that young romance means less time for study and interferes with academic concentration. Pressure is upon girls to defer romantic relationships until they enter university, however much they resist this. Aeran felt comfortable enough with me over time to talk to me one day about her parents' stand on boyfriends. She told me that she felt not only that her parents were being too restrictive in the matter but also that, far from being a distraction to study, boyfriends could be helpful as study partners. In fact, parents are not the only ones to use the anti-boyfriend argument; as a teacher myself, I and my colleagues were encouraged to take the same approach. Thus, both home and school constitute the background against which the see-saw of opposing viewpoints, adult and teenage, is played out.

these fantasies are not integrated by all readers in the same way. Aeran, who unlike her friend Yuni is not an avid reader of romance comics, hinted at the influence of the latter on her friend. She teasingly suggested that Yuni in her enthusiasm for Soonjung might be tempted to create a fantasy world inhabited by any boy she took a fancy to. Aeran though took a rather more cynical view of romance comics:

Having a Soonjung comic hero for a boyfriend would be great but I know it could never be. When I look at the boys around here, the boys who go to the same church as I do, for example, I know they could never measure up to those guys in the comics. What a laugh! The guys I know would never be capable of treating girls in that gentle way. They're uncultured goons! You should hear the language they use . . . I know some girls actually dream of getting married to someone like the guy in Full House. They get carried away by the stories into some never-never land and lose touch with reality. But we all know that it would be virtually impossible to find that kind of man in the real world.

Aeran's comments show that young girls react to the same material in different ways, some expecting their future world to contain elements of the romantic imagery conjured up by Soonjung and others knowing full well that Soonjung characters inhabit a world of make-believe created by the fertile imagination of some very imaginative comic artists.

Another of my young female informants, Jin, introduced a further complex dimension of the effect of reading romance comics. A devotee of Soonjung, Jin had been reading them since primary school and had the largest collection of these of any of the girls I interviewed. Interestingly, she admitted to reading the genre more now that she was at university than ever before. However, it was clear that she had no difficulty distinguishing between the fiction of Soonjung and the real world and told me how her romantic expectations had changed over time:

Like many young girls I dreamed of meeting someone tall, dark and handsome like the male characters in the comics or on TV. Of course, I attended all-girl schools back then so you can imagine I didn't get to meet many guys. But since I started university I've seen lots of ordinary guys who are neither tall nor good looking . . . You know, when I look at my friends' relationships with their boyfriends, I can see that very few of them have a man who treats them in the caring way males treat the girls in Soonjung comics. But that's life. You start to realise that the man you dream about doesn't really exist. Actually

I'm at the stage where I realise that looks are fine but in real life it's more important that your man has good job prospects and important things like that.

Through her lived experience Jin has modified her perceptions of what constitutes the ideal male and appears not to be caught up in the web of fantasy spun by romance comics as are some of her peers.

In her study of a 15 year old black British girl, Angelique, Gemma Moss (1993) also shows that her subject has no difficulty distinguishing between the fantasy manufactured by a romantic text and the reality of which her everyday life is composed. Angelique's literacy reflects her divided world. At home she tries her hand at writing romantic fiction for pleasure, using many of the stock devices of the genre and peopling her stories with black characters who speak black street slang. In the stories which she writes as part of her school work, on the other hand, Angelique used 'standard' English and white characters, even positioning herself as white. Moss's article demonstrates that reading and writing are reflective practices mediated by the writer's life circumstances and their previous experiences. The examples of my informants and Moss's Angelique show young people actively constructing meaning by resisting as well as by accepting what they read. They are not necessarily passive recipients hopelessly trapped and subdued by an all-powerful popular text which relentlessly undermines their perception of the real world.

7.5 Other aspects of male-female relationships

Having looked at how my informants experience gender representation, with specific reference to physical appearance and sexual behaviour, I now turn to the way in which young

people's relationships are enacted in accordance with gender. It is clear that different expectations and assumptions are at work in these relationships. As a reflection of the belief that through romance comes personal fulfilment, young girls are under some pressure as they grow older to start to loosen their friendship ties with their own sex and to be more available for interaction with the opposite sex. Boys on the other hand are under no such pressure, male bonding being as highly valued by society as male involvement in romantic relationships. This ideology is reflected in young people's reading material, especially in the popular magazines they read.

One issue of a well-known fashion magazine aimed at teenage girls (*Cindy the Perky*, July 1999), for example, addresses the difficulty girls have in finding boyfriends and gives the following advice:

- Try to go off by yourself without having other girls around . . . for example, once a week go shopping or to the cinema on your own. Going to a library without a friend tagging along gives you a better chance of meeting a boy.
- Try not to be too dependent on your girlfriends for company because that way you weaken your ability to think for yourself. Your tightknit little circle may eventually become a chain tying you down. It's better to keep some distance between yourself and the old gang. When you meet that special 'him', he's not going to hang around if you're always running back to them simply because you're not getting the same amount of attention from him as you get from them. Don't get caught in the vicious circle: you meet a boy - you spend too much time with your girlfriends - he feels you don't need him and goes off - you strengthen the bond with the gang. Presto - you've lost your man.
- Try not to push your own tastes . . . remember, a relationship involves two people. For example, while shopping bear in mind what his preferences are. Spare a thought for what he thinks about the things you're picking out . . . Making it clear to him that his opinions are important to you will create a good impression.

Thus the advice girls get suggests that too much same sex fraternising stifles a girl's independence and keeps her in 'chains' (the word itself creates an image of imprisonment). Furthermore there is the implication that in order to get and keep a boy a girl should subjugate her own needs and wishes to his.

The same magazine goes on to advise girls to ingratiate themselves with the male friends of the boy who is the object of their affection on the basis that males are swayed by peer opinion and look for peer support. In one article a boy points out what a serious business male camaraderie is for most men: "Girls, if you want to score with me you must also be a hit with my friends." The advice continues with a reminder that the girl should be accommodating and friendly to them if the boy brings his male friends along when the two of them go out together. In that way, she can gain the all-important seal of approval from them. Although on first reading such articles may give an impression of breaking with convention in encouraging girls to take the initiative, further reflection will confirm that they are doing little to challenge stereotypical attitudes concerning gender roles. Implicit assumptions of the importance of male bonding have no counterpart in the female context. At the same time as the female is encouraged to distance herself from her friendship circle in order to gain the attention of the male, it is considered quite acceptable, indeed normal, for the latter to involve his mates in evaluating the female. The right of males to bond seems to exist as an unquestioned given. There is no suggestion, as there is with the female, that consorting with his cronies is likely to weaken the male's independence or keep *him* 'in chains'.

Through articles which emphasise the need for submission and sacrifice as part of their advice to young girls on how to go about finding a boyfriend, magazines like *Cindy the Perky* appear to be reinforcing patriarchal conventions which hold that, in order to fulfil their destiny of finding Mr Right in a romantic relationship, the female should subjugate her own needs to those of the male. The same conventions, while viewing female friendships as transitory and short-term, place male friendships with their same sex friends in an inviolable

and permanent framework (see Lee M.K., 1993). Indeed I found that each of my young female informants was keenly aware that their father's friendship network was far more closeknit and active than their mother's. Jin's mother was a prime example. Mrs Lee made no effort to keep in contact with her friends from before marriage, accompanying her husband only to social events involving his own circle. She in fact was outspoken in her belief that a woman had no right to attach the same importance to her friends as a man had to his. I do not have enough evidence to assume that the girls in my study internalise the same ideological framework or absorb without resistance its essence through the magazines they read. As none of my young informants were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of my interview (to my knowledge!), I was not able to pursue this issue with them. However, it would be interesting to know how young people deal with this gender-biased paradigm through their literacy practices: do they consolidate the conventional norm or do they transform it?

7.6 Attitudes towards housework

The archetypal female activity in Korea as elsewhere is housework. From an early age all my female informants have been imbued with the ideology that it is a requirement of their gender to help with household chores such as cleaning, washing and meal preparation. My male informants, on the other hand, are under no such obligation. In acknowledgement of their busy school routine, girls are not given specific chores to complete on a regular basis, but whenever they have a free moment it is assumed that they will help their mothers with the housework. The association of domestic labour with the females of the house is routinely conveyed by media advertising. An advertisement for laundry detergent, for example, shows

a perky female model sitting on a washing machine while other females dance their way to the clothesline. In another advertisement elegantly dressed female models cavort in a luxuriously equipped kitchen where not a male is to be seen. Yoon Huh (1997) in her study of magazine advertisements aimed at female and male readerships notes the same gender divide (see also Park K.S., 1990 and Yoo S.Y, 1997).

In an issue of the fashion magazine *Céci* (August 1998), female readers are told they can prove their love by decorating their boyfriends' rooms. The article guides the reader step-by-step through the job of interior decoration, and shows photos of 'real' couples in which the female partner has carried out the labour of love recommended by the magazine. Significantly, while the young woman is hard at work in her boyfriend's room, cutting, pasting and sewing, the young man is sprawled on his bed playing the guitar. The sequel shows the happy couple in the newly decorated room at the conclusion of the girlfriend's labours. Both text and photos are framed so as to give a clear message that interior decorating is a female activity and that the way to a man's heart is through her compliance with conventional gender roles.

In an issue of *Cindy the Perky* magazine (July 1999), a young woman outlines the strategy she used in order to create a dependency relationship on the part of the man she was interested in. Her strategy included preparing his meals, washing his clothes, being at his beck and call if he fell ill, and cheering him up when he was down. In support of her chosen methods, the young woman reasons as follows:

He lives a long way from home and without a mother around to help out you know what a bachelor's life is like. He doesn't eat properly and his place is a mess. By doing everything I can for the poor guy he can't avoid coming to the conclusion that I am indispensable in his life.

The young woman subsequently gets the man to admit that he cannot think of life without her. The message readers get is that when a woman takes over the running of a man's domestic affairs, her efforts will be amply rewarded. The traditional association of the female with domestic work is thus reinforced and continues intergenerationally. While the avowed intention of the article is to suggest a strategy for a modern woman to get her man, the ideology embedded in the suggestion merely perpetuates conventional norms.

Conventional notions of the division of labour are also apparent in the lives of my informants. Heesoo, whose bachelor status as a university student living away from home is similar to the that of the young man in the advice column described above, had often been teased by his mother about his 'inability' to find a girl who would do his washing for him. He ruefully told me of one occasion when he came home in trainers that had seen better days:

All my family fled, holding their noses. My mother of course [sic] washed them, but she asked me when I was going to find a girl to do that for me so she wouldn't have to!

For Heesoo the incident was simply an amusing family anecdote. He obviously did not question the assumption that washing his dirty trainers was 'woman's work'. Once a week Heesoo's mother, Mrs Chun, in fact washes her husband's dirty clothes which he brings home with him on weekends from where he works. Although this chore is an irritant to her after her own long work week, Mrs Chun would not dare to voice her displeasure or ask her husband to do the work himself. Her attitude is that washing clothes is a woman's job and there is nothing more to be said.

Not all my interviewees, however, easily accepted the gendered role assigned to housework.

Several told me that their parents' assumptions in this regard had caused them discomfort.

Aeran's comments are typical:

When there are chores to be done my parents often accompany a request for help with words such as, "You're a female so you need to get accustomed to doing this kind of thing." Gosh, I hate to hear that! Just asking me to do the chore is enough. I don't need to be reminded that I'm a woman. The idea that being a woman automatically means it's your duty to do housework drives me crazy.

Aeran went on to express a hope that in her own marriage there would be a just and equitable division of labour in the household, a sentiment that her friend Yuni concurred with:

Aeran: It would be great if my future husband is willing to help out with the housework. You know, when both partners work outside the home both come home tired at the end of the day and don't feel like doing much. So they should both pitch in. For example if I cook, he does the dishes; while I clean up, he bathes the children, and so on. But I'm the kind of person who when tired has no interest in eating, so I probably won't feel like making food. Then I feel if he wants to eat he should be the one to make the food.

Yuni: Right! When I'm tired, I'm the same. Making food is my least favourite chore. I'm also planning to work after I get married, so I feel my partner should be willing to help me with the housework.

Yet in response to my more direct questioning the girls seemed somewhat resigned to the blatant inequities that so obviously exist and in fact were rather doubtful that their own marriage would break new ground:

Researcher: How likely do you think it is that you would find a man who would be willing to share the housework with you?

Aeran: To be honest, I don't think it would be possible to find such a man. When I look at the boys around me, I can't see any of them being that sort of person. Yes, I'd say it would be difficult if not impossible to find any boy who wouldn't mind doing housework.

Yuni: On the other hand you do hear of some mothers who get after their sons to help their partners with the housework.

Aeran: I can't believe that. In my father's generation there wasn't a man who would stoop to doing housework and frankly I don't think times have changed that much, even though nowadays there are a few boys who might occasionally think about lending a hand if they're really pushed. Anyway, I'll bet you could count on the fingers of one hand the men in this city who help their partners with the housework.

If girls find unacceptable any implicit messages in the magazines they read (and here I think specifically of the implication that housework is woman's work), it seems logical that they

would confront such messages. Certainly the girls I talked to are under no illusion that changes in the status quo happen overnight, so it would be interesting to find out how they integrate textual interpretation into their lived experience. However, I did not follow up this line of inquiry. Unanswered then is the question: might literacy materials provide the means by which young women can resist the efforts of vested interests to win their consent to dominant patterns of control, or do such materials simply reinforce entrenched roles?

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show how gender issues are entwined in young people's everyday reading and writing. Through their literacy practices Korean young people engage in discourses constructed by Korean society relating to gender roles and gender identity. To the extent that girls play out patriarchally-defined roles, their perceptions and beliefs about these roles may be constructed and reconstructed by gendered reading and writing. In a male-dominated society like Korea, as we have seen, romance literature and other mass media products encourage teenage girls to direct their lives according to the dominant social definition of a woman's place being first and foremost in the home (Weedon, 1987 in Cherland, 1994). Young women are thus led by the strong textual messages they receive to seek fulfilment in their lives within the structure of heterosexual marriage accompanied by child-bearing. In the process they develop their gender identity.

In her study of girls at a Birmingham youth club (1991), McRobbie's informants were situated within a 'culture of femininity' which was organised around domestic duties,

consumption, personal life and, above all, romance. Their immersion in such routines was responsible for the prominent positions the girls occupied within the home and family, but which ultimately would restrict them to marginalised positions in work outside the home. Although many of the girls questioned aspects of this mode of femininity, they ultimately endorsed a conventional femininity because they saw housework and children as 'unavoidable, unalterable aspects of life'.

Although the girls in my own study to a certain extent share the same culture of femininity, in their case there is a major difference. McRobbie's subjects would not expect or be expected to follow a career in the conventional sense. Korean girls, on the other hand, are from a young age encouraged to set their sights on career prospects, yet at the same time it is assumed they will carry out domestic duties. Thus, while they aspire to a 'life beyond the kitchen sink', Korean girls continue to accept patriarchal norms and values. Walkerdine refers to the powerful discourse maintained by literacy practices in this regard:

That the girl appears willingly to accept the position to which she is classically fitted does not . . . tell us something basic about the nature of the female body, nor the female mind, but rather, tells us of the power of those practices through which a particular resolution to the struggle is produced. (1991: 163)

Gender subjectivity (or the construction of a sense of self) is a dynamic process which is played out in the arena of young people's literacy practices. At the same time as they encourage young women to participate in a patriarchal and profit-driven social structure, popular culture materials constitute a forum where women can resist taking traditional places in this structure. It is apparent, moreover, that literacy activities offer spaces for participants to explore questions relating to gender identity and role appropriation. On the basis of my observations of the gender dimensions of literacy practices, I would like to suggest that

gender subjectivity is neither unitary nor coherent but plural and fragmentary. Furthermore, that literacy plays a significant role in the complex configuration of gender representation, providing a site for the cultural production of gender identity (see for example Weedon, 1997). Michael Apple aptly sums up the dimension of gender in literacy practices as follows:

They (popular cultural forms such as romance fiction) are involved intimately in securing and producing the consent of women and men to particular hegemonic meanings for gender . . . and sexual difference. At stake in the struggles and contestations over these meanings are not only textual representations of femininity and gender relations in particular cultural commodities, but also their place and significance in the lives of the actual women and men who consume, use, and make sense of them in the contexts of their daily practices and social relations.
(in Series Editor's Introduction in Christian-Smith, 1990)

Chapter 8 Power relations embedded in literacy practices

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which people's literacy practices support, maintain, and in certain cases undermine power structures in the Korean home, school and church. First I look briefly at the ways in which print literacy practices function to assign power in both home and school. As part of this topic I refer to certain specific reading and writing practices of the families Lee and Chun, thereby re-introducing the informants who participated in the first phase of my research fieldwork: Jin and Sumi (Lee), Heesoo and Wooil (Chun), and Kiho. I then move on to a more extended discussion of the evolving role of electronic literacy practices in the power dynamics encountered in school and church. This discussion focuses on the website literacies engaged in by the informants who participated in the second phase of my fieldwork: Aeran and Yuni (the girls) and Dan, Hwa and Jongwon (the boys).

In order to understand how literacy is embedded in power relations in the Korean home and school it is necessary to look at how power is structured in those domains. The reader may gain some insight into that power structure from anecdotes drawn from my research interview experiences. The first concerns an incident during my work with the Lee family.

When I first visited the Lee family to interview the parents, I could sense conflict between the father and his daughter, who was about to start university. Mr Lee was upset that a visitor (me) would see Jin's untidy room and got into an argument with the girl about cleaning up her room. I do not think he realised that I had been to the house on several prior occasions and

had already seen Jin's room in its untidy state. For Mr Lee a tidy house represented part of the act of offering Korean-style hospitality to a guest. However, his daughter would not cooperate because she could not see the point of tidying up her room after I had already seen it as it was. Moreover, Jin knew that my visit that particular day only involved her parents and would take place in the living room, not in her room. Mr Lee told me about the argument he had had with his daughter and said he was determined to make her change her messy habits by the time she had finished university. I sensed that the issue would provoke further confrontation between father and daughter for as long as the former continued on his hobby horse.

I observed the role of authoritarian parent - here also the father - in the Chun family as well. Mrs Chun told me about a problem between her husband and her two older boys which had arisen as a result of her husband's insistence on running the household along what he considered were democratic lines. As part of his plan Mr Chun had inaugurated regular family meetings at which family members were supposed to discuss their individual concerns together. Although no doubt well-intentioned, and arguably supported in current social theory, Mr Chun's meetings were hardly models of democratic procedure. According to his wife, these meetings invariably consisted of hour-long lectures to his family by the father. Neither wife nor children, however, dared criticise Mr Chun's idea of a democratic meeting, yet neither did they express their true opinions during them. This anecdote serves as an indication of where power lies in the Korean home.

I begin an examination of the power relations embedded in the Korean educational system by relating the shared experiences of the students and their parents I interviewed. The Confucian

ideal that teachers should be respected as much as the monarch himself dominated Korean thinking from the Yi Dynasty until the end of the nineteenth century (Lim H.S., 1995). Such is the strength of historic tradition that teachers are still figures of undisputed authority to most students. In order to set the problem I am about to describe in context it should be noted that Korean schools are under great pressure to get as many students as possible accepted by the leading national universities and thereby raise the school's reputation in the eyes of the community. Mrs Chun recalled that her first son's final year of high school was made intolerable because of a difficult teacher. The Chun family's difficulty was that they disagreed with the teacher over the choice of university for their son. Exercising the power available to him, this teacher would not agree to get the son's university application officially signed by the school principal. It seemed to me that the teacher's refusal was due to political pressure on him to maintain the school's standing at the highest level possible in the 'league tables' of feeder schools for the top ranking universities. To the parents, whose overriding concern was simply to secure the boy's admission to a college which offered him a programme appropriate to his needs, the teacher's attitude was incomprehensible and intolerable. The parents had to struggle to finally persuade the teacher to see it their way and have their choice accepted.

A further example of power relations in action is illustrated by a story Kiho told me. He and his classmates had a form teacher who was very demanding and who nagged his students constantly, even to the extent of making them stay in the classroom during breaks and continue working. Class members had several secret discussions about the matter and came up with a plan of resistance. They put up a sign on the classroom door forbidding entrance to the room on the pretext that uninvited visitors would disturb their study. The sign of course

was specifically meant for the teacher as a protest at his annoying habits. The campaign continued the whole school year and achieved its desired effect of excluding the unwanted teacher. Although strong bonds were thereby created among the students, an unlooked for effect was that the students, confined as it were to barracks, found themselves working harder than ever! (Perhaps the teacher had the last laugh.).

As the above incidents show, parents and teachers have power and authority in their relationships with children and students. One result of this asymmetry is that different roles emerge within the same literacy practice. I will look at instances in which reading and writing activities point to power differences, sometimes leading to resistance against the assumed power base and at other times to negotiation to achieve a new balance of power. First I will examine ways in which reading and writing are used to position family members, and then I will look at how these activities are used to position students in school.

8.2 Power relations revealed in print literacies

8.2.1 Power relations in reading and writing at home

Within their families my adolescent informants were noticeably dependent on their parents, whose rules and standards demanded obedience and compliance. Reading and writing were often parentally regulated. Jin and Sumi, for example, had to take part in a system of notemaking whenever they needed money. In order to exercise a degree of control over the family budget, which he saw as subject to individual whim and caprice, father had set up a scheme whereby his daughters had to inform him in advance of anticipated expenses by

making entries in a notebook assigned to the purpose and labelled 'preparation book'. However, the system broke down because the notebook was also used to record ordinary telephone messages, most of them for the parents. In this example the literacy activity was an imposed duty, with the effect of positioning the children lower down the family power structure and of maintaining an established framework.

The father had also established a system he called an 'outing record book', which imposed a further literacy practice on his children. As both parents were away from the house for much of the time, this system was designed to monitor the children's comings and goings by having them record the time at which they left and returned home. The father was particularly concerned that his younger daughter was spending too much time away and hoped that this system would curb her movements. In order that the girl should not feel singled out, the father had all the family members take part in the scheme. To give the appearance of fairness, the parents themselves were the first to fill in the outing record book. At the time of my interviews the scheme had already been in effect for several months but I could see that it was not being strictly followed. Even while I was in the house the children came and went but no entries appeared in the book! One reason for the scheme's lack of success might be the fact that it did not become a routine for those concerned. Perhaps the plan's manipulative intent was too obvious and was therefore unlikely to deceive a teenage girl. Here was a further example of the imposition by parents on their children of literacy tasks within the framework of family power relationships, with predictable results: minimal cooperation on the part of those involved.

Letter writing is another literacy practice I observed which plays a role in mediating the

relationship between children and parents. Ever since their children were quite small, the parents (Mrs Chun and Mrs Lee especially) had written letters to them. Letter writing had been a channel through which the parents expressed their opinions to their children with the purpose of disciplining them. The topics addressed ranged from behaviour at home to academic performance at school. Sumi told me that in the past she had received letters from both her parents when she had upset them with inappropriate behaviour. Her parents either gave the letters to their daughter in person or mailed them to her at school. Jin too had received letters from her mother on several occasions, though less frequently than her sister. What is worthy of note about this kind of communication is that it was played out in some unusual ways. Jin's mother, for example, had on one occasion written her letter to Jin directly in the outing record book mentioned above. In it she had asked Jin to be more understanding with her sister, who had been causing friction in the family. Although addressed to her older child, the mother's letter was obviously meant to be seen by both children.

Whereas Mrs Lee remained unconvinced of the value of such letters, it was clear to me that Mrs Chun firmly believed in them. On numerous occasions she had corresponded with her sons Wooil and Heesoo and they in turn had written back to her. According to Mrs Chun her letters had undergone a change in tone over time. Whereas at one time her letters had been accusatory in tone, in the more recent ones she had adopted a gentler, more reasonable approach. Mrs Chun told me that her new approach owed much to what she had learned from reading a book on communication styles and claimed that her change of tactic had helped her build a better rapport with her sons. In her case letter writing had been instrumental in building a more positive relationship between children and parents.

As can be seen, parental letter writing is either accepted or rejected by the children. Whatever the outcome, communication was always initiated by a parent, not by the children themselves. Letter writing is another example of a medium of cross-generational communication in Korea which reflects the family power structure of those who are in a position to direct (parents) and those who have to comply (children).

8. 2. 2 Power relations in reading and writing at school

The Korean school system makes a clear distinction between institutionalised and vernacular forms of reading and writing, to the detriment of the latter. Therefore it is not surprising that young people's out-of-school literacy practices are devalued, regulated, and at times even restricted by the school authorities. It is instructive to observe the subtle processes by which an institution maintains sanctions on vernacular literacy by granting control and power to teachers and, on the other hand, to witness the equally inventive attempts by those being controlled to undermine that power through illicit literacy practices.

Sumi and her classmates, for example, were not allowed to write in their diaries during independent study time because it was considered by the teacher to be time-wasting. Anyone who broke the rule was reprimanded. Yet, as I discussed in Chapter 5, a wide range of unauthorised literacies was carried out during school time even though strict sanctions were in effect. On several occasions Jin had been reprimanded and even physically punished for reading fiction and comic books. Despite that, she continued to read such proscribed material. One might wonder if she was a particularly stubborn student but she was not alone

as many of her classmates also broke the rules. Among possible explanations I want to consider are whether these were cases of outright defiance of authority or attempts to undermine the sanctions imposed by an all-powerful institution.

Another subversive activity I observed was the adoption of a secret writing system, which I examined in greater detail in Chapter 5. Jin described how friends of hers would write letters to each other using an invented writing system in which English letters represented the equivalent Korean sounds. In this way the girls were able to deceive the teacher into thinking they were working on their English. Sumi told me that she and her classmates did the same. It would be interesting to explore the rationale for the use of English by students as a medium for subversion. Since English is a compulsory subject and a shared language experience for adolescents in secondary school, it may be that these young people attribute an aura of power to this international language. Thus, the choice of English written forms among the resources available to them in their bid to challenge teacher authority may not be entirely coincidental. In addition to anglicised writing, the young people make use of authentic expressions from the foreign languages they learn in school such as English and German.

Although all my male informants used real English words in their letter writing, it appeared that none of them adapted English to represent Korean sounds as the females did. A partial explanation might be found in the fact that letter writing was a far more important activity to the girls than to the boys and so the former have to be more inventive.

8.3 Power relations revealed in website literacies

Access to the Internet is now freely available to most Koreans, not only at home but also via the websites of school and university and church, thus enabling communication among people and institutions. Moreover, young people are able to take advantage of the relative anonymity inherent in computer technology to express their views and opinions without the need to reveal their identity. The wider audience thus afforded increases people's opportunities to discuss online with others a variety of issues and agendas. By examining the contents of e-mail messages and the dynamics of exchanges, I hope to provide an insight into the power relations displayed in the domains of reading and writing. In the following discussion I focus on the websites of two senior high schools and a Catholic church which my informants attend. For simplicity's sake, I refer to the institutions with letter names only 'School B' being the boys' school and 'School G' the girls. Despite being rather different institutions, both schools and churches share features in common on their webpages, including a message bulletin board on which subscribers may express their views and concerns. In this section I examine the role of the bulletin board in assigning power. Specifically I examine a selection of messages exchanged on three websites between March and July 2000, exploring both their content and context with my informants. I begin with a brief description of school bulletin board policies in general at each of the schools.

Both schools employ Information and Communication Technology specialist staff whose duties include maintaining the school home page. Subject only to the open-to-view policy adopted by the school authorities, anyone can post a message to the bulletin board. The bulletin boards provide an arena in which various voices, those of students and others,

intersect. As they offer the facility of reply to messages posted there, the bulletin boards in effect function as online forums. Via these, students have the opportunity to voice their concerns and receive a response from school personnel. A first year student in School B, for example, who wanted to raise a point concerning his school's music offerings, posted the following message:

Here's hoping that my music teacher reads this message. My name is Hong and I'm in the first year. What a pity that first year students don't get school music lessons! Take me, for example. I enjoy singing and in junior high I was in the school choir. We took part in competitions and once we even won! I'm wondering why we don't have choir in senior high. Could you please please tell me where I can go to sing? Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated. Looking forward to hearing from you.
Hong.

This message seemed to open a floodgate of similar messages from other students, all expressing a similar interest in a school choir. For some time there was no reply but finally the school's music teacher was forced to post a message:

I apologise for not responding sooner to your inquiry. We used to run a school choir but internal difficulties have led to its suspension. However, rest assured that you will get music lessons in your second year with us. Thanks for your concern in this matter.

Hong's reply ran as follows:

I am certainly looking forward to being able to take part in the school choir next year.

Although couched in diplomatic language, Hong's message was clear in its implication that he was expecting to be able to join the choir the following year.

Whereas most students post messages relating to their academic programme, it is by no means unusual to come across messages targeted at non-teaching staff. One posting, for example, contained a protest from a student who was upset by the poor service he had received at the hands of the school shop staff. The reply from the latter contained an apology

and an expressed commitment to more polite and friendly service in the future. It seems that student concerns which are open to public view are more likely to elicit an appropriate response from those in authority than views which are communicated person-to-person.

The ease with which students can access electronic messaging facilitates ongoing contact between teachers and former students, too. Around Teachers' Day in May messages to their former teachers are posted by school alumni. Here is one such example:

Dear Mr Kim,

This is Il-Guen. Can you let me have your e-mail address? All of us who were in your class two years ago have set up an Internet cafe to keep in contact with one another and you are more than welcome to visit us there. In fact, we would be really thrilled to hear from you. Hope to see you in the cafe.

Il-Guen

This message received a personal reply from the teacher a day later in which he gave his own e-mail address.

The examples I have given of the general uses of online message boards illustrate the lighter side of the equation. Now I will turn my attention to the darker side and examine the conflicts inherent in young people's use of online messaging facilities which in turn manifest the complex dimensions of social power dynamics.

8. 3.1 Power relations expressed through voices raised to authority

8. 3. 1. 1 Voices which challenge authority

As already mentioned, the anonymity conferred by computer technology enables students to

express their opinions more openly on issues which in a Korean societal context would be considered the traditional preserve of the school authorities. One issue which dominates computer-mediated discussion channels is that of assessment and evaluation since great importance is attached to this aspect of the school programme. In their postings students raise various issues, including complaints about the errors occurring in exam items, the quality of supervision during exam sittings and the lack of teacher guidance in homework set as formal assessment. In a School B message posting, for example, one student urged his teachers to maintain a higher standard of accuracy in constructing exams so that students could save the time they wasted trying to interpret poorly or incorrectly worded instructions while the exam was in progress. Another message posting encouraged a specific teacher to provide a more detailed guide for the Internet research homework he assigned his students. As the whole issue of assessment plays such a crucial part in the university application process, parents too tend to get involved. A typical example is when parents question the validity of a particular answer given as 'correct' on an exam paper.

Not all student postings contain real or implied criticism of school procedures. Constructive suggestions can also be found on message boards. One such made reference to the incidence of cheating on multiple choice exams. The student in question proposed a solution to the problem of examinees passing on answers to others: that students should be required not only to give answers but also to show the process by which they reached them. The agendas addressed by students in their postings, however, rarely elicit direct responses from teachers. Of over a dozen student messages I read which politely requested answers to their concerns, I noted that a mere two actually succeeded in obtaining explanatory replies from teachers. The reply posted in one case is indicative of the attitude taken by school administrators.

Following a particular exam at School B there had been a student protest, including a call for the exam to be readministered. This provoked the school administration to hold a meeting of the assessment committee in question, all of them teaching staff, ostensibly to address the problems raised by the students. The committee subsequently posted the following message:

We would like to reply to questions raised with respect to the recent Korean language exam. A meeting of the full assessment committee was held in order to examine the validity of these points. It reached the following conclusions:

1. The few items which were alleged to have been drawn from a specific supplementary publication were considered by the committee to be solvable provided that the contents of the approved textbook had been digested thoroughly.
2. An analysis of the exam results failed to show any significant variation between classes in respect of mean scores and scales of achievement. As a result it was felt that no purpose would be served in readministering the exam in this subject.
3. Serious attention will be paid in future to the adequacy, validity and reliability of exams in this subject.

As can be seen, the tone of this response is formal and authoritative in the extreme. The apparent intention of the school administration was to justify its actions in answer to the negative points raised by the students, but in no way to admit culpability in the matter. The wording made it clear that, as far as the administration were concerned, the matter was now closed.

Although evaluation and assessment issues tend to predominate, postings concerning the use of physical punishment are also frequent. Even though their complaints are made in appropriately restrained and respectful language, student frustration with the status quo is palpably evident in the content of the messages they post, as the following example shows:

The sound of the cane rings out from every classroom every morning

I've got something to say to you teachers. Although my words may upset some of you, please excuse me, one of your students, on this occasion and give some thought to what I am about to say. As you teachers all know, the sound of the cane can be heard from the classrooms all along the second floor where we second year students are located. The purpose of education isn't really to punish students, is

it? I can understand that students do need to be disciplined, but is caning them the best way to do that? I have some problems understanding that it is. I believe that the best way to get through to students is to talk to them. Do you know why young people open up with their friends but not with their teachers? It is because they don't feel the distance from their friends that they do with their teachers. Being punished physically only adds to the gulf which exists between teacher and student, who finally says to himself, "I don't want anything more to do with teacher X", and turns his back on him completely. You know, at a certain point constant physical abuse stops working. Do you really think we would stop listening to you if you stopped caning us? Let me tell you, it's not like that at all! Any teacher who is willing to listen to what we have to say and to talk things through with us will command our deep respect. We will happily share our thoughts and feelings with such teachers. I know you might worry that some students would take advantage of a cane freeze and make it impossible for you to keep classroom control. But I say, just give us a chance. There are an awful lot of us who would be behind you if you laid down the cane. My humble thanks for reading this. I hope you will understand why I am not able to reveal my identity for the present. Best wishes.

Another example:

A respectful request addressed to first year science teachers

Can I ask you a favour? I'm sorry but I'm having trouble making out your blackboard writing. When I ask classmates sitting near me to help, they say they are having the same problem. Is it possible for you to write more clearly? Mr Song's writing is especially difficult to read.

I ALWAYS ENJOY YOUR INTERESTING LESSONS AND AM GRATEFUL FOR YOUR EXCELLENT TEACHING. [*The message at this point contained upper case font*]

I hope you won't take offence at my request. Please consider it a plea from a student who is very much concerned about copying down accurately from the blackboard. Thank you.

Despite its respectful tone, this request failed to produce either a reply or a change in the blackboard writing habits of the teachers addressed. Two weeks after his initial request the same student posted another plea, again to no avail. Their failure to respond may be interpreted as a sign either that teachers are not anxious to participate in online discussion or that they really do not care what students think. According to my informants, most teachers show by comments they make from time to time that they are indeed aware of what is posted on their school's message board. Online silence then may actually be a teacher's way of ignoring what he sees as student resistance to his authority. It would seem that many teachers are fearful that such resistance will undermine their disciplinary control. On the other hand, some teachers make it clear that they welcome opportunities for constructive dialogue with

their students. My informants Dan, Hwa and Jongwon nevertheless had little faith that anything positive came out of such dialogue, whether it was entered into in good faith or not:

Dan: You can express your views on the message board - your complaints about the school, the teachers or even the school shop. But then the teachers don't take our complaints seriously. They say we don't consider all sides of an issue, that we can't even know all the issues involved because we don't have the necessary experience.

Hwa: That's right! Right after dishing out some punishment or other, some teachers even say things like, "OK, now I dare you to go online and grass about this!"

Jongwon: There isn't much point in us posting messages. If we do, we get flak from teachers. Things don't change and even if they do it only has a short-term effect. Teachers don't seem to be really affected by anything we students post on the board.

Despite these negative perceptions, there seems to be a general feeling among students that website postings can make a positive contribution to raising an awareness of student concerns. Online postings also increase the number of communication channels which exist between school administration and student body. Some teachers, far from seeing the medium as a potential challenge to their authority, are actually eager to explore its potential for positive outcomes. Regardless of individual teachers' attitudes, however, it is undeniable that the new technology permits students, to a hitherto unprecedented degree, to put the activities of school administrations on show. Thus any freedoms the latter might in the past have felt were available to them to act autonomously without taking into consideration a wider public either no longer exist or have been significantly curtailed.

8. 3. 1. 2 Voices which defend authority

The evidence I have presented so far has mainly shown where conflict or confrontation with administrative views exists. But it should be said that the voices to be heard on school bulletin boards by no means sing in consensual unison. As I will show, there is a significant

majority which supports the authority traditionally vested in schools. Messages defending the position of teachers are posted by students, graduates and parents. Some of these are at pains to point out that any particular criticism levelled at teachers represents the view of the message poster rather than of the student body as a whole. In some cases even the identity of the message poster is called into question. By asserting that the critics of authority are in the minority, some seem bent on defusing situations where an administration has reacted vigorously in defence of its policies. The following message is one such example:

Our teachers are the best in the world

Dear Principal and Vice-Principal,

I'm a student in my final year and I couldn't let this opportunity pass to comment on your recent reactions to the postings of certain students on our school's Internet bulletin board. I want to assure you that the negative comments made by a few students in no way represent the views of the many. The danger is that, by over-reacting to the postings of those few, you might make the situation worse by encouraging them to post more such messages. Everyone knows that [*there follow the names of the teachers who are named in the postings*] are excellent and professional teachers. If any of the negative comments made by a minority were to upset these fine teachers and thus affect the high quality of their lessons, it would be everyone's loss.

Thanks for taking the time to read this message.

In the message above the writer purports to represent the voice of the majority. In common with other messages in defence of maligned staff members, this one attempts to smooth ruffled feathers without addressing any of the points raised by the original message poster. The underlying assumption is that negative postings are subversive of the status quo, which must be defended at all costs. In the message below, this assumption is made even more overt:

To those coming through from one who has been there

As a School B graduate I've learned one or two things which I'd like to pass on to you. As the student body you have the power to either build up or destroy the reputation of our school. Be proud that you are a student of School B. Show respect to your teachers at all times and always make sure your language is polite. Be grateful for everything your teachers do for you, and if occasionally they don't live up to your expectations, refrain from criticising them. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes and teachers are no exception. You yourself are the first to expect understanding when things don't turn out

perfect. By the same token, be gracious to your teachers when they make a mistake. Don't be too ready to make accusations . . .

The admonition 'show respect to your teachers . . . and make sure your language is polite' is significant. In fact, none of the postings I read could be said to be deficient in the respect they showed for authority or lacking in appropriately polite language. It seems to be implied by those posting 'counter-messages' that critics of the system are by definition first subversive and by extension disrespectful and impolite, perceptions apparently shared by school administrations. There is, too, the further implication that airing school matters in 'public' space is detrimental to the school's reputation.

Other supporters of the status quo decry the fact that parents get involved in postings critical of the school administration or of school policy. Some even suggest that, by invoking parental support for their cause, message posters are disloyal to their school and selfishly immature in their attitudes. In short, the discourse of counter-messaging portrays student message posting as undermining the absolute authority of the teaching profession and therefore needing to be controlled. Inevitably, this oppositional stance places additional restraints on a burgeoning student voice, making it a less potent and representative medium of student communication.

Discourse embraced by the oppositional stance can indeed be understood in relation to the notion of hegemony. According to Nordenstreng, the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci (to whom the term 'hegemony' is attributed) maintained that society's dominant institutions 'introduce elements into individual consciousness that would not otherwise appear there, but which will not be rejected by consciousness because they are so commonly shared in the

cultural community' (1977 quoted in Lull, 1995: 32). Hall argues that hegemony is not a direct stimulation of thought or action, but is a framing of all competing definitions of reality within the dominant class's range, bringing all alternatives within their horizons of thought. The dominant class sets the limits - mental and structural - within which subordinate classes live and make sense of their subordination in such a way as to sustain the dominance of those ruling over them. He further suggests that 'it is crucial to the concept that hegemony is not a given and permanent state of affairs, but it has to be actively won and secured; it can also be lost' (ibid: 333). Ideological work is the winning and securing of hegemony over time. Lull points to the pivotal role dominant group ideologies play in the construction of hegemony:

Mass-mediated ideologies are corroborated and strengthened by an interlocking system of efficacious information-distributing agencies and taken-for-granted social practices that permeate every aspect of social and cultural reality. Messages supportive of the status quo emanating from schools, businesses, political organisations . . . all dovetail ideologically. This interarticulating, mutually reinforcing process of ideological influence is the essence of hegemony. (op cit: 33)

The close-knit intersection between ideological assertions and cultural assumptions is the key element of hegemony. The interplay is required to maintain hegemony in the extent that society members accept the dominant ideology as 'normal reality or common sense . . . in active forms of experience and consciousness' (Williams, 1977 quoted in Lull op cit: 34). Thus the position taken by certain alumni and students in the school bulletin board postings quoted above can be considered to be a function of the ideological and cultural convergence which results in reinforcing and securing hegemony.

8.3.1.3 Voices which praise authority

As well as raising their voices to challenge or to defend school personnel and policies, students may post messages of praise. The purpose of such messages is not always clear but it

may be surmised that complimenting specific behaviours in one teacher is likely to send signals to others:

Mr Kang deserves the respect of all of us. Do any of you realise that this man supports charitable causes on a massive scale? Even those gifts you gave him last Teachers' Day he gave to the poor and needy. Can you believe it? How many of our teachers are like Mr Kang? They may think they've made it because they drive fancy cars, but did you know that Mr Kang commutes to school by bus so that he can give more to charity. I ask you, who is really the more successful: the teacher who has all the material comforts of life but no heart for the poor or the marginalised or our Mr Kang? Here's to Mr Kang! I love that man! I only hope that I grow up to be as fine a person as he. When they read this, perhaps other teachers may find time to reflect on the efforts they themselves have made to help people in need.

The suggestion that one teacher's sacrifices for the needy are to be valued more highly than the pursuit of individual success operates to expose the hypocrisy of teachers who give lip service to the virtue of charity but who in fact do not practise it. If teachers are to be effective role models for their students, is the tacit implication, then they should practise what they preach. Another message pays homage to Mr Kang's professional qualities:

I really respect Mr Kang

Mr Kang is the best teacher I have ever had. . . Unlike some others, he doesn't use the cane without first allowing us time to reflect on our behaviour. He also understands that it isn't easy for us to concentrate in class right after lunch and has ways to lighten up the lesson for us at that time. For these and many other reasons, I respect him very much. I hope I can grow up to be like him - warm-hearted and understanding. I'm proud to be a student of his and I'd like to wish him good health and send my warmest love to him.

Implicit in this tribute to Mr Kang is a reference to the kind of behaviour students might value in their perception of a 'good' teacher. The writer might well have added to his eulogy, "You other teachers take note!" Similar complimentary comments feature in another posting:

I'm in Mr Park's math class and love his lessons. His sense of humour makes learning math so enjoyable that I even look forward to math classes. Surely that proves what a great teacher he is! The boring classes of some other teachers don't bear comparison with those of Mr Park. To put it bluntly, they send us to sleep! Mr Park's lessons are easy to follow and enjoyable. I like him a lot for that.

Whether or not intended (and it is difficult to imagine that they are totally innocent in intent), comments such as these undoubtedly raise awareness among other teachers, sensitising them

to student perceptions and even causing emotional reactions among those who are not fortunate enough to be singled out for praise. Indeed from my own teaching experience I know that in ways both overt and covert teachers do vie with each other for student approval. Message postings are on the face of it a tactful way to get across to all teachers the signal that certain personal and professional qualities are valued by students. The spotlight is thus turned on the quality of teaching received by students who might otherwise be conceived as passive and compliant participants in the teaching process. Other messages, even without referring to teachers by name, serve the same function:

Five top tips to be a hit with your students:

1. Make your lessons exciting. Students will pay attention if your lessons grab them . . .
2. Go easy on that cane. Using your cane may get instant attention but the effect is short-lived. Occasional use of the cane may be necessary but use it frequently and you will turn your students off.
3. Listen to your students. When their questions are ignored, your students will not bother to pay attention in class. Also, teachers should admit it when they have made a mistake - especially when students have already discovered it for themselves!
4. Do not have too high and unrealistic expectations of your students. Even with hard work there are certain things students find tough to learn. . .
5. Try to get a handle on youth culture. Students distance themselves from teachers who are alien to their culture. Listening to the music and the TV programmes favoured by students will give you a better idea of what students are up to.

Rest assured, if you teachers satisfy all the above criteria and still get messages of criticism from students, you can safely ignore them!

By appealing to teachers' reason and by not taking a hard line, this kind of message is likely to achieve a positive response from teachers who have their students' interests at heart.

8. 3. 2 Power struggles between school administration and student body

As we have seen, message posting causes conflict between school administrations who are unwilling to relinquish their position of authority and students who have hitherto been a suppressed group and who now have the opportunity to explore the potential of making their

voice heard. In this section I will look at some dimensions of this conflict and the ways in which two schools deal with it. Each school has its own specific guidelines for the use of the school's message board. School B places minimal restrictions on the participation of its students in exchanges. School G, on the other hand, is highly proactive in restricting student message activity. Interestingly, the contrasting attitudes of the two schools result in different types of message being posted. On School G's board the dominant message type is commercial. With vastly more active student participation in message activity than School G, School B has had to adopt a more restrictive stance in relation to commercial advertising on its website.

School G's principal, an authoritarian figure in many ways, represents a school administration which is keen to foster an image of being in control. In early April on a visit to School G's bulletin board, for example, I found a message requesting an extension of individual study time after normal school hours:

I'm a second-year student with a suggestion. I'm not the only one who feels that our school should run an individual study session for students. I admit that I wasn't overjoyed to be assigned to this school at first, but now I've come to appreciate how hard the teachers here work for us students. At the moment everyone is preoccupied with preparation for the university common entrance exam. Other schools allow their students to stay in school until 9 o'clock so they can get in more preparation time. North School, South School and East School have already been doing that for over a year and now even state schools like West School and Regions School have begun to allow their students this privilege. I can't help thinking that our school is behind the times on this issue. Is our Principal afraid he will be asked to resign if he allows self-study? If so, I'm wondering how come the Principals of the other state schools are able to remain in their posts. This is something we students want. Please consider our needs. If I have offended anyone with my suggestion, please excuse me. It was not my intention.

A brief contextual framework may help my readers to make better sense of the message above. All teachers and principals in Korean state schools are civil servants. The appointment of principal and vice principal is made by the regional educational authority, who are subject to control by the Ministry of Education. By the wording of her posted

message it is evident that the writer is well aware of this hierarchical structure in her attempts to persuade her school principal to follow the lead of the other schools she refers to. I asked Yuni what her school administration's reaction to this message had been:

Yuni: Because it contained references to what other schools were doing the message seemed to set off alarm bells within our administration. We students found out this morning that an emergency staff meeting had been called in order to discuss the message. Our form teacher explained to us that if the inspector happened to visit our school website he would not be at all pleased to find out that some schools were extending school hours, which is against board policy. This would get the principals of those schools in trouble. We were told that posting such messages is the equivalent of grassing on the other schools' administrations. At least, that's how it was put to us. From now on anyone wanting to post a message on the school website has to get clearance from their teacher.

Researcher: How did you girls react to that?

Yuni: Actually until then many of us hadn't been aware of the message because not many of us visit the school website. But it is true that lots of us really want our school to institute extra study time but our school principal won't allow it. We've tried to get him to see we need it but without success. Students have basically given up on him and are just putting in time until we can get out of here.

Some time after this conversation I revisited School G's website and discovered some changes to the bulletin board. With the initial click to access the site came an automatic message from the principal himself setting out school policy on the extension of self-study time. It was couched in the semi-formal 'admin-speak' typical of Ministry statements. Significantly, there was no sign of the original student message posting.

Generally speaking, School G students were much less active participants in their school website than those of School B. This may reflect the stricter controls which were in place on the former. Nevertheless a small minority of School G students were active message posters. One in particular, a girl called Suk, consistently spoke her mind on various school matters. She posted several messages critical of the heavy load of assigned Internet homework, for example, and was a severe critic of school policy on student use of mobile phones in school. In several well-argued postings bemoaning her school administration's unwavering ban on

even the carrying of phones on school premises, Suk pointed out the significance of the mobile phone in young people's social lives, citing the fact that more than half the student population had handsets and drawing attention to the security benefits of mobiles for students and their families. The following posting of Suk's refers to an incident which caused a great deal of ill-feeling among students:

My mobile and why I distrust my teacher

I'm going to talk about what happened to the kids in two first year classes. The other day their teachers promised to think about allowing them their mobiles in school as long as they owned up to having one. Nobody's phone would be confiscated if they were honest. What happened? The kids fell right into the trap. They fessed up and right away lost their phones. Can you believe it? How can students possibly trust their teachers after something like this? Can you blame students for keeping mum after such a scam? Teachers will ask and kids will deny they have a mobile and nobody knows the truth. Surely this is not the way to build trust and respect between teachers and students! Not even the need to control text messaging in class time can justify the damage done by these actions. I feel certain that incidents like these will increase the gulf which is already growing between teachers and students in this school.

The following day the school administration posted the following reply over the Principal's signature:

A statement of school policy on mobile phones

With regard to the use of mobile phones in School G, we consider that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages and that is the reason for our blanket ban on them. Let us examine some of the reasons for this.

First, how did you come by your mobile? You nagged your parents until they bought one for you, right? Perhaps you used the argument that without a mobile you would feel left out. We, on the other hand, have all too frequently had parents ask us why on earth students need mobile phones and beg us to help them get across the message that life doesn't begin and end with a mobile. I can't afford these phone bills for each member of the family, they tell us, they're ruining me. It is these same parents who came to us and requested a complete ban on student mobiles on school premises.

Apart from the financial burden you place on your parents, we ask you to consider the negative effects of mobiles on your schoolwork. Many students arrive late for classes because they've been on their phone talking to friends. Others make excuses that they need to go to the toilet when in reality it is to read text messages coming in during class time. Although we haven't had this problem in our school, I know of at least one case of a student using the mobile to cheat on an exam. Also, there have been instances where students have used their mobile to make clandestine arrangements which parents, if they knew, would be horrified about.

Yes, we know the familiar argument that the mobile phone is a convenient device for letting your parents know where you are. We also know that some mobiles have the facility of Internet access. We say it is just as easy to use a public phone to let your parents know where you are. And as for the Internet, the school provides you with online computers in the library, the computer lab and in the classrooms. One thing for sure: a mobile's text screen is too tiny to be of much value for study

purposes!

Apart from the numerous unsupported assumptions made, there are several specious arguments in this message. First there is the suggestion that students use strong-arm tactics to obtain their mobiles from financially pressed parents. My own informants told me that this was certainly not the case; their parents it seemed were quite happy to provide mobiles for their offspring, often for reasons of security as I earlier explained. Then there is the implication that parents have approached the school administration en masse to ask for help with the so-called phone problem. From my own experience, it is much more likely that only one or two parental voices were raised. Of course it needs only those few to constitute a convenient justification for the school to claim a deluge of requests for whatever policy meets their needs in a particular situation. As for the argument that mobiles lead to unpunctuality, the regime of strict discipline which is the norm in Korean schools would make it highly unlikely that this is a problem on any but a limited scale. Furthermore, it is stretching belief to blame the mobile for students' lack of concentration. A bored student will inevitably find something to divert her attention. Her handset is merely one of several alternatives. The final point concerning screen size seems to be clutching at straws. Users accustom themselves to the continuous miniaturisation of consumer electronic products, of which the mobile phone is no exception. Subsequent postings by students themselves affirm this fact and by so doing draw attention to an administration which is obviously out of touch with the realities of both the marketplace and student culture.

Considered in its totality, then, the administration's website posting, far from making any telling points, instead gives the impression of a heavy-handed bureaucracy attempting to rule

with an iron fist. There is little account taken of student concerns, nor does there seem a willingness to enter into a dialogue of cooperation or compromise. Trying to have their voices heard via the online forum must at times be a frustrating experience for students at School G. With battle lines seemingly being drawn on the frontiers of technology which the online forum represents, administrations are taking positions to defend their hereditary rights of power by means of new rules and regulations to control the challenges which are daily mounted by emerging student voices.

In any battle combatants may stoop to subterfuge to steal a march on their opponents. After Suk repeatedly questioned the ban on mobile phones on school premises, a message finally appeared defending the principal's decision in the matter. Although purportedly a student posting, the adult rhetorical style of the message immediately raised student suspicions that the message had been composed by a member of staff, perhaps in a bid to ingratiate himself with the principal:

Re: Our principal should listen to student views on the mobile phone ban

I have the impression that this message was posted by a first-year, so as a senior and a friend I will take the liberty of replying. You say our Principal should listen to students. Since when has our Principal ignored our voices? This man always has the interests of all of us students at heart. He is vitally concerned with our well-being at all times. Don't you girls realise that? I suggest you think first before you place unrealistic demands on our Principal. The time to insist on your rights is when you have fulfilled your own duties and responsibilities. I'm sure I'm not alone in conveying my deepest gratitude to our considerate and understanding Principal and all the other wonderful teachers in our school.

From one who is proud to be a student at School G.

To other students the portrayal of their principal as someone with deep concern for their welfare must have seemed ironic in the extreme, considering it was he who tried at every turn to suppress their voices. Even my informants commented scathingly on the man's rigid discipline and obduracy in the face of even the mildest of student requests.

More was to come. Two messages appeared concurrently asking teachers to consider reducing the amount of homework they assigned. One of these was unsigned and the other bore Suk's name. The response of the school administration was to issue a curt statement to the effect that in future it would ignore all unsigned postings. Suk immediately protested that she *had* signed her posting. It then emerged that the administration had had doubts about the posting which bore her name, suspecting that someone else was using Suk's identity as a known and frequent message poster to mount their own views. Even when this misunderstanding had been cleared up, the administration steadfastly refused to enter into further discussion of the homework issue. Some days later, however, the principal posted the following notice:

Warning about the use of abusive language

When students have suggestions or complaints to make, they are required to identify themselves giving their full name and class. The rationale behind this decision is that the administration can be sure that the views expressed are legitimate and proceed from the person who sends them. Some students have expressed concern that revealing their identity will limit their freedom of expression. We on the other hand feel that anonymous messages suggest that the writer is not confident about her assertions and if so such assertions are clearly not worthy of the school's consideration. From now on, only postings accompanied by unmistakable identification of the writer will be allowed to remain on the school website and only those will be given any consideration. The understanding of all students in this matter is appreciated.

The title of the principal's message gives the impression that students were anonymously posting messages containing abusive language. However, I found absolutely no evidence of this. Indeed, in an appeal to students to use the school's message posting facilities more actively, the student union president referred to a recent meeting of her fellow school presidents at which the issue of abusive language on message boards had been high on the agenda. She, it seems, was the only rep to report that not only was abusive language not even an issue in her school, but also that student apathy left the school's message board largely

blank.

Thus it would appear that the principal was using the issue of language as a red herring to divert attention away from his true motive of discouraging bulletin board use in the school and thereby limiting the opportunities for students to raise their voices. In this he appeared to have been eminently successful. With the rigidly-enforced policy of self-disclosure in place, the bulletin board ceased to function as a forum for student views either negative or positive and instead became a medium for advertising messages and other commercial information. Even the formerly vociferous Suk stopped her posting campaign. The final message to appear, expressing a hope that school library facilities could be extended during the school break, came from a student who was at pains to word it in a manner unlikely to cause offence. However, even she felt compelled to add the postscript, "It's better not to say what I really think because I have to provide my name." It was the last message to appear on the board between the principal's edict and the end of that school term.

The claim that CMC grants students 'total freedom of expression' (Kremers, 1989 referred to by Colomb and Simutis, 1996) and 'results in the erasure of the teacher's authority' (Dimatteo 1990 quoted in *ibid*) does not, in fact, reflect the realities of CMC use by the Korean students in my study. Rather, the methods used by the school administration I describe to deal with students' voices have more in common with Fairclough's perceptions of the use of power:

Power is conceptualised in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed (and hence the shapes of texts) in particular sociocultural contexts . . . The power to control discourse is seen as the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular ideological investments in dominance over other alternative (including oppositional) practices. (1995: 1-2)

The exercise of control of 'production, distribution and consumption' by School G's administration ensures that the latter exerts continued dominance over student channels of communication and reinforces its power position even in relation to the new communication technologies.

8.3.3 Power struggles within the student body

Power struggles are not limited to those played out between the administration and the student body; they also occur within the student body itself. Many reflect the existence of a hierarchy based on age. Just as students are in a subordinate position to teachers, so junior students are expected to show respect for their seniors. As Confucian tradition demands, the notion of hierarchy is firmly grounded in Korean social relationships and, as in the larger society, the language of honorifics is a mechanism within the school context for differentiating power relations between juniors and seniors. An unspoken tenet of the school hierarchy is that junior voice should not be raised against senior. Bulletin board postings, however, offer younger students the opportunity to challenge the power of more senior students while remaining anonymous, as the following exchange illustrates:

Bad habits of first year students

I'm a second year student and I'm posting this message to call attention to a bad habit of some first years. Smoking! I've seen you at the corner of the tennis court during PE. I'm warning you people to cut this out and I would swear (XXXXXXXXXX) but online I'm not allowed to. You may think it's all right to smoke in school but I'm telling you it isn't. If you want to smoke, go home and do it. Teachers, please get tough on students who smoke in school. Shame on you smokers!

This message reflected school rules forbidding smoking as part of a wider social embargo on underage smoking. A reply from a younger student was not long in coming:

Seniors should be role models for juniors

I'm a first year student who agrees that smoking by juniors is wrong. However, before taking potshots at us I think seniors should clean up their own act. Whenever I and my friend go down the outside steps near our classroom we see a group of third year students smoking there. What kind of example is that? I've also heard that some younger smokers get tips from older ones on safe places to smoke.

The exchange continued with a retaliatory posting from a senior:

Admittedly there may be one or two older students who smoke on school premises, but they are in the minority. I don't break school rules and neither do any of my friends. So come on you juniors, get with it. No smoking means no smoking!

Although a senior had the final word in this heated exchange, the message board had at least provided a forum for those lower down in the power structure to express their voice which otherwise would not be heard.

A hierarchy is also evident in terms of academic performance. The more capable a student is academically, the more school-sanctioned opportunities he has to speak his mind on school matters. As an illustration, I came across a posting from a high performer giving his evaluation of recent school exams. In his message the student evaluated each exam in turn and made some complimentary comments on the high standard of the exam content. During the days which followed, several other students also posted messages but these were critical of the first. In essence they accused him of showing off. The following is representative:

Just listen to you and your fancy talk! It's not as if you were top of the class in the recent exams. What right have you to sound off about things like exam quality? You make me sick.

By means of postings belittling the achievement of high performers, as we see here, lower-performing students are able to show their resentment of the special treatment accorded the former by their teachers and parents. This is a further example of students using the website forum to challenge school norms and values and to make their voice heard within

the power structure.

Power struggles may also be played out in other arenas. Group membership, for example, may confer power on individuals who outside the group have little or none. Student representatives in their capacity as actors on behalf of the students who elect them have positions of power and opportunities to wield that power. If their status is challenged, many will fight hard to hold on to it. Such was the case when Suk posted a message criticising her student union for not representing student interests more aggressively. This triggered a lengthy reply from the union president:

A reply to Suk from the President of the Students' Union

As President of the Students' Union I first of all want to compliment you on your active participation in the school's online bulletin board. Thank you for your question, "Is our Union working for us students or not?" To answer it I need to tell you a bit about how your Union is organised and how it functions. Student unions in this country work in close cooperation with the school administration and have to answer to the disciplinary committee of that school, which in turn is responsible to the local educational authority. A common student perception that unions are independent of school administrations is therefore false. Only student representations which have been approved through collective student agreement may be made to the school administration. It will accept no individual representation, no matter how important or reasonable it may seem to the person making it. If it supported any attempt to short-circuit the approved procedure, your Union's strong position would be compromised and students would ultimately be the losers.

You are probably aware that certain student proposals in the past failed to be implemented by the administration. In each case these proposals were debated by your Union representatives and, for whatever reason, were dropped. I want to stress that a decision to drop a proposal is never taken lightly and only after sufficient views are sought from students, parents, the school administration, and other groups where appropriate. A failed proposal in no way reflects your Union's failure to listen to the voices of those it represents. We do hear you and we do listen carefully. Moreover, I personally have to say that our school administration is more than willing to trust your Union's judgement and support it. I hope that by this rather roundabout way I have answered your original question.

And now I would like to ask *you* something. Are *you* working for your Union? By that I mean, are there ways in which you could more actively support our activities? Union members have the feeling that students are awfully quiet these days. We would love to talk to you. Don't hesitate to contact any of us. Always remember though that we have the responsibility to represent the voices of the majority. We are not here to push the agenda of an isolated few. The school's online message board is there for students to express their views, it's true, but it also gets visits from the general public. In this sense our web site represents the public face of our school. I don't mean that negative comments shouldn't be posted but rather that students might first go to the source of their concerns to get answers before 'going public' with their complaints.

Let me again assure all students that they are welcome to contact me c/o the Students' Union with any

concerns they may have.

Despite the reasoned arguments used by the President of the School Union, the reader is left with the distinct impression of a power structure in which the individual student's voice will have great difficulty being heard. For one thing, there is the clear implication that the Union is anxious to avoid any potential confrontation with the school administration. Moreover, the call for students to get involved with the Union is strikingly at odds with the seemingly complicated procedures students face in getting their voices heard. Last but not least, the President's praise at the beginning of her message for Suk's online contributions sits uncomfortably with her barely concealed criticism of Suk at the end for 'going public' on the school message board.

Ironically, the following message had been posted a few weeks earlier by this same President:

My name is Song and I'm the current President of the Students' Union. The purpose of this message is to express my deep regret for the lack of interest shown in our school website. As a school we (and I include myself as well) don't seem to make much use of it at all. Yesterday I attended a meeting of union representatives and had the opportunity to learn about the problems faced by other schools. A major one is how to deal with inappropriate language on website bulletin boards! As you can imagine, I had nothing to contribute on that issue because hardly anyone uses our bulletin board, let alone uses inappropriate language. Anyway, attending this meeting made me realise that as a school we shouldn't waste this important resource. Therefore, I want to encourage all of you to use the bulletin board more actively to exchange views and information. As your President I pledge to do all I can to raise awareness of the benefits of student participation in our school website. Please let me know if you have any questions.

This call by the student union president for student participation in the website is hardly consistent with the 'dressing down' she gave to Suk for attempting just that. The signals being sent are that student message postings are acceptable as long as they cause no discomfort to those in authority. Indeed, I learned from my informants that following Song's long tirade to Suk very few messages of any kind, and certainly none that could be construed as remotely

critical, found their way onto the bulletin board. In one sense at least Song's postings could be said to have achieved the desired effect, but at the expense of further student involvement in School G's bulletin board.

As I have tried to show, school web sites provide a dynamic environment for interaction between the conventional power structures of administrations and traditionally subjugated student populations. The format provided by cyberspace for the exchange of opinion and viewpoint, as well as the inherent potential of anonymity for participants, play a significant role in this power struggle. A poignant e-mail from a senior student of School B reflects thoughtfully on how cyberspace has brought about changed perceptions of roles in education:

I'm a student in my final year. There has been a lot said recently on the subject of student message postings on the school home page, so I'm almost afraid to open my mouth. Anyway, here goes.

During my twelve years' schooling I have had many good teachers who I think of with respect and gratitude. On the other hand I have also had some who made me question their right to be called a teacher. We final year students have been in on the development of the school website since the beginning. We were excited to think that this new technology would herald a new era of democracy in the culture of our school, one in which we would be able to participate fully. Up until then it was only teachers evaluating students. Now it could be the other way round as well!

Well, it hasn't turned out to be quite like that after all, at least not yet. Some teachers don't seem to be able to let go of the belief that their position authorises them to ignore what students want. Lacking in dedication, upsetting students with their prejudiced attitudes towards students' religion or family background, these teachers shouldn't be allowed to carry on their tyranny anymore. We don't need any more dictators. Instead we need people with dedication and expertise who place the needs of students before those of higher authorities. This is the wave of the future promised by the electronic revolution.

But a revolution needs revolutionary thinking and as part of this all teachers need to rethink their own attitudes and assumptions. At present some of them are afraid of student criticism, considering it a direct personal attack on themselves and their authority. This is not what it should be about at all. Kneejerk negative reactions and excuses only result in students losing respect for teachers. Instead, teachers should welcome student comments as an opportunity to improve relationships and to reflect on how things could be done differently for the benefit of all concerned.

So much for teachers. Students too need to look at themselves. Some tend to go too far and take unfair advantage of their new online freedom, posting only negative comments. What all students need to do before posting a message is to discuss the issue with their friends first and get a representative sampling of opinion. Following that, if there is general agreement that something should be said, the message ought to be composed in polite language with an accurate and detailed account of which specific lesson, which specific remark or which specific act was problematic. If our message board is

used in that way, the chances are good that teachers will take our postings more seriously, think about the point being made and take the time and effort to try and do something about it.

As the posting suggests, both students and staff have to be prepared to adjust to the new wave of democracy heralded by digital communication technologies if things are to function effectively. Letting go of some of their traditional power may be difficult for teachers and administrators. On the other hand, student expectations of a rapid, large-scale and smooth transition of power to them are doomed to disappointment. Breakthroughs will occur along the way though, as this story of Aeran's illustrates:

A boy I know told me what happened at his school. There is a ministerial regulation that high schools should not normally run supplementary classes after regular school hours, but his school had decided to do so anyway. Many of the students were unhappy about that and appealed to the school to cancel the classes. But they got nowhere. Then a student got the bright idea of posting a message on the local educational authority's website informing them of the school's decision. The upshot was that the school was ordered to shut down the classes.

Despite the efforts of students to take a more active role in matters affecting their education, such incidents have so far been isolated ones. But for better or worse the process is underway, albeit for some painfully slow and for others uncomfortably fast. Conflict within the school hierarchy will inevitably be accompanied on different occasions and in varying contexts by negotiation, compromise, rejection or acceptance. The seeds of the struggle are embedded in societal values and assumptions which are difficult to reconstruct. The power position assigned to each social member in relation to another is based on a cultural and social framework which has existed largely unchanged for a long time. I myself examined the bulletin board of Schools B and G for a period of three months; a longer period of study might well uncover other dimensions of power relations revealed through literacy practices.

8. 3. 4 Power struggles within a religious context

As a concluding part of my examination of power relations in literary practices, I now turn to the religious context. Just as in the school context, a power struggle can be observed in both the vertical dimension (between priest and young churchgoers) and the horizontal dimension (between young churchgoers themselves) of the church hierarchy. For exemplifying purposes I will draw from the website of the Catholic church attended by my informants Yuni and Aeran, who with their peers were the first to use their church's online bulletin board. Aeran explains:

For a while after it [the church's web site] was set up nobody used it at all. You see, our senior priest is the kind of person who just makes up his mind about things without consulting anybody else, so there was no real communication going on. A few months back he came up with the idea that young people should have their own service in a smaller hall off the main one which the adults use. None of us kids were happy about this, we wanted to attend the same service as our parents, so we objected strongly. We even signed a petition but we got nowhere. Then one day one of the guys posted a message on the online bulletin board complaining about the change of room. Now that got action! The church administrators held a meeting and we went back in with our parents! Ever since that incident the bulletin board was used much more, especially by us kids.

There was another incident which got the board buzzing. We have summer workshops of various kinds every year and in the past it's been left to us kids to arrange the programme. Last year the church wanted to give this job to an outside agency but we could see that that would cost money in agency fees, money that could better be spent on the programme itself, so we opposed the idea. This involved a raft of message board postings both ways but eventually the priest in charge gave in and told us we could get on with the arrangements ourselves and that the agency wouldn't be involved. We won!

These incidents are part of a pattern which suggests that church authorities treat the youth voice differently from school administrations. Perhaps the church is prepared to show greater flexibility in its dealings with its younger constituents, whether in order to cultivate a public image of democracy in action or because, unlike the school, it does not see itself in the business of controlling youthful views. From my informants I discovered that young people considered the church bulletin board a communication channel that, tactfully used, could be very effective for expressing their concerns. The following give the flavour of the messages

posted on the church board:

Dear Father Peter,

Yesterday it was our junior high school choir's practice day. Because the Easter service is coming up, we needed perhaps another ten minutes to go over one or two things. But we couldn't because the university band people came in for their practice and, without waiting for us to finish, more or less took over the place. While we were singing in one corner of the hall, they were in the other banging away on their instruments so we could hardly hear ourselves. We rushed through the rest of our practice, but then we noticed a funny thing. The university band only played for about ten minutes and then left. We couldn't understand why they had made us leave so quickly when they needed so little time themselves. Their lack of consideration left us feeling quite upset.

Dear Father Peter,

I'm a member of the junior high group and want to speak about the poor quality of the instruments assigned to us. Compared to ours, the ones assigned to the university group are in much better condition. Just recently they even got a new piano even though the old one was still in good condition. Our drum kit is on its last legs and we really think it should be replaced. We can't help feeling that we are being discriminated against. Father Peter, I know that you show concern for us in so many ways but could you please think about our request?

Certain incidents may reveal a group hierarchy which has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Yuni told me of one conflict between different status positions in her church hierarchy which led to a fullblown public debate:

Recently our online board really heated up with discussion of something which got posted there. A message appeared criticising the leader of the high school group at our church, a boy called Kwon, in language which was very strong. It was signed only, 'Anti-Kwon', but actually we all knew who had posted it. You see, there had been a sort of fight which several of us had seen happening between Kwon and a junior. Kwon had gotten mad at the younger boy for being disrespectful and had cuffed him one. The boy got upset about this and the result was his angry message. Well, this episode got several of us involved because we had different views on it. Eventually our head priest had to intervene to sort things out.

Being curious to know if the episode Yuni described might shed any light on the issue of power relations which I was investigating, I revisited the church bulletin board to follow the sequence of postings which the matter had provoked. I first went to the original message which had sparked things off. It was indeed couched in strong language:

To Kwon: Who in their right mind could have elected you leader of the high school group? You think you're King S . . . t and you disgust me. You should stop throwing your weight around. I can't for the life of me understand how you got to be where you are. Obviously it wasn't through your ability. Get a hold of yourself and act your age, if that's possible. Anti-Kwon.

It was my informant Aeran, as I discovered later, who then responded to the above posting, but without fully revealing her identity:

To Anti-Kwon: Flaming someone without telling them who it is is a cowardly and immature act. How can you call yourself a church-goer? What you call 'throwing your weight around' is what I call showing leadership, something we need around here. You're the one I would call disgusting. Although you have the right to post messages, you don't have the right to speak ill of people. You aren't satisfied with what Kwon does for the church, but could you do any better? I hope you will think twice before posting a message like that again. Surely an apology is in order.
[Aeran signed her message with her e-mail pseudonym]

A day later, Anti-Kwon replied:

To [Aeran's e-mail pseudonym]:
Why don't you give your real name, whoever you are, because you call me a coward for not giving mine! You should first reveal your own identity before you order someone else to. Actually, I'm not really surprised that you don't want to, considering who you're defending. By the way, it's you Kwon who posted the last message, isn't it? I know it is because you're just the kind of person who is capable of doing that.
Anti-Kwon

Meanwhile several other people got in on the exchange, most of whom supported Kwon. Anti-Kwon kept up his vendetta, however, lambasting each posting in turn and continuing to attack Kwon. Aeran then posted a further message:

To Anti-Kwon: It was me, Aeran, using my e-mail identity who posted that first message in reply to yours. You know, it makes me very sad to see you using the church bulletin board to make personal attacks on people. Everyone I've talked to feels the same way. If you have anything to say to Kwon you should say it to his face. Let's have no more postings from you of this kind, OK?
From Aeran

This provoked a bitter reply from Anti-Kwon:

Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha ^^ Aeran, mind our own business. The war is already on.

Kwon himself posted the next message:

This is Kwon. Recently the online bulletin board has been full of postings about me. Enough already! Can everyone please stop now! I admit I made a mistake and I won't let it happen again. Just leave me alone!

However the exchanges continued until finally the head priest contributed a posting :

Dear Anti-Kwon and everyone,

This is Father Dolan and I've noticed the many postings about Kwon on our online bulletin board. Anti-Kwon, I have an idea who you are but I don't intend to follow up my hunch at this stage when you may have good reason for concealing your identity. But I do want to say this to all of you: Our homepage and bulletin board are dedicated to the exchange of ideas and useful information between members of the Christian faith. Our website must never become a battleground for conflict of any kind. If someone has something to say concerning someone else then they should say it directly to that person and identify themselves using their real name. If you have a problem with this, then please see me. I repeat, online communication can be a blessing for us all if we use it to exchange ideas and information. I look forward to seeing you all in church this coming Sunday.
Father Dolan

The following message appeared shortly afterwards:

Dear Father Dolan,

I now see that I over-reacted without thinking through what I was doing and I'm sorry if I upset anyone. There will be no more messages from me about the matter you refer to. I have learned my lesson and I hope so has Kwon. My apologies to you and everyone else I may have offended by my postings, Kwon included. I mean this from the bottom of my heart.
The person called Anti-Kwon

This sequence of postings graphically illustrates how even in a religious setting, online messages provide a medium for the playing out of power struggles. Someone of lower status in a hierarchy (Anti-Kwon) is able to use online messaging to reprove someone of higher status (Kwon) and seek support from an invisible audience in cyberspace. The issue in this case was resolved by means of intervention by someone with ultimate authority in the established hierarchy, Father Dolan, the head priest.

8.4 Conclusion

I have tried to show that power is a key element in the fabrication of the reading and writing experiences lived by Korean young people in two strategic domains. In their daily lives young people position themselves or are positioned to encounter a wide range of literacies contained in various forms of text, both print and electronic. The texts they encounter consist

of 'sites of tension between centripetal and centrifugal pressures' (Bakhtin, 1986). Centripetal pressures are embodied in texts which accord with cultural and societal conventions and norms, while centrifugal pressures arise from the need to produce texts in a creative way. In the literacy practices engaged in by the young people represented by my informants and their friends, many are the pressures to align themselves with texts which accept traditionally and culturally appropriate roles and norms. At the same time, their creative urge leads them to produce, distribute and consume texts which challenge conventions and the entrenched status quo.

Growing numbers of communication scholars speculate that the rise and increasingly universal use of new communication technologies such as electronic bulletin boards and other interactive networks will contribute to the construction of communities which equalise their members through the removal of embodied hierarchical structures (Kiesler et al, 1984; Van Gelden, 1990). They theorise that this will lead to membership of groups 'posited as the epitome of a form of post-modern community within which multiplicity of self is enhanced and difference proliferates uninhibited by external, social structures' (Wilson, 2000: 647). However, as we have seen, escape from social inequities and attitudes relating to various forms of embodiment of identities is not automatically achieved through mere use of the new media by itself. Whatever mode of literacy is implemented, literacy practices involve what Foucault calls 'polymorphous techniques of power' (Foucault, 1976 referred to by Nguyen and Alexander, 1996: 118). Through literacy practices, groups which are ascribed authority and power attempt to ensure that their higher status in the power structure is maintained. By his emphasis on multi-methods of power, Foucault tried to indicate the present impossibility of determining precisely the boundaries of both the field of power relations and the

techniques and strategies of power itself. In fact, according to Nguyen and Alexander Foucault's description of the strategies and techniques of power lead unerringly to the formulation of a theory focusing on the elusiveness of power:

The subject and object of power are themselves elusive in the sense that both are continually shifting - like clouds. When Foucault tries to address the dynamics of power beyond mere description, he can only speak of counter-power's evasive and resistant dynamics . . . It (power) is a precariously shifting relationship between dominant and dominated, the knower and the known. It does not exceed their singularities. As it spins and twirls, it produces one human turning point after another. Eventually, it always transforms the people it catches up, their relationships, their contexts - and itself. It continually produces an ever new matrix of discourses, of bodies, of strategies, and of techniques. (op cit: 119)

Although in the Korean power structure shifts of power between dominant and dominated occur within a relatively limited range, there are certainly actions and attempts to achieve 'counter-power's evasive and resistant dynamics', as revealed in the literacy practices taking place in daily contexts. Literacy plays a significant role in the complex dynamics of the struggle for power being played out in the social and interpersonal relations of young Koreans at home, school and church.

Chapter 9 Summary and implications of the research

My research is essentially a study of vernacular literacy among Korean youth and the ways in which vernacular literacy helps to represent a voice which is often discouraged and at times suppressed by dominant academic literacies. This final chapter reviews my principal arguments and considers the overall implications of my thesis. First I will summarise the range of vernacular literacies which I have drawn from my data analysis. Following that I will reflect on the gender and power issues which my analysis has uncovered. Finally I will assess the implications and possible contributions of my study.

9.1 Vernacular literacies

I have identified six areas of everyday life in which reading and writing play a central role, exploring in the process both print and electronic literacies. I think it is important to reiterate that any reading and writing activity may have multiple and overlapping significance in the life of its subject and this makes it difficult to categorise literacy activities on the basis of specific texts (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Literacy users engage with a given text in different ways depending on the context in which they encounter it or on the purposes for which they produce it.

Organising daily life

While this is a traditional and familiar aspect of literacy use, my research revealed novel and innovative practices which have been created by a new generation to serve their need for

organising frameworks to plan, remember and record. To bring a sense of order to their daily lives young people use a number of media, both print and non-print. Each medium serves a different purpose, often overlapping that of another. The scope of familiar artefacts has been extended, modified or changed entirely. The pre-formatted diary of an earlier generation, for example, has been superseded by a range of media which in their less restrictive formats allow the expression of adolescent creativity and individual identity.

Documenting life

The documenting of lives through personal journals and diaries is a practice encouraged formally by the educational establishment during the early years of schooling for avowedly pedagogical purposes. I show how young people continue a practice they are already familiar with and adapt it to their own needs and interests long after the obligation to do so has lapsed. I show too how young people adapt other formats such as letters and dialogue notes for documentation purposes.

Combatting boredom at school

Faced with long hours of classes and study periods in school, young people are practised in finding ways of circumventing restrictions and easing their academic burden. Letter and dialogue note writing are two representative practices which are played out in order to fulfill such purposes. The surreptitious passing of messages around the classroom has the effect of reducing the power implicit in school authority and bonding members of the class into a community. This 'under the school book' subversion often takes the form of multiple player gaming which is carried out under the pretense of participating in the lesson in progress. The

engagement of the whole class is usually assured, regardless of whether participation is active or passive. I show how non-sanctioned literacy practices enable young people to take a stand against school-sanctioned literacies, often without the knowledge of the school authorities. I argue that, far from constituting a distraction from academic work, non-sanctioned literacies have the effect of sustaining the students' interest in continuing their school career and enabling them to cope with the pressures of an exam-based system.

Developing and maintaining social relationships

Young people use literacy in order to maintain their existing social relationships or to develop new ones. Print-based literacy practices engaged in include the cooperative reading of magazines, comics and fiction titles, the sharing of diary entries, and the interactivity of exchange journals. Participating in these literacy practices helps young people to construct their identity as adolescents and to build up group affinity. Young people also use the new communication media (e-mail, computer greetings cards, the institutional websites of church, school and university club) for the same purposes. The mobile phone is a further tool which is used for maintaining relationships. Text- and graphics-based messaging in particular provides young people with the means to feel continuously 'connected', and at the same time positions them in the social landscape as members of an insider language community. Young people also harness the potential of chatroom communication on the internet as forum for self-expression, source of advice seeking and giving, and even as launch pad for romantic encounter. I draw attention to the fact that the new digital technologies force issues of gender identity to the fore, the lack of social cues in online communication resulting in the simultaneous reinforcement and subversion of stereotypical gender roles.

Engaging in leisure activities

Young people integrate a wide range of literacies into their leisure-time activities. CMC in particular is a dominant source of amusement and entertainment which provides youth with a vast range of literate experiences. Engaging in multi-user computer games, young men appropriate technology in the construction of their identities and the enactment of gender roles. The fan fiction phenomenon permits young women to harness the power of language to generate space for exploring their own sexuality. CMC provides the means of breaking socially constructed gender barriers and challenging gender-associated social restrictions in a confidential and largely risk-free environment. CMC-based textual experiences, moreover, help young writers to form a community for cultivating both authorship and readership.

Participating in a consumer society

Membership in a consumer society embraces a whole range of literacies related to consumption. Young people collect and use the printed ephemera such as coupons and vouchers connected with merchandise and services which industry and commerce make available. In this way they engage in consumer practices which reflect their increasing acculturation into the adult world with its concomitant gender issues. Because their engagement with consumption is at a different level than that of adults, often young people will appropriate the tools of consumerism for themselves in unexpected ways. The use of photo stickers is a good case in point. High school girls use these stickers as a medium for self-expression and creative communication in ways unlikely to have been thought of by their originators.

9.2 Gender

The dimension of gender is ubiquitous in literacy practices. Reading preferences reflect gendered roles; the criteria used for selecting and using text can be interpreted as enacting gender identity. With my primary focus on young women's textual experiences, I explore how gender is displayed in texts and how young people react to these texts in terms of their attitudes towards physical appearance and sexual behaviour. Teenage boys want to project an image of physical strength. Teenage girls value prevailing norms of physical attractiveness such as the slim body and the conventionally pretty face. Fashion magazines and comics carry the message that, with the aid of consumer beauty products and services, girls can transform themselves into objects of beauty and that their efforts will ultimately be rewarded by success in romance. I show how difficult it is for young women to escape the assurances of this media bombardment and to resist peer-urged pressures to achieve the ideals of beauty portrayed by them.

Norms of sexual behaviour are constituted differentially in accordance with gender. Texts show young males as active in expressing their sexuality, while young women are portrayed as sexually naive and inactive. Discursive practice among the young moreover feeds the ideals of virginity and chastity for the female, assertiveness and aggression for the male. I maintain however that, just because the texts of romance fiction and romance comics depict the woman as powerless and subservient to the male, it does not necessarily follow that the female reader's experience is also disempowering. I show how Korean young women read romance comics in order to satisfy their own sexual interest in defiant challenge of societal expectations. The resistance implicit in their reading does not reside in the texts themselves

but in the social contexts in which they are consumed. This is in line with Besnier's (1995) assertion that the meaning of literacy resides in the sociocultural context in which it is embedded and not in any inherent property of literacy itself.

9.3 Power relations

Street's (1993) observation that the power structure of a society is embedded in its literacy practices is wholly relevant to an examination of the literacies which the young people in my study engage in. Their dependent status means that some literacy obligations are assigned to these young people by their parents and monitored for the purpose of controlling behaviour. The examples I give of outing record books and letter writing are practices which fall into this category. At school the time and space permitted for the practice of non-academic literacy is governed by the school administration on pain of reprimand or penalty for non-compliance. The examples I give of invented writing systems are one way in which young people subvert authority by communicating with each other surreptitiously in code.

One of the most striking aspects of the literacies of Internet discourse is the potential for challenging the authority of dominant institutions. Although young people have traditionally had few opportunities to express their opinions on decisions made by those in authority, I show how institutional websites offer much wider potential for opposing agendas to be aired. In my study the dynamics of power are played out on the websites of school and church by young people who take advantage of the anonymity inherent in online participation to challenge the existing power structure. At times these new opportunities for communicating

different viewpoints result in the acceptance of young opinions as valid contributions to a dialogue. At others, they meet harsh resistance on the part of those in power. Gramsci's notion of hegemony is central to an exploration of this dialectical relationship. He suggests that the ruling classes do not simply impose their will on other groups. What actually happens is that subordinate groups and classes appear to support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meanings which bind them to, and incorporate them into, the prevailing structures of power (Marsh and Millard, 2000: 18). I indicate some of the ways in which hegemony is both threatened and sustained by means of online literacy practices.

Of course, hegemony does not reside exclusively in the vertical relationship between young people and those in authority. As adolescents do not make up a unitary entity, power issues also infuse interpersonal relations within this heterogeneous group. Power struggles between juniors and seniors and between the privileged (e.g. student union members, high academic achievers) and the less privileged (e.g. non-members, low academic achievers) are also mediated by literacy. As Griffin (1993) argues, power is not an innate capacity, nor is it an idiosyncratic characteristic of particular individuals. Power operates in the context of social structures, cultural and ideological practices. My account of how literacy shapes and is shaped by power relations makes clear that relations of power and dominance are closely interwoven with literacy practices. In the words of Freebody et al, 'power is something which is . . . done on, through, and with the printed word' (1998 quoted by Alvermann, 1998). Participants in literacies continually seek to position themselves in the power structure through engagement with literacy.

9.4 Implications and contributions of my work

To the question, 'What contribution does my work make?', I will make a threefold response. I will first relate the question to my research goal of contributing to the theoretical understanding of literacy by investigating and documenting literacy practices in the lives of young people. The exploration of everyday literacies has helped me to see that reading and writing in adolescents' lives must always be read in relation to a world that shapes and is shaped by them. It is thus necessary to view literacy practices as being embedded in all acts of social engagement (Gee, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 1998), and in multiple social contexts (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanić, 1994).

As far as a theoretical approach to literacy is concerned, rather than the autonomous model of decoding texts and focusing on the simple transmission and internalisation of a set of cognitive functions or skills, Street's proposal of an 'ideological' model has led the way not only to an acknowledgement of the diversity of literacies in their social settings but also to a recognition of the significance of the attendant issues of power, authority and social differentiation. As the approach adopted by New Literacy Studies suggests, there is no single, monolithic, autonomous literacy: rather, there are 'literacies' or 'literacy practices' whose character and consequences differ in each context (Baynham, 1995; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Baynham refers to the crucial role of context for understanding literacy in use as 'not the immediate context of situation in which uses of literacy occur, but the ways in which broader socio-cultural categories impinge on and shape literacy practices, through social power relations and the impact of institutions and ideologies' (op cit: 245). Various aspects of the everyday reading and writing I have identified exhibit the situatedness of

literacy within discourses and ideologies. Both its multi-dimensional as well as its situated nature lead to the view of literacy as both social process and social practice. As such, literacy mediates the social interactions and social purposes in which various discourses and ideologies reside. Hence my viewpoint that literacy needs to be understood in relation to the discourses and ideologies which link it to everyday social life.

Adopting a social approach to literacy, my work highlights the relationship between identity and literacy and this account of literacy inevitably invokes the cultural dimension of identity construction. As my work examines the ways in which identity shapes and is shaped by literacy, the relationship between culture and literacy requires clarification. Ferdman defines this relationship in the following way:

Each of us maintains an image of the behaviors, beliefs, values, and norms - in short, of the culture - appropriate to members of the ethnic group(s) to which we belong. This is what I call *cultural identity*. Cultural identity, I argue, both derives from and modulates the symbolic and practical significance of literacy for individuals as well as groups.
(1991: 348, italics in original).

This assumes that all literacy users are members of a defined culture with a cultural identity, and the degree to which they engage in learning or using literacy is a function of this cultural identity. Pérez et al (1998) maintain that literacy can never be considered 'content-free' or 'context-free' for it is always used in the service of or filtered through culture and cultural identity. Both authors appear to agree that literacy is always culturally situated at the same time as it is socially situated. My own ethnographic work carried out in a Korean context proposes that the ways in which literacy users interpret and encode information about the world and their experiences are determined by their cultural identity (Ferdman, 1991; Purcell-Gates, 1995). Viewing literacy within its sociocultural context enables me to identify

the process of cultural and social identity construction and to focus on the aim, purpose, audience, text and context in which reading and writing occur. I demonstrate that literacy is an interactive process that is constantly needing to be re-defined and negotiated as the individual transacts within his sociocultural environment and that being an adolescent in Korean society involves participation in a complex array of literacy practices.

The second implication of my work stems from my attempt to incorporate various theories of adolescence into my analysis. As I suggest in Chapter 3, the theoretical approaches taken by adolescence studies are required reading for researchers in adolescent literacies. The psychoanalytic perspective sees adolescence as a time of upheaval and trauma exemplified by unpredictable, anti-social behaviour. The sociological perspective views adolescence as a period of anticipatory socialisation for adult roles during which the adolescent prepares for occupation, marriage, parenthood and other social roles related to adulthood. Neither of these perspectives, however, adequately represents the views adolescents have of themselves, nor is either helpful in suggesting a framework for considering non-academic literacies. The most that can be said from either perspective is that non-academic literacies play some (rather inchoate) part in reinforcing adolescent trauma or in preparing adolescents for adult social roles. Yet, while vernacular literacies demonstrably do help to undermine authority, neither the performance nor the consequences of the literacy practices themselves show adolescence in a state of turmoil. And as far as preparation for future roles is concerned, the fact that vernacular literacy is devalued and marginalised suggests that it will hardly figure prominently in that preparation.

On the other hand, the perspectives of both developmental contextualism and anthropology

do show an awareness of the interaction between the adolescent and his/her cultural and social context. Luke and Elkins (2000) suggest that adolescent literacies may be understood as part of the complex ecological and social relationship which exists between adolescents and their language- and discourse-rich environment. Viewing literacy users as agents of their own development, the developmental contextualists look upon vernacular literacies as significant products of human beings at a transitional stage in their lives. The anthropological perspective considers adolescence a crucial time in its own right and vernacular literacy as a discursive practice bearing its own social and cultural significance for the adolescent. As the two latter perspectives on adolescence align themselves with social views of literacy, they alone are able to shed light on the significance of vernacular literacies and for this reason form logical reference points for my own research.

The final implication of my work can be found in the rationale behind my ethnographic account. The literacy practices I have described are communicative and transformative in that they are used to make and represent meaning for adolescents' lived experiences and to help the adolescent gain or maintain positions in particular social spaces. Although non-academic literacy practices are often dismissed as idle amusement of no intrinsic value, or classified under 'other' in the pantheon of school literacy discourse (Alvermann, 1998), I find that they are a significant force for the construction and representation of identity in adolescent lives. Yet school sanctioned literacies control, silence and even dismiss the voice of youth, constructing discourses which marginalise youthful literacies. Even young people themselves appear to tacitly accept that their own everyday literate experiences are somehow trivial and unworthy of attention.

I argue that the young people in this study are sophisticated practitioners of literacy who are 'writing themselves into the world' (Moje, 1999) by means of their literacy practices. Young people are all too aware of the fact that their own voice is frequently ignored but do not know how to use linguistic and discursive knowledge to navigate other social spaces and challenge the ways in which their social and cultural spaces are positioned in society. In order for the voice of young people to be heard, a medium needs to be established to carry this voice and to provide opportunities for learning about and deconstructing language (including literacy). I hope my work will contribute to the creation of such a medium. Social change aimed at achieving the recognition of marginalised literacies can be brought only about by raising people's awareness. The point is nicely expressed by Nan van den Bergh:

To change language may not be to embark on drastic social changes directly, but it does involve consciousness-raising; that is, bringing awareness of a problem to the public's attention. The assumption underlying consciousness-raising is that before a behaviour can be changed, there must be awareness that a situation exists warranting alteration.
(1987 quoted by Talbot, 1998: 15)

Denaturalising the use of language through the scrutiny of literacy is one of the main concerns of this study. I hope this study contributes to a broader understanding of the issues involved and encourages the articulation of a discourse which gives fuller range to the voice of youth.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Research participants

Below I list all those names which appear in my thesis. All are pseudonyms. All are pseudonyms. The dates given in brackets refer to the approximate age of the participant at the time when I began my fieldwork with him/her.

1999 fieldwork

Girls

Sumi and Jin

Both sisters were attending high school at the time of our interviews, Sumi (age 16) in her first year at a vocational high school and Jin (age 18) in her final year at a mainstream high school. Their father, who at the time was assistant manager in a domestic appliance store, had previously spent many years at sea. Their mother worked at the same store. The family were Catholic and regular church-goers.

Boys

Heesoo and Wooil

The two brothers are my nephews. Heesoo (age 17) was near the end of his second year at a boys' high school, Wooil (age 19) was in his first year of university. Their father was a high school teacher and their mother worked in a department store. Although not regular church-goers, the family had a Christian background.

Min and Kiho

Both brothers were attending a boys' high school. Min (age 17) was approaching the end of his second year, Kiho (age 18) had just finished his final year and was awaiting entrance to university. Their father was a supermarket manager and their mother a home-maker.

2000 fieldwork

Girls

Aeran

Aeran (age 17) was in her second year of a girls' high school and lived in the same block of flats where I stayed during my research visit. Her sister, Serim (age 15) was in her final year of junior high school. Their father worked in a bank set up to serve a local taxi drivers' association. Their mother had worked as a cashier in a superstore until a few months before my interviews, but was currently unemployed.

Yuni

Yuni (age 17) was a close friend of Aeran's who lived in the same community. Like Aeran, she was in her second year of high school and had a younger brother (age 16) who was in his first year at a boys' high school. Their father worked for the Korean Telecommunications Company and their mother had been a home-maker throughout her marriage.

Jin

I got to know Jin first during my first research visit. At that time she had just finished her

final year of senior high school and was 18 years of age. During my second round of fieldwork, Jin was in her second year at university and was then 19 years old.

Boys

Jongwon

Jongwon (age 16) had just started his first year at a very strict, academically-oriented boys' senior high school. He had a sister (age 18) who was in her final year of high school. Their father was manager of a building society and their mother had worked at the post office until a few years ago, but was now a full-time home-maker.

Dan and Hwa

When I met Jongwon I also met two other boys, Dan and Hwa (both 16), who went to the same school as Jongwon. Dan had a brother who was eight years younger. Their father worked in a bank and their mother was a home-maker.

Hwa's brother was already in university. Their father worked as a company manager and their mother was a home-maker.

Heesoo

Heesoo is the same nephew I interviewed during my first research visit. At that time he had been in his second year of senior high school and was 17 years of age. Now he had just started university and aged 18, and was living away from home, but on his occasional visits home I managed to have several conversations with him.

Appendix 2 List of themes

I) LITERACY PRACTICES

Reading matter

Reading processes

Writing practices

Writing processes

Record-keeping

Public and private

II) ACCESS

Borrowing and owning

Use of libraries

Acquiring reading materials

III) VALUES

Attitudes

Value of ownership

Morality

Censorship

Religion

IV) ROLES

Asymmetry of roles

V) NETWORKS

Networks of support

VI) CONTEXTS

Other forms of information exchange

VII) HISTORICAL BASIS

Reading and writing life history

Childhood

(categories used by Barton and Hamilton in their community research, 1998)

Appendix 4 Storyline summaries of two Soonjung comic series

i) Full House

This series of 16 comics, which appeared over a period of four years (1995 -1999), was written and illustrated by a female Korean artist. In her preface the author lists her three aims in producing the series: i) to create an exotic atmosphere; ii) to give the reader pleasure; and iii) to provide light entertainment. England is the exotic setting. Although English place names, family names and particular cultural icons form a backdrop to the text, the text itself is firmly grounded in the Korean ethos. The storyline features as heroine a young Korean woman in her early twenties who happens to be settled in England. She is described by the author as a woman of 171 cm, who is fit, strong and self-confident and who aspires to be a writer for TV soaps. The hero is a famous film star with an upper class English society background, who possesses the right combination of wealth, fame, looks and strength to equip him as the ideal romantic partner. The two meet each other as the result of contested ownership of the house which figures in the comic's title. To the heroine the house represents the last precious link between her and her late father who built it. The story centres on the heroine's long and bitter struggle to get title to the property. Along the way, hero and heroine enter a fake engagement so the man can present a heterosexual front to the local populace, who believe him to be gay. The two are involved in various relationships and conflicts of various kinds, and to add to the mix the heroine is abducted by gangsters but later rescued by the hero. After many trials and tribulations, hero and heroine realise that they are meant for each other and are last seen exchanging marriage vows with the prospect of living happily ever after.

ii) Orange Boy

This comic series, written and illustrated by a female Japanese artist, was in its 23rd issue at the time of my fieldwork. Senior high schoolers are the main characters in the comic. The heroine is a girl from a humble family background who attends a very expensive private school because her parents are eager to provide her with opportunities for upward social mobility, even though it costs them dearly. At the school a group of four male friends, whose parents' financial support of the school is a key factor in its survival, are throwing their weight around. Their parents' position of power enables them to cock a snoot at the school authorities and their loutish behaviour continues unchecked. The four boys, moreover, are popular with the girls due to their strength, height and good looks. One of them, the hero of the story, is the group leader and the most aggressive of the four. The heroine enters the picture as she attempts to defend a friend who is the object of the gang's bullying. As a result she herself becomes the target of their harassment, but she fights back and her bold counter-attack is admired by the gang-leader/hero, whose romantic feelings towards her develop apace. The heroine, however, feels herself drawn to one of the other gang members and ignores the hero's bid for her attention. The storyline continues with the heroine's involvement in other (more or less platonic) relationships, while the hero's passion for her grows with each passing moment. Whenever the boy declares his love for her the heroine always manages to invent an excuse for not succumbing to his advances. My informants told me that they found the heroine a particularly appealing person due to her great sense of humour.