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Fields of Experience:  
Young People's Constructions of Embodied  
Identities

By

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A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award

of

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## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with issues relating to young people, identity and physical culture, and attempts to highlight how the complex structure of young people's social experiences can influence their constructions of self. It follows a number of calls by various researchers for a multi-dimensional approach to the study of youth lifestyles (e.g. Hendry et al, 1996), and one that, while acknowledging societal influences on young people's practices, does not deny their potential to act agentially (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000). As such, taking into account the concerns expressed over the increasing pressures facing young people in contemporary society, and the problematisation of various youth behaviours, it examines the extent to which young people shape and are shaped by their experiences in a number of interrelating social contexts. The research upon which this account is based focuses on a notion of identity that is ephemeral, reflexive, and embodied, and examines the experiences of young people in five intersecting social sites that were identified from the literature as important contexts for individuals' constructions of identities: family, peers, school, media, and physical culture. These social arenas are likened to Bourdieu's notion of fields, and are perceived to be structured spaces in which the development of an appropriate habitus and the possession of relevant capital can help to determine an individual's practice and position within them. Data were generated through a series of focus group discussions with four groups of five young people (ten boys and ten girls) from three schools in the Midlands. The young people were selected from a larger sample that had been surveyed and clustered in relation to their motivation to physical activity, and each group comprised an individual from each cluster. The focus group sessions involved semi-structured conversations in addition to a program of activity-based research tasks, and culminated in the creation of individual identity posters. The taped conversations and material information generated through the focus group sessions were then collated, and a grounded theory approach was employed in the thematic analysis of the data. A number of analytic strategies such as coding, memos, and conceptual mapping were utilised within this process, and, in association with a consideration of the conceptual tools of field, habitus, practice, and capital, contributed to the development of theory. Within the thesis, the five main analysis chapters presented the key themes in relation to each field, and highlighted the identity

work that the participants engaged in within each of these social sites. The chapters map out the structure and practices of each field, and examine their influences on the young people's attempts to construct understandings of self. The final chapter of the thesis then attempts to summarise the findings of these previous analysis chapters, and examine them in relation to the central research questions that guided and underpinned the study. As such, the repetition of core themes, such as the management and presentation of self, a desire for autonomy and respect, and a tension within a dialect of conformity and resistance, were identified as significant aspects of young people's social practices. Additionally, the evident overlaps between the different contexts indicated the complex configuration of fields within the experiences of young people. In relation to this issue, the final chapter focuses in particular on how the fields configured for the young people in relation to the field of physical culture, as this was identified in the study as a primary site for the construction of embodied identities. Having presented these key findings, the thesis concludes with a discussion of the implications for those working with and for young people, and for the design and implementation of youth policies, particularly in relation to the area of physical activity.



# Publications and Conference Presentations

## Journals

Gorely, T., Holroyd, R. & Kirk, D. (in press) Muscularity, the Habitus and the Social Construction of Gender: Towards a Gender-relevant Physical Education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.

## Conference Presentations

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Holroyd, R. (2001) Identities under Construction: School as a Core Field for Generating an Understanding of Self in Young People, *Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference, Leeds, September 2001.*

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Holroyd, R. (2002) 'Body Work': Physical Capital, Habitus and the Field of School, *Paper presented at British Educational Research Association Conference, Exeter, September 2002.*

## Book Reviews.

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Holroyd, R. (2002) Book Review. Tait, G. (2000) Youth, Sex and Government, in *Journal of Youth Studies*, 5(1).

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	i
<b>Publications and Conference Presentations</b>	iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	v
<b>Table of Contents</b>	vi
<b>Chapter One</b>	
<b>Fields of Experience: Young People and the Production of Embodied Identities</b>	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 OUTLINING A PRECEDENT FOR THE STUDY	1
1.2.1 Young People’s Construction of Identities Within Contemporary Society.....	1
1.2.2 The Problematisation of Youth Transitions.....	2
1.2.3 A Concern with Young People’s Participation in Physical Activity.....	3
1.2.4 Emphasising Young People’s Agency.....	4
1.2.5 Introducing the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	5
1.2.6 An Outline of the Methodology.....	6
1.3 INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	8
1.4 AN OVERVIEW AND CONTENT OF THE CHAPTERS	10
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
<b>An Introduction to the Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study</b>	16
2.1 INTRODUCTION	16
2.2 CONCEPTUALISING THE NOTION OF IDENTITY	17
2.2.1 The Historical Development of Identity.....	17
2.2.2 The Socially Constructed Body.....	19
2.2.3 Identity in Adolescence.....	20
2.2.4 Summary.....	21
2.3 A GENERAL OUTLINE OF BOURDIEU’S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	22
2.4 FIELDS	23
2.4.1 A Network of Interrelating Contexts Comprising the Social Landscape.....	24
2.4.2 Sites of Struggle and Competition for Available Resources.....	25
2.5 HABITUS	27
2.5.1 Habitus as ‘Embodied Sensibility’.....	27
2.5.2 A More Dynamic Approach To Habitus.....	28
2.6 PRACTICE	30
2.6.1 ‘Practical Sense’.....	30
2.6.2 Social Reproduction Through Practice.....	31
2.7 CAPITAL	32
2.7.1 The Distribution of Capital.....	32
2.7.2 The Forms of Capital.....	33
2.7.3 The Conversion of Capital.....	33
2.8 MAPPING THE SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE FIELDS	34



2.8.1	Family.....	35
2.8.2	Peers.....	36
2.8.3	School.....	38
2.8.4	Media.....	39
2.8.5	Physical Culture.....	41
2.9	SUMMARY	43
<b>Chapter Three</b>		
<b>Navigating a Middle Way: Methodological Issues and Considerations</b>		46
3.1	INTRODUCTION	46
3.2	ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESEARCH: Empowering Competent Social Agents	48
3.3	THE SCHOOL AS A RESEARCH SITE: Social Interaction, Cultural Practices and Institutional Habits	51
3.4	THE MOTIVATION AND SELF PERCEPTION SURVEY	53
3.4.1	Composition of the Questionnaire.....	54
3.4.2	Questionnaire Procedures.....	56
3.4.3	Description of the Cluster Groups.....	57
3.4.4	Summary: The Potential Value of the Cluster Groupings.....	58
3.5	EMPLOYING A FOCUS GROUP APPROACH: ‘A Dynamic, Interpersonal Process’	59
3.6	EMPLOYING PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES: Various Considerations	63
3.7	INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH TASKS	64
3.7.1	‘Identity Posters’/‘Personal Web Page’.....	65
3.7.2	Ice Breaker.....	65
3.7.3	Journals.....	66
3.7.4	Topic Discussion Task.....	67
3.7.5	Time-Space Maps.....	67
3.7.6	Magazine Exploration.....	68
3.7.7	Summary.....	69
3.8	REFLEXIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS	70
3.8.1	Positioning Myself in the Study.....	70
3.8.2	The Emergent and Dynamic Nature of the Research Process.....	72
3.8.3	The Development of Research Questions.....	74
3.8.4	Tapping the Participants’ Interests.....	75
3.9	THE ANALYSIS OF DATA	76
3.9.1	An Explanation of a Grounded Theory Approach.....	77
3.9.2	Data Generation and Analysis: An Interrelated Process.....	78
3.9.3	The Use of Codes and Memos.....	78
3.9.4	An Illustrative Example.....	80
3.9.5	Conceptual Mapping.....	83
3.10	MOVING INTO THE ANALYSIS CHAPTERS	84

<b>Chapter Four</b>	
<b>'Who You Are, What You Are, and Why You Are It': The Influence of the Familial Field on the Construction of Identities</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.2 FAMILIAL IDENTITY: 'They made you who you are...well part of you'</b>	<b>88</b>
4.2.1 A Complex, Intricate and Dynamic Field.....	88
4.2.2 Constructing Familial Identity: the 'official', the 'biological', and the 'social'...	88
<b>4.3 SOCIALISING WITHIN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'family time'</b>	<b>92</b>
4.3.1 The Changing Structure of Family Life.....	92
4.3.2 Socialising Practices within the Family.....	93
<b>4.4 THE GENERATION GAP IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'sometimes they just don't understand'</b>	<b>94</b>
4.4.1 Generational Issues as a Significant Challenge.....	94
4.4.2 To Be (or Not to Be) Children?.....	96
<b>4.5 FAMILIAL INFLUENCE: 'taking after'</b>	<b>97</b>
4.5.1 The Circle of Life?: becoming like your parents.....	97
4.5.2 A Practical Influence: passing on skills.....	99
4.5.3 Influencing Tastes and Values.....	100
<b>4.6 THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'you always act around different people in different ways'</b>	<b>102</b>
4.6.1 A Place of Comfort.....	102
4.6.2 Managing the Self in the Familial Field.....	105
<b>4.7 SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: Conflict, Competition and Companionship</b>	<b>108</b>
4.7.1 The Nature of Sibling Interactions.....	108
4.7.2 Role Models or Rivals?.....	110
<b>4.8 REGULATION AND AUTHORITY OF PARENTS IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'they tell you what you can and can't do'</b>	<b>111</b>
4.8.1 The 'House Rules'.....	111
4.8.2 Being Hypocritical or Employing Double Standards.....	114
4.8.3 Parental Control over Financial Issues.....	115
4.8.4 Over-Commitment to the Parental Role: a concern for present and future security.....	116
<b>4.9 SUMMARY</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Chapter Five</b>	
<b>'Standing Out' and 'Fitting In': Contradictions and Complexities in the Field of Peers</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>5.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>5.2 PEERS AS A SUPPORT NETWORK: 'I mean, what would you do without your friends?'</b>	<b>123</b>
5.2.1 Friends as a Source of Social Comfort or Emotional Security.....	123
5.2.2 Peers as a Source of Affirmation and Advice.....	125
5.2.3 An Additional Need for Personal Space.....	126



5.3 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF PEERS AND FAMILY: ‘with your friends you can do what you like’	127
5.3.1 The Degree of Association between the Fields.....	127
5.3.2 The Field of Peers: an opportunity to act agentically?.....	129
5.4 RULES AND REGULATIONS IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: ‘normal is nothing too extreme...you just stay quiet and go along with the crowd’	131
5.4.1 The Field of Peers as a Structured Space with Norms and Ideals.....	131
5.4.2 ‘Normal’, ‘Different’, ‘Cool’ or ‘Sad’: positioning individuals in the field of peers.....	132
5.4.3 The Perceived Danger of Non-Conformity.....	135
5.5 PRESENTING THE SELF IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: ‘it’s all pretence really’	137
5.5.1 Conforming to the Perceived Expectations of Others.....	137
5.5.2 The Management of Behaviour.....	139
5.5.3 The Management of Appearance.....	140
5.5.4 The Practice of Comparing Self with Others.....	142
5.6 DIVERSE FRIENDSHIPS IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: ‘we have busy lives you know’	143
5.6.1 A Dynamic and Multi-Contextual Field.....	143
5.6.2 Constructing Friendships in the Field of School.....	145
5.6.3 An Increasing Perception of Shared Tastes and Interests.....	146
5.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF A SHARED PAST IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: ‘do you remember when...?’	149
5.7.1 The Use of Narrative to Construct Self.....	149
5.7.2 The Significance of Shared Experiences.....	150
5.7.3 Using Stories to Revisit and Reminisce Past Experiences.....	151
5.8 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: ‘getting on, showing off, and going out’	152
5.8.1 The Nature of Male and Female Friendships.....	152
5.8.2 The Intricacies of Male-Female Friendships.....	153
5.8.3 Conformity to Gender Stereotypes.....	155
5.9 THE USE OF HUMOUR IN THE FIELD OF PEERS	157
5.9.1 The Veneration of Humour in the Peer Group.....	157
5.9.2 ‘Taking the Mick’.....	158
5.10 SUMMARY	161
<b>Chapter Six</b>	
<b>‘Blue Tights and Friday Pants’: Freedom and Constraint in the Field of School</b>	<b>163</b>
6.1 INTRODUCTION	163
6.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: ‘I think that school is way different’	164
6.2.1 An ‘Artificial’ Environment.....	164
6.2.2 A Space of Structured Positions.....	165

6.3 THE REGULATION OF BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: ‘Playing the Game’	167
6.3.1 The Hidden Curriculum.....	167
6.3.2 Developing a ‘School Relevant Habitus’.....	168
6.3.3 Teacher/Student Relations.....	169
6.4 THE REGULATION OF TIME IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: ‘it takes all your time up’	170
6.4.1 A ‘Defining Feature of Schooling’.....	170
6.4.2 The Embodiment of Time Regulations.....	171
6.4.3 The ‘School Time’ / ‘Free Time’ Distinction.....	173
6.5 THE SCHOOL FIELD AS A SITE FOR LEARNING: ‘it educates you’	175
6.5.1 A Site for Accumulating Capital.....	175
6.5.2 A Need to Achieve: School and Familial Pressure.....	176
6.5.3 The Role of the School in Structuring Opportunities: reproducing inequalities?..	178
6.5.4 The School Ethos: an influential or inhibiting factor?.....	180
6.6 SCHOOL UNIFORM AND THE REGULATION OF BODIES: ‘it’s like a badge that identifies you’	181
6.6.1 The Embodiment of School Identity.....	181
6.6.2 Conformity or Resistance?.....	183
6.6.3 Regulated Freedom: ‘Own-Clothes Days’.....	185
6.7 THE REGULATION OF SPACE IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: ‘it’s like a prison, ain’t it’	187
6.7.1 Determining the Boundaries of the Field.....	187
6.7.2 The Explicit and Implicit Regulation of Space.....	188
6.7.3 Creating Space within the Field of School.....	190
6.8 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF SCHOOL AND PEERS: ‘it’s a place where you see all of your friends’	190
6.8.1 The Role of School in Structuring and Nurturing Friendships.....	190
6.8.2 The Significance of Shared Experiences: a collective school identity.....	192
6.8.3 Gender Issues within Peer Interactions in School.....	193
6.9 CONTRADICTING VIEWS OF THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: ‘the best times of your life?’	194
6.9.1 Ambivalent Attitudes.....	194
6.9.2 A Dialect of Conformity and Resistance.....	195
6.9.3 A Love-Hate Relationship?.....	196
6.10 SUMMARY	196
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	
<b>‘It’s Just like There all the Time’: The Pervasive Influence of the Media Field in Shaping Young People’s Social Experiences</b>	<b>199</b>
7.1 INTRODUCTION	199
7.2 THE CENTRALITY OF THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘it’s just like there all the time...you’re just like susceptible to it’	200
7.2.1 The Pervasive Nature of the Media Field.....	200
7.2.2 Informed Consumers of Popular Culture.....	202



7.3 THE MEDIA FIELD FOR COMMUNICATION: ‘if I don’t have (my phone) then I feel that I’ve like lost contact with everyone’	203
7.3.1 Mobile Communication.....	203
7.3.2 Computer Literate Individuals.....	205
7.3.3 Identities ‘Under Construction’.....	206
7.4 THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘it’s a fact that...’	208
7.4.1 Being Informed by Media Resources.....	208
7.4.2 The Value of Media Generated Information within the Peer Group.....	210
7.5 THE PROMOTION OF IMAGE IN THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘what you should wear or how you should look’	212
7.5.1 An Image Saturated Era.....	212
7.5.2 Being Fashion Conscious.....	212
7.5.3 Affiliation to Image Cultures and the Construction of Self.....	214
7.5.4 ‘Grebos’ vs. ‘Townies’.....	215
7.6 THE PROMOTION/REPRODUCTION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘no matter what people say, everybody judges people by they was they look’	218
7.6.1 Conforming to Gender Stereotypes regarding Image.....	218
7.6.2 ‘Normal’ Male Behaviour: the boys’ objectification of women.....	218
7.6.3 ‘Normal’ Female Behaviour: the girls’ concern with image.....	219
7.6.4 The Girls’ Reading of the Media Field: ambivalence regarding the perceived degree of influence.....	221
7.7 CELEBRITIES AND ROLE MODELS IN THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘people you model yourself on’	224
7.7.1 The Value and Appeal of Role Models.....	224
7.7.2 Identifying and Selecting Role Models.....	226
7.7.3 A Desire to be Famous.....	228
7.8 RESISTANCE AND/OR CONFORMITY IN THE MEDIA FIELD?: Being ‘Cool’ not ‘Sad’	229
7.8.1 Conformity to Peer Norms and Ideals in the Media Field.....	229
7.8.2 Peer Use of the Media as Resistance to Adult Authority.....	231
7.8.3 Negotiating Resistance and Conformity.....	232
7.9 ‘DECEIVED DUPES’ OR ‘CLUED-UP CONSUMERS’?: ‘you have to go by fashion, well you don’t <i>have</i> to...’	233
7.9.1 Young People as ‘Deceived Dupes’.....	233
7.9.2 Young People as ‘Clued-Up’ Consumers’.....	235
7.9.3 Not Gullible but Ultra-Responsive?.....	236
7.10 SUMMARY	237
<b>Chapter Eight</b>	
<b>‘Love It’ or ‘Hate It’?: The Role of Habitus and the Configuration of Fields in Shaping Young People’s Perceptions of Physical Culture</b>	240
<b>8.1 INTRODUCTION</b>	240

8.2 THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AS A SITE FOR CONSTRUCTING A SENSE OF SELF: 'it's kind of my life'	241
8.2.1 Constructing Understandings of Self in the Field of Physical Culture.....	241
8.2.2 The Development of Habitus in the Field of Physical Culture.....	245
8.3 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AND FAMILY: 'I've been brought up just liking and playing sport'	246
8.3.1 Familial Influences on Young People's Interests in the Field of Physical Culture.....	246
8.3.2 The Role of Economic Capital in Shaping Engagements with the Field of Physical Culture.....	248
	250
8.4 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AND PEERS: 'it's quite a social thing to do'	250
8.4.1 Making Friends in the Field of Physical Culture.....	252
8.4.2 The Value of Physical Capital in the Peer Group.....	253
8.4.3 Some Gender Issues.....	255
8.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOTHING IN THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE: 'whatever you do kind of shapes how you dress'	255
8.5.1 The Association between the Fields of Peers, Media and Physical Culture.....	256
8.5.2 Clothing and Accessories as Physical Capital.....	259
8.5.3 Using Clothing Tastes and Appearance to Position Others.....	261
8.5.4 Economic Capital as a Determinant of Physical Capital.....	
8.6 THE CONSTRUCTION OF EMBODIED IDENTITIES IN THE FIELDS OF SCHOOL AND PHYSICAL CULTURE: 'you do compare yourself to others'	261
8.6.1 The Field of Physical Culture as a Primary Site for the Construction of Embodied Identities.....	261
8.6.2 Physical Education as a Connection between the Fields of School and Physical Culture.....	263
8.6.3 A Negative Experience?.....	263
8.7 FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE: 'I think you should just do whatever you want'	265
8.7.1 The Significance of being Self-Determining.....	265
8.7.2 School Physical Education as Competitive and Prescriptive.....	267
8.8 GENDER ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE: 'the lads are like, 'you can't play football!'	269
8.8.1 The Field of Physical Culture: A domain for the boys?.....	269
8.8.2 Gender Appropriate Activities.....	270
8.8.3 Challenging Gender Stereotypes.....	271
8.9 SUMMARY	273
<b>Chapter Nine</b>	
<b>'What's All of this For Then?': Summarising the Key Findings and Implications of the Study</b>	275
9.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER	275



<b>9.2 THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF FIELDS</b>	<b>277</b>
<b>9.3 OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD ANALYSIS CHAPTERS</b>	<b>278</b>
9.3.1 Family.....	278
9.3.2 Peers.....	279
9.3.3 School.....	280
9.3.4 Media.....	281
9.3.5 Physical Culture.....	282
<b>9.4 THE CONFIGURATIONS AND INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FIELDS</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>9.5 YOUNG PEOPLE’S CONSTRUCTION OF EMBODIED IDENTITIES</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>9.6 THE MANAGEMENT OF SELF: Becoming Endowed with the Habitus</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>9.7 LEARNING LESSONS, MAKING PROGRESS, MOVING FORWARD:</b>	<b>288</b>
Implications of the Study	
9.7.1 Young People as Skilled Agents in a Multi-Dimensional Social Space.....	288
9.7.2 The Significance of the Field of Physical Culture.....	289
9.7.3 Implications for Physical Education.....	290
9.7.4 Critiquing the Use of Motivational Constructs.....	291
<b>9.8 SUMMARY</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>295</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>341</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>350</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>358</b>

# Chapter One

## Fields of Experience: Young People and the Production of Embodied Identities

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses the complexities of the identity formation process for young people in contemporary society, and explores and examines the extent to which an individual's experiences within a number of core social spaces can influence their understandings of self. Acknowledging the current concern over the numerous pressures facing individuals in a complex social world, and following a growing trend towards recognising young people as skilled social actors capable of agential action, it represents a multidimensional, reflexive, and constructive approach to the study of youth lifestyles. The study itself focuses upon the experiences of twenty young people, which were articulated and discussed within a number of semi-structured, and task-based focus group meetings and individual interviews. Through an interpretive analysis of the data generated by these participants, the thesis provides an insight into the structure and organisation of young people's social worlds and the ways in which their various experiences impact upon their construction of embodied identities. The purpose of this introductory chapter is primarily three-fold. To provide a review of the major literature and research that provides a precedent for this study, to introduce the five key research questions that have guided and underpinned this research, and, finally, to outline the focus, structure and content of the subsequent chapters.

### 1.2 OUTLINING A PRECEDENT FOR THE STUDY

#### *1.2.1 Young People's Construction of Identities within Contemporary Society*

There is a long history to the interest of individuals in the notion of identity, and the concept has been heavily theorised over time with many researchers looking to understand its complex nature. Historically regarded as a single identifiable entity, pre-determined and fixed from birth, recent theorists of identity perceive it not as a



solid concept that is lodged within the mind, but as a transient and embodied notion, multidimensional by nature, and determined in part by situation and context (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993a; Shilling, 1993). In other words, the concept of identity is an ephemeral construction, a reflexive process increasingly linked to the body, and susceptible to change in relation to an individual's fluctuating social experiences. The focus upon the notion of identity is of particular relevance in relation to young people as the period of youth, more specifically adolescence, is traditionally considered a significant time in the identity formation process (Hendry *et al*, 1993). However, as a period in which individuals make the complex transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescence can also be perceived as a time in which young people are susceptible to crises in their identity constructions (Erikson, 1968). A period of new experiences and challenges characterised by both increased responsibilities and freedom, the many different factors that impact young people at this time can be seen to shape, in part, their tastes, values, beliefs, and personal understandings of self. A number of authors have expressed concern that, in recent times, the extension of this transitional phase, in which young people are held between the restrictions of childhood and the increased freedom of adulthood for longer periods of time, has meant that the social experiences of youth are now characterised by contradiction and confusion (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Smith, 2000). Indeed, the literature in this area itself appears to be divided between perceiving a disappearance of childhood on the one hand (Postman, 1994), and a prolonged period of youth on the other (Kelly, 1999). In each case, however, there is a common underlying issue relating to the blurring of boundaries between child and adult. The increased reflexivity and individualisation of modern life, which is seen to have 'dissolved' the traditional parameters of pre-modern societies relating to patterns of social reproduction, is itself perceived to have compounded this problem and increased the complexity of the identity formation process for young people (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992).

### ***1.2.2 The Problematisation of Youth Transitions***

The contemporary problematisation of youth transitions, epitomised perhaps in the move from school to work, has led to a growing perception of 'youth-at-risk' (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Kelly, 1999, 2001; Tait, 2000), and has intensified the regulation of,



and the intervention in, youth practices and behaviours by authoritative powers. Such a situation is evidence in itself of a capillarisation of power within contemporary society, and a shift in the locus of control from external to internal (Foucault, 1991). According to Tait (2000), this has resulted in a pervasive condition of governmentality, in which young people are encouraged to engage in self-shaping practices in order to comply with societal norms. Youth research has often been characterised by the notion of youth as a problem, a perception that was central to many of the sub-cultural theories, in particular, and often promoted and reproduced through media representations (Willis, 1990; Garratt, 1997). Such a 'moral panic' of youth, which tends to focus on the notions of either 'youth-in-trouble' or 'youth-as-trouble', can also be seen to underpin concerns relating to a number of youth practices in contemporary society. For example, the problematisation of youth unemployment or youth crime, as well as young people's involvement in unhealthy or anti-social behaviours such as underage sex, drinking, smoking, or drug use, among others, are all apparent causes for concern. Moreover, they are perceived to point to a need for intervention programs designed to provide young people with appropriate guidance towards achieving the skills, values, and attitudes required to make successful and acceptable transitions to adulthood. Such a situation has significant implications for an individual's constructions of self, although there is now a growing recognition that young people are not only influenced by external factors but can also actively manage their presentation of self in different social contexts. Researchers have suggested, for example, that young people are not completely bound by external regulation, and that the very notion of an increased individualisation in contemporary society can be seen to raise significant questions concerning the links between social structures and individual agency (Wyn & Dwyer, 1999). This notion is supported by a increasing body of evidence to suggest that young people in contemporary society are exercising agency that allows them to maintain their own aspirations, despite the persistence of structural influences in their lives.

### ***1.2.3 A Concern with Young People's Participation in Physical Activity***

As has been shown, then, contemporary society has witnessed an increasing concern over a number of youth practices seen to challenge and contradict dominant societal notions of appropriate or healthy behaviour. In recent years there has also been



growing concern that young people around the age of adolescence are becoming less involved with physical activity, and some research has highlighted the dangers of an inactive lifestyle at such an important stage of development (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Armstrong & McManus 1994; Kremer *et al*, 1997). The significance of these findings are perhaps particularly pertinent in relation to this study, given the perceived potential for an individual's participation in sport and physical activities to influence their identity constructions.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is a growing body of literature to suggest that the field of physical culture can be a primary site for the construction of embodied identities (e.g. Vertinsky, 1992; Kivel, 1998; Kirk, 1999c; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). Such concerns with the health of young people has lead to a number of studies designed to uncover more about this complex area, and to develop and implement intervention programs intended to impact young people's attitudes towards their involvement with physical activities. It was my own involvement with the data generation phase of one such study, the Nike/Youth Sport Trust 'Girls in Sport' partnership (Kirk *et al*, 2000), that helped to form the basic conception of this study. For, while it was clear through the conversations that I had with the young people involved in that study that there were structural factors that influenced their experiences of physical culture, it was equally evident that the individual's themselves were actively involved in shaping their social practices. Moreover, the interviews with these young people indicated the degree to which they were skilled in the process of managing their constructions of self within a number of contrasting social arenas.

#### ***1.2.4 Emphasising Young People's Agency***

This research experience thus generated an interest in the different social worlds that comprise young people's social landscapes, and a concern with how their engagements with these sites, which can be seen to have often contradictory elements of structure and organisation, contributed to their construction of embodied identities and management of self. In examining potential ways to explore these issues in more detail, I was then drawn to a body of contemporary literature relating to youth research that seemed to reaffirm the need for a deeper consideration of this area, and which further shaped and inspired the conceptualisation of the study. For example, the growing recognition that young people's daily lives are characterised by engagements with a number of social worlds has led researchers to call for multi-dimensional



approaches to the study of youth identities and lifestyles, as well as a detailed examination of the influences of their experiences within these social spaces (Brettschneider, 1992; Hendry *et al*, 1998; Kivel, 1998). Furthermore, recent shifts within the social studies of childhood literature have seen a move away from theoretical frameworks that perceive young people as a homogenous social group, positioned simply as objects of research, to more reflexive approaches that acknowledge them as skilled and competent social agents (Alderson, 1995; James & Prout, 1997; James *et al*, 1998; Christensen & James, 2000). Within these approaches there is an acknowledgement that actively engaging young people within the research process can both facilitate the generation of rich data, and provide a liberating and empowering experience for young people (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Punch, 2002a). Making spaces for young people to express, articulate, and examine their social experiences through the research process, was thus established as a central concern of this study.

### ***1.2.5 Introducing the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework***

Taking into account the information generated within, and my experiences of, the 'Girls in Sport' study, as well as the wealth of complementary literature in this area, five contexts were identified from research as important sites in which young people construct a sense of self; family, peers, school, media and physical culture. I intend to make no claim here for originality in identifying each individual area as an important influence, indeed a vast body of evidence exists in support of them and several researchers have linked two or three (e.g. Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Hendry *et al*, 1993; Livingston, 1996; Kremer *et al*, 1997; Obidah, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999). However, I do suggest that it is in combination that they most accurately reflect the complex social worlds of young people, and hence can make a useful contribution to this area of study. These five core contexts, then, have formed the backbone of this study, in effect providing a structure around which the data could be generated and organised. The relationships between these social spaces offered a particular point of interest, and through a detailed analysis of the generated data it was intended that a greater understanding of these configurations would be achieved.



Employing elements of the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the core contexts are viewed as fields, i.e. social spaces in which young people conduct aspects of their daily experience. In addition the notions of habitus, practice, and capital are applied to those behaviours and skills required for movement between and within fields, and together these concepts interact to determine an individual's practice (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1986). The notion of fields is useful in relation to this study as it recognises the transient boundaries of the core contexts, their pervasive influence and dynamic nature. As a sociological approach it also allows the relationships between agents to be observed. Perhaps the main relevance of Bourdieu's work, however, is the notion of habitus, as the process by which the social is written into the corporeal (Jenkins, 1992; Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). In this way Bourdieu helps to see the link between social environment, agent, and, most importantly, their understanding of identity. Bourdieu's theories have been used extensively within social research, increasingly so in recent years (Clement, 1995; Defrance, 1995), but surprisingly has rarely been employed directly to understand the social experiences of young people. The proposed study intends to highlight the use of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field in particular, in relation to its ability to provide a greater insight into the interrelationships apparent within the social practices of young people. The value of regarding the social world as a 'multi-dimensional space' (Bourdieu, 1985b) in this way, is that it allows for the fact that 'young people have many identities and live within a variety of contexts – all of which contribute to their development of self' (Kivel, 1998 pp. 38). Indeed, researchers are now beginning to suggest that in order to better understand the lifestyle experiences of young people, it is essential to take account of the various social spaces that constitute their day to day lives (e.g. Hendry *et al*, 1998). This is particularly significant in relation to the notion of embodied identity, when it is considered that the particular environments that comprise an individual's social experience can be seen to influence the body, and induce certain dispositions or habits (Bourdieu, 1984; Laberge, 1995).

### ***1.2.6 An Outline of the Methodology***

This study sought to explore the relationships between these five fields primarily through a qualitative, interpretive approach, although a combination of both qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed within the methodological

framework in order to examine more closely both the structural and agential influences that shape young people's social experiences. Moreover, the multi-method research design was seen to provide an opportunity to transcend the rigid and restrictive dichotomy of research methods through the fusion of epistemological and methodological approaches (Hammersley, 1992; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), and the generation of rich data that allow for a constructive examination of the study's key concerns. This approach is intended to allow the participants an opportunity to explore and articulate their social experiences, and to contribute, in part, to a critical analysis of the influence of their social practices on their constructions of self (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). The participants themselves were selected and stratified into four smaller groups, each comprising five individuals, on the basis of their motivation to participate in physical activity, using the clusters developed in the 'Motivation and Self-Perception Survey' (Wang & Biddle, 2001). The decision to utilise this survey was made, in part, because it led directly on from the work conducted for the 'Girls in Sport' project and offered an opportunity to further study the young people in each of the five cluster groups, as well as the use of motivational determinants to classify young people's dispositions. More specifically, however, in grouping young people in relation to their tastes and interests, more specifically their motivation towards participating in physical activity, it was also seen to offer a potential insight into the development of an individual's habitus.

These smaller collectives became the venues for a series of semi-structured focus group discussions (Lewis, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morgan, 1997), in which the participants engaged in a number of activity-based research tasks designed to prompt, in particular, a discussion, consideration, and critique of their experiences of the five core fields. Following a process of collation, adaptation, and innovation of a number of participatory research methods, a protocol for the study was established that included the techniques of journal writing (Nesbitt, 2000; Punch, 2001), magazine exploration (Oliver & Lalik, 2000), and the construction of time-space maps (Christensen & James, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Punch, 2002b), and led to the construction by each participant of an 'identity poster'. It was intended that through this semi-structured approach the study would generate accurate and specific data pertinent to the central aims of the study. The data generated through these group discussions were, in some cases, examined more closely through individual



interviews, and then, in every case, analysed thematically, and with a consideration of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, through a grounded theory approach.

### 1.3 INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I have proposed that the underlying purpose of this study is to shed light on the ways in which young people come to generate understandings of self in a number of social contexts, and to identify the social factors that shape and influence this process. An additional aim is to determine whether this information can explain in some way the choices, attitudes and behaviours of the participants involved in this study, and, if so, what implications there may be for those involved in research, practice, and policy development with and for young people. In particular, the inclusion within the study of the field of physical culture, which as this discussion has shown has been identified by a number of authors as a primary site in which embodied identities are constructed, raises significant questions concerning the nature of interventions intended to promote participation in physical activity among young people. Given this outline of the project, and bearing these fundamental issues in mind, a number of points of interest are central when considering the specific aims of this research project. Broadly speaking, these are reducible to three core objectives, which represent the primary focus of the study. Firstly, my aim is to explore the ways in which the young people involved in the study negotiated their social experiences within a number of core fields; family, school, peers, media, and physical culture. Secondly, I will inquire into the sources of knowledge that informed and influenced the participants within these fields, and assess the impact on the ways in which they constructed and managed their understandings of self. Finally, I intend to consider the implications of these influences for those involved with youth research, practice, or policy, particularly in relation to the development of effective and constructive programs and interventions intended to provide a positive and inspirational experience for young people within physical activity.

More specifically, however, there are five key questions that focus upon particular elements of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, and which have guided and underpinned each phase of the research process. These are now outlined

below, and in each case the primary concern is followed by a number of secondary questions that articulate more precisely the aims and intentions of the research objective.

### **Research Question 1**

*What do the participants' experiences show in relation to how the five fields are structured and organised?*

What allows or signifies membership of the fields?

Who holds the positions of power or legitimacy within the various fields?

What behaviour is required of the members of this field, and how does this influence the development of habitus?

What forms of capital are central to the practices of the fields, and how can they be acquired, accumulated, and converted by individuals engaging with each social context?

### **Research Question 2**

*What patterns, relationships, or configurations exist between the five fields?*

*Are there similarities or differences between individuals?*

If so, are these related to gender, social status, or cluster group?

Are (any of) these configurations dynamic or stable?

Is there a hierarchy of importance and are some fields more pervasive than others?

What reasons may there be for these findings?

### **Research Question 3**

*How can the findings of the study contribute to an understanding of the ways in which young people come to construct embodied identities in a number of social contexts?*

How can they facilitate an understanding of the ways in which young people adopt particular tastes, values and beliefs?

Can this help to explain young people's choices concerning their participation in physical activities?



**Research Question 4**

*Does the habitus that an individual develops contribute to an 'authentic' construction of self, or merely a 'persona' (e.g. Goffman, 1990b; Maffesoli, 1996) adopted to satisfy the needs of a particular field?*

(How) do young people alter their behaviour in order to fit into a particular field?

To what extent is this a conscious or unconscious decision?

**Research Question 5**

*What are the implications of this study for those engaged in research, practice, or policy development with and for young people?*

How might the information generated through this study influence the formation of policies intended to promote and increase physical activity participation among young people?

**1.4 AN OVERVIEW AND CONTENT OF THE CHAPTERS**

As this chapter has shown, then, the study is concerned broadly with the processes by which young people come to construct multidimensional embodied identities within a number of interrelated social contexts that are likened to Bourdieu's (1985b) notion of fields. With a theoretical framework that allows for a consideration of the influences of the interrelationship and interdependency of social structures and individual agency, the study examines the extent to which young people shape and are shaped by their engagements with the fields of family, peers, school, media, and physical culture. In order to do this it has drawn heavily upon the experiences of twenty young people, aged thirteen to fifteen years, that were articulated, explored, and examined within a series of task-based focus group and individual interviews. In analysing the data generated by the participants, the aim of the study has been, firstly, to contribute to a theoretical and conceptual understanding of young people's social experiences within contemporary society and the influence of these on their construction, management, and presentation of self. Additionally, it has intended to examine the implications of the findings of the study for those involved with research, practice, or policy development with and for young people, particularly in relation to the promotion of physical activity.

Having thus outlined some of the core issues in this introductory chapter, the thesis progresses in chapter two to a more detailed examination of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study. A discussion of the concepts that are central to this study is provided, with a review of major literature and research pertaining to the social construction of embodied identities helping to support this formal theory. Beginning with an overview of the conceptualisation of identity as a dynamic, reflexive, and embodied notion within contemporary society, the chapter moves on to a brief outline of Bourdieu's theoretical framework and an examination of its significance in relation to this study. In particular, I highlight his perception of the body as a site of social memory and his attempts to transcend the problematic structure-agency binary. A more detailed discussion of the conceptual tools of 'field', 'habitus', 'practice', and 'capital' then follows, along with an explanation of how these, together with the notion of positioning, are perceived to provide an effective framework for the analysis of young people's social experiences. The chapter closes by mapping out the 'social topography' of each of the highlighted fields (Bourdieu, 1985b), and presenting relevant literature to support their identification as significant social arenas in the day to day lives of young people.

Through this process of outlining the study's theoretical framework, the discussion in chapter two makes reference to the problematic nature of a study that attempts to examine simultaneously both individuals' practices and the structure of society, and hence circumvent the traditional objectivist-subjectivist divide. Debate surrounding this issue is continued into chapter three, which provides an overview of the methods, methodology, and epistemology utilised in the study and examines the complexities of an approach that attempts to transcend traditional paradigmatic boundaries. In order to account for the specific research design of the study, contemporary shifts in the theorising of young people and their role in the research process are first presented. In particular, the shift towards a more reflexive, inclusive, and constructive approach to the study of young people's social worlds, in which they themselves are positioned as active participants within the research process, is highlighted (Alderson, 1995; James & Prout, 1997; Christensen & James, 2000). The chapter then moves on to indicate how this approach can be seen to underpin both the choice of research techniques adopted within the study and the strategies employed for the analysis of data. As such, the discussion here provides an overview of the selection of research participants and



the rationale behind selecting the school as a research site, as well as identifying the quantitative and qualitative methods employed in the study and the specific techniques involved in the analysis of the data. In addition, a personal account of my experiences of the fieldwork phase of the study provides an indication as to the reflexive dimensions of the research, and is included in order to draw attention to the dynamic and emergent nature of the data generation process.

The next five chapters present an analysis of the data generated in relation to each of the five fields highlighted in the study. Taking each field in turn, the chapters identify core themes within the young people's discussions of these social arenas, and examine how the organisation and structure of each site, as well as the way in which individuals are positioned and position others within them, can be seen to influence their development of habitus and constructions of self. With reference to the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, and a specific focus on the key concepts of habitus, practice, capital and position, the participants' comments are examined in order to facilitate an understanding of their experiences within each of the core fields. Moreover, these chapters draw attention to key inter-relationships that exist between the fields, and their patterns and configurations within the social experiences of the participants. The complex and often contradictory structure of the fields is highlighted within these discussions, and is accompanied by a consideration of the impact that this has for the construction of dynamic, multidimensional, and embodied identities.

These analyses of data begin in chapter four with the familial field, which has been highlighted within the social studies of childhood literature as providing a significant influence in relation to young people's constructions of identity (James & Prout, 1997; Adler & Adler, 1998; Christensen & James, 2000). The importance of this social arena is examined in relation to the participants' comments regarding the family, the analysis of this data providing an insight into the role that this social site plays in shaping young people's understanding and management of self. As such it provides an opportunity to determine whether the relative stability of the structure of this field, and role that it is perceived to play in the reproduction of social and cultural norms, indeed means that it represents such a primary influence on the development of core beliefs, attitudes and values in the habitus.

Moving on from this discussion of the familial field, chapter five presents an analysis of the data relating to the field of peers and identifies the role that friends and friendships can be seen to play in shaping the participants' understandings of self. Through a discussion of the young people's direct comments relating to this field, as well as more covert references evident in both their conversations with and behaviour to one another, the chapter provides an indication of the structure and organisation of this complex social space and the participants' experiences within it. In doing so, it attempts to determine the degree to which peer groups and friendships are, as the literature suggests, central to the social security, comfort, and satisfaction of young people, and play a critical role in their acquisition of social identity and selfhood (e.g. Hendry *et al*, 1993; James, 1993; James & Prout, 1997; Adler & Adler, 1998).

Having examined the fields of family and peers, chapter six moves on to discuss the data that relates to a social site in which young people spend considerable amounts of time during their most developmental years; the field of school. As a heavily structured and regulated social arena, the school is seen to provide an interesting context to examine in relation to young people's construction of identities, particularly in the light of research highlighting the potential for individual's to assimilate and embody the norms, values, and ideals of their school environment (e.g. Kirk, 1998, 1999a). In exploring the young people's conflicting opinions regarding their school experiences, this chapter can be seen to focus in particular on the 'body work' that young people are encouraged to engage in, in order to conform to the rules of their particular institution. Bearing in mind the interrelated nature of fields, however, the discussion also draws attention to a number of significant and perceptible overlaps with the other analysis chapters.

In chapter seven attention turns to the media field, a pervasive social arena that is perceived to saturate daily life in contemporary society and function as a medium through which cultural norms and ideals can be produced, reproduced, and disseminated (Kellner, 1992; Ralph *et al*, 1999). Through an analysis of the major themes and issues evident within the data relating to this field, the chapter examines the influences that these potentially powerful media representations have on the young people's constructions of self. Consequently, the discussion also engages in a critique of the notion that young people are particularly vulnerable to media messages



(Messenger-Davies & Machin, 2000; Smith, 2000), and examines whether the participants can be perceived to be culturally duped by or consciously consume the information made available to them in media resources.

The final analysis chapter turns to a discussion of the field of physical culture, a context of specific significance to this study as it has been identified within a body of literature as a primary site for the construction of embodied identities (e.g. Kivel, 1998; Kirk, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). This chapter, then, is concerned with the extent to which the young people's involvement with various sports, physical activities and recreational practices can be seen to influence their understandings of self and their perceptions of bodily ideals or images. Given the wealth of research that exists in relation to physical culture practices within the school environment (e.g. Connell, 1983; Theberge, 1991; Vertinsky, 1992; Kirk, 1999a; Oliver & Lalik, 2000), particular attention is given to the participants' comments relating to school physical education, although the discussion here also includes significant references to each of the other core fields.

Finally, chapter nine draws upon the discussions of the previous eight chapters to provide a summary and overview of the entire thesis. In particular, it highlights the main findings of the five analysis chapters and discusses these in relation to the core research questions, presented in this chapter, which underpinned and guided the study. Through a synthesis of the literature and the information generated by the young people within the group and individual interviews, it presents an overview of the main characteristics of the nature and structure of fields. In relation to this, the chapter involves a brief recapitulation of the key themes and concerns relating to each of the core fields that were addressed within the analysis of data. The chapter then moves into a discussion of the significant patterns and interrelationships that were evident between the fields, with particular attention given to the configurations involving the field of physical culture for, as this discussion has shown, it has been identified as a primary site in which embodied identities are constructed. Bearing in mind the research that has pointed to the complex arrangements of fields within the social environments of the young people (e.g. Adler & Adler, 1998), the influence of these configurations on young people's construction of embodied identities and management of self were also considered. The thesis concludes by considering the

implications of these findings for those working with and for young people, and for the development of youth policies, particularly in relation to the promotion of physical activity. Following a consideration of the participants' role within the study, and with reference to the new social studies of childhood literature (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000), it is argued that young people should be acknowledged as competent, skilled, and agentic social actors and that their views be both sought and heard within research settings<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, in highlighting the significance of the field of physical culture for the construction of embodied identities, the chapter points to the perceived necessity for health educators, practitioners, and policy makers to ensure that young people's experiences within this social arena are positive.

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<sup>1</sup> A number of studies have pointed to the beneficial effects that physical activity participation can hold for young people during a period in their lives that Hendry *et al* (1993) have described as a peak time for leisure needs. Researchers such as Toner (1991) and Bammel and Burrus-Bammel (1996), for example, have discussed the potential for physical culture practices to influence the moral development of young people, a belief that underpinned much of the development of rule bound physical activity within English public schools in the 1900's (Mangan, 2000). In addition to these behavioural effects, researchers have pointed to the capacity for sport participation to have a positive psychological effect upon an individual's confidence and self-esteem (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997; Trew *et al*, 1999), ultimately leading to more constructive conceptions of body image and self (Coakley, 1994). The social nature of physical activities is also seen to play a role in this process, and a number of researchers are now beginning to recognise the significance of the sports arena as a site in which young people can establish social contacts and develop collective identities (Donnelly & Young, 1988; MacClancy, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps helpful here to qualify and contextualise this notion of competent youth. While acknowledging that young people are capable of successfully understanding social processes, engaging with others, and negotiating a complex terrain within their own social spheres, I do not wish to suggest that such abilities have equal currency within every social context. To do so would clearly fail to recognise factors such as the significance of lived experience, the potential for developing competencies, or parental responsibilities in relation to caring for their children, ensuring their safety, and regulating their behaviour. As such, this notion of 'competent youth' is not intended to imply that young people are capable of taking full responsibility for all decisions relating to their social practices, hence negating the need for adult supervision and guardianship, but rather to credit them with the ability to adequately interpret elements of their behaviour, articulate their experiences, and negotiate interactions with their contemporaries.



## Chapter Two

# An Introduction to the Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter builds upon the basic framework outlined in chapter one, and presents a more detailed examination of the theoretical concepts that are central to this study. It begins with an overview of the conceptualisation of identity, presenting an account of its historical development over time and highlighting the perceptible shift that has seen it move from being perceived as a stable and pre-given entity to a multidimensional, dynamic, and embodied concept. The changing structure and organisation of social life are highlighted as having contributed to this process, with the reflexivity and complexity characteristic of the current age leading to an increased significance of the body as a site and symbol of individual identity. The discussion briefly outlines the work of a number of theorists who have focused on a sociology of the body, and examines the way in which the socially constructed body has become firmly linked to the 'project' of self-identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993). It then moves on to look more specifically at young people's constructions of self, noting the research that has highlighted the adolescent period in particular as a significant period within the identity formation process. Having provided a brief review of literature relating to the concept of identity, the remaining sections of the chapter are given over to a more detailed description of the elements of Bourdieu's theory that are relevant to this study. The conceptual tools of fields, practice, habitus, and capital are all outlined and examined in relation to their ability to provide a constructive framework for analysing the social experiences of young people and their constructions of embodied identities. The chapter then closes by mapping out the 'social topography' of each of the five fields that are highlighted in this study, and indicating some of the research that identifies them as significant social arenas within young people's day to day lives.

## 2.2 CONCEPTUALISING THE NOTION OF IDENTITY

### 2.2.1 *The Historical Development of Identity*

It has been suggested that recent years have seen a 'veritable discursive explosion' regarding the notion of identity (Hall *et al*, 1999), and that, as a concept that is central to much social discourse and theory, it can now be regarded as a significant 'cornerstone' of the times (Jenkins, 1996; Van den Bulck, 2001). A fervent interest in the concept of 'identity' has been in evidence throughout history, although from a conceptual point of view the passing of the years has not been without effect. The term 'identity' is itself a relatively new one, coming into popular usage in academic literature during the 1940's (Weigert *et al*, 1986), and is derived from the Latin root *idem* meaning sameness and continuity. This choice of terminology is significant here, for it can be seen to reflect the traditional belief that the core of an individual's being was inherently determined at birth and remained relatively stable over the course of their life. Later theorists, however, disputed these views and moved the debate on from this Enlightenment view of a pre-determined inner self to acknowledge the potential influence of the social environment on the formation of identity. Encompassing a variety of theoretical viewpoints ranging from early symbolic interactionism (e.g. Cooley, 1962; Mead, 1934), to more recent psychological (e.g. Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Fox, 1997) and sociological approaches (e.g. Goffman, 1963; Giddens, 1991; Woodward, 1997), these theorists have sought to further understanding in relation to the nature and development of identities within contemporary society. The acknowledgement of a social influence has had a significant impact on the conceptualisation of identity, however, and has led over time to a gradual fragmentation of the notion (Hall *et al*, 1999). In other words, contemporary understandings of identity no longer perceived it to be a solid concept, but a complex, multidimensional notion that is influenced by both situation and context (Kellner, 1992).

Identity in pre-modern societies, then, was regarded as somewhat unproblematic, a pre-given entity not open to the revision or reflection espoused in the later sociological theories of theorists such as Giddens (1991) or Beck (1992), and certainly not something to be subject to crises (Erikson, 1968). In fact, crisis in identity is, some



have argued, a necessarily modern trait, for ‘only in a society anxious about identity, could the problems of personal identity, or self-identity, or identity crises arise and be subject to worry and debate’ (Kellner, 1992 p.143). Whether theorists support the notion of a post-modern order (Baudrillard, 1983; Foucault, 1991) or the concept of an advanced modernity (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), there is general agreement that contemporary life has been characterised by radical change (Ackroyd & Pilkington, 1999). A growing interconnectedness of societies, a transcendence of time and space, and a breaking down of traditional barriers has changed the nature of social groups, so that individuals are no longer bound so tightly to a local context or the progression of a clearly defined life cycle (Giddens, 1991; Maffesoli, 1996). It is argued that there is now an increased reflexivity to the nature of contemporary social life, whereby society is shaped and re-shaped as a result of individuals’ lived experiences (Giddens, 1990, 1991; Beck, 1992). Moreover, this reflexivity of modernity is perceived to extend to the self, and, as such, significant changes in the structure and organisation of social life can be seen to have important implications for individuals’ construction of identities. As Nettleton and Watson (1998) have noted:

‘Within post-traditional societies, our identities and our sense of self are not givens. That is, we can no longer hang on to, or derive our identity from our traditional place in society – be it class, family, gender, or locality. Rather our self and identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour.’ (p.6)

Due to structural and institutional changes, identity in the current age is no longer considered unified or stable, tied to traditional markers such as those cited above, but rather fragmented, dynamic and increasingly embodied (Hall *et al*, 1992). Social changes, then, have been accompanied by an increasing focus on the body as a medium through which to construct an understanding of self, although the contemporary perception of identity as embodied and socially constructed follows a series of societal shifts in relation to the way that the body has been perceived throughout history<sup>1</sup>. Indeed Turner (1996) has argued that his notion of a ‘somatic society’, which describes the current social climate in which we live, is intended to capture something of this significant historical dimension to the body in society. Whereas there is now such a fascination with the body in contemporary intellectual and popular discourse (Theberge, 1991), however, this has not always been the case.

As a number of researchers have noted, the body has been largely absent in sociological theory until relatively recently, save perhaps for a number of theorists influenced by the work of Foucault, although this state of affairs is now changing (Frank, 1990). This is largely thanks to the efforts of theorists such as Shilling (1993) and Turner (1996), whose work has helped to bring the body back into the mainstream sociological agenda and acknowledge the role that bodies play in producing and reproducing social practices.

### ***2.2.2 The Socially Constructed Body***

The body as socially constructed in culture, then, is now perceived to play a central role in the formation and maintenance of individuals' identities, by allowing them an opportunity to construct coherent understandings of self and to position themselves within social life. This body, as Giddens (1991) has noted, is not an 'extrinsic given', but rather is a site and symbol of individual identity constructed through learning and interaction with others. In other words, the body and its appearance are inherently linked to the 'project' of self-identity, and individuals are constantly engaged in work on their 'incomplete' bodies in order to shape them in relation to their lifestyle choices and practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993)<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, an increase in individualism and privatisation of the body in contemporary Western society allows individuals more time to allocate to the conscious management, maintenance, and appearance of their bodies within a society that clearly recognises the potential of the body to act as a resource (Shilling, 1993). The social construction of the body is not without complications, however, for it takes place within an environment that is saturated with social and cultural meaning, and societal discourses can help to promote some bodies over others<sup>3</sup>. In much of the literature relating to the sociology of the body, the body itself is explored as a product of discourse and as an object of practice and of power (Frank, 1990; Shilling, 1993). Foucault (1991), for example, has contended that a shift in the locus of control in contemporary society, from external to internal, has meant that the body can now be perceived as the ultimate site for discipline, regulation, and control.<sup>4</sup> The need for a close management of the body and careful consideration over the 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1990b), has been associated with a desire by individuals to portray a desired impression to others. This can be seen to relate, in part, to the values and meanings



that they perceive to be associated with certain bodily ideals or behaviours. These ideals are largely concerned with various definitions of body shape and physical attractiveness, intersecting with various factors such as gender, class, and age, and are associated with the dominant norms and ideals espoused within a consumer society (Featherstone, 1991; Kirk, 1993). Through their production and reproduction in the visible aspects of popular culture, these bodily ideals attain a higher status and 'exchange value' within society and are promoted above others (Goffman, 1963; Sparkes, 1997). For example, media resources can often portray the body as inadequate, incomplete, or in need of control, and encourage individuals, particularly young people who are perceived to be vulnerable to media messages, to engage in 'body work' in order to manage the presentation of their bodies (Featherstone *et al*, 1991; Tait, 2000). Although outlined very briefly here, these issues are discussed in more detail in later chapters of the thesis.

### 2.2.3 *Identity in Adolescence*

The period of youth, more specifically adolescence, is widely considered a vital time in the identity formation process (Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Hall *et al*, 1999). As a period of intense transition between childhood and adulthood however, it is also commonly regarded in psychological theory as a challenging time in which young people are susceptible to crises in identity formation (Erikson, 1968). In addition to such perceptions of adolescence as a period in which young people must master certain skills if they are to pass successfully into adulthood (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997), however, sociological theories have indicated that the importance of the body as a site for constructing an understanding of self is necessarily problematic given the significant changes that bodies undergo during puberty (Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Oliver & Lalik, 2000, 2001)<sup>5</sup>. In association with the significance of peer comparison and approval in adolescence (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998), such a focus on the body can render the formation of identities a complex undertaking for young people. As noted, in contemporary society the body has come to be perceived as the 'last bastion' for self-concept and identity formation, due to the falling away of previously solid institutions such as religion, societal transition, and family value systems (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997). Over the past few decades, processes such as globalisation, pluralisation, and individualisation have left

adolescents unable to rely on the given values and life patterns that were perceived to provide markers of identity in pre-modern societies. As Brettschneider and Heim (1997) have commented, this has meant that 'teenagers roles are now so unclear that not only do they not know who they are, but also they have little raw material on which they can begin to develop an identity' (p.212). Furthermore, the prolonged transition into adulthood that many young people now face in contemporary society can also represent a continued denial of agency, and provide a source of conflict in relation to a mismatch between their expectations for and achievement of independence from the family (Kelly, 1999)<sup>6</sup>. As such, it is perhaps not surprising to hear of adolescence being described as a time in which identities are particularly fluid (e.g. Hall *et al*, 1999). Moreover, given that the particular environments in which individuals spend time can be seen to influence the body and induce certain dispositions or habits (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990a, 1990b), the plurality of spaces comprising young people's social terrain in contemporary society necessarily have implications for the construction of multidimensional, embodied identities. Indeed, a number of researchers are now beginning to suggest that in order to understand fully the lifestyle experiences of young people, it is essential to take account of the various social spaces that constitute their day to day lives (Brettschneider, 1992; Hendry *et al*, 1998).

#### 2.2.4 *Summary*

The viewpoint taken in this study is that identity is an ephemeral, multidimensional, and reflexive concept, incontrovertibly social, inherently embodied, and determined in part by situation and context (Giddens, 1991; Kellner, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993; Jenkins, 1996). This section has highlighted a number of theorists whose work collectively provides a means of approaching and understanding the complex issues associated with the construction of identities. The following section now moves on to look in more detail at the influential work of Pierre Bourdieu, which is seen to provide such an effective framework in relation to this study. His theoretical approach, and in particular his valuable and versatile conceptual tools, are now outlined in order to indicate how they might contribute to an effective and constructive analysis of the processes involved in young people's construction of embodied identities.



### 2.3 A GENERAL OUTLINE OF BOURDIEU'S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Besides being so good to think with (Jenkins, 1992; Jarvie & Maguire, 1994), the great value of Bourdieu's concepts of practice, field, habitus and capital rests in the way in which they help to make sense of social experiences and an individual's positioning within the social world. They do not simply provide a means for describing actions and structures, but also help us understand how individuals actively engage with the social world. A key aspect of Bourdieu's approach is an attempt to understand the visible social world, and to construct a theoretical model of social practice that accounts for both social structures and individual agency (Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu has described his work as a theory of action that is neither rational nor structuralist, and as being characteristically relational and dispositional (Bourdieu, 1998b). As such, his approach represents an attempt to break with taken-for-granted notions and problematic dualisms, to circumvent the objectivist-subjectivist divide, and transcend the dualisms of mind and body, or thought and action, which have traditionally framed social scientists' theories of social life (Light, 2001). Moreover, it reflects Bourdieu's (1990a) recognition that 'the body is in the social world, but the social world is also in the body' (p.190). The relationship between agent and social world here is not one between a subject and an object, but one of ontological complicity.

Critical of the notion of 'theory for its own sake' (Jenkins, 1992), Bourdieu has instead referred to his theoretical concepts as 'thinking tools' intended to aid the understanding of particular contexts and situations, and defined his theory as 'a temporary construct which takes shape for and by empirical work' (Wacquant, 1989 p.50). In other words, the concepts are simply instruments that show little when standing alone, but when used in combination and in reference to specific social research situations provide a means of examining simultaneously both individuals' practices and the structure of society (Light, 2001). It is this principle of Bourdieu's that is so appealing in relation to this study, for it allows for a dynamic and flexible understanding of specific social contexts, while at the same time representing a robust and coherent theoretical approach to the understanding of social practice (Jenkins, 1992). Furthermore, his approach is particularly relevant thanks to its understanding of the social world as a multidimensional space, its recognition of influential social

structures associated with family, school, media and sport, and its focus on the central role of the body in the reproduction of culture (Bourdieu, 1985b, 1998b, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002). Güneri *et al* (1999) have suggested that ‘all dimensions of self-identity interact with each other, and the connections are complex’ (pp. 545-6). Taking this viewpoint into account, Bourdieu’s (1985b) concept of social fields is employed within this study to represent the various social arenas in which young people spend time. This notion of fields, along with the concepts of practice, habitus, and capital (Bourdieu, 1985a, 1986), are seen to create an effective framework for understanding the social worlds of young people, as they take account of the transient and intersecting boundaries of social sites, their pervasive influence and dynamic nature. Having said this, the approach is not without its criticisms or its shortcomings, and in the following discussion the work of other theorists has been included alongside Bourdieu’s own in an attempt to enhance my understanding of the concepts and clarify their use within the study. As well as allowing me to examine, and address where necessary, some of the criticisms levelled at his theory, this reactivation and reworking of some of Bourdieu’s concepts would appear to be consistent with his epistemological view of all conceptualisation as a ‘cumulative’ process (Bourdieu, 1985a)<sup>7</sup>. The following sections provide an overview of some of the concepts central to this theoretical framework, beginning with the notion of ‘field’. It is intended that an examination of these social worlds, which comprise an individual’s social environment, can offer a sense of context in relation to the other conceptual tools, and hence provide a degree of structure to the remaining discussion.

## 2.4 FIELDS

Bourdieu introduced the concept of ‘field’ into his work partly as a means to look more closely at the relationship between agents and structures (Robbins, 1991). Using this concept it was possible to look at a society as a multidimensional space comprising a number of fields, each with their own specific rules but part of the society as a whole (Bourdieu, 1985b). Human action arises from an individual’s engagements with these fields, and their access to the various resources (capital) available in one field could be seen to influence not only their position within that particular context but also within any of the numerous spaces that comprise their social landscape. Given that individuals are constantly looking to improve or



consolidate their position within society, struggles can be seen to ensue over resources available within each field. This theory, then, offered an explanation of the workings of societies and also the nature of class divisions within them.

#### *2.4.1 A Network of Interrelating Contexts Comprising the Social Landscape*

As has been noted, the encompassing social world shapes and is shaped by individuals, and influences the development of habitus and the construction of self. As such, the fields comprising an individual's social environment can be perceived as social locations that help to 'contextualise people's daily lives and contribute to the development of their bodies' (Shilling, 1993 p.129). These fields, then, are more than metaphorical spaces, although, as Jenkins (1992) has argued, 'there may be differing degrees of specificity and concreteness' (p.84). Bourdieu (1985b) has described fields as spaces of relationships that are 'as real as a geographical space' (p.725) that comprise both individuals and institutions, suggesting that it can be both distinct physical structures as well as more indeterminate symbolic features that constitute these social worlds. In this study, it is argued that it is particularly useful to perceive the highlighted fields as comprising specific physical locations within the wider social environment that young people can literally, as well as figuratively, move between. In this way, the perception of these fields, in association with others not focussed on in the study, as co-existing both temporary and spatially within the wider social environment is facilitated. However, as individuals' social experiences are inter-contextual, it is also evident that these social sites do not stand independently ring fenced but overlap with other fields thereby rendering their boundaries malleable and dynamic (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002). The areas of convergence between fields are of particular interest in this study in terms of their combined effect upon the identity construction process. Given that fields interrelate and configure in dynamic ways, then, it is necessary to accept the fluidity and transience of field boundaries and the potential for individual's to be engaging with more than one field at a single point in time. Morrow (2001) has made reference to the complexities associated with the spatial dimensions of fields, and has acknowledged that they do not always occupy the same physical locality (e.g. friends, family, school).



There are many fields within any given society, more so within technologically advanced societies (Jenkins, 1992), and Bourdieu has identified such examples as the state-bureaucratic, literary, economic, scientific, philosophical, artistic, journalistic, educational, and religious fields (Bourdieu, 1985b, 1998a, 1998b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002). The nature and degree of influence of these fields is not consistent, however, with some proving more pervasive in reach than others. In contemporary society, for example, the media can be seen to be a ubiquitous field with a seemingly ever-increasing sphere of influence (Livingston, 1996; Postman, 1994; Ralph *et al*, 1999; Scannell, 2000). In acknowledging this overlapping element of the nature of fields, Bourdieu (1993a) suggested that the limits of fields could be thought of as being where the ‘effects’ of the field are felt. Again, this provides an interesting concept in relation to this study, as such prevalence can allow one field to influence others, resulting in a much greater impact upon the individual within them. Bourdieu & Wacquant (2002) have referred to this in relation to the ‘field of power’ (i.e. the political field), which acts as the pre-eminent or ‘meta-field’ within society and is able to impinge on weaker fields, structuring in part the social practices and hence the development of individuals’ habitus(es) within them. Fields are described as partially autonomous social arenas, each with their own logic and taken-for-granted structure that members of the field all tacitly adhere to (Bourdieu, 1985b). However, there are also some homologies between fields, such as evidence of domination and subordination or struggles between individuals and/or groups, which can be seen to reflect commonalities of habitus and practice and, ultimately, the power of dominant fields to impinge on weaker ones (Jenkins, 1992).

#### ***2.4.2 Sites of Struggle and Competition for Available Resources***

Fields are not a deliberate act of creation neither are they a ‘dead’ structure. Instead they are contexts that individuals enter with a commitment to the field and the intention of actively pursuing the ‘prizes’ that they offer (Bourdieu, 1990b). As Bourdieu (1993a) has commented, ‘a field defines itself by (among other things) defining specific stakes and interests specific to other fields and which are not perceived by someone who has not been shaped to enter that field’ (p.72). It should also be noted, however, that there are also objective elements to the structures of fields that are not simply reducible to the intentions of the individual agents who enter these



social spaces. As such in order to understand the concept of fields it is necessary to have a theory of the social agents involved, perceiving them to be 'acting and efficacious...endowed with an ensemble of dispositions which imply both the propensity and the ability to get into and play the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002 p.19). As mentioned, another feature of fields is that they are characterised by struggles between individuals, both for available resources (capital) and also the ability to determine the legitimate standards or principles of the field (Bourdieu, 1985b), and these themselves determine the distribution of relative power within the field. As the distribution of capital is not fixed within fields but reflects the struggles between individuals or groups this leads to a variation in agents' ability to acquire, accumulate and mobilise forms of capital. This means that fields comprise a structured yet fluid system of social positions that depend on individuals' access to capital and hence reflect relationships of dominance, subordination or homology. Those with greater volumes of valued capital, and with more opportunity to acquire, accumulate or convert capital, tend to be located in positions of relative power and determine the legitimacy of forms of capital. Their elevated position also affords them a greater opportunity to reproduce this particular state of affairs and maintain their dominance. As Bourdieu (1998b) has noted, by agreeing, albeit tacitly, to play the game individuals can also be seen to reproduce the 'game' because they confirm a belief in the resources at stake and a necessity to engage in a struggle for them in order to improve or consolidate their position within a field. Agents involved with a particular field, then, are united by common interests and are concerned with the continued existence of the field. Bourdieu (1993a) has argued that this leads to an 'objective complicity' that can be seen to lie at the heart of the field's structure concealed by the more visible struggles between individuals. As he has suggested, 'it tends to be forgotten that a fight pre-supposes agreement between the antagonists about what it is that is worth fighting about' (Bourdieu, 1993a pp.73-74).

Jenkins (1992) has noted that in employing Bourdieu's concept of 'fields' in social analysis it is necessary to present a social topography of the structure of positions that comprise the field, and to examine and analyse the habitus(es) of the agents within the fields (p.86). Bearing this in mind, an outline of the structure of the five fields highlighted in this study is given towards the end of the chapter. However, in order to facilitate this 'mapping out' of the fields it may be useful to first explore and examine

the remaining elements of the theoretical and conceptual framework that, together with the notion of 'field', provide a means of analysing the complex social experiences of individuals within contemporary society. The following sections, then, address the concepts of habitus, practice, and capital, and examine how each of these notions can be seen to influence the means by which individuals come to be positioned, and position themselves, within various social fields.

## 2.5 HABITUS

### 2.5.1 *Habitus as 'Embodied Sensibility'*

The structure of social fields are seen to influence, both consciously and unconsciously, the behaviour of the individuals within them as over time they come to learn the style, manner and customs required to be active members within that social context. As a result, individuals become 'endowed with the habitus' (Bourdieu, 1993 p.72), and it is this concept that helps to define the process by which the social is written into the corporeal and embodied identities are established (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). Habitus is a central concept in Bourdieu's attempt to overcome the problematic binary between structure and agency, and to demonstrate the 'ontological complicity' that defines the relationship between agents and their social worlds (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002). A product of an individual's entire social experiences, it can be thought of as 'embodied sensibility' (Calhoun, 1998), a result of them 'culturally learning, refining, recognising, recalling and evoking dispositions to act' (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994 p.186). It is not overtly observable, but is instead manifested through the development of 'tastes', defined by Laberge (1995) as 'dispositions and schemes of perception and appreciation' (p.136), which help structure, as well as reflect, individuals' choices and lifestyle. Moreover, the habitus can also be seen to influence the body more directly through the influence on an individual's behaviour, deportment, and attitudes. In this way, it is possible to understand Bourdieu's (1990a) comment that 'habitus is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is' (p.73). As such, although each individual's experience, and hence habitus as the embodied history of social practices (Bourdieu, 1990b), is necessarily unique, it is possible to see that individuals who have experienced similar social contexts, or occupied comparable positions within fields,



will develop a similar habitus (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Light, 2001). Habitus, then, can be seen to be the embodied social, physical, and cultural world, and as such influences in part the actions and behaviour of individuals, i.e. their social practices. Having said this however, habitus should not be seen as a purely mechanistic concept, for in doing that it would defeat the purpose of using such a relational term. Instead, it should perhaps be understood that habitus acts only as a guide in social situations, and does not wholly determine behaviour.

‘Habitus is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal!’  
(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002 p.133)

However, Bourdieu has also noted that the long-established and deeply embedded nature of habitus means that it is not easily changed, but continues to work long after the conditions of emergence are dislodged (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990b). In relation to this study, it can be seen that the various fields, in which young people are often required to establish dispositions for appropriate deportment and behaviour over significant amounts of time, can have a significant impact upon the development of habitus.

### ***2.5.2 A More Dynamic Approach to Habitus***

Having said this, Bourdieu’s dislike of professorial definitions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002), which can be seen in part to represent his reaction against positivism, has meant that it is difficult to establish a definitive understanding of the term. As such, there has been some criticism of the notion of habitus. Some have doubted that the concept allows a break from the limitations of structuralist thinking, and have argued that despite its appearance of doing so remains overtly deterministic through its focus on social reproduction (e.g. Jenkins, 1992). Others, however, have perceived the notion as a mediating concept that introduces an element of unpredictability into social actions (e.g. Harker *et al*, 1990). In this study, however, I adopt the view upheld by Lemert (1997) and Robbins (2000), among others, that there are elements of both these arguments in the notion of habitus, and that despite its limitations it represents a valuable means of transcending the structure-agency divide. As Robbins (2000) has commented, ‘for Bourdieu, the habitus embodies the attitudes which we inherit, but it does not constitute a stimulus which conditions how we must



behave' (pp. 29). In this way, he has argued, it is possible to avoid the problematic extremes of both 'mechanicalism' and finalism. I would, however, agree with Kauppi (2000) that Bourdieu's notion of habitus is somewhat 'formal and static' (p.116)<sup>8</sup>, and that a more dynamic and contextual understanding of the term may allow it to be perceived more constructively as an evolving concept. As Brown (2001) has argued, uncoupling habitus from the 'intellectual tyranny' of a constraining relationship with the concepts of capital and field can allow it to become a more 'reflexive, malleable and dynamic phenomenon' that reconnects with a sense of agency (p.65). This is not to give precedence to an agential aspect of social action, for I would agree that habitus constitutes a set of dispositions, inculcated both through explicit teaching and learned experience, which guide but not determine behaviour. To be more specific, however, I would say that this notion of habitus can be continually developed and reworked as individual's experience new and challenging situations, and integrate these new understandings with the more deeply embedded aspects of habitus. It may be more helpful here to think of individuals as not being simply subject to the control of the habitus, but also as having potential to actively deploy it. In other words, individuals have the potential to 'manage' their habitus rather than it simply being a habitual action (Ryle, 1976), so that at times their reaction to a situation is perhaps relatively instinctive (e.g. a new or frightening situation) whereas on other occasions it may be managed in a more conscious or strategic way (e.g. to conform to the perceived values and needs of a particular group).

This perception provides a more fluid approach to the notion of habitus, and as such allows for the potential to incorporate an understanding of social change, a feature that some researchers have seen to be lacking in Bourdieu's approach (Shilling, 1993; Kauppi, 2000; Brown, 2001). In other words, if habitus can be reworked and developed over time, then it is likely to reflect the differences within an individual's field experiences and subsequent changes in their social practice. This is a particularly interesting notion in relation to this study, given the perception of adolescence as a period of significant transition (e.g. Adler & Adler, 1998). Furthermore, in acknowledging that changing experiences, circumstances, and perceptions can influence the development of habitus, this approach would also appear to confirm one of the central tenets of this study, i.e. that there is a need to examine the role that



others play in relation to an individual's social practice (Kauppi, 2000). It is to this concept of practice that the discussion now turns.

## 2.6 PRACTICE

I have argued, along with others, that habitus is a central notion in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, and that it does not stand alone from the other core concepts but is inherently connected with them. It is perhaps because of the potential of these conceptual tools to provide, in combination, such a comprehensive framework for the analysis of social action that have enabled Bourdieu's work to be so influential within the sociological arena over the past two or three decades (Clement, 1995; Lemert, 1997; Kauppi, 2000). For Bourdieu, human action is perceived to be deeply situated within social and cultural contexts without being fundamentally reducible to either one (Calhoun, 1998). Moreover, this practice is located within both time and space and is not perceived to have any meaning as a visible entity outside of these boundaries, which encompass the processes that structure an individual's social experiences (Jenkins, 1992). It is this recognition of temporality as a central feature of practice that is perceived as so valuable in relation to this study, as the location of practice within space and its occurrence over time is an undeniable aspect of its nature (Bourdieu, 1985b, 1990b).

### 2.6.1 *'Practical Sense'*

Within his work Bourdieu attempted to understand social practice by means of a theoretical model, seeing social action as meaningful behaviour both shaping and shaped by an individual's situation and context (Bourdieu, 1977). In this way, the visible practice of individuals cannot simply be taken for granted for underlying structures and relationships can be seen to influence the behaviour of individuals (through the habitus), and help to determine the means by which the dynamics of daily life are played out (Jenkins, 1992). In the same way, it is through this practice that social structures become embodied through an individual's habitus and are reproduced over time. As Light (2001) has noted, 'practice mediates between habitus and social fields' (p.6). Practices are neither objective nor subjective, however, but are produced by the interaction of the social context and the social action of agency. As such, they

are neither conscious nor unconscious, but a combination of 'the intended and the unintended' (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994 p.187). In other words, individuals are not completely aware of the reasons for their social action nor are they mere dupes, but over time they develop a socially constituted 'sense of the game' which affords them some degree of practical mastery, i.e. an unconscious understanding of what is required to fulfil the demands of the 'game'. This is what Bourdieu described by notions of 'practical sense' or 'practical logic', which refer to the way in which movements or actions, although initially conscious, are embedded through repetition so that they become 'second nature' and are undertaken unconsciously (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990b). Despite this 'practical accomplishment', however, a recognition of the strategies of individuals also allows them to retain the possibility of exercising agency. As such, Bourdieu (1990b) has argued that in order to account for practices it is necessary to consider both the social conditions in which the habitus that generated them was developed, as well as those conditions in which the practice itself was implemented.

### ***2.6.2 Social Reproduction Through Practice***

As this indicates, through its relationship with habitus there is clearly an historical aspect to practice, and it can be seen to reflect the logic of the fields with which an individual engages as well as the particular circumstances surrounding their particular position within those social worlds. While social practice is influenced by the habitus, it can also be seen to embed in the habitus particular dispositions or ways of using the body that reflect the social and cultural distinctions (e.g. class, gender, race etc.) evident within the social conditions of their production. In this way, through the embodiment of particular tastes or interests, habitus functions as a marker of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984, 1998b), a distinction that is then in turn reflected in, and reinforced through, social practice. This cyclical process can be seen to lead to the reproduction and legitimation of certain orientations to oneself, manifest through tastes, which reflect differences in the conditions of existence for various individuals. As Light (2001) has commented, individuals' social practice is often inherently, and unconsciously, associated with a maintenance or reproduction of unequal social relations.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, it may also be helpful to consider this view of practice alongside that of MacIntyre (1992), in which there is an understanding by individuals



as to the value of the outcome of a certain practice and, more importantly, a desire to strive for the consequential reproduction of the conditions of the practice in some way. As such, some researchers have argued that the focus of social reproduction in practice has significant implications for the embodiment and reproduction of cultural distinctions and identities, particularly in relation to the issues of gender, race, ethnicity, or class (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; McNay, 1999; Brown, 2001). In this way, practice can be seen to influence an individual's position within field, because a sense of position involves mastery of the structures of the field i.e. internalisation of the social structures and acceptance of it as the way it is (Bourdieu, 1985b).<sup>10</sup>

## 2.7 CAPITAL

### 2.7.1 *The Distribution of Capital*

As we have seen, the social world is perceived as comprising a number of sites or fields, each with a specific structure set of objective, historical relations between positions that are based upon the differentiation and distribution of various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1985b, 1986). These forms of capital, 'like the aces in a game of cards' (Bourdieu, 1985b p.724), represent the 'stakes at stake' and, as such, are imbued with value and have the capacity to empower their holder. This is instrumental in establishing the hierarchical structure of fields, as individuals are positioned within them on the basis of both their volume and composition of these properties (Bourdieu, 1985b). As mentioned above, the struggles within fields by which positions are determined are also related to the degree of capital an individual possesses, and all agents attempt to gain relevant and legitimate capital within the field. Changes in the distribution of capital can lead to structural changes, which accounts for the dynamism and malleability of fields. However the concept of habitus provides regularity and stability to fields, making social life relatively predictable. Bourdieu (1986) has suggested that the accumulation of significant capital enables individuals to 'appropriate social energy' (p.241), and that the volume and composition of this capital can determine, though only in part, the degree of motility open to them within a field.

### 2.7.2 *The Forms of Capital*

Capital can be thought of as representing the particular goods or resources available to individuals within fields, and is conceptualised by Bourdieu in three fundamental forms: economic capital (raw currency), cultural capital (embodied, objectified or institutionalised cultural resources), and social capital (valued or significant social relations). These forms of capital, then, can be accumulated and converted from a symbolic form, defined as that ‘in which the different forms of capital are perceived and recognised as legitimate’ (Bourdieu, 1985b p.724), to more marketable material forms. In addition to these forms of capital, however, Bourdieu’s concern with the development of the bodies through social experiences also led him to examine the way in which the body itself could be seen to act as a ‘possessor of power, status and distinctive symbolic forms, which is integral to the accumulation of various resources’ (Shilling, 1993 p.127). For Bourdieu (1978), this physical capital referred to an embodied state of cultural capital, although some researchers have called for a broader understanding that recognises the body as a form of capital in its own right (Shilling, 1991, 1993). The body is seen to act as a ‘possessor of power, status and distinctive symbolic forms, which is integral to the accumulation of various resources’ (Shilling, 1993 p.127). Physical capital can be seen to comprise those physical attributes and abilities such as strength and skill that are embodied through particular sporting and social practices, and that can be readily converted into other forms of capital (e.g. money, fame, status). As with the other forms of capital, however, the opportunities to accumulate and exchange physical capital are unequal, as they are dependent to some extent upon an individual’s particular social characteristics (e.g. class, gender). In relation to this study, the centrality of the body to a number of social practices (e.g. the wearing of school uniform, behavioural regulation by both self and others, and the skill acquisition associated with physical activities), identifies the five highlighted fields as sites in which physical capital can be both acquired and converted.

### 2.7.3 *The Conversion of Capital*

The great value of the concept of capital lies in its capacity for transformation or conversion, that is the (re)investment of resources in an attempt to create capital with ‘exchange value’ (Shilling, 1993). Individuals seek to maximise the quantity and quality of capital available to them and, through this, strive to improve or consolidate



their social position (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Robbins, 2000). Capital, then, is a resource that empowers, and allows individuals ‘the capacity to exercise control over one’s own future and that of others’ (Calhoun *et al*, 1995 p.4). It is this that engages individuals in social struggles, both in terms of accumulation and maintenance of convertibility potential. As knowledgeable social actors, individuals are aware that the value of capital is not evenly distributed among the variant forms, e.g. economic capital is generally regarded as the most efficient, yet the conversion of any capital to the symbolic form is more powerful (Harker *et al*, 1990; Calhoun *et al*, 1995). Furthermore, the value and convertibility of one form of capital is neither constant nor guaranteed and will reflect changes in the symbolic value accorded to particular resources (Shilling, 1991). Conversion can be partial or transient, and the relative degree of opportunity and risk will vary depending upon an individual’s social position. Individuals can only invest in forms of capital that are available to them, and those with less capital are dependent upon the recognition of that capital by dominant players (Shilling, 1993). Conversely, there is pressure upon those with more cultural or economic capital to successfully convert this to social capital, in order to continue defining legitimacy and hence the exchange value of resources in this way. Consequently, the process of conversion can serve to reproduce social inequalities, e.g. gender or class distinctions, as ‘individuals have different opportunities for converting physical capital into other forms of capital’ (Shilling, 1991 p.656).

## 2.8 MAPPING THE SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE FIELDS

The previous discussion has attempted to outline the key concepts of field, habitus, practice, and capital, which together are seen to provide an effective theoretical framework for understanding and analysing the social experiences of young people in contemporary society. Furthermore, it has also examined how these conceptual tools influence the ways in which individuals can position themselves, or be positioned by others, within the various spaces that comprise their particular social landscapes. Having examined this framework, then, and as mentioned earlier in the chapter, the following sections go on to look at each of the fields highlighted in this study in more depth. This is in order to establish their significance for young people, as well as determine how they can be perceived to be structured and to describe how they can be thought of as a ‘field’ in relation to the content of the previous discussion.

### 2.8.1 Family

For the majority of young people, the primary influence within the early years of their life will be from the immediate family unit within which they live. As such it is important to look at this social space as a means to understand the influences that it can have upon their construction of embodied identities. The family has traditionally been seen to form the bedrock of society, a relative constant within the dynamic shifts in social structure, although some suggest that its role within the lives of young people has decreased in the modern age (Postman, 1994). There is also a great amount of evidence to suggest that during the period of adolescence it is the peer network and not the family that provides the major source of identification for young people (Harris, 1995; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999). Despite this belief, however, it is evident that the family remains extremely influential within the lives of young people (Simmons & Wade, 1987), and as such is a field that 'plays an important role in adolescents' identity and behaviour' (Güneri *et al*, 1999 p.543). The importance of the family lies primarily with its involvement in the process of socialisation, and there is a strong belief that the adult-child relationship is one of the most important avenues through which cultural values are reproduced from one generation to another (Galbo, 1983). Parents and other family members significantly impact the physical, social, and psychological experiences of young people within their care in many ways. For example, they can help to structure and enable social contacts, determine access to economic resources, provide influential role models, and impact young peoples' social practices through the choices that they make for and present to them (Adler & Adler, 1998; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Mota & Silva, 1999). Furthermore, the inter-personal relationships between family members can be seen to provide a valuable source of support and affirmation (Dean & Lin, 1977). The influence of the family on the actions of young people also holds true in terms of participation in physical activity, and a number of researchers have highlighted the importance of parental participation as a means of setting an example for their children (e.g. Mota & Silva, 1999).<sup>11</sup>

The family can be regarded as an important field in terms of its capacity to provide the basic skills (cultural capital) that an individual requires in order to be able to mobilise or accumulate capital in other fields (Bourdieu, 1998b). As Harker *et al* (1990) have



suggested, for example, the capital generated through the familial field, at least for the dominant social groups, 'can act as a multiplier of educational capital, not just in the field of education but also in the related fields of jobs, community work, cultural consumption and so on' (p.97). In relation to the previous discussion, these skills could be perceived to constitute part of an individual's generic habitus and represent deeply embedded dispositions reflecting, for example, class, race, or gender distinctions. These dispositions will also reflect, as well as influence, an individual's position within the familial field, positions that are based on their volume and composition of accumulated capital. The nature of capital in this case can take the form of age (with power generally residing with the older generation), occupation, or practical knowledge, and young people learn that as they gain skills and grow in maturity they are able to gain more valued capital and move to a more 'elevated' position within the field. The primary space within the familial field is generally the family home, although the itinerant nature of the family unit and the extended network of family relations signify that the boundaries of this field extend beyond this single location (Morrow, 2001). This large network of family members also means that young people may position themselves, or be positioned by others, in different ways depending upon their relationship to particular individuals e.g. as son, brother, nephew or cousin.

### 2.8.2 *Peers*

It is widely acknowledged that peers play an important role within the lives of young people, particularly during the period of adolescence (e.g. Hendry *et al*, 1993; Livingston, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). Numerous reasons are given for the beneficial nature of these social relationships, although perhaps the most important aspect of the peer network is as an arena in which to engage in identity work (James, 1993; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Ungar, 2000)<sup>12</sup>. Adler & Adler (1998) alluded to this belief when they suggested that 'through interacting with their peers, and by judging themselves against the standards and behaviours of peer norms, people forge self-conceptions that lie at the core of their being' (p.207). The belief that the peer group represents an important influence in relation to a young person's understanding of self, necessarily attributes importance to the environments in which young people come into contact. Adler & Adler (1998)



have shown that young people have affiliations to numerous friendship groups, and that these friendships can be close or casual, temporary or (relatively) stable. These are reflections of the different 'niches of life', and are grounded in shared tastes and experiences. As such, being a collective with which they engage for significant periods of time, an individual's peer network inexorably overlaps with the fields of family, school, media, and physical culture (e.g. Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996; Livingston, 1996; Mota & Silva, 1999). Due to their social nature, these relationships are dynamic and unpredictable, and as such it is not surprising to find conflicting views as to their relative value for young people. Some research, for example, highlights the increased pressure faced by young people in contemporary Western societies, both in terms of meeting and conforming with the expectations of their peers (e.g. Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). Whereas others, such as Ungar (2000), debunk the notion of this peer pressure as a 'myth', suggesting that, for young people, adopting the behaviour and appearance of peers is neither coercive nor destructive, but a 'consciously employed strategy to enhance personal and social power' (p.177).

This social space may appear at first more difficult to recognise as a field, due to the fact that it involves diverse groups of individuals and can't easily be identified as representing a distinct physical locality. In terms of social landscape, then, the field of peers can be seen to comprise spaces that have been carved out by young people within other core fields such as the home or school. These can perhaps be thought of as the 'back regions' within these other fields (Goffman, 1990b), providing spaces that represent relatively private arenas in which young people can engage with their peers. In other ways, however, there are more evident characteristics that can identify the peer group as a social field. For example, there is a definite structure to peer groups and a hierarchy of positions contingent on the possession of particular values, skills, and attributes. Consequently, such things as money, beauty, fashion, good humour, intelligence, and even age, represent capital (cultural, economic, or physical), allowing individuals the potential to gain (or lose) status (social capital). For an individual to successfully gain admittance to a particular social group, and hence be positioned as a 'friend' or 'group member', they must adhere to the ideals of that group, adopting a habitus that allows them to be comfortable with their peers. As Jarvie & Maguire (1994) have commented, 'for Bourdieu the ability to absorb



appropriate embodied actions is the key to developing specific feelings which enable the individuals to be at ease with their self and others of the same community' (p.189). This relates back to the 'identity work' so important within adolescent friendship groups, in that an individual who fails to embody the appropriate habitus will inevitably lack legitimate capital, and as a result may, effectively, be rejected by their peers (Donnelly & Young, 1988).

### *2.8.3 School*

As we have seen, the particular environments that comprise a young person's social experience each influence the body and induce certain dispositions or habits (Laberge, 1995). The field of school, then, in which young people are required to spend so much time in their developmental years, can be seen to play 'a formative role in the lives of children' (Wyness, 1999 pp.353-4). Several researches have identified the time spent within this field as extremely influential, and pointed to valuable role that it plays in socialising young people and embedding cultural values (Vertinsky, 1992; Wren, 1999). However, others have provided evidence to suggest that school is no longer such a positive experience for young people, and indeed may, conversely, be a source of alienation (Simmons & Wade, 1987). The field of school also supplies a link with that of physical culture through the provision of physical education, which leads once again to the notion of constructing and reproducing bodies. There is a great deal of curricular and pedagogical research at present that is concerned with the role of the school in general, and physical education in particular, in the embodiment of cultural norms and the reproduction of gender distinctions (Theberge, 1991; Kirk, 1993; Armour, 1999; Francis, 2000). The school environment, then, can be seen to significantly contribute to an individual's understanding of self through the management and formation of the body, for within contemporary society it is increasingly recognised that it is through the body that identities are manifested (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993). It can be seen then, that through ongoing membership in a community of practice an individual is able to gain knowledge concerning the skills, discourses and techniques associated with the practices of that community. As a result, they are able to build up an identity for themselves within the broader setting of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).



The school environment is perhaps relatively easily conceptualised as a field, for it can be seen to comprise a hierarchical structure of positions, i.e. management staff, teachers, pupils, in which the power can be seen to reside with the adult members of the field who possess significant cultural capital. Although young people lack such resources when they enter the field, the school, along with the family, can be seen to represent a primary site for the acquisition of transferable capital (Harker *et al*, 1990). The acquisition of knowledge and qualifications through education can be thought of as form of cultural capital, which can then allow individuals to gain more status and even material rewards through its conversion in other fields (Bourdieu, 1993a). Furthermore, it is also possible to think of the progression through the year groups as producing a hierarchy and providing a natural way of accumulating capital. For young people, their involvement within the educational field can also be seen to develop a 'school relevant' habitus that allows them to engage successfully with the practices central to this social context e.g. being in the right place at the right time, following the instructions of the teacher, or obeying the school rules. As Wren (1999) has commented, students need to accumulate capital in the form of internalised social norms, before they can function effectively within smaller social sites such as the school. This 'hidden curriculum' is viewed as an effective means by which young people can assimilate cultural norms and values, and has become the topic of much debate in recent years (Kirk, 1992; Wren, 1999). The traditional nature of the school environment, with its deeply embedded ideologies and practices, also contributes to the reproduction of such values over time, a factor that can lead to the maintenance of social inequalities. In addition, although young people are legally required to be in education until sixteen, they are nevertheless active participants within the structure of the field, through their attempts to achieve qualifications presented as standards by those in positions of power within the field.

#### 2.8.4 *Media*

The identification of the media field as a core site with which young people engage was perhaps a foregone conclusion, almost inevitable it could be argued, given that the 'media today saturate everyday lives' (Real, 1989). Most individuals now have access to countless forms of media, and actively engage within the field through actions such as watching television, reading newspapers, or succumbing to the lure of



advertisements (Garnham, 1993; Livingston, 1996). This engagement can at times seem unconscious, a form of 'practical logic' (Bourdieu, 1990b), and is seen as being particularly influential for young people who have grown up regarding media technology as the norm (Osgerby, 1998; Hendry *et al*, 1998; Ralph *et al*, 1999). The fluid and dynamic characteristic of the media field is seen by some to reflect the social structure of a post-modern society, and as such contributes to the ephemeral and transient nature of identity. As Kellner (1992) has argued, 'television and other forms of mass-mediated culture play key roles in the structuring of contemporary identity' (p.148). Many others have endorsed this view and regarded it as particularly relevant for young people, for whom a society saturated by media images and information is perhaps almost 'natural' (Thompson, 1995; Anderson & Miles, 1999).<sup>13</sup> A number of studies have looked at the role of the media in shaping young people and, in particular, the reproduction of dominant cultural norms through the promotion and veneration of specific bodily forms (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Tait, 2000; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). Some concern has been expressed, however, at the potential for the media to transmit messages to young people, and the possible effects that could ensue if they are not interpreted appropriately.<sup>14</sup> Although there are arguments for and against the media in this debate, however, the potential of the media to influence in some way the lives of individuals in society is not contended.

In this study a broad viewpoint allows the media field to be perceived as encompassing all forms of media technology and resources. There is a structure to this field that comprises many groups of individuals within a hierarchy of power. This power runs from the conglomerate businesses to the consumers of the product, via the providers of ideas, images and informative material. In addition it is possible to see power relations between individuals within this field, while some dominate others are dominated, and the economic competition between different sections of the field (particular businesses or companies). The media field can be seen to influence individuals through the promotion of certain desirable standards, behaviours, or bodily ideals, all of which can be seen to reflect dominant societal or cultural norms (Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Frith & Gleeson, 2001). As such individuals, positioned and positioning themselves in the consumer role, are encouraged to develop a particular habitus, which then acts as a means of accumulating various forms of capital. For

young people, the media field can be seen to provide a means of accumulating, in particular, cultural and physical capital that can then be converted into social capital within the peer group. In terms of its organisation in space, it is possible to identify some distinct localities, such as cinemas or shopping centres, which represent this social world, although the pervasive nature of the variant media forms allows the boundaries of this field to reach into other social spaces. The potential for this field to reach across space and time means that the relationships between members of this field are often less direct although, as Bourdieu (1998a) noted, they are influenced by the same pressures and effects 'because they belong to the same world' (p.41).

### *2.8.5 Physical Culture*

Before going on to discuss the characteristics of this broad and diverse field, it may be useful to explain that the decision to adopt 'physical culture' as the term of choice within this study, rather than 'sport' or 'physical activity' for example, was more than a simple linguistic preference. Kirk (1999c) has defined the notion of physical culture as 'a range of practices concerned with the maintenance, representation and regulation of the body', which are centred on 'highly codified, institutionalized forms of physical activity' (p.66). This viewpoint includes all discourses that are related to the bodily practices constitutive of sport, physical recreation and exercise, and, as such, was deemed more functional than the somewhat amorphous alternative of 'physical activity'. There has long been an established link between the body, physical activity and corporeal power (e.g. Foucault, 1980, 1991; Kirk, 1993, 1998), and this association is a significant one when considering the construction of embodied identities. The discourses that shape young people's experiences of sport, physical recreation and exercise are concerned in part with the production of particular bodies, and are thus understood as significant influences that are imbued with meaning. The forms that such bodily constructions can take are numerous, and are contingent on various factors such as an individual's age, ability, and choice of activity. In contemporary culture, however, perhaps the most significant distinguishing variable is that of gender, whereby the archetypal masculine body is seen as being strong and muscular, and the feminine body slender and submissive (Tinning, 1985; Bordo, 1993; Connell, 1995). Young people in the contemporary information society are faced daily with a barrage of information informing, confirming, and reproducing such bodily



stereotypes, and the current 'healthism' within physical education, through which proposed 'ideal' bodily forms become synonymous with physical well-being, simply adds to the pressure for conformity (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989; Kirk, 1999b).<sup>15</sup> It has long been considered that physical activity has many important benefits for the individual, and a number of researchers have touched upon this subject (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991; Mason, 1995; Kremer *et al*, 1997; Kivel, 1998). The period of adolescence is often considered a peak time for leisure needs (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Hendry *et al*, 1998), and research indicates that involvement in physical activity can yield effects that are behavioural (Toner, 1991; Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996), psychological (Biddle, 1997; Brettschneider & Heim, 1997) and social (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Sports Council 1998). In addition, a growing body of evidence suggests that sport and physical activity provides an important context in which young people negotiate and develop an understanding of self. For example, Messner (1992) has argued that identities can be constructed, in part, through the physical experience of sporting practices, a statement that highlights the importance of ensuring that an individual's experiences of physical activity are positive.

For Bourdieu, the terrain of sport provided a useful means of understanding the influences of society upon the body, and the way in which the body acted as a site of social memory (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). Given the reproduction of sporting culture from one generation to another and the continued perception of gender or class distinctions in individual's activity choices, it is perhaps possible to identify one way in which the social spaces of physical culture may function as a field. The field itself can be seen to comprise a number of localities within the wider social environment, and these can be both formal, for example leisure centres or sports clubs, or informal arenas such as gardens, streets, or parks. Moreover, significant overlaps with other fields, most significantly the field of school, create additional spaces in which young people can engage with physical culture practices. There is an identifiable structure of positions in this field, which encompasses the producers and consumers of sport products, professional, amateur, and recreational participants in organised sports, and individuals involved with various unstructured or informal physical activities (Roberts, 1996; Brettschneider, 1992). There is potential for individuals to progress through this structure if they are able to generate significant capital and develop an appropriate habitus. In organised sports, for example, it is necessary for individuals to

abide by universally accepted rules if they are not to challenge the status quo, and as a result they learn appropriate forms of action and behaviour compliant with their position within the field. Positioning within this field can be seen to relate broadly to an individual's tastes and interests (for example, being positioned as a footballer, skater, hockey player etc.), as well as to their place within the structure of a particular activity (e.g. coach, captain, goalkeeper etc.). In each case, however, it is dependent upon the possession of valued capital, which in this field is primarily physical capital. This physical capital may take various forms, such as the acquisition of skills or attainment of a particular physical appearance (Shilling, 1991), and has the potential to be converted to different forms of capital within other fields e.g. social capital (status) or economic capital (financial gain). As has been mentioned, certain bodies are also imbued with capital through social and cultural associations, and this embodiment of capital can also be seen to create a natural hierarchy of power within the field. The dynamic nature of fields, however, and the potential for changing one's position within them, encourages the view of the body as a 'life-long project', and engages individuals within the process of accumulating or transferring various forms of capital (Shilling, 1993).

## 2.9 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented an overview of the conceptualisation of identity, and has outlined in particular the transient, reflexive, and embodied understanding of the notion that is employed in this study. In addition it has introduced the theoretical framework of the study, and explored in more detail the central concepts of field, habitus, practice, and capital that, along with the notion of social positioning, are perceived to represent an effective means by which to generate an understanding of young people's social experiences. Moreover, an overview of each of the five fields has also helped to identify them as important social contexts in which young people spend time, and hence establish their significance in relation to this study. Having thus provided an overview of the conceptual and theoretical framework, the discussion now moves on in chapter three to a consideration of methodological issues.

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<sup>1</sup> In Pre-Enlightenment times, for example, an understanding of the body was largely articulated in and through prevailing religious orthodoxies, whereas the Renaissance brought about a more scientific



perception of the body as rigidly defined systems of flesh and bones (Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Sparkes, 1997). The naturalistic body was perceived to be both trans-historical and trans-cultural, and the biological essentialism of this influential approach meant that it became difficult to view the body, deemed to be a site of established fact, as anything other than mechanical (Turner, 1996). Recent times, however, have seen a renewed interest in ways of understanding and articulating the body, including an increased recognition of the body as socially constructed (Bourdieu, 1984; Goffman, 1990b; Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1991). Social constructionist views, although there are a variety of views within this approach with often distinct ideas concerning the relationship between body and society, generally move away from the determinism of the naturalistic approach to argue that the body can be simultaneously present in both nature and culture (Shilling, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> In this way, the dynamic nature of identity construction can be seen. For it has been suggested that identities are related to 'signs' that alter in relation to cultural change (Schwalbe, 1993), and that as a result of these changes over time an individual's identity, and hence their body, can come to represent the 'story' of their life (McAdams, 1985; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Sparkes, 1995, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> For example, researchers looking at the social construction of gendered bodies have noted how certain values, meanings, and physical attributes have been attached to specific male and female bodily forms, and how over time particular bodies have become privileged and accepted as the 'ideal' (e.g. Young, 1980; Bordo, 1990; Connell, 1995). Within contemporary society, then, the ideal female body is perceived to be that which is slender, athletic, and toned (Featherstone, 1991; Kirk, 1993) whereas the ideal masculine body is strong, aggressive, and mesomorphic (Connell, 1995; Sparkes, 1997). A number of health educators have noted how these ideals are reproduced through physical education practices, and have expressed concern at the promotion of ideals that are often unrealistic and unattainable for young people (e.g. Theberge, 1991; Vertinsky, 1992; Connell, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Several researchers have used this theoretical approach, and in particular the notion of technologies of self, to understand the role of power in young people's regulation of self (e.g. Pini, 1997; Hopkins, 1999; Tait, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> A number of researchers have argued that this is particularly true for young women, for whom changes to the body during puberty can be perceived, in general, to take them further from the dominant feminine ideal of a slender body (e.g. Frost, 2001; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). Some of these issues are also discussed in the analysis chapters (in particular chapters seven and eight).

<sup>6</sup> A further discussion of the agency issue within youth studies is provided in chapter three.

<sup>7</sup> This view of Bourdieu's, that the reactivation of certain theoretical instruments can assist in the constructive development of new approaches, is often used to respond to the criticism that his concepts are simply misrepresentations, re-inventions, or re-workings of previously defined terms (Laberge, 1995; Kauppi, 2000). As he has argued, 'the capacity to actively reproduce the best products of past thinkers by putting into use the instruments of production which they have left behind, is the condition which allows access to a thought which is truly productive' (Bourdieu, 1985a p.15).

<sup>8</sup> Although some indication was given by Bourdieu that habitus can potentially be transformed by changing circumstances or 'an awakening of consciousness' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002 p.133), I would agree with Jenkins (1992) that this remains an underdeveloped area within his approach.

<sup>9</sup> This is particularly evident within Bourdieu and Passeron's (1979) work on the French educational system.

<sup>10</sup> In other words, the issue of an individual's occupation of space within fields is not simply a case of being passively positioned, but also one of active position taking based upon the dispositions of habitus through which they are able to draw upon cultural knowledge and discourses at their disposal. In this respect, the work of Davies and Harré (2000), which highlights the relationships between discourses, discursive practices, and the production of multiple selves, can provide a useful reference point in relation to this study. Although heavily language based, it contains some useful concepts for understanding issues of agency and self, as well as the ways in which individuals are positioned and position themselves within social fields.

<sup>11</sup> This raises important implications for those working to increase activity levels among young people, and a number of researchers have indicated that any successful attempt to increase youth participation will need to consider the influences of early socialisation, such as the family, peer and school environments (Vertinsky, 1992; Douge, 1999; Mota & Silva, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Many authors have attempted to offer some justification for the increased significance of the peer group during the adolescent period. These have included a belief that peer relationships allow for the promotion of agency (Wyness, 1999; Ungar, 2000), provide a protected space in which to safely exercise resistance to authority (Kovarik, 1994), and offer a source of support and identification (Güneri *et al*, 1999).

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<sup>13</sup> Although it is not just television that influences an individual's identity, its particular nature and structure does lend itself to be a key player here. As Hogan (1999) has commented, 'television is perhaps the most pervasive and invasive of the mass media. Its multi-sensory messages demand our attention and our involvement in a way that other broadcast and print media cannot' (p.749). Having said this, advertisements, films, music, fashion, computers, books, and radio are all part of the cultural experience, and carry with them particular meanings and ideologies. Through all of these forms of media young people are provided with information regarding such things as what they should wear, how they should look, and what they should do, and are encouraged to shape themselves in line with this (e.g. Oliver & Lalik, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> The so-called 'media-effects' debate has gained much momentum in recent years (Cook, 2000), and as Livingston (1996) has pointed out, the findings both against and in favour of the media are controversial. On the one hand the media can be viewed negatively, as something that 'dupes' young people, and that is ultimately responsible for poor social behaviour (Nava & Nava, 1990; Postman, 1994). On the other, it can be regarded as potentially educational and informative, and something that young people can be skilled at interpreting (Willis, 1990; Anderson & Miles, 1999; Hayne, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Several researchers have highlighted the dangers inherent within this promotion of specific bodily ideals, particularly, although not exclusively, for young women, and the processes by which young people come to be engaged in processes of self-shaping (Wolf, 1991; Vertinsky, 1992; Connell, 1995; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Tait, 2000).



## Chapter Three

# Navigating a Middle Way: Methodological Issues and Considerations

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical framework of the study, and introduced and examined the conceptual tools employed to help address the objectives of inquiry laid out within the research questions. In doing so, it can be seen to have highlighted the complex process of positioning a study that, although predominately qualitative and aligned with the assumptions of the interpretive paradigm, also acknowledges elements of the theoretical perspectives associated with alternative, and allegedly opposing, viewpoints. In other words, while perceiving identities to be reflexively and individually constructed, dependent in part upon the interplay between situational and contextual variables within an individual's social experiences, there is also an appreciation that social structures can significantly shape and influence this process. This chapter moves on now to address the methodological concerns of the study, and to discuss the implications of such a complex situation in relation to issues such as research design, the adoption of particular data generation techniques, or the use of specific analytic strategies. Throughout the discussion, references are made to the challenge imposed by this attempt to navigate something of a middle way, and by emphasising the associations between both theoretical and methodological considerations it is hoped that this chapter can help to clarify and reinforce the positioning of the study in relation to the literature.

The chapter begins by addressing some of the literature concerned with perspectives on childhood and the process of conducting research with young people. It highlights in particular some work within the new social studies of childhood, in which young people move from being positioned as objects of research to knowledgeable social actors who, being capable of understanding their social experiences, are active participants within the data generation process. This is seen as allowing a shift away

from determinism, and an adoption of a reflexive and constructive approach to the study of young people's social worlds. The chapter then moves on to look more specifically at the methodological aspects of the study, and begins by reviewing the advantages and disadvantages of using the school as a research site. Although there were some negative issues in relation to this choice, such as the difficulties of having to comply with official regulations and policies, the advantage of this site in highlighting the significance of contextual variables on the construction of identities is acknowledged. The following sections of the discussion look directly at the data generation methods employed in the study, and highlight once again the value of transcending traditional paradigm boundaries to combine qualitative and quantitative techniques. In employing both surveys and focus group methods the research design is seen to allow for an acknowledgement of both structural and agential influences in shaping young people's social experiences, and hence a constructive examination of the issues central to the study. Furthermore, the use of semi-structured focus groups is perceived to be an additional means by which this structure-agency dualism can be explored. In other words, the group discussions themselves allowed the participants an opportunity to voice their opinions and articulate their interpretations of their social experiences, while the research tasks employed within the sessions allowed for a focus upon the various social fields and their influences on the young people's understandings of self. The discussion includes a description of all activities used within the data generation phase of the study, and highlights the value of using participatory techniques in research with young people, before moving on to a consideration of the reflexive dimensions of the research process. In this section I review my experiences of the research process, and examine, among other things, my own position within the study and the dynamic, emergent nature of qualitative research. The chapter closes by addressing the techniques and strategies used within the analysis of data, outlining the grounded theory approach adopted within the study and providing illustrative examples of the coding, sorting, and theory building stages of this process.



### 3.2 ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESEARCH: Empowering Competent Social Agents

‘Research which looks at young people’s views on communication with adults makes it clear that, by and large, they have little confidence that they will be listened to or their opinions respected. One of the most common findings is that adolescents do not feel that their views are taken seriously by adults. One of the things they most wish for is for adults to show some them some respect, to listen to them, and to treat what they say as a legitimate contribution to any discussion or conversation.’ (Coleman *et al*, 1997 pp.229-230)

Several authors have noted how young people’s voices have largely been muted, silenced or ignored in much of the youth research to date (Alderson, 1995; James & Prout, 1997; Hendrick, 2000). This is generally attributed to the fact that traditional views of childhood have conventionally been grounded theoretically in developmental or psychological approaches, and have regarded young people as somehow ‘incomplete adults’ (Woodhead *et al*, 1991; James *et al*, 1998; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000). Furthermore, it is clear that much of the previous research conducted with young people has been designed, framed, analysed and interpreted purely by adults (Roberts, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). There is a danger here that researchers’ own agendas can dominate this type of research, potentially resulting in a misinterpretation of information, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and lack of serious engagement by the research participants. Given that the notion of young people’s active involvement in their individual constructions of self is a central tenet of this thesis, views such as those outlined above, which have served to deny these individuals’ agency (Alderson, 1995; James *et al*, 1998), position them simply as objects of research (James & Prout, 1997; Hendrick, 2000), and treat them as a homogenous social group (Davis *et al*, 2000; Punch, 2002a), are clearly inconsistent with the theoretical stance of the study. Indeed, it was clear from the data generated in the focus group sessions that some of these issues were strongly challenged by those individuals involved in this study<sup>1</sup>. As such, the data analysis itself confirmed the need for a less deterministic, more reflexive approach to research with young people (Christensen & James, 2000), particularly, in relation to this study, in the light of being able to ask questions of the body-self-society complex.

The methodological approach of the thesis, then, reflects contemporary theoretical views of young people in which they are positioned as competent and skilled social actors, knowledgeable to a degree regarding their own social experiences (James & Prout, 1997; Davis *et al*, 2000; Mayall, 2000; Morrow, 2001). These views bring with them obvious implications for young peoples involvement in research, for, as Alderson (2000) has suggested, 'if children's social relations and culture are worthy of study in their own right, then who is better qualified to research aspects of their lives than children themselves' (p.244). It has been suggested that significant knowledge gains can result when young people's active involvement in research is deliberately solicited, and when their views and perspectives are both acknowledged and accepted (Alderson, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). In this way, increasing the involvement of young people within the research process can be regarded as both liberating and empowering (Edwards & Alldred, 1999; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Punch, 2002a). It was hoped that actively engaging young people in the qualitative phase of this study would prove to be both an enjoyable experience for the individuals themselves, and a means of generating rich data to illustrate the issues central to the research endeavour.

This is neither a simple nor straightforward decision to make, however, for as several authors have noted there are a number of significant methodological and ethical issues facing those who wish to actively engage young people in research (Christensen & James, 2000; Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). Taking the view held by researchers such as Alderson (1995) and Woodhead and Faulkner (2000) that it is crucial to be aware of these aspects of the research process, I attempted to identify and account for such problematic issues both within the research design and throughout the data generation phase itself. Central to these ethical struggles is the notion of a power dynamic, clearly present in any process of social interaction and assumed in a research situation to reside with the adult researcher (Kvale, 1996). Additional ethical issues highlighted throughout the literature on youth research tend to relate back to this underlying notion of power, and it is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that O'Kane (2000) identifies it as providing the 'ultimate challenge' for adults working with young people. The primary ethical struggles encountered throughout the study included a need to confront 'generational issues' (Mayall, 2000), protect the young people's right to confidentiality (Punch, 2001), and avoid premature interpretation of



their perspectives without clarification (Mayall, 1994), and have been written into the appropriate sections of this methodological account. Another issue of significance here, however, was the need to ensure that the research process afforded the young people involved a genuine opportunity to contribute their views. Coleman *et al* (1997) once again associate this issue with a notion of control, and suggest that unless power is equal in a conversational situation individuals can doubt their ability to be heard. It is important, then, for researchers not only to *listen* to young people (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Punch, 2002b) but also to *hear* what is being said (Morgan, 1997). By employing active listening and creating spaces in which voices can be heard, researchers indicate their respect for their research participants and are able to learn more effectively from them (O’Kane, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2000).

A consideration of these theoretical and ethical issues, in addition to the specific research questions underpinning this study, necessarily influenced the methods that were selected in order to generate the data for analysis. In being concerned with both the influence of social structures on individuals’ practices and young people’s active construction of their understandings of self, the intention of the study was ultimately to find an appropriate means of mediating this structure-agency dualism. As such, it represented an interesting methodological challenge and called for a multi-method research design. It has been established that there is no single accepted method for generating or analysing qualitative data, and that many authors now point to the value of utilising multiple research techniques in order to gather richer information (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; O’Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002b). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the view of a rigid dichotomy of research methods, in which qualitative and quantitative methods are linked primarily to interpretive and positivist epistemologies respectively (Brannen, 1992), can be restrictive and inhibiting, and that, alternatively, an integration of research methods can prove both enabling and effective (Hammersley, 1992a, 1992b; Cresswell, 1994). Consequently, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has been employed in this study, i.e. questionnaires, focus group discussions and individual interviews, in order to address most effectively both the research agenda and the theoretical perspective. Before moving on to explore the particular research methods employed in this study, however, the following section provides a brief introduction to the study’s research

sites and discusses the relative merit of locating a project such as this within an educational setting.

### **3.3 THE SCHOOL AS A RESEARCH SITE: Social Interaction, Cultural Practices and Institutional Habits.**

In terms of identifying a research site for this study, the decision was made to locate the study within an educational setting as this was felt to offer a number of advantages. On the one hand it allowed access to groups of young people, provided a venue for the focus group discussions, and facilitated the organisation of regular meeting times, but, more significantly, it also positioned the research within one of the core fields central to the study. Using schools as the research site, then, allowed for an examination of this particular context and, as school is a field in which young people have a great deal of contact with friends (Adler & Adler, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1998) and engage in physical culture practices (Connell, 1983; Kirk, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2000), it also afforded a means of exploring some of the other highlighted fields and identifying the associations between them. Following negotiations with a number of local schools, in which the purpose and structure of the research was clearly outlined, three institutions agreed to take part.

- i) St. Agnes' Convent School – An Independent Girls School (3-18 years).
- ii) Thornhill Boys' School – An Independent Boys' School (11-18 years).
- iii) Fenburgh Community College – A Co-Educational College (11-14 years)<sup>2</sup>.

The decision to include a range of schools, both private and state-maintained, was an intentional one and, as it was hoped that it would, added an interesting class and gender dynamic to the data generated<sup>3</sup>. Despite these advantages, however, I was conscious of the literature calling for researchers to acknowledge the influence of the physical context when interviewing young people (Scott, 2000), and that conducting research within an educational setting would bring with it additional pressures and issues for consideration (Simons, 1984; Punch, 2002b).

The two most significant issues that I encountered in this study related to my role as researcher within the field, and the notion of confidentiality. In negotiating access to



each of the schools, and particularly in setting up and conducting the focus group discussions, I was engaging with both teachers and students, and this meant that I was required to position myself differently in each of these contexts (Punch, 2001). It has been suggested that the researchers who interview young people within the school setting are often perceived as teachers, and that their ingrained response to this type of situation can impact the nature and validity of the data generated (Christensen & James, 2000; Punch, 2002b). As Simons (1984) has suggested, 'a stranger coming in for a few odd days may have difficulty getting beyond institutional habits' (p.243). However, although I attempted to distance myself from this teacher identity, the 'institutional habits' exhibited by the participants were not necessarily regarded as problematic because they provided valuable information relating to the development of habitus. The need to be flexible in switching between different identities (i.e. as 'researcher' on the one hand or 'friend' rather than 'teacher' on the other) in order to meet the demands of the specific situation, however, was a particular challenge in this study. In relation to the second issue, there was a need to conform to the rules and regulations of each school regarding the question of consent. In each case these stipulated that before I was able to begin the focus group meetings I was required to secure the parental consent of each young person involved in these sessions, and that I should ensure the anonymity of both institution and individual. However, when the issue of confidentiality was addressed in the focus group discussions a number of the young people expressed a desire to keep their own names or use their nicknames, as they felt that these were a significant aspect of their constructions of self.<sup>4</sup> It has been suggested that when considering the reporting of qualitative data one of the main concerns for researchers is the issue of participant anonymity (Christians, 2000). It is generally assumed that such maintenance of privacy is an integral feature of ethical research, and indeed a number of research societies and organisations have this issue embedded in their codes of practice<sup>5</sup>. However, some authors such as Grinyer (2002) have questioned whether this practice of allocating pseudonyms can cause individuals to feel that they 'lose their ownership' of the data (p.1). She goes on to suggest that in allocating names to individuals 'there is always the danger that (it) will result in them being called by a name that has bad associations or that they simply cannot relate to' (p.4), and as such it is important that assumptions are not made regarding the desires of participants. In an attempt to take notice of opinions such as these, and to deal with the conflicting desires of schools and students, it was decided to afford the participants

(who are introduced later in the chapter) an opportunity to select their own pseudonym in order to retain a degree of 'ownership' of their data (Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Grinyer, 2002).

Having briefly introduced the three research settings, we now move on to look at the specific qualitative and quantitative methods employed in this study, both those that helped to identify young people to be involved in the research process and those that contributed to the generation of research material.

### **3.4 THE MOTIVATION AND SELF-PERCEPTION SURVEY**

Although the majority of the data generated was via qualitative means, through the focus group and individual interviews, the quantitative aspect of the methodology played a fundamental role. Marshall and Rossman (1991) have noted that researchers often 'administer questionnaires to some sample of a population to learn about the distribution of a characteristic or set of characteristics or a set of attitudes and beliefs' (p.83). In this study a modified version of the Motivation and Self-Perception Survey<sup>6</sup> (Wang & Biddle, 2001) was employed in order to identify young people's attitudes and orientation to aspects of physical culture, highlighted in this research endeavour as a primary field in which embodied identities are constructed. As such, the quantitative phase of the research process played an important sampling role, a matter of some importance when it is considered that this process is often considered 'a major key to the success of focus groups' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000 p.288).

There is a vast body of psychological literature to indicate that motivational determinants such as physical self-perception, perceived self-competence and goal orientations are key factors in relation to young people's orientation to physical activity (e.g. Duda, 1989; Fox & Corbin, 1989; Biddle, 1997; Fox, 1997). These determinants do not sit in isolation, however, and the Motivation and Self-Perception Survey (MSPS) was designed in order to assess the nature of the relationships between these various constructs. This survey was developed for use in the Nike/Youth Sport Trust Girls in Sport project and, although modified for this study, the rationale behind the identification of research variables and particular instruments for measuring these determinants necessarily reflects, in part, the wider focus of that



research endeavour. Nonetheless, each instrument included in the construction of the MSPS was selected because it had been examined and ratified through psychometric testing and, as such, had achieved a degree of validation through this process.

Although the MSPS comes from a strong body of psychological research, it is clear that there are links between the psychological and sociological disciplines in relation to some of the issues discussed here. As Biddle (1997) has suggested, 'the notion of the self...is closely related to motivated actions' (p.59). The notion of an individual's identity, particularly for young people, can become increasingly linked to a sport or activity, and this can provide a strong motivational intensity for participation. The development of identity through exercise can lead to the formation of 'domain-specific identities' (Biddle, 1997 p.69), which can then become part of the self-schemata, i.e. the self is linked into the social. It can be argued, then, that cognitive approaches to motivation are strongly related to the themes of the physical self and related self-perceptions, and that, as such, it is important to consider them in relation to this proposed study. As mentioned, the MSPS was developed in order to examine more fully the interrelation of those psychological constructs outlined above in any one individual, and, through the use of cluster analysis, to identify sub-groups of individuals sharing similar motivational profiles. The aim of cluster analysis has been defined as an attempt 'to identify homogenous groups or clusters based upon the characteristics they possess' (Wang & Biddle, 2001 p.8), and as such it is beneficial because it allows similar people to be grouped together rather than simply group similar variables. In relation to the aims of this study, it was speculated that this would group individuals with similar aspects of habitus and, as such, allow for a study of the factors that may contribute to the development of these schemes of perception and appreciation.

#### ***3.4.1 Composition of the Questionnaire<sup>7</sup>.***

The first section of the questionnaire included five brief questions relating to the respondents' generic involvement in physical activity, and also the organisational level of this participation i.e. whether it was recreational or competitive. This was intended to provide some detail as to the young people's current involvement with physical cultural practices.



The following section of the questionnaire utilised the Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ) (Duda & Whitehead, 1998) in order to assess the respondents' dispositional achievement goal orientations. Goal perspective theories have identified an important relationship between the way that young people define success and their motivation to be physically active (Treasure & Roberts, 1995). The thirteen items used in the questionnaire were intended to identify the degree to which an individual's goal perspectives were either task- or ego-oriented. In other words they determined whether an individual tended to define success or competence in terms of improving their mastery of a given skill or action (task-oriented) or, conversely, with winning or surpassing others (ego-oriented). In association with other factors measured by the survey, such as self-competence, these goal orientations can help to determine young people's motivation towards physical activity.

Based upon self-determination theories highlighting the necessity of acknowledging individuals' needs and motives in relation to motivational issues (Biddle, Soos & Chatzisarantis, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000), the next section was concerned with the reasons young people gave for participating in sport and physical activity. The items in this section all began with the stem 'I take part in physical education and sport because...', and represented four behavioural regulations central to self-determination theories; external regulation (extrinsic control), introjection (internal pressure), identification (self-determined behaviour), and intrinsic motivation (done for its own sake). These factors were assessed using the Perceived Locus of Causality Scale (PLOC) developed by Goudas *et al* (1994), and the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) was calculated in order to indicate the relative degree of controlled or autonomous regulation<sup>8</sup>. In addition to these regulatory factors, this section of the survey also measured amotivation, a concept consistent with a self-determination framework yet significant in its own right. Amotivation refers to 'a lack of motivation where no contingency between actions and outcomes is perceived and there is no perceived purpose in engaging in the activity', and is often associated with feelings of helplessness (Wang & Biddle, 2001 p.5). In this version of the MSPS, amotivation was measured by three items adopted by Goudas *et al* (1994) from the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand *et al*, 1992).



Following on from this, the fourth section of the survey evaluated the respondents' beliefs regarding the nature of sports ability. Grounded in self-theories of ability beliefs, twenty-one items based on the Conceptions of the Nature of Athletic Ability Questionnaire (CNAAQ2) (Biddle *et al*, in press) were included to assess the degree to which individuals regarded sport ability to be fixed (entity beliefs) or changeable (incremental beliefs). The final two sections of the survey were concerned with the respondents' personal views regarding both their general behaviour and their participation in physical activity. In the penultimate section, enjoyment and effort subscales from the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (McAuley *et al*, 1989) were employed in order to assess the respondents' perceptions of their involvement with sport and physical activity.

In the final section, individuals were requested to indicate the degree to which they agreed with six statements, referring to their perceptions of enjoyment and effort within physical education. These statements were adapted from the Physical Self-Perception Profile (PSPP) (Fox & Corbin, 1989), their responses indicative of their levels of perceived physical competence.

### **3.4.2 Questionnaire Procedures.**

All in all the questionnaire took only ten minutes to complete, a fact which increased its attractiveness to the schools involved in this study, and provided an adequate means of clustering young people on the basis of their motivational profiles in relation to sport and physical activity. This adapted version of the survey was administered to 231 young people (128 male, 103 female) aged 13-15 years in the three participating schools<sup>9</sup>. General instructions were provided on the questionnaire itself and assistance was also offered when necessary, for example if any of the questions were found to be unclear or caused confusion. Students were asked to write their names on the questionnaires, although they were assured that this was simply for the purpose of identifying individuals to be involved in the focus groups and that their individual responses would not be observed by anyone other than myself. The information generated by the young people was entered into SPSS and a cluster analysis was performed using the motivational variable outlined above<sup>10</sup>; task and ego orientation, incremental and entity beliefs, RAI, amotivation and perceived self-competence. This

resulted in the formation of five cluster groups that are now outlined in the following section.

### ***3.4.3 Description of the Cluster Groups.***

The young people were positioned in one of five cluster groups, of which two reflected highly (positively) motivated individuals (clusters 1 and 2), one reflected predominantly externally motivated individuals (cluster 3), and two reflected lowly motivated individuals (clusters 4 and 5). The five clusters are outlined briefly here and these descriptions, in association with the following graph (fig. 3.1), are intended to provide an illustration of the general motivational profile of each group.

Cluster 1 (n= 48 male, 31 female) contained individuals who were characterised by high scores in most of the motivational variables apart from amotivation. This cluster was labelled 'self-determined' as the general profile of those individuals within it suggested that they were characterised by high levels of intrinsic motivation towards physical activity.

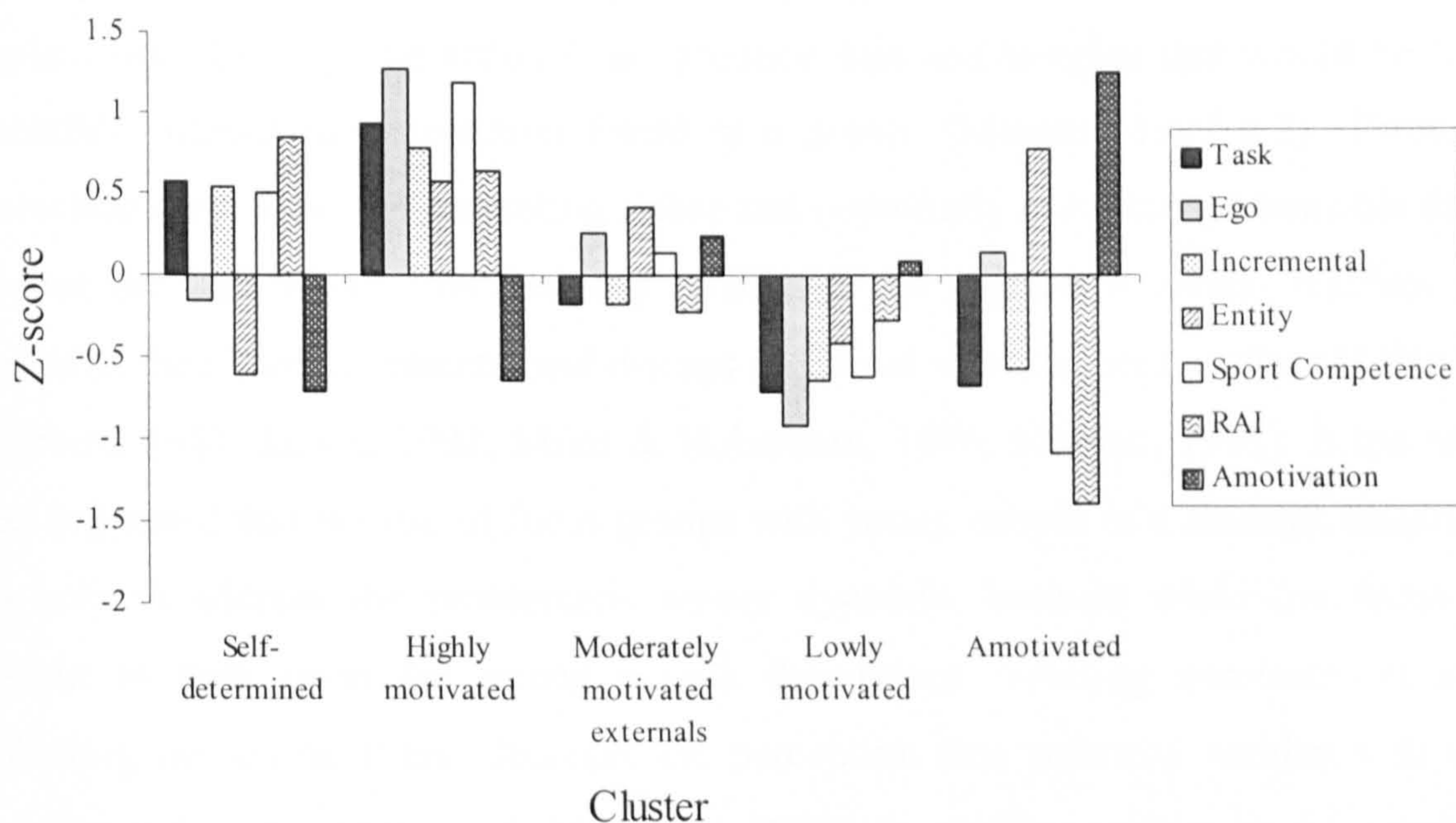
Individuals in cluster 2 (n=16 male, 2 female) were also characterised by high scores, although these were predominantly related to the 'intrinsic' aspects of motivation such as task orientation and incremental beliefs. As such, this cluster, which was predominately male, was labelled 'highly motivated'.

Conversely, cluster 3 (n=31 male, 20 female) had a relatively 'flat' profile of average scores. This group was labelled 'moderately motivated externals', as the profile of those individuals within it was characterised more by 'external' aspects of motivation i.e. ego-orientations and entity beliefs.

Cluster 4 (n=10 male, 28 female) was characterised by low scores in relation to most of the motivational and self-esteem variables. This cluster, in which females were highly represented, was labelled 'lowly motivated' as the profile of these individuals suggested that they were unlikely to orient themselves towards participation in physical activity.



Finally, cluster 5 (n=19 male, 22 female), was also characterised by a number of low scores, although there were higher scores for both entity beliefs and ego-orientation and the amotivation score in this cluster was the highest of all of the groups. The high amotivation score in here is indicative of a more substantial aversion to sport and physical activity, and accounts for the labelling of this cluster ‘amotivated’.



**Figure 3.1: Graph showing the Z-scores for each motivational determinant divided into cluster group.**

#### 3.4.4 Summary: The Potential Value of the Cluster Groupings.

The adapted version of the MSPS utilised a number of psychological constructs, each supported and validated by a body of literature and research, and allowed for individuals to be grouped in relation to their motivation to participate in physical activity. However, this study is not simply concerned with identifying these profiles but instead seeks to examine the reality of young people’s experiences of physical culture in the wider context of the ‘multi-dimensional’ social space (Bourdieu, 1986). As such, the information generated through the MSPS was used as a springboard to further inquiry and a step towards the qualitative phase of the research. Moreover, the qualitative data generated in this next phase also provided a means of assessing the validity of the psychological concepts associated with motivational variables and their measurement. In this way, the two data generation phases were clearly not distinct procedures, but were bound together in a constructive, reciprocal relationship.



### **3.5 EMPLOYING A FOCUS GROUP APPROACH: 'A Dynamic, Interpersonal Process'.**

The use of focus groups is now a popular and widely used method of generating qualitative data, and as one that is particularly suited to the interpretive perspective (Morgan, 1997) it was deemed an appropriate technique to employ in this study. Focus groups are a 'dynamic, interpersonal process' (Simons, 1984) in which the 'explicit use of group interaction (can) produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (Morgan, 1997 p.2). Through interaction they allow for generating richer and potentially more comprehensible data because the individuals involved can challenge one another's views, reaffirm or contradict their own comments, and discuss any areas of agreement or discord (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987; Lewis, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morgan, 1997). It has also been suggested that the use of focus groups with young people in a research situation can help to address the problematic power dynamic, because when the focus is brought to bear upon the young people themselves directing conversation and generating discussion it can decrease the perception that authority resides with the interviewer (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In relation to this study, specific attempts to deal with this power issue included employing active listening (Oliver & Lalik, 2000; O'Kane, 2000), asking for clarification regarding unclear remarks, or seeking confirmation that I had understood the young people's meanings correctly. In this way, it would help to avoid misinterpretations of their comments in the analysis of the data. Focus groups are not the soft option, however, but require 'skilful and sensitive guidance' (Lewis, 1992 p.413) in order to direct the conversation (Simons, 1984), deal with problematic issues such as dominant speakers or disruptive behaviour (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987) and ensure that the structure of the interview is both enjoyable and engaging to encourage the participation of all group members (Morgan, 1997). As such, there is a need for the researcher to be prepared and informed regarding both the group they are working with and the issues to be discussed, but also flexible and adaptive in order to deal with the issues that will undoubtedly arise in such a dynamic situation.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) have suggested that the 'contrived nature' of focus groups is both their primary strength and weakness, and so in order to ensure



that this method would be an effective addition to the research design careful consideration was given to the nature of the group composition and size. Each group comprised five individuals, one from each of the clusters identified through the MSPS, a number which also sits in the optimal range for focus groups of four to ten individuals proposed by a number of researchers (Lewis, 1992; Morgan, 1997; Punch, 2002b). There were four groups in total involving ten boys and ten girls (see fig. 3.2), and the decision of which individuals to approach for inclusion in these was made with the help of the contact teacher at the relevant school and based as far as possible around the notion of natural friendship groups<sup>11</sup>. Although some researchers suggest that it is generally better to comprise focus groups of relative strangers (e.g. Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000), others observe that in research with young people 'friendship groupings may be the most important single criterion to use for selecting groups' (Lewis, 1992 p.418). Given that the field of peers was a central concept in the study, it was felt that friendship groups would certainly be more appropriate to use in this case. In addition to affording the young people a degree of mutual support and rendering the group discussions less intimidating (Renold, 2001a; Punch, 2002a), it was hoped that the use of friendship based focus groups would generate valuable contextual information relating to peer interactions. A number of authors have stressed the importance of acknowledging the social environment as a significant influence in research situations, and that the social interaction that takes place in an interview situation is itself embedded in social life (Lewis, 1992; Morgan, 1997; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). This, then, was seen as a major advantage of the focus group method, as the notion of context had been identified as an important factor in both the development of an individual's habitus and their construction of identities. Bearing these issues in mind, however, it is necessary to acknowledge that although the focus group discussions constituted a peer 'setting', the fact that they took place within the school environment necessarily exposed them to the dynamics of the school field. As such, it was important to be aware of the influence that both of these significant fields could have on the data generated by the young people.

Some researchers have noted that focus groups do not allow for the generation of in-depth knowledge of participants (Morgan, 1997), and as such have questioned the potential for making valid interpretations based on single encounters (Fetterman, 1989; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). One way to circumvent this problem is to

have repeated meetings with the same group, as this allows the researcher to develop a rapport with the research participants (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). This then helps to create a more comfortable and trusting environment that is ultimately more conducive to the generation of an extensive body of rich data (Marshall & Rossman, 1991; Punch, 2001, 2002a). In relation to this study, the utilisation of repeated interviews would also allow an appropriate amount of time for the completion of the specific research tasks (outlined later in the chapter). Having made this decision, however, it proved to be a highly problematic issue, and following negotiation with the participant schools I was able to secure only five weeks of working with each group<sup>12</sup>. Although unavoidable, it is acknowledged that this short time period is a major limitation to the study. The decision had already been made to have a degree of structure in the focus group meetings, and the additional time constraints, which demanded that I make the most of the limited group contact, simply confirmed the necessity of this. It was felt that a certain element of structure would help to direct the conversation and keep it 'on track' in terms of addressing the research objectives (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987, Morgan, 1997), while at the same time allowing the young people to identify, raise and discuss additional or unanticipated issues (Silverman, 1993). Furthermore, in following the current trend to bring interviewing in line with an ethnographic approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Morgan, 1997; Gaskell, 2000), it was hoped that this semi-structured research design would help to frame the focus group discussions as 'negotiated accomplishment' (Fontana & Frey, 2000 p.663) and hence allow for an element of reflexivity.

**Fig. 3.2 An introduction to the research participants.**

Name	Age	Sex	School	Cluster	Information
Amadaia	15	F	SACS	1	Amadaia is from a close family and has a strong Christian faith. She is best friends with Katie.
Chloë	14	F	SACS	2	Chloë is one of the youngest in her year and is quiet within the focus groups. She identifies herself as Muslim and is passionate about sport.
Mia	15	F	SACS	3	Mia is confident and outspoken, and appears to be more socially mature than her peers. She is good friends with Lara.
Lara	14	F	SACS	4	Lara is confident and appears to be popular among her peers. She is involved in a number of school sports teams and is good friends with Mia.
Katie	15	F	SACS	5	Katie is a very high achiever though she



					lacks self-confidence. She identifies herself as Christian and is best friends with Amadaia.
Danny	14	M	TBS	1	Danny is a keen sportsman and involved in numerous school teams. He is friends with Frederick.
Frederick	15	M	TBS	2	Frederick is a talented sportsman and captain of his schools cricket team. He is popular with his peers and is friends with Danny.
Mike	14	M	TBS	3	Mike is articulate, outspoken, and often confrontational. He describes himself as a 'skater' and of all group members is most friendly with Bob.
Lloyd	14	M	TBS	4	Lloyd identifies himself as Indian and describes himself as 'musical'. He is involved in some school sports and is the joker of the group.
Bob	14	M	TBS	5	Bob describes himself as 'arty' and as uninterested in sport. He is keen to offer his views within the group discussions and is most friendly with Mike.
Carl	13	M	FCC (gp. 1)	1	Carl is articulate and talkative within the focus groups. He participates in a number of sports both within and outside of school. He is friends with all of the group, in particular Alex and Liz.
Alex	13	M	FCC (gp. 1)	2	Alex is a keen sportsman and is a strong supporter of his national and local football teams. He often plays the joker and is most friendly with Carl and Liz.
Ben	13	M	FCC (gp. 1)	3	Ben is involved with a local air cadets group and appears to be popular among his peers. He is quiet within the focus groups.
Simon	13	M	FCC (gp. 2)	4	Simon enjoys skateboarding but dislikes physical activity within school. He is popular among the group and is friends with Sophie.
John	13	M	FCC (gp. 2)	5	John has some learning difficulties and is quiet within the focus groups. His comments are often dismissed or challenged by the rest of the group.
Sophie	13	F	FCC (gp. 2)	1	Sophie is articulate and confident within the focus groups. She is involved in a number of school sports teams and is friends with Zoe, Laura and Simon.
Liz	13	F	FCC (gp. 1)	2	Liz is outspoken and occasionally confrontational. She is a keen dancer and is involved in this outside of school. She is friendly with Carl and Alex.
Zoe	13	F	FCC (gp. 2)	3	Zoe is very talkative within the focus groups but is often quite defensive. She is friends with Sophie and Laura through their involvement in school sport teams.
Laura	13	F	FCC (gp. 2)	4	Laura is quite confident and outspoken. She is close to her family and participates in physical activities inside and outside of school. She is friends with Sophie and Zoe.
Jill	13	F	FCC	5	Jill is reserved and quiet within the focus

		(gp. 1)		groups. She dislikes sport but enjoys horse-riding in her free time.
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### 3.6 EMPLOYING PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES: Various Considerations.

Within the focus group discussions numerous research tasks were employed in order to generate and encourage discussion and, most importantly, to actively involve the young people in this qualitative phase of the research process. There is a growing body of research to suggest that although young people are similar in many ways to adults, they often possess different competencies which should be taken into account when designing a research protocol (James *et al*, 1998; O’Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002b). For example, it has been shown that some young people can communicate effectively through media other than verbal interaction (Alderson, 1995; James, 1995; Prosser, 1998), and that the familiarity of engaging in activities, thanks to their extensive use within various educational contexts, can render visual and written tasks both efficient and easeful methods to employ (James *et al*, 1998; Punch, 2002b). As a consequence of these beliefs, a number of techniques which emphasise the particular skills of younger research participants have been designed and developed, for example the use of journals or diaries (Oliver & Lalik, 2000), writing and drawing techniques (Morrow, 1999), visual triggers (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 1999), or auto-photography (Fitzgerald, Kirk & Jobling, 2002).

O’Kane (2000), however, warns that participatory techniques, although enjoyable, can be unpredictable, and that they should only be used in an appropriate context. Punch (2001) also emphasises that task-based activities should not be viewed simply as child-friendly techniques, but highlights that the questions and themes to be addressed through the research will determine the most appropriate methods to use. Bearing these concerns in mind, an informed decision was made to include a number of research tasks in the focus group sessions, although I was careful to ensure that those activities used were tailored to the aims and intentions of the study. As such, each task provided a means of examining the young people’s social experiences, exploring the relationships between social fields, or highlighting aspects of their identity work. The primary reasons for making this decision were not only grounded in an interest in new and innovative research techniques, but also took account of the significance of employing ‘analytical diversity’ (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996 p.3) within qualitative



methods of data generation. It was my belief that some semi-structured activities would help to prevent boredom and sustain interest, encourage innovation and reflection, decrease the pressure for constant conversation, and defuse problematic power dynamics that can potentially arise in such a contrived situation (Kvale, 1996; Punch, 2002a, 2002b; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Furthermore, the inclusion of activities also allowed myself as researcher some time to reflect on the situation, and I found it particularly useful as a means to observe the complexities of group dynamics and the more covert aspects of peer relationships.

### **3.7 INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH TASKS**

Ideas for activities and tasks to use within the focus group interviews came from a variety of sources both within the literature and through personal communication with researchers in similar fields. A primary influence in relation to research design was the work of Oliver & Lalik (2000, 2001), which attempts to critique the social information that is used by young people in their construction of body narratives. Their work with adolescent girls in the US involves the use of a combination of innovative techniques to draw out the desired information, and a number of these have been adapted or appropriated for inclusion in this study. Other studies that provided research ideas were those of Chandler and Roberts-Young (1998) looking at the construction of identity in the personal web-pages of adolescents, Simmons and Wade (1984, 1987) utilising open-ended questions to access young people's views, Bromnick and Swallow (1999) concerning issues relating to role models and the shaping of the self, and Ungar (2000) highlighting the role that friends and peer groups play in the lives of teenagers. It was therefore through a process of collation, adaptation and innovation that I developed a protocol for use within the focus group sessions.

As has been mentioned, the overall rationale behind the focus group sessions was to explore the social experiences of the young people within the context of the five identified social fields, and hence to achieve some of the 'thick description' (Geertz, 1975) that was lacking from the quantitative cluster analysis. The decision to include research activities within these sessions was intended to enhance and facilitate this process, although I was conscious of ensuring that each task served a specific purpose and that they fitted together in a logical, progressive and coherent, yet at the same

time flexible, framework. This section of the chapter seeks to outline the basic elements of this framework, and to provide some justification for their inclusion in the study.

### 3.7.1 *'Identity Posters'/'Personal Web Page'*

The ultimate aim of the focus group sessions was the creation by each individual of an 'identity poster', a collage of images, people, places etc. that were deemed to be of significance to each of the young people within the group.<sup>13</sup> Following the vast body of literature emphasising the centrality of media forms to young people's social experiences (e.g. Kellner, 1992; Jenkins, 1996) and the significant role that they can play in the construction of self (e.g. Miles *et al*, 1998; Pietrass, 1999), and with particular reference to the work of Chandler & Roberts-Young (1998), these posters were also referred to as 'Personal Web Pages', in order to generate an interest in the project and provide a familiar reference with which the young people might be able to identify<sup>14</sup>. It was hoped that by presenting these posters as the intended outcome of the sessions it might provide the young people involved with an idea as to the purpose of the interviews, and also indicate the active participation that would be required of them week by week. In addition to being a practical activity, the posters also provided a source of discussion throughout the focus group sessions, particularly in the final meeting with each group in which the young people were asked to describe what they felt the poster expressed about themselves. In this way, the task sits quite nicely with the theoretical issues underpinning this thesis, as it identifies both the social structures that can be seen to influence young people's tastes and actions, and the ways that individuals actively appropriate, interpret and utilise these influences in their constructions of self. As Chandler & Roberts-Young (1998) suggest, personal homepages can provide a comprehensive representation of an individual's identity, because they allow for the fluidity, revision, and reflection that are central to contemporary notions of self.

### 3.7.2 *Ice Breaker*

It has been suggested that the use of 'ice-breaker' activities can prove useful in both defusing tension and setting the mood of a focus group discussion (Morgan, 1997). As the focus groups in this study were themselves constructed around friendship groups



there was little need to introduce the individuals to each other, but I still felt that some kind of introductory activity would be beneficial. As such, the first activity that I employed with each group was to ask them to discuss among themselves the question 'what does the word identity mean to you?'. This was useful both as a means of introducing the topic and also familiarising the young people with the interactive process of discussion, central to the success of focus groups (Simons, 1984; Lewis, 1992; Morgan, 1997).

### 3.7.3 *Journals*

A growing recognition of the need to listen to young people and actively engage them in the research process has led a number of researchers to include the use of journals or reflexive writing activities in their research design (Nesbitt, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2000, 2001; Punch, 2001, 2002a). It is suggested that these research tools can afford participants an opportunity to record their thoughts and feelings about the research process, allow them to engage in self-reflection and analysis, and function as 'safe spaces' of communication directly with the researcher (Cooper, 1991; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). I liked the idea of using journals, both for the reasons cited above and also as a medium through which to set the young people short weekly tasks that would encourage them to think about some of the issues central to the study<sup>15</sup>. Taking this into account, it was necessary to adapt the form that the journals would take so that it would be possible to collect completed work, in order to generate themes for discussion in subsequent sessions, without removing the journals completely. At the beginning of the first session, therefore, I gave each individual a document wallet containing individual sheets of coloured paper and explained the purpose of these journals to them, i.e. that they would be given tasks or questions to complete within the journals, but that they could also use them as a medium through which to make notes, ask any questions, or raise issues that they didn't want to discuss in the group situation.

The journals were in some ways both the most and least successful aspect of the research design. Although I actively encouraged the young people to write down their thoughts and feelings concerning their involvement in the study, very few individuals actually used their journals for this purpose. It is felt that the time restrictions imposed



upon the fieldwork phase of the study provided a limitation here, in that there was not a long enough period in which the young people could develop the skill of journal writing. On the other hand, the semi-structured nature of the journal tasks proved very successful, and the journals did represent a space in which some of the young people offered more private thoughts and information. Furthermore, the ways in which the journals were decorated by some of the young people provided an additional and unexpected source of information about their particular tastes and interest.

#### **3.7.4 *Topic Discussion Task***

A number of previous studies have used grouping and ranking tasks as a means of determining young people's perspectives on various issues central to their specific research endeavour (O'Kane, 2000; Punch, 2002a; Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, in press). In this particular study, the topic discussion task involved the young people being given a list of social contexts, which included the five highlighted fields, identified through the literature as spaces in which young people spend significant amounts of time (see appendix B). They were then given some time to look through this list and discuss it with the other members of the group before they were asked to select the five contexts that *they personally* felt had most influenced their perceptions of self. They then ranked their choices from the most influential (1) to least influential (5). These responses were then used as a trigger for a group discussion in which questions relating to their reasons for choosing particular contexts over others, their perceptions of whether they acted differently in one context compared to another, and their opinions regarding which contexts allowed them to feel most comfortable or confident framed the conversation. In this way, it was hoped that the activity would help to generate information relating to the specific configuration of the fields in the social experience of each individual, and highlight some of the issues central to these perspectives.

#### **3.7.5 *Time-Space Maps***

Similar to the 'personal maps' used by Oliver & Lalik (2000), the 'My Week' tool employed by Christensen and James (2000) and the 'Places I Know' spider diagrams adapted by Punch (2002b), this research task generated pictorial representations of an individual's movements, practices and social interactions throughout a particular day



or days<sup>16</sup>. These time-space maps were then used as an additional means of initiating conversations within the interviews. The process of constructing time-space maps involved each young person making a full record of their activities during a whole day, i.e. from waking to sleeping. Questions such as ‘where did you go?’, ‘what did you do?’, ‘who was there?’, and ‘how much time was spent there?’ were asked in order to help construct the ‘map’, and to identify the social structures and situations with which the young people came into contact (see appendix B). The grounds for including this activity were primarily two-fold. Firstly, the use of time-space maps in this way could allow for the ‘concretizing of the very abstract notion of time use’ (Christensen & James, 2000 p.165) and, secondly, the construction process could encourage cumulative recall and increased reflection on the part of the young people.

In identifying habitus as a central theoretical concept in this study, it has been acknowledged that individuals are not always consciously aware of the social factors that can influence their practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1985b, 1990). Consequently, when talking within an interview situation upon a specific topic it was possible that the young people would recall only those situations that had been consciously registered as important (Dillon & Moje, 1998). This ‘forgotten’ information, however, is important in understanding the individuals, situations and practices which are encountered or undertaken by the interviewees, i.e. those factors within and between fields which comprise the social experience and which provide potential influences in the construction of identity. As such, the process of constructing time-space maps was particularly useful as it allowed for an exploration of the young people’s social worlds, and determined, in part, the extent to which their actions were perceived as self-determined, structurally regulated, or indeed governed by a notion of ‘practical logic’ (Bourdieu, 1990b).

### ***3.7.6 Magazine Exploration***

This research task was adapted from the work of Oliver & Lalik (2000, 2001), and was seen as particularly relevant in relation to this study as it relates directly to the field of media. Furthermore, as cultural channels through which meanings are constructed, interpreted or reproduced, magazines are also a useful tool for potentially identifying some of the key factors influencing aspects of an individual’s habitus



(McRobbie, 1982, 1994; Tait & Carpenter, 1999; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). A selection of magazines covering a wide range of topics were made available in the focus group sessions<sup>17</sup>, along with scissors, glue sticks, large sheets of paper, pens and other stationary equipment. The young people were then asked to cut out any images that they thought were significant in helping to describe aspects of their identities, and to categorise and label their choices (Oliver, 1999). For example, pictures that made them think about themselves, reminded them of their family or friends, or indicated role models, sporting or musical tastes etc. These were then used both as initiators of discussion, i.e. the explanation of individual's choices and the similarities or differences seen among the group, and in the construction of each individual's 'Personal Web Page'.

The value of using magazines as a research tool in this way is that stimulus material can often act as a springboard into discussion, opening up avenues of inquiry and allowing individuals to illustrate and expand their responses (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 1999; Punch, 2002a). Furthermore, it was hoped that the use of such culturally familiar material (Hazel, 1996) would help to ensure that the research was seen as more attractive and relevant by the young people, engaging their interest and encouraging full participation. The inclusion of this activity also allowed me time to talk to individuals within the group in a less threatening way (because other conversations were taking place simultaneously), to listen to their own conversations and identify interesting points for discussion, and to observe once again the dynamics of peer interactions.

### **3.7.7 Summary.**

This section has intended to highlight the main research activities that the young people were engaged in within the focus group discussions. In the provisional construction of the research protocol I also attempted to develop an appropriate schedule for these research tasks, and this is shown in appendix B. Allowing for the dynamic nature of qualitative research, this schedule was not rigidly defined but included a number of alternative activities and contingency plans. Although there were many changes that occurred over the course of the data generation period<sup>18</sup>, this



schedule did provide a general degree of structure to the focus group sessions that I believe was useful in ensuring the core issues of the study were addressed.

### **3.8 REFLEXIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

It has already been noted that the study was an ‘evolving process’ (Peshkin, 2000), and that it was both adapted and developed throughout the period of research. It was certainly found to be a learning process in which preconceptions were challenged, problems were encountered, and plans were changed. Yet it was also one with a fair measure of ‘serendipitous findings’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and these often provided timely encouragement to persevere. Above all, the dynamic nature of the qualitative aspects of the research process reiterated the need for flexibility (Marshall & Rossman, 1991; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Punch, 2001) and a reflexive understanding of my own involvement in the study. Although aware of the literature that highlights the reflexive role of the researcher as a significant influential factor in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996; Small, 1997; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Peshkin, 2000), and the need to incorporate a degree of flexibility into the research design (Marshall & Rossman, 1991; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Punch, 2001), I was struck by the inherent reality of these comments as the focus group discussions began and progressed. The following section is intended to highlight some of the core issues in relation to this epiphany, identifying those significant occasions when I was required to question, consider, or readdress my approach to the study, and indicating the means by which problematic or contentious situations were handled or overcome.

#### ***3.8.1 Positioning Myself in the Study.***

One of the most significant issues that I faced during the study was that of understanding my role in the research process, and establishing my position within the focus group discussions. A number of authors have attempted to outline the role that a researcher should take when working with young people, suggesting, for example, that they should position themselves as ‘friends’ (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988), ‘least adults’ (Mandell, 1991) or simply ‘facilitator’ rather than ‘leader’ (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987). This attempt to neutralise the power relations between adults and young people was something that I considered significant and as such, and after much consideration, I elected to present myself to the young people involved in the study as a ‘student’. In



this way I was able to distance myself from the somewhat authoritative labels of 'teacher' or 'researcher' and highlight the degree of connection between us, as well as reinforce the notion of the young people's agency in this study. The wearing of casual clothes (Fontana & Frey, 2000), a consideration of appropriate language and terminology use (Oppenheim, 1992, Punch, 2002a), and an adoption of a relaxed approach to time-keeping and disruptive behaviour (Christensen & James, 2000; Roberts, 2000), were all consciously employed to help reinforce this non-threatening image. In addition to this, there were some unanticipated factors that facilitated my communication with the young people. I found, for example, that simply being a relatively young person myself (in appearance if not in years), and reasonably well informed regarding elements of popular culture (through the literature on youth research, personal interests and previous research experience with young people), provided me with significant social capital. Having said this, however, there were a number of occasions when a *faux pas* on my part<sup>19</sup>, or an inside joke that wasn't clarified, identified me as an 'outsider', the very thing I had been attempting to avoid.

While a relaxed approach facilitated, to a degree, the development of a comfortable and trusting relationship, there were also some problematic implications associated with affording the young people so much freedom within the focus group discussions. For example, some of the young people took the opportunity in these relatively unregulated meetings to test the boundaries of acceptable behaviour or language, exploit the promise of confidentiality, or simply engage in trivial conversation with their peers (Hill, 1977; Watts & Ebbutt, 1987; Punch, 2001). It has been suggested that;

'Information people offer on their own initiative is more true, some argue, than what they say in answering questions. Whether or not this is so, interviewees' unsolicited responses often alert the interviewer to consider the subject under discussion in a new light and in the context central to the person being interviewed' (Simons, 1984 p.240)

It was certainly the case that some of these frustrating aspects of the focus group discussions provided rich data relating to contextual influences on group dynamics and peer interactions. The dilemma, then, was not in preventing this behaviour but rather ensuring that a balance was struck between the solicited and unsolicited elements. The semi-structured design of the focus group schedule was instrumental



here in keeping the group conversations on track (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987; Morgan, 1997).

From the first meeting with the participants I was aware that I was not simply an external observer of their social interactions. Rather, I was responsible for initiating and directing conversations, I was an active listener when others were talking, and, above all, I was engaged with them in a consideration and analysis of my own social worlds and constructions of self. As Denscombe (2002) has noted, 'researchers have a personal history and a personal identity' (p.34) that cannot be segregated from the research process, and as I was asking the young people to consider elements of their identities I too found myself reflecting on my own social experiences (Simons, 1984). Furthermore, I was often struck by how similar some of the individuals in the study were to myself when I was their age, and found that this enhanced my interest in, and commitment to, the study (Oliver & Lalik, 2000, 2001; Dillon & Moje, 1998). As it was evident that I was inherently involved in the research process and that it was both appropriate and necessary to acknowledge this in the analysis of the data (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987), I was careful to record my thoughts and feelings about each group session in my research diary. In addition to writing an account of my perceptions of each meeting, I also found the diary a useful place in which to note any information that would help to address the loss of important contextual information that is associated with the transcription process (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). As such, I recorded things such as the seating arrangement of each session, examples of non-verbal communication, patterns of interaction, interruptions, and information relating to school or cultural events (e.g. Simons, 1984; Lewis, 1992; Coleman *et al*, 1997, Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).<sup>20</sup>

### ***3.8.2 The Emergent and Dynamic Nature of the Research Process.***

As well as having to acknowledge and understand my own role in the research process, I was challenged by the dynamic nature of the focus groups that called for a flexible and adaptable approach. It was evident that not only were the characteristics of each group distinct and unique, but also that each individual had different needs and competencies (James *et al*, 1998). In order to engage effectively each individual in the research process then, and hence to generate more comprehensive data, there

was a need to develop and adopt appropriate interviewing strategies. One of the primary problems that I faced in the focus group discussions was encountering an 'I don't know' response from the young people. On the one hand, this response was perhaps related to an incompatibility between the participants' specific competencies and the level of literacy or conceptual ability required to complete the tasks. It has been noted that researchers often make, incorrectly, the assumption that the young people involved in their studies are instinctively aware of the needs of the research, and have at hand the information required (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). However, it was clear in this study that the participants weren't practised at answering questions relating to the structure of their social experiences, and hence found it a difficult task to engage in. This response in itself, however, represented interesting data in relation to the theoretical basis of this study, as the young people's struggle to articulate their social practice alluded to the embedded nature of habitus and the ingrained element of some social action (Bourdieu, 1990b). As such, to avoid drawing a deterministic conclusion that the young people's apparent inability to define the reasons for their behaviour was due to its external regulation, it was necessary to develop alternate ways of questioning that allowed them to identify both structural and agential aspects of their practice.

This particular aspect of the research design was emergent in that it developed over the course of the discussion meetings and in association with the needs and demands of each group of individuals. One of the approaches that I found helpful to begin with was to allow the young people time to discuss particular questions, either together or in small groups, enabling them to share ideas and decreasing the pressure for an immediate response. Moreover, in the full group interactions I was also careful to afford individuals an opportunity to speak without unnecessary interruptions to their dialogue (Christensen & James, 2000). As the weeks progressed, it was possible to employ more direct or informed questioning, using information generated in previous meetings to highlight specific subject matter for discussion or clarification (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). Moreover, I was able to identify topics of interest to those individuals whose voices were somewhat absent from the group discussions, and then use these significant issues as a means of drawing them into conversations in subsequent weeks. I found that this use of active listening and informed questioning was particularly effective, because it allowed me to target areas of interest in relation to the study, and



it also indicated to the young people that I was attentive to, respectful of and interested in their comments (Coleman *et al*, 1997). Another approach that proved useful was to employ strategic questioning (Oliver & Lalik, 2000) in order to encourage the young people to critique or challenge the validity of some of the topics being discussed, or to elaborate on their comments. In this way, questions such as ‘why do you say that?’, ‘what do you mean by that?’, or ‘do you really believe that?’ were used to examine, among other things, the young people’s perceptions of magazine images, ‘facts’ relating to their lack of agency, and their views regarding adults’ perceptions of children.

### ***3.8.3 The Development of Research Questions.***

The emergent and dynamic nature of the research process was an influence on the core questions underpinning the study. Although there were general objectives outlined in advance of the fieldwork phase, there were one or two shifts experienced in relation to these as a result of the ongoing data generation process. I found that the experiences of communicating and interacting with the young people allowed for a tighter focus on some of the broad initial questions, so that the objectives became clearer in the light of the information that was being generated. For example, one of the initial questions was concerned simply with the ways in which the young people negotiated their social experiences within fields and the influence of this on their understandings of self. However, given that the presentation of self was highlighted as a significant factor in the participants’ social practices, an additional question was generated that was concerned with the particular role of habitus in shaping individuals identity constructions i.e. are the dispositions of habitus ‘genuine’ or merely indicative of a persona adopted to satisfy the needs of the field? Not only this, however, but the conversations of the young people often highlighted issues that had not previously been considered. For example, it was evident that the five fields highlighted within this study were not the only core contexts in which the participants spent significant amounts of time. As such, an additional research question was generated that asked what other contexts could be identified as significant within the social experiences of the young people, and in what ways did these sites interact with those fields highlighted in the study?



#### *3.8.4 Tapping the Participants' Interests.*

Throughout the focus group sessions it was evident that tapping the young people's interests was an effective means of instigating discussion, as well as targeting topics and issues central to the study (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). As such, I adapted the presentation of some of the research tasks in the hope that they would prove more arresting and interesting. For example, it was clear that the field of media was a particularly strong influence for the young people, and much of their discussions regarding this topic centred on television programs and magazines. Mindful of this, and of the youth research literature emphasising the significance of using familiar materials (Hazel, 1996; Punch, 2002a), I decided to present the journal biography task in the format of the television program 'This is Your Life'. In addition to providing a recognisable link to familiar territory, this task also allowed the young people to make use of narratives in their constructions of self. The use of stories among the young people had been identified as significant trend within the focus group discussions and, although not previously considered, provided a new and constructive direction to the analysis of the data (e.g. Renolds, 2001a, 2001b). Rather than being simply an external observer to these narrative constructions of self, however, I was often called upon by the young people to join reciprocally in the sharing of stories (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). The communal nature of the group situation appeared to provide an arena in which the young people were comfortable to ask questions of me (Lewis, 1992), and this gave rise to not a 'reversal of roles', as Simons (1984) has suggested, but rather a sharing of the interviewer role. At times, then, I found myself answering the young people's questions regarding my own background and social experiences, and, as a result of this, I felt that I was drawn further into the analytical processes of the study.

Although this collaborative approach to the focus group discussions assisted in the establishment of a more comfortable relationship between the participants and myself, this is not to say that all of the meetings ran smoothly or without complications. A number of authors have suggested that the personal characteristics of researchers, and their gender in particular, can represent a significant factor in determining the nature of their relationship with their particular research participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). In this study, it was certainly the case that I found the focus group discussions with the girls' group and the mixed groups more



enjoyable and less challenging than those with the boys' group. While I felt more relaxed in my communication with the girls' group, I found the peer dynamics within the boys' group, i.e. their competitiveness, one-upmanship, confrontational attitudes and attention seeking exploits, particularly difficult. Although behaviour such as this has been identified as characteristic of boys' peer relations (Wight, 1994; Connell, 1996; Black, 2000; Renold, 2001), and hence represented valuable data themselves, they were not conducive to the completion of the research tasks. As such, after four group interviews with the boys, and when it was clear that little constructive progress was being achieved in this context, the decision was made to complete my time at the grammar school by conducting individual interviews<sup>21</sup>. This combination of group and individual interviews was particularly helpful in allowing for the clarification of unclear information, expansion of previous significant comments, and prevention of misrepresentations. Furthermore, it reinforced the influence of context on individuals' social behaviour and constructions of self, and highlighted peers as a particularly significant social field in the lives of young people.

### **3.9 THE ANALYSIS OF DATA**

This section now deals with the methods employed to explore, describe and conceptualise the data generated through the focus group discussions, before leading into the analysis chapters in which the end results of this analytic process are displayed. It has been acknowledged that there are many ways of analysing qualitative data, although none of these appears to have achieved a clear monopoly over the others in the eyes of researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Indeed, Dey (1995) has stressed the 'interdependence and mutual enhancement of apparently opposing approaches' (p.266) such as numbers, patterns, categorising etc. This tenet was embraced to some extent within this study, as the variety of research methods employed generated a wealth of data in various forms (transcribed speech, field notes, visual displays and written accounts) that necessitated a broad approach to analysis. Having said this, the analytic methods used in this study have all been underpinned by the principle of a grounded theory approach to the analysis of data.



### *3.9.1 An Explanation of a Grounded Theory Approach*

Grounded theory is largely attributed to the work of Glaser & Strauss (1967), although the approach has been adapted and developed in a variety of ways since this early formulation of the method (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Grounded methods specify particular strategies of analysis rather than identifying predetermined techniques for generating information (Charmaz, 2000), and the fact that researchers can use grounded theory techniques with various data generation processes renders this approach a pertinent one in relation to this study. Grounded theory is a systematic form of inquiry used within qualitative research, in which the researcher analyses the data in order to generate theory that will, in turn, facilitate an understanding and explanation of this data. As Ryan and Bernard (2000) have pointed out, 'grounded theorists...want to identify categories and concepts that emerge from text and link these concepts into substantive and formal theories' (p.728). Grounded theory involves a number of double-back steps in which the researcher annotates the data through the use of codes and memos, and moves backwards and forwards between the various stages of generation and analysis in order to compare and contrast their formulation of theory with subsequent generation of data. In this way, the theoretical framework can be reworked and refined, in order to ensure that it fits with the data, as well as being workable, relevant and modifiable (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

There is some contention, however, over what grounded theory is and should be, because although the method is located within a logic of positivism a number of theorists have started to take it in conflicting epistemological directions (Charmaz, 2000). For example, Glaser (1992) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) both adopt a stance that assumes an objective, external reality, but whereas the former perceives the researcher as a neutral observer and 'discoverer' of data, the latter encourages researchers to give recognition to participants' views as well as their own. In relation to this study, the approach adopted is perhaps more akin to that of 'constructivist grounded theory' as defined by Charmaz (2000), a position that allows for a move away from the limitations of positivism and an acknowledgement of the logic of constructivism. Having said this, the analytic process in this study was necessarily unique, for the adoption of Bourdieu's conceptual tools provided some element of a theoretical framework in advance of the data generation, although the data itself



determined the direction that the theory building would take. As such, the analysis process outlined below represents an adaptation of the more traditional grounded theory approach.

### ***3.9.2 Data Generation and Analysis: An Interrelated Process***

Although qualitative research is ‘end-loaded’ (Cohen *et al*, 2000), i.e. categories emerge from the data as in a grounded theory approach, this does not mean that the fieldwork must be completed before the researcher can make sense of the data. On the contrary, because of the need for both flexibility and reflexivity in these kinds of methods, a number of authors have emphasised the need for qualitative researchers to engage in data generation and data analysis simultaneously (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richardson, 2000). For example, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) have argued, ‘letting data accumulate without preliminary analysis along the way is a recipe for unhappiness, if not total disaster’ (p.2). This need for contemporaneous data generation and analysis can also be seen to underpin Miles & Huberman’s (1994) approach to qualitative data analysis in which their three central processes of data reduction, display and verification are all interwoven so that the analytic procedure ‘is a continuous, iterative enterprise’ (p.23). In relation to this study, I found that keeping a research diary was a valuable means of facilitating analysis while in the field. Through noting contextual variables<sup>22</sup>, observations of behaviour, and my own thoughts and feelings I was able to generate information that enhanced and informed the analysis of data. Furthermore, a conscious effort to transcribe the focus group discussions immediately after the meeting, to read them through, and to highlight key issues, all before the following session, contributed to this process. Such immersion in the data also allowed me to become familiar with the information that was being generated and facilitated my growing understanding of the themes emerging from the conversations.

### ***3.9.3 The Use of Codes and Memos.***

The primary aspect of analysis involved reading through the transcripts, as well as the material information generated by the participants (e.g. their identity posters, time-maps and journal tasks), and using coding categories to identify key themes. Coding is highlighted by a number of authors as a highly significant aspect of the data analysis

process (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). A means of organising, retrieving and associating fragments of data, it can be seen to assist in the conceptualisation of theory. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify three types of code, descriptive, interpretive and explanatory, and the principles underpinning these, i.e. increasing depth of conceptualisation and complexity of information, are useful in relation to this study as they represent broadly the developmental approach that I took in analysing the transcripts. The analysis of the conversations was a continual and evolving process, in which the coding became more focussed and detailed as the emergent theory became more established through repetitive and comparative examinations of the text. This was not always a linear process, but involved a number of false starts and diversions that required me to revisit, rethink and rework my coding categories in order to ensure a fit with the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The use of memos was valuable in relation to this particular aspect of the analytic process, as they represented a means by which I could note down thoughts concerning specific elements of the data, highlight associations between particular themes or coding categories, and incorporate new data into the analysis as it emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Dey, 1995 Charmaz, 2000). Moreover, they provided a space in which I could begin to identify connections between the data, the theoretical framework proposed in this study (i.e. Bourdieu's conceptual tools), and wider literature. As Charmaz (2000) has suggested, the memo writing process allows the researcher to remain focussed on the analysis:

'Memo writing is the intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis. This step helps to spark our thinking and encourages us to look at our data and codes in new ways...Through memo writing, we elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that are subsumed under our codes. Memo writing leads us to explore our codes; we expand upon the processes they identify or suggest. Thus our codes take on substance as well as a structure for sorting data.' (p.517)

This memo writing itself was also a developmental process, for as I moved backwards and forwards between them I was able to expand upon initial memos, concerned perhaps with thoughts and questions, to create more detailed comments that outlined explanations for particular themes or patterns within the data.



### 3.9.4 *An Illustrative Example.*

The following discussion, in association with an extract of conversation (fig.3.3), is intended to provide an illustration of the analytic process outlined briefly here, and to summarise the series of successive decisions that were made concerning the data, its categorisation and organisation. The extract is taken from the first focus group meeting with the grammar school boys, and represents a conversation in which we are discussing their first choices in the topic discussion task (i.e. the social contexts that they perceive to be most important to themselves).

As mentioned, the thematic analysis began with the use of simple codes and brief memos that purely highlighted and labelled themes as categories of data. Initially this involved the identification of data that related to each of the five fields, labelled simply with the codes 'family', 'peers', 'school', 'media' and 'physical culture'<sup>23</sup> (shown in bold in the above example), as well as those themes that stood out as being notable, perplexing or interesting (e.g. Mike's negative comment regarding his family). In the early stages of analysis, when the data generation was still taking place, this process was a useful way of highlighting significant issues for further clarification or discussion, as well as representing a springboard into more detailed inquiry. For example, in this extract, the fact that I had highlighted Mike's negative comment regarding his family and puzzling reference to 'elbowing people in the head' meant that I was able to explore these in subsequent focus group meetings (indicated through the links to different sessions or individual interviews).

<p><b>PC/Peers</b> Family - negative comment. Why? (see also wk. 4 and individual)</p>	<p>RH So you put sport (to Danny) and you put friends (to Mike). Mike: My family didn't come into it (laughs)</p>
<p><b>PC</b> Peers - use of code, only coherent within peer group. Refer to individual interview. [MGS.21]</p>	<p>RH Why did you put that? (to Danny) Danny: Because I just love sport, I love playing sport, I play like every single sport. RH: What is it you enjoy about doing sport? Mike: Elbowing people in the head! (laughing)</p>
<p><b>PC - difficulty articulating experience (habitus?) [MGS.]</b></p>	<p>Danny: I don't know, I've just always played sport and I just really like playing it, I don't know why.</p>
<p><b>PC</b> PC/Family - strong association between fields. Links to reproduction of familial tastes? [MGS. 1/6/21]</p>	<p>RH So what did you have? (to Frederick) Frederick: Sport. RH You had sport as well. Did you have the same reasons for doing it? Frederick: Yeah, I've always been brought up just liking sport and playing sport, because my dad was really sporty.</p>
<p><b>Peers - friends for support, companionship and affirmation. 'Taking the Mick' - to gain social capital (kudos)? (seen as acceptable among friends)</b></p>	<p>RH And you said your friends? (to Mike) Mike: Friends yeah, because I couldn't imagine life on my own. It'd be crap, you'd be like bored with nothing to do.  Lloyd: You're a loner, (laughs)  Mike: Yeah like Lloyd. (laughing)</p>

**Figure 3.3: An extract of an interview transcript showing the memos and codes employed in the analysis of the data**

The next level of analysis provided more detail to these initial codes as well as formulating new ones, and involved an attempt to give some meaning to the categories that had been generated. This process meant that the initial categories were often divided into various sub-categories, as shown in the example by the association drawn between the fields of family and physical culture. Although not evident in this extract, this more detailed examination of the data often resulted in the development of new categories, particularly in relation to more generic issues that transcended the fields (e.g. 'the presentation of self', 'respect', or 'conformity/resistance'). As the focus



groups progressed I found that I was able employ ‘*in vivo* coding’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), i.e. identify categories and terms used by the young people themselves, which has been identified as a valuable means of acknowledging the role of participants in the generation of data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). In the extract of conversation here, the code ‘taking the mick’ refers to a term that the young people themselves used frequently to describe the use of humour among the peer group (other examples from the data include the coding categories ‘cool/sad’, ‘grebo/townie’).

Finally, as the analytic process continued and I became more familiar with the data, I was able to progress to another level of analysis in which I could begin to explain the categories in more detail and make associations between them. In the extract, this is highlighted by the use of memos and is evident in the comments relating to the conceptual tools, i.e. the references to habitus and tastes. The example also indicates the progressive construction of memos, moving from brief and basic comments or questions, e.g. ‘links to the reproduction of familial tastes?’, to more detailed descriptions involving the incorporation of theory. These memos were often too long to be included on the transcripts themselves, and so I recorded them in a computer file and allocated a code that allowed the two to be linked together. The code TBS.1 then, referred to the following memo:

Danny can’t explain why he likes sport, just that he likes it. There is difficulty in articulating experience. Bourdieu explains this in part when he talks about habitus in relation to sporting actions, and the notion of practical logic. As Jarvie & Maguire (1994) state ‘The practical sense or logic of social actors involves then the expression of dispositions that lie at the intersection of the conscious and the unconscious’. This then allows us to understand how ‘the sport’s performers’ seeming inability to cognitively describe their actions is less to do with inarticulateness, and much more to do with the fact that such activities, and indeed day-to-day practices more generally, result not from a process of reasoning from pre-set rules, but stem from ‘systems of action’ (pp. 187). It could be suggested then that Danny’s interest and involvement in sport has become such an ingrained response, deeply embedded as part of his habitus, that he no longer questions why he takes part. In addition, his sporting tastes are also part of his familial identity, passed down from one generation to another. In this way, they may be simply accepted rather than contested.[see also TBS.6 and TBS.21]

This analytic process then allowed me to gradually build up a theoretical understanding of the data, and provide a degree of structure that would allow me to

write and present the theory in a meaningful way. It wasn't, however, the only approach that I employed in order to make sense of the data. Due to the great wealth of information that was generated in the study, I found that it was often difficult to identify relationships and patterns between themes and categories of data.

### ***3.9.5 Conceptual Mapping.***

Dey (1995) has noted that 'making maps is certainly a useful way of making sense of data' (p.203) because in dealing with the relationship between one point and another they allow for an analysis of the connections between themes and categories. The use of such visual tools has been identified as a technique consistent with a grounded theory approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994), although the use of 'mental maps' (Dey, 1995) and 'cognitive maps' (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) have also been associated with alternative forms of qualitative inquiry. The conceptual mapping tools that I used in this study were adapted from these ideas and were visual illustrations of the associations between themes. For example, after I had been through all of the transcripts and generated a number of themes I printed the title of each category onto a sheet of paper, cut them out, grouped similar themes together, and arranged them on a large sheet of paper. I was then able to annotate the various categories, or groups of categories, and to indicate significant associations or configurations between them by the use of lines or arrows. This was particularly useful as means of condensing large amounts of data and being able to view it simultaneously, and when the same technique was employed in relation to each field it provided a degree of structure that facilitated the writing of the analysis chapters. The creation of these maps went hand in hand with the continuing analysis of the transcripts, and as these two processes progressed I was able to incorporate verbatim quotes (often using numerical codes) and use the *in vivo* codes to provide headings and subheadings for many of the categories.

In addition to providing structure for the analysis chapters, I also made use of conceptual mapping techniques such as tables, flow charts and pictorial diagrams to facilitate understanding of the data in relation to the theoretical framework. For example, I constructed a table that referred to the associations between the different fields and then noted down the explicit references to these relationships made by the



various participants. This table (see appendix C) then allowed me to highlight significant associations (e.g. the link between the fields of peers and school) and see more clearly patterns between and within the fields in relation to the variables of gender or cluster group (e.g. the negative association between the fields of school and physical culture for girls). Taking this a stage further, I then constructed pictorial representations of the relationships between the fields for each of the participants (see appendix C). These particular techniques were extremely useful in developing my understanding of the conceptual and theoretical framework, and were particularly valuable in that they highlighted the fact that configurations between the fields were unique to each individual.

### 3.10 MOVING INTO THE ANALYSIS CHAPTERS

Having been introduced to the research techniques that were used to generate the data, and the strategies employed to make sense of the resulting wealth of information, we now move our attention to an exploration of the themes, issues and emergent theory that emanated from this analytic process. Dealing with each field in turn<sup>24</sup>, the following chapters seek to map out the terrain of these core social sites, explore the configurations between them, and identify the ways in which they both shape and are shaped by the engagements that individuals have with them. Consequently, the discussion in each chapter is intended to allow for an examination of the concern central to this study, i.e. the identity work that is undertaken by young people in the various spaces that comprise their social experiences and which contributes to their construction of embodied identities. The following chapters are not arranged in order of importance or influence of the fields, and should not be perceived as a linear progression but rather as a collection of interrelated discussions. Having said this, we do begin with an examination of a field that has been acknowledged as a primary social influence for young people, one that can be seen to shape their development in the early years of life. For this reason, and not because any claim is made in relation to its primacy among the other fields highlighted in the study, the familial field would appear to provide a logical start point for a discussion of analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> I refer in particular to a conversation between the grammar school boys, presented in section 4 of chapter seven ('The Promotion of Image in the Media Field'), in which Danny made the point that 'you can't really talk about the whole of youth because everyone's so different' (TBS, wk 1).



<sup>2</sup> The names of the schools are pseudonyms and for ease of reference are often shortened to the initials SACS, TBS, and FCC throughout the thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Although there were some interesting examples in the data of differences between the young people that could be seen to relate to class distinctions, the limited information that I had regarding each individual's family status and the relatively small amounts of data generated at Fenburgh Community College compared to the independent schools makes me cautious of making any grand claims here.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that there was often also a conflicting desire to ensure that their comments could not identify themselves to staff or other students at their respective schools.

<sup>5</sup> The British Sociological Association Code of Ethical Practice, for example, points out that 'research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data gathering devices such as tape-recorders and video cameras' (British Sociological Association, 1992 p.704).

<sup>6</sup> The modification of the questionnaire was made with the assistance of one of the co-authors of the MSPS, Dr. John Wang, in order to ensure that the resulting survey would be appropriate for the purposes of this study while remaining statistically valid.

<sup>7</sup> A full copy of the modified questionnaire is shown in appendix A.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that a higher RAI score indicates a higher degree of internal or autonomous regulation, which is generally considered to be a more positive characteristic in relation to an individual's participation in physical activity.

<sup>9</sup> The intention was to administer the survey to the year 9 classes in each school, in order to minimise the disruption to students undertaking their GCSE studies. In the two independent schools the completion of the survey took place before the summer break, so that although the young people were in year 9 at the time they were in fact in year 10 at the time of the focus group interviews. The particular structure of Fenburgh college, however, necessitated a slight alteration to the proposed research schedule. As this institution only took pupils up to year 9 a decision was made to delay the administration of the survey so that the young people completed it as they moved into year 9, allowing the focus groups to take place before the end of that academic year. As such, there was a slight discrepancy in the ages of the young people involved in the research, although the differences remained within a range two years.

<sup>10</sup> It should be acknowledged that as this aspect of the analysis involved quite specific technical skills, the cluster analysis was performed with the assistance of Dr. John Wang. It was felt that the decision to do this was admissible as the procedure represented such a small part of the overall research process, and the time required to become proficient in these skills myself would have detracted unnecessarily from the allocated period for the generation of qualitative data.

<sup>11</sup> There were obviously some limitations here in terms of the clusters providing a restrictive guideline for inclusion, although the intimate nature of the school environment ensured that all of the individuals involved had at least some degree of association. Interestingly, the arrangement of the focus groups in this way resulted in there being two single sex groups (from the independent boys' and girls' schools) and two mixed groups at the coeducational college. Although not intentional, this situation provided an additional gender dynamic which proved both challenging and fruitful. Additionally, timetable restrictions at Fenburgh Community College necessitated that the groups could not comprise one individual from each cluster, although there was still one male and one female from each cluster represented between the two groups. It should also be noted that, bearing in mind the suggestion of Davis *et al* (2000) that young people should be considered the ultimate gatekeepers to their world, each individual identified for inclusion in the focus groups was first approached regarding their willingness and agreement to be involved.

<sup>12</sup> Last minute changes by the authorities at Fenburgh Community College resulted in further time restrictions, and confined my contact with the two groups there to only two weeks. As such, the structure of the focus group sessions needed to be adapted to fit this time scale and the data generated here was somewhat limited.

<sup>13</sup> Some examples of the participants' posters are shown in appendix B.

<sup>14</sup> Hazel (1996) and Punch (2002a), among others, have emphasised the importance of using materials and concepts in research settings that are familiar to young people, and it has been suggested that this can help to increase both the understanding and social comfort of research participants, ultimately enhancing the validity of the material generated.

<sup>15</sup> Some of the journal tasks included in the study were specific questions relating to situational comfort in the various fields, open-ended questions and free-writing activities relating to aspects of identity (Simmons & Wade, 1987; Silverman, 1993), the construction of time-space maps (see full text) and biographical writing exercises (Oliver & Lalik, 2000).



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<sup>16</sup> In order to see general patterns and the configuration of the influences exerted by the different fields, the young people were asked at various times to create maps of a 'typical day', 'a school day', and 'a weekend day'.

<sup>17</sup> The range of topics included music, sport, celebrities, fashion, wildlife, television, films, computers, cars/motorbikes, health & beauty, image and lifestyle, and was added to week by week as the young people informed me of other publications they liked to read or brought in their own specialist magazines (e.g. relating to skate-boarding, Garage music or technology).

<sup>18</sup> The following reflexive section outlines some of the changes, both enforced and intentional, that occurred in relation to this provisional research schedule.

<sup>19</sup> For example, during Lloyd's individual interview he was elaborating on his interest in Garage music. In an attempt to identify particular tastes in this area I asked which bands he liked, only to be told that there weren't really specific bands but rather particular DJ's who mixed the music.

<sup>20</sup> This use of a research diary also helped to address the need for simultaneous data generation and analysis that characterises much of qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). This issue is explored in more detail within the following section dealing with data analysis.

<sup>21</sup> A number of researchers have pointed to the value of combining group and individual interview techniques to create an effective framework (e.g. Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Morgan, 1997; Punch, 2002a, 2002b). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) note, for example, that integrating group and individual interviews within the same research design incorporates the advantages of each method, and that group interviews may help to identify issues that can then be pursued in individual interviews.

<sup>22</sup> The contextual variables referred to here included the seating arrangement of participants, the location of the focus group discussions, and any interruptions that occurred during the session that altered the flow of the conversation. In addition, I also noted significant issues in the wider context of the school or cultural environments, as these were often significant influences on the young people's behaviour or central themes in their discussions. For example, one visit to Fenburgh college coincided with Comic Relief's 'Red Nose Day' in which staff and students were able to wear casual clothes or fancy dress, and the third visit to the convent school took place in the last week before the Christmas holidays. In both of these cases, the changes in the traditional school routine were a cause of excitement and the significance of the events meant that they were discussed in some detail in the focus groups.

<sup>23</sup> Coffey and Atkinson (1996) have suggested that in relation to the analysis of qualitative data a useful start point for the researcher is for them to be guided by their theoretical or conceptual frameworks.

<sup>24</sup> Although focussed upon individually the fields do not stand alone, but rather are inherently connected, through various associations, with each other. These interrelationships are acknowledged and referenced within each chapter. The decision to discuss each field in turn was made simply to allow each social site to be the focus of examination, bearing in mind the significance of contextual and situational variables highlighted within the literature regarding identity construction.



## Chapter Four

### **‘Who You Are, What You Are, and Why You Are It’: the Influence of the Familial Field on the Construction of Identities.**

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the data that was generated in relation to the familial field, and seeks to explore the role that this central context plays in a young person’s understanding of self. As highlighted within the previous chapter, this field is perceived to represent a significant influence in relation to young people’s construction of identities, as it constitutes the social context with which they have the most contact within their early years. The notion that because of this your family has ‘made you who you are’ (Lara) is examined within the following discussion, as is the notion that familial influences are evidenced in the way that individuals ‘take after’ (Bob) their parents. The various positions that the participants occupied within the field (child, grandchild, sibling etc.), and the social interactions that took place there, were identified as a key factor in this process, and were seen to influence their identity formations through the perceived need to manage their presentation of self in different situations. Although an undeniably important social context, there were also tensions and contradictions within the familial field which are explored in the following discussion. These appeared to be grounded within the young people’s struggle against the authority of their parents and desire for autonomy within the familial field, and are seen as being indicative of a growing ‘generation gap’ between the young people and their parents. This chapter, then, covers a variety of issues concerning the structure of the familial field, the nature of the social interactions that take place there, and the rules and regulations that govern behaviour. It begins, however, with a focus on the deep impact that the familial field appeared to have on the construction of core elements of the participants’ identities.



## 4.2 FAMILIAL IDENTITY: ‘They made you who you are...well part of you’ (Lara)

### 4.2.1 *A Complex, Intricate and Dynamic Field.*

The trouble that the young people seemed to have with defining the notion of family may be explained by the fact that there are many diverse facets to this social field, and each individual’s experience is necessarily unique. Furthermore, changes in the mode of family life and the way in which the institution of the family has been understood within British society have changed over time, and have been influenced by both the social and political climate (Giddens, 1991). In such a climate of change, it is understandable that there should be some debate over the way that this field is viewed. Traditional views of the family are often romanticised interpretations of a bygone era that are focussed on a tightly defined social unit, its reliability and relative stability making it a primary marker for an individual’s identity (Kellner, 1992; Postman, 1994). However, recent research argues for an understanding of the family as the product of contemporary social discourses, suggesting that it should be regarded as a socially constructed reflection of reality (Bourdieu, 1998b). Given the somewhat unpredictable nature of contemporary society (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), it is not hard to see why the traditional views of the family might come to be questioned. Several authors have noted the contemporary concern over the ‘decline’ of the family, and registered an associated belief that an individual’s family no longer represents such a significant influence in their conceptions of self (Miles *et al*, 1998; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Bers, 2002). Bourdieu (1998b), however, has suggested that the principle of construction is a constituent part of habitus, and if habitus is regarded as a basis for perception in the social world it is clear that the familial field can indeed represent an influential social context for young people.

### 4.2.2 *Constructing Familial Identity: the ‘Official’, the ‘Biological’ and the ‘Social’.*

There were three main ways that the young people viewed the influence of family on their constructions of self, and these can be thought of as representing different facets of their familial identity; the official, the biological and the social. The official influence referred to the taken-for-granted belief that the familial identity is largely given and not contested. It was certainly the case in the focus group discussions that

the initial question of 'what do you think identity means?' often resulted in reference being made to the family. This primary reference indicates an underlying belief that the family's influence is somehow indisputable, grounded in something more significant than superficial signs. There are obvious associations to be made here with the notion of habitus as being deep-rooted and ingrained, but it is perhaps also illustrative of the fact that the family is often perceived to be the most significant initial influence in a young person's development of identity (Wyn & White, 1997; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999). The biological identity was associated with this perception of familial identity as undeniable, and referred to the genetic heritage shared by family members. As the following extract implies:

Lara: They (your family) brought you up, so they made you who you are, well part of you.

Amadaia: They made you, let's face it!

Katie: To put it bluntly (laughing)

(SACS, wk 1)

This biological aspect of their identity was associated with appearance, race and cultural heritage, and has parallels with those traditional markers of identity used in official documents. In addition to these indisputable influences upon identity, the young people indicated that the family also exerted a significant social influence upon their conceptions of self. A great deal of research has highlighted the importance of the family as a socialising influence for young people (e.g. Kovarik, 1995; Adler & Adler, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999), and it would certainly appear as though the data from this study endorses this view. For the young people, families were those individuals with whom they had spent the most time, the ones who 'brought you up' (Lara) and had 'been around you from day one' (Mia). It was understood that a great deal of effort had been invested in the young people by their families and the influence was considered to be evident in characteristics such as personality, behaviour and attitudes. In Bourdieu's (1998b) view, it is these dispositions of habitus, passed down from one generation to another, that contribute to the reproduction of social order over time.

'The family plays a decisive role in the maintenance of the social order, through social as well as biological reproduction, that is, reproduction of the structure of the social space and social relations. It is one of the key sites for the accumulation of capital in its different forms, and its transmission between the generations' (pp. 69)



In this way, it is easy to understand the significant role that the family is believed to play in young people's identity development processes (Adler & Adler, 1998, Güneri *et al*, 1999), particularly perhaps in relation to the formation of a gendered identity. As Giddens (1991) has pointed out 'nothing is clearer than that gender is a matter of learning and continuous 'work', rather than a simple extension of biologically given sexual difference' (pp.63).<sup>1</sup> The distinction between the perceived, given and contested aspects of identity was a complex one for the young people to grasp, and it was clear that there was some ambiguity in relation to this issue. Take for example the concept of naming, which all of the young people mentioned as an essential aspect of identity. On the one hand a name was considered to be perhaps *the* primary marker of identity, following Crozier and Skliopidou's (2002) belief that a person's name is 'central to his or her identity' (p.122), a means of being identified by others with access to official documentation. On the other hand, names were also imbued with social meaning. For example, there appeared to be a practice among boys within the peer group of using an individual's surname (or some variation on it) as a nickname. Moreover, a name was often regarded as providing an indication of your national identity or cultural heritage.

RH So everyone has put 'name'. What does that tell you then? What's in a name?

Alex: Where you're from, because if you've got a name like, I don't know, Jean-Claude that means you're probably from France.

Liz: Like MacDonald is from Scotland.

Alex: And if you've got a really simple name, that's probably from England.

Liz: Like Smith.

Alex: And if it's something like Razza, it's probably Indian or something.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

The association between families and nationality was another issue of importance to the young people and appeared to represent a significant aspect of their identities, influencing aspects such as comportment, dress, religious beliefs and speech. The cultural capital afforded to the individuals in this way, along with 'inherited' dispositions of habitus, helped to frame the ways in which they positioned themselves and others i.e. as English, Scottish or Indian etc. In some cases it also influenced the practices that took place within the family. As Liz suggested:

Liz: I'm not full Scottish, I'm half Scottish.

RH Does that influence you at all?

Liz: Yeah it does, because like my mum's pure Scottish I have to celebrate stuff like Robert Burns day, and St. Andrew's day and stuff like that. And my brother hates it, because every time we have to go to a wedding he has to wear a kilt.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 2)

It was evident that the young people drew significant associations between name, nationality and social location, and that, albeit through a process of conceptual slippage, the notion of 'place' was deemed an influential factor in their construction of identities. As such, it is possible to understand the significance attached by some of the young people to the family home, as it was seen to provide a distinct marker of geographical identity. Moreover, it was perceived as an important symbolic marker of familial status, indicative of social class and respectability, and the size and situation of an individual's house, in combination with other factors such as parental occupations, was often referred to within the peer group in an attempt to gain recognition. For example:

[in reference to a girl at the school that they referred to as a 'gypo' i.e. from a deprived family]

Carl: Yeah, but she actually lives on Tyler Road.

Liz: Yeah, that's really bad up there.

Carl: That's like where people try to stay away from, and this area, no offence to you Alex but there are some people around here that -

Alex: No there isn't!

Carl: Our end's the posh end, the other end.

Liz: I can't really see that. Are you calling yourself a snob?

Alex: Excuse me, Carl I've got a bigger house on my street than just about any house up there...I'll show it to you. It's like a mansion, so you can't just call your end the best.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

A final way in which families were perceived to influence young people's constructions of self was by structuring their early social contact with others, endorsing the belief that parents can exert significant influence over young children's friendships (James, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998). Given that 'children's experience of both having and being friends plays a critical part in their acquisition of social identity and Selfhood' (James, 1993 p.201), this is an important role that families undertake. The significance of social interactions, and the particular nature that this takes in relation to the familial field, is the main theme of the following section of analysis.



### 4.3 SOCIALISING WITHIN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'Family Time' (Mike)

#### 4.3.1 *The Changing Structure of Family Life.*

For the young people in this study, their membership in and engagement with the familial field was perceived as compulsory and incontrovertible. The structure of the family unit itself was often compartmentalised, based upon the degree of contact that they had with various family members. The nuclear family was regarded as the 'official' aspect of the field, representing the individuals who co-existed within the family home and with whom the young people had the most contact. It was therefore parents and siblings, and occasionally other close relatives such as grandparents or cousins, who were deemed to be most significant to the young people within this field and who represented the most important influences on their conceptions of self. The 'extended' family were those individuals with whom there was little or infrequent contact, and who were not known well enough by the young people to suggest that they might have any notable impact on their identities (save perhaps for the official family ties). There is no doubt that there have been significant changes in the structure of the family over the past few decades, and that these have transformed the experience of family life for many people (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Lash, 1992; Postman, 1994; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Bers, 2002). Separation, divorce, re-marriage and step-siblings were all referred to within the young people's discussion of family life, more so by the individual's from Fenburgh Community College<sup>2</sup>. This necessarily increased the complexities of the field of family for these young people, for as Giddens (1991) has noted '...divorce is being mobilised as a resource to create networks drawing together new partners and former ones, biological children and step-children, friends and other relatives' (pp.177). What then are the implications for identity, when young people move from being a two-parent family to a single parent family, go from having no siblings to having step-brothers and sisters, become estranged from some of their relatives, or move away from 'the family home'? One of the main influences for the young people in this study appeared to be the way that this situation structured their contact with significant others. As Alex and Liz suggested:

Alex: My mum and dad are split up.

Liz: So are mine.

RH So who do you live with?

Alex: My mum. I don't hardly, well I see my dad sometimes but I don't



see him that much.

Liz: Yeah when my mum and dad split up I lived with my mum, but I don't see my dad that often because he's always travelling for work.

Alex: He works twelve hour shifts like every day.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

#### *4.3.2 Socialising Practices within the Family.*

It is clear, then, that the structure of the familial field is incredibly complex and diverse, with the closeness of family units being contingent on a number of factors. As such, the social interactions that take place within the field can vary considerably, and young people's experiences of the family are necessarily unique. Having said this, however, when the young people came to talk about socialising as a family, two main practices seemed to provide dominant themes within the conversations; holidays and 'get-togethers'.

A lot of the young people mentioned holidays when talking about the family, because often it was the sole occasion that families were able to spend sustained periods of time together. As Carl said, 'that's the only family event we do every year, go on holiday'. In addition, these occasions were often grounded in tradition, with families going to the same location each year. The stories of past holidays were significant memories for the young people, and formed a part of their individual biographies. In this way, as Kovarik (1994) has suggested, families can be seen to influence an important aspect of young people's sense of self. The importance of holidays as a break from the normal routine of family life, albeit still organised and controlled by parents, was clearly evident in the individual's discussions of this topic. However, there were also more subtle issues at work here, with the choice of holiday destination and frequency of vacations being seen as indicative of a family's economic capital. Family 'get-togethers' were a notable aspect of family life for the young people, and represented those special occasions such as parties, weddings and traditional festivals when the disparate sections of the familial field gathered to celebrate and 'catch-up' with each other. These situations were often viewed positively by the young people because, once again, they were a break from the everyday routines of family life and allowed them to have contact with relatives who live far away. Such events represented specific and significant memories for the young people, and formed part of their biographies of self. However, these 'get-togethers' also represented a



challenge for young people in that they often brought them into contact with individuals that they didn't know very well, causing them to be more cautious (and conscious) in their management of self. As Bob explained, 'I hate (family) get-togethers, there's too many people (and) you know that if you're talking to one person another person is going to be thinking 'why is he not talking to me?''.

Although difficult at times, these social events were important in the young people's understanding of the familial field because they allowed them to see (often directly) the politics that take place there. Several of the young people mentioned a degree of tension in relations between family members, and Bob suggested that in a big family 'there's always stress there'. He gave the following example.

RH So what kind of things do you do at Christmas?

Bob: Usually my mum's parents or my dad's parents come round, down. If my mum's parents come down then my dad's parents usually get a bit jealous, and then they have to come down next year, and it's just stupid. So we're planning to go away next year at Christmas, but this year my gran and granddad are coming down on mum's side. We usually just stay at home and lounge about, because we're a really lazy family.

(individual)

This extract is interesting because not only does it indicate an element of collective familial identity (the use of 'we'), but it also implies that there are complex arrangements in the field and implicit struggles for status between different individuals (in this case the respective sets of grandparents). In other conversations the young people also mentioned the ways in which their parents were often required to conform to the wishes of their own parents, indicating perhaps the reproduction of this aspect of habitus from one generation to another. This issue of generational reproduction in relation to the familial field provides the theme for the next section of analysis.

#### **4.4 THE GENERATION GAP IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'Sometimes they just don't understand' (Lara)**

##### ***4.4.1 Generational Issues as a Significant Challenge.***

It is evident that there can be a substantial amount of tension associated with the time spent in the familial field, and this appears to reflect the different points of view held by parents and children concerning tastes and behaviour, as well as conflict over issues of freedom and constraint. This 'generation gap', alluded to by a number of the young people within the focus group discussions, can be associated, at least in part perhaps, to changes in the nature of adult-child relationships that occur over time and alter the way in which each positions the other. The concept of generation, then, would appear to be central to the task of understanding young people and their social behaviour and, as such, the role of the familial field as a place of 'generational role development' is an important issue for consideration (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 1999).

'Key relationships (for young people) are with adults in homes, schools and public spaces. Adults have divided up the social order into two major groups – adults and children, with specific conditions surrounding the lives of each group: provisions, constraints and requirements, laws, rights, responsibilities and privileges. Thus, just as the concept of gender has been key to understanding women's relationships to the social order, so the concept of generation is key to understanding childhood' (Mayall, 2000 pp.120-121)

A number of researchers have suggested that as individuals grow up they rely less on their families and more on their peers as the primary reference group for identity work (James, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999). At this time, young people start to generate their own tastes and understanding of capital within the peer group, and consequently achieve a greater sense of ownership over their choices and opinions. As Bourdieu (1993a) has said, 'the aspirations of successive generations, parents and children, are formed in relation to different states of the distribution of goods and of the chances of obtaining the different goods' (pp.99). In this way, the differences in the constitution of capital between generations are significant enough to exclude those who have not grown up experiencing similar situations. This can help to explain perhaps why parents' tastes or behaviour were often referred to as 'sad' or 'embarrassing' by the young people involved in the study, because these actions would not hold the same degree of capital or significance for them as they would for their parents. The young people were also quite protective of their tastes and peer culture, and were keen to keep this aspect of their behaviour free from parental regulation. This did not stop parents from being interested in their



children's tastes, although ultimately they lacked the cultural capital to fully appreciate the underlying meanings of them. As Mia explained, 'your parents sometimes try and listen to the stuff that you're into and they're just (puts on a blank expression) you can see it on their faces, it's just so funny'. In another example, Zoe and Sophie demonstrated how parents' assumptions made about young people's tastes, or attempts to appear knowledgeable about youth fashion, often resulted in them 'getting it wrong'.

[when asked whether they liked to follow fashion]

Zoe: No I don't. My mum says that, she goes 'oh you'll want...', I went, because someone was wearing some really disgusting trousers, I said 'oh they're disgusting' and she goes 'you'll want some when they're in fashion'.

Sophie: When I go shopping my mum will go 'oh this is in fashion' and I'll be like 'yeah, but it's disgusting'. I don't care.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

Parental interpretations of their children's tastes or peer group behaviour were often disliked by young people, primarily because they tended to be based on invalid assumptions or stereotypes and implied a degree of humouring on the part of the adults. As Amadaia explained:

Amadaia: My dad called me weird last night...for wearing black nail polish. He just starts laughing and he goes 'Mary, our daughter's turning into a Goth', and then he starts laughing again. Like the other day to Amy's birthday party I wore a really short skirt, a red jumper and like this hair piece which is really not normal hair and dad thought I looked like my sister, because I don't usually dress like really girlie. He just went on really sarcastically, and I thought 'thanks that's nice, you could have said I looked really nice or something'.

(SACS, wk 3)

#### 4.4.2 *To Be (or Not to Be) Children?*

This consternation can be understood in relation to young people's desire for the freedom to be self-defining in their social actions and, moreover, to be treated as adults within the familial field. In ridiculing their children's tastes, then, parents are perceived to show a lack of respect, and as such it is perhaps understandable that the response of the young people in this study to this kind of behaviour was so negative. Having said this, there were some occasions when the young people indicated that they were happy to allow parents to play the 'adult' role and treat them as 'children',

although these were associated with exceptional or extenuating circumstances. One way in which this was illustrated within the data was through the perpetuation of old family traditions and cultural practices, such as a belief in ‘Santa Claus’ or the ‘Tooth Fairy’. Being positioned as ‘children’ within these situations appeared to be tolerated by the young people because the practices themselves were grounded in a degree of tradition and nostalgia, and, as such, they represented an important part of each individual’s biography of self<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the young people were clear that as they knew the ‘truth’ of the situation there was no real danger of losing social capital, indeed they stood to gain a certain degree of capital, by going along with the pretence. The following quote demonstrates how the girls at the convent school were able to joke about this issue, but it also indicates the esteem in which these institutional family practices were held.

Lara: The only presents to go under our tree before Christmas are the ones from my granddad because he always gives them to us a couple of days before

Mia: My parents still like sneaking around

Katie: My parents still like sneaking around

Mia: And to help them you go ‘just leave them under the tree’ but they’re like ‘no! it’s more fun like this’

Amadaia: My dad keeps going ‘is Santa going to come in your room’ (as if speaking to a young child) and I go ‘I hope not’.

(SACS, wk 4)

The importance of maintaining these beliefs suggests that they have played an important part in young people’s early experiences within the family. We now move on to look more closely at the influences that this field can have on a young person’s constructions of self.

## 4.5 FAMILIAL INFLUENCE: ‘Taking After’ (Bob)

### 4.5.1 *The Circle of Life?: Becoming Like Your Parents.*

On a number of occasions the young people talked of ‘taking after’ various family members, although there was a certain amount of ambivalence in their attitudes here. For example, in one discussion Liz suggested that her father had been an important influence in her life, yet in another asserted that ‘I don’t think my parents have influenced me in any way at all’. This contradiction is perhaps an attempt to deny



conformity on her part, and exert a degree of control over her own social actions and behaviour. However, it also indicates the deeply embedded nature of the habitus, in that some of the ‘inherited’ characteristics and dispositions are not consciously learned. Lara, Mia and Amadaia hinted at some of these issues in the following extract.

[when talking about who they model themselves on]

Lara: Your parents are the main ones, even though everyone goes ‘I’m never going to be like my mum or I’m never going to be like my dad’, but there are things about you that are similar.

Amadaia: And you realise that you are really like them.

Mia: And it’s really scary so you try and change yourself.

Amadaia: You do something and you think ‘oh that’s what my mum would do’.

(SACS, wk 2)

There is a suggestion here that although young people may attempt to resist being influenced too greatly by their parents, in many ways the situation is in effect simply a matter of course, i.e. it is both inevitable and indisputable. This acceptance is perhaps understandable, given that by the time young people come to assess and challenge the behaviour of their parents, the core components of the familial habitus have been deeply ingrained.

There were various ways in which this ‘taking after’ family members could occur, and seemingly it could be positive or negative depending upon the young person’s view of the particular characteristics they had ‘inherited’. One way in which family members were perceived to influence the young people was in terms of personality, and is illustrated quite well within the following extract from Bob’s individual interview.

RH How do you take after your dad then?

Bob: My dad cleans (a lot)... well I don’t think I do because my bedroom’s the messiest in the house. If you just leave a crisp packet or an empty bottle out, and you’re about to clear it up right after a film’s finished, he takes it away and clears it up, and just goes (sighs). My mum just goes ‘just leave him alone’. Because when (his grandfather) comes down it’s really weird to see that dad’s turning in to him because they’re always tidying up. You see them running about the house cleaning everything up.

RH Do you notice things about yourself that remind you of your dad?

Bob: Yeah, well my mum said a few days ago that I’m completely different to my dad, but I’ve got the same personality as him. So it’s a bit

weird... my dad goes, if he's er, he goes 'are us'. He goes like 'pubs are us' if we're going to the pub or something, and I've been saying that quite a lot lately. It's really weird (pause) And because they're Scottish I say 'half' (pronounced 'haff') sometimes.  
(individual)

These comments help to confirm the role of the family as a socialising influence, and demonstrate quite clearly the reproduction of trends and dispositions from one generation to the next. Although Bob recognises that he is different to his father in a number of ways (notice this was mentioned first), he also picks up on traits that they have in common such as personality, mannerisms, accent and vocabulary.

#### *4.5.2 A Practical Influence: Passing on Skills.*

In addition to the influence on aspects of personality however, family members were seen to have a more direct influence on the particular skills and talents of young people. This influence could be either inadvertent (such as Bob's mother's success as a textile artist inspiring his own, but distinct, artistic flair) or intentional (such as Ben's computer programmer father teaching him about information technology). It wasn't just parents, however, that were seen to teach the young people in this way. As Lloyd explained:

Lloyd: I sing Indian songs and stuff on stage...I've been on radio and everything.

RH So how did you get into that?

Lloyd: My granddad he was brought up in Africa, in Kenya, and he used to play for this band. Well at first he used to sort out the speakers like a technician and everything, then he started singing and stuff. So he taught me everything and I've been singing since the age of five.

(individual)

Here we can see Lloyd's grandfather giving him the benefit of his musical knowledge and experience, and, more importantly, it indicates once again the transferral of cultural traditions via the adult-child relationship (Galbo, 1983). This brings us back to the notion of sharing tastes within social groups, for in passing on their skills to young people older family members are also passing on a sense of excitement and passion for particular areas. One of the main ways that this was evidenced within this study was in the young people's conversations concerning sporting activities. Several authors have pointed to the important role that families play in encouraging young people's interest in physical activity, and in shaping and structuring their sporting



involvement (Vertinsky, 1992; Brustard, 1996; Colley *et al*, 1996; Douge, 1999; Mota & Silva, 1999). There is also a gender issue at play here, in that the majority of the young people who mentioned a family sporting influence were male and had been encouraged in this way by their fathers.

Carl: My dad has (influenced me) because he was like sporty. My dad plays rugby and when he was younger, at sixteen he was actually quite fit, like now he's fat...but he played for Arsenal schoolboys, which inspired me a bit more. So my dad's done that.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

This specific treatment of boys has been noted by several researchers (Messner & Sabo, 1990; Messner, 1992; Hickey *et al*, 2000), and serves in some way to maintain the dominant notions of masculinities within contemporary society, i.e. sport is a man's activity. Other individuals, Frederick, Danny and Alex for example, also mentioned 'taking after' their fathers in terms of sporting prowess, and suggested that their parent's sporting interests had provided more than a simple point of reference. In addition to the encouragement that they had obviously received from a young age, there was also a suggestion of inherited physical capital (height, strength etc.) and allegiance to specific sports. As Carl's comments suggest, his father's connection with Arsenal football club had inspired his support for the team. Other references were made to supporting football teams, with several of the young people supporting their local teams or following the teams supported by their parents. This, then, is another way in which the familial field can be seen to represent a site in which embodied identities are constructed, particularly through the shaping of interests and loyalties.

#### 4.5.3 *Influencing Tastes and Values.*

In their study concerned with sources of self-identity in adolescence, Güneri *et al* (1999) note that religious beliefs can be an important aspect of identity for young people, and can influence both their morals and behaviour. Several of the young people mentioned that they had strong religious beliefs, and implied that it had a significant impact on their social behaviour. These beliefs were developed as a result of being taken to church or Mosque by their parents from a young age, and as such can be seen as a reproduction of particular tastes from one generation to another. In addition, it also represents a reproduction of cultural tradition, because the two Asian

young people I spoke to both followed Islam, whereas the Caucasian young people who professed to a strong faith were Christians. This religious following influenced young people both in terms of providing a belief system, and in structuring some of their social time (church or mosque attendance, Sunday school groups, religious lessons etc.). In terms of influencing values, it was clear to see that religious norms were learned to such a degree that they were embedded within the habitus and constituted part of the young person's conceptualisation of identity.

Katie: I go to church and I help in the Sunday school with the little kids, and then I play in the church orchestra as well. And I think that it does influence me because I mean, you don't necessarily act like it around your friends but ...it gives you a basis, how you're meant to live. You don't always follow it I have to admit, I know I don't. But then at least you can definitely see where you've gone wrong. Because like you know, I wouldn't, well I wouldn't anyway because I've got a guilty personality, but I wouldn't steal because I've been taught definite right, that that's *definitely* wrong in every situation.

RH So (religion) teaches you -

Katie: The way you're meant to live, according to what I believe in.

(SACS, wk 1)

The influence of the family was an important one here, and engagement with the field of religion<sup>4</sup> is often undertaken as a family group. For example, in her time map Chloë indicated going to relatives houses in order to pray as a family, and in one discussion Katie described in detail the family ritual of going to church on a Sunday.

Katie: I get up at nine to get to church and then it starts at ten and it finishes at eleven, so that's like half ten so it finishes at half eleven, and we don't usually get away until after twelve. We go and get a paper and then perhaps stop off at the supermarket to get something for lunch, then that's half past twelve by the time we get home so it's taken up the whole morning.

(SACS, wk 3)

The field of family is perhaps so important in developing the tastes and ideals of young people because it represents the social context in which they spend a great deal of time in their most formative years. As such, family members can be seen to have a significant impact on an individual's interests through the choices that they make and the examples that they set (Adler & Adler, 1998; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Mota & Silva, 1999). As Danny pointed out when attempting to explain how his interest in sport started:



Danny: Just when I was little my mum and dad decided to take me to either football lessons, or tennis lessons, swimming lessons, and I've just always carried it on, since I was about five...and I've always liked it.  
(individual interview)

Parental involvement in structuring their past social experiences was generally appreciated by the young people, however as they got older such intrusion was less easily tolerated, showing once again a desire for self-control over their own lives.

The influence of the familial field as a site for learning appropriate cultural behaviour has been touched on in parts of this analysis so far, but it may be worth noting more clearly the impact that it has on a young person's construction of self. The learning of specific ways of talking, dressing and acting are all indicative of the particular culture within which an individual grows up, and forms part of the basis of their habitus. Moreover, it also influences the way that an individual thinks and conducts themselves in social interactions with others, and influences what they consider appropriate behaviour for someone of their class, status and gender. Their generation of habitus then will frame the subject positions that they consider to be open to them, influence the practices that they engage in, and ultimately influence how they see themselves in relation to other individuals, both within the family and in other fields. In the next section the discussion moves on to look more closely at the importance of social interactions within the family, and the ways in which young people conduct themselves in this particular field.

#### **4.6 THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'you always act around different people in different ways' (Lara)**

##### ***4.6.1 A Place of Comfort.***

The importance of the familial field to young people has been widely documented (Simmons & Wade, 1987; Harris, 1995; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999), and is something that was generally acknowledged either explicitly or implicitly within this study. Even when the young people highlighted the negative aspects of family relationships, the underlying importance of the family, e.g. as a source of comfort,

provision or identification, was evident. As Mike points out in response to an earlier comment in which he said that he hated his family.

Mike: Well, I do like (them), I wouldn't be able to cope without my family because like I need them and they're like important to me. But they annoy me a lot of the time. They just like, especially my mum, she *really* annoys me. I get on alright with my dad, but my mum is just annoying.

(TBS, wk 4)

The inter-personal relationships within the family were seen as a vital source of help and support, and the girls in particular advocated the security of the family network as essential for well-being. This gender specific attitude was also evident within the young people's perceptions of which social context they felt most comfortable in, the girls tending to identify the home and the boys preferring to be with friends in community or commercial places (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 1999). For many of the young people the family was a field in which they were 'known' and could be themselves, free from judgement and without the need for impressing people. Dean and Lin (1977) have suggested that family members can be 'an important element in adolescent's ability to cope with life stressors', and much of this would appear to be associated with the young people's perception of the family as 'a comfort situation'. Habits and routines are part of the family life from birth, and help to develop a sense of stability and security for young people (Misztal, 1996). Giddens' (1991) notion of ontological security, defined as 'a sense of community and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual' (pp.243), implies that this requires a degree of trust on the part of individuals. As Misztal (1996) has argued:

'Trust as habitus is a protective mechanism relying on everyday routines, stable reputations and tacit memories, which together push out of modern life fear and uncertainty as well as moral problems. For most people the existence of social order, which dwells in day to day predictability, is convenient and comforting.' (p.102)

These notions of security and trust have important implications for an individual's understanding of their social world and their conceptions of self, as 'for young people especially, trust is the necessary condition for the development and elaboration of self-identity' (Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 1999 p. 27). The following extract links a



number of these issues, and highlights in particular the importance of feeling 'comfortable' for young people.

RH Well which one of those (five fields) would you say that you felt most comfortable in?

Sophie: My family.

Laura: Yeah, my family and friends...because my family, I can like trust my family and my friends, and my mum will like help me through everything that I go through. Like sometimes I can't tell my friends things.

Sophie: Yeah, and they know you very well, they know what you're like.

RH Does that make a difference do you think?

Sophie: Yeah, it helps you feel more comfortable.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 2)

Reference to feeling comfortable or not having to try and make an impression within the field of family point to the ways in which young people are aware of managing their behaviour within different contexts, in order to make an acceptable presentation of self (Goffman, 1990b). As we have seen, an individual's habitus is influenced by the particular social environments in which they grow up, and in part comprises dominant norms and ideals concerning appropriate behaviour. Mastering the art of social interaction is an important skill to learn, then, if individuals are to be afforded a more central role within the workings of a field. If, as has been suggested here, the familial field is an important site for personal and social construction and reflection, it can be seen to play an important part in this learning of social skills. As Dunn has suggested:

'Children are motivated to understand the social rules and relationships of their cultural world because they need to get things done in their family relationships. What we see...is the child's increasing subtlety as a member of a cultural world – a subtlety achieved in part because of the pressure of the individual's needs and relationships within that world.'  
(Dunn, 1988 p.189)

In this way, the home can perhaps be thought of as the 'backstage' region (Goffman, 1990b) within the familial field 'in which social roles, especially gender and generational, are rehearsed and developed' (pp. 27).

#### 4.6.2 *Managing the Self in the Familial Field.*

It was clear from the focus group conversations with the young people, that the ways in which they conducted themselves and their interactions with others varied considerably from one social context to another and from one individual to another. As Alex noted 'I think I behave better when I'm at school and (with my) family, and doing all the other two (fields), but when I'm with my friends I sometimes act badly'. There appeared to be both conscious and unconscious elements to this behaviour, suggesting that the young people were in fact extremely skilled and experienced in managing their behaviour. Giddens (1991) has provided a link with the concept of identity here by suggesting that 'all human beings, in all cultures, preserve a division between their self-identities and the 'performances' they put on in specific social contexts' (pp.58). As Lara explained, 'you always act around different people in different ways, like if you've met someone for the first time and you talk to them for a bit, and you go back home afterwards and you realise that that's not what you're usually like...you realise that you change'. However, it could be argued that as these 'performances' are an important aspect of young people's understanding of their social interactions, they are also inherent within their conceptions of self. The need to 'be false' within social situations was something that was mentioned a great deal by all of the groups within this study, and occasionally in relation to the field of family. As the following extract shows:

Mike: You've got to be good around your parents (laughs)

Lloyd: (In front of) parents you can't like swear or anything, but with your friends you can do what you want.

Mike: You have to be false with your parents...because if you upset them they don't speak to you, and they don't give you your allowance, and they ground you, and they do horrid things.

(TBS, wk 3)

Here we can see that Mike and Lloyd are aware of the need to act in a way that fits in with the rules and norms of the field, which are perceived to be endorsed by their parents. The necessity of this course of action is indicated by Mike's highlighting of the consequences of not conforming in this way, which in itself suggests first hand experience of them. In order for young people to maintain access to capital, or the means of accumulating it, they must meet the demands of their parents, whose position of relative power allows them the right to determine its distribution



(Bourdieu, 1985). This is once again linked to the notion of habitus, and such behaviour on the part of the young people can be understood as a result of past experiences in the field. This does not mean of course that all of the interactions that young people have with their parents are contrived and superficial. In this next extract, which follows on from the previous one, Mike explains how the demands of the situation are taken into account when considering the appropriate course of action, and indicates to the degree of control that this takes on the part of an individual.

RH So what's this thing about being false then?

Mike: No, I don't have to be false, but I just don't tell them much. It's just like, I don't know, my parents are really (pause) strange.

Lloyd: My mum I can tell her like, I'm not afraid of her or anything, I can tell her my grades if I've got like something bad. But if I want like my dad to know my grades I tell my mum to show him them.

Bob: That's what I do.

Mike: I'd rather show my dad than my mum...

Bob: Dads get really angry though.

Mike: Because my dad doesn't like care as much as my mum does. My mum thinks oh my god I'm failing at everything, and my dad just goes 'oh, OK'.

RH So if you have to be false in some situations, is there any situation when you are not, when you're like the 'real' you?

Mike: When I'm angry with them (pause) if I'm like actually angry with my parents I don't hold back much. I tell them (how I feel).

(TBS, wk3)

The context specific nature of the young people's behaviour appeared to be based upon both the expectations of significant others within the relevant contexts (parents, peers, teachers etc.) and an interpretation of what was required in order to fulfil the demands of the situation. In relation to the family, it usually entailed considering the expectations of parents and an awareness of their authoritative position within the field. As such, it is hardly surprising that many of the young people echoed Alex's sentiment outlined above and maintained that they generally behaved much better at home than they did within the less regulated field of peers. However, as the following extract shows, this situation was not clear cut as it may first appear.

[in reference to a comment that you could be most like the 'real you' at home]

Mia: I think with family maybe would be a place too, because your family know you anyway, so you don't have to pretend.

Katie: You can't always. No, but then when you're at home you have to act intelligent so they go 'oh yeah' and stuff and be what they want.

Amadaia: I don't (laughs) No, I think you act differently to different people in your family. Because I went to a family get together thing on Saturday, and I haven't seen some of them for ages, and I was, I knew I was acting differently around them.

Lara: But it's probably how close you are to them.

Katie: I'm only *ever* myself when I'm completely *by* myself.

(SACS, wk 1)

It would appear then that the nature of the relationship between family members, as Lara put it 'how close you are to them', determines the form of interaction that takes place. The implication from other conversations on this subject was that the young people were more cautious of communicating with less familiar family members than they were with parents, siblings or closer relatives. In this case, they were more consciously aware of their behaviour and monitored more closely their social interaction. Parents then were people with which the young people could exercise some degree of resistance (albeit often limited), but they had to be more careful within the wider social context of the familial field. Katie's final comment here is quite astute, in that it recognises the necessity for some degree of presentation within any social interaction. It also brings up the notion of personal space, which a number of the young people mentioned as being important. Abbott-Chapman and Robertson (1999) have suggested that the home is often considered to be an important private space by young people, the concept of their own room being central to this. There was frequent mention of bedrooms within the young people's conversation, with the primary use for them being a means of getting away from direct parental authority because parents on the whole seemed to respect the privacy of their children's rooms. This then allowed young people space in which they could exercise some autonomy within what was often a heavily regulated field, provided of course that they didn't transgress the house rules too much (e.g. by playing loud music, or having an exceptionally messy room).

The need for individuals to consider and employ management of self within the family not only points to the fact that the structure of this field is broad and complex, but also that it involves numerous relationships with various other members of the field. Those individuals with whom young people have most contact are the members of their immediate family, and in particular those who live in the same household. Whereas parental influences on the construction of identities has already been discussed, there



has been little attention paid so far to another group of individuals that the young people often mentioned in relation to this field – their siblings. The following section moves on to address this point.

#### **4.7 SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: Conflict, Competition and Companionship.**

##### ***4.7.1 The Nature of Sibling Interactions.***

All of the young people who had brothers and sisters mentioned them within their discussions of the family, often without prompting, and this in itself indicates the significant place that they occupy within young people's social experience. The positioning of themselves and their siblings as 'brother' or 'sister' was an unconscious act for these individuals, and showed the extent to which this acceptance of roles and positions was a constituent part of their habitus. As mentioned, there is a wealth of research indicating the immense potential that family members have to influence adolescent identity development (Freedman-Doan, 1996; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). Though even without this it would be difficult to believe that young people could fail to be influenced by individuals with whom they spend such a great deal of time, not to mention share a genetic connection. Siblings were most often mentioned in relation to the practices that families engaged in together, such as holidays and social gatherings. These communal experiences were important to the young people, and constituted a shared family biography. In a society in which personal narratives are deemed to be 'at the core of self-identity' Giddens (1991 p.76), this has obvious implications for their constructions of self within the familial field.

One particular role that siblings played was to provide an alternative to peers within the field of family, being individuals to socialise or engage in activities with. However, the implication was that this situation was often a last resort and that, given the choice, the young people would much rather spend their time with peers. Unlike with peers, the young people could not always choose the times that they spent with their siblings, and this led to a certain amount of tension. For example, in explaining why she would rather socialise with friends away from her house, Amadaia said 'if I stayed at home all the time I'd go insane...my brother would drive me crazy, totally

crazy'. The nature of the relationships that the young people had with their siblings was both variable and complex, indeed there seemed to be a whole set of rules and norms that were 'understood' to govern behaviour here. Much of these regulations were associated with an individual's age and, as a result of this, their position within the family hierarchy. There was some suggestion that the closer in age siblings were, the more likely they were to do things together, such as when Mike mentioned going out skate boarding with his brother. This perhaps links with the issue of sharing tastes (Mike's brother was 'into in-line skating'), both connected with their experiences within the family (see section 3) and their exposure to wider social trends and influences. However, this closeness in age didn't always equate to closeness in relationship, and quite often there appeared to be more tension between siblings who were of a similar age. The complexities of sibling relations are outlined within the following extract, which comes from a conversation that the Thornhill boys had regarding the familial field.

Bob: I've got two older brother and sisters, and they're alright because they don't live with me, they live in Scotland. And my two younger sisters are just a nightmare.

Danny: I'd hate to be the middle one in a family, because I'm the biggest and I just take the mick out of the middle one more. Because when you're the oldest the younger one's don't do much to you because they'll be scared of you. And when you're the youngest they're probably aren't as bad on you because you're the younger. But when you're in the middle you're kind of in between.

Mike: I'd hate to be the youngest out of like just two children, because like my little brother, he gets so much stick from me. He just like, he tends to lose it sometimes...He chases after me with knives sometimes.  
(laughs)

Lloyd: Yeah but when you're younger then, your parents like don't tell you off as much as the older, the ones that are older, so it's alright, it's not that bad...but older brothers and sisters, you just take the piss out of them.

(TBS, wk 1)

From these comments, and endorsed by conversations in other groups, it is clear that a hierarchy of power exists within sibling relationships in which age equates to relative 'power' and determines the amount of capital that individuals have within the familial field. Elder siblings often have an advantage in physical capital that allows them to consolidate their elevated position, although younger siblings do not always seem to accept the legitimacy of this capital and seek to challenge attempts to subjugate them.



This tension indicates some struggle for supremacy between siblings, although the apparent 'authority' associated with the position of older brother or sister is not without its drawbacks. Several of the young people mentioned the 'responsibilities' that came with this role, and seemed to be aware of the expectations of others, both those within the family and without, to do their 'duty' here. This in effect meant becoming a 'proxy parent', particularly in situations where senior family members were absent, and carried a requirement to both protect and provide for their siblings. Far from simply being a position of power, however, this responsibility was also seen as putting them at the mercy of younger brothers and sisters who try to instigate conflict. The following extract illustrates some of the issues outlined here, in particular the tension that surrounds the concept of authority between siblings.

Katie: My sister gets picked on on the bus because she's so immature.

Like the other night I just laughed at her because -

Lara: Ah! But you're her sister, you're meant to protect her.

Mia: Yeah.

Katie: Yeah, but you don't know her that's the thing, she is such a pain she really is. No but she's such a mardy as well, she goes, she was on the bus stop this morning, and she was sitting in the doorway of this shop but it was like a house doorway, and I was like 'Rebecca, don't sit on the floor' and she goes 'I'm not sitting on the floor', I said 'well don't sit on your bag then' and she goes 'oh!' and gets up. And then these people come out of the door, and I said to move to the side, and she was like 'no'. So I said 'how would you like it if someone sat on your doorstep?' and she said 'we've not got a doorstep, it's a piece of paving stone'.

(SACS, wk 4)

#### 4.7.2 *Role Models or Rivals?*

Güneri *et al* (1999) suggest that role fulfilment, imposed by friends, parents and society in general, can function as an important aspect of young people's social identity, and would appear to be confirmed by the individuals involved in this study. The understanding of what it means to be a sibling would certainly appear to be deeply rooted within the young people, and that in itself implies an influence on the constructions of self. In addition to this almost unconscious impact, siblings could also have a more direct influence on young people's behaviour. As Alex mentioned, 'I'm influenced by my brothers, really bad'. In some cases (usually older) brothers and sisters could act as role models for their siblings, influencing aspects such as behaviour, attitudes or tastes. One example of this is provided by Bob, who said that

he wanted his eyebrow pierced because his elder brother had his done. With both Bob and Alex, the implication is that the behaviour of their older brothers is admired because it is 'cool' and challenges in some way the regulation that they themselves still feel within the field of family. This was also the case with Mia, who appeared to particularly revere her older sister because she lived independently, away from parental control and authority. The influences were not always positive, however, and often there appeared to be rivalry or competition between siblings. These situations included being envious of appearance or looks (Katie's implication that her sister was prettier than herself), jealousy regarding popularity (Mike's sarcastic yet charged comment that 'yeah, we're all jealous of my little brother'), and pressure to achieve similar academic success.

Frederick: My (older) brother's still at school, he's in the sixth form and he did quite well at his GCSEs, which puts the pressure on me...well not really, but there's a bit of pressure. My mum keeps saying 'oh you're just yourself, just do whatever you do' but he got three A\* and seven As which is quite good.  
(individual)

This section has identified an undercurrent of both compliance and insubordination running through young people's sibling relationships, and this reflects a significant tension that is a recurring theme within much of the analysis of data. In the following section, which is concerned with the nature of parental authority and regulation within the familial field, this conflict between conformity and resistance is explored in more detail.

## **4.8 REGULATION AND AUTHORITY OF PARENTS IN THE FAMILIAL FIELD: 'they tell you what you can and can't do' (Zoe)**

### **4.8.1 *The 'House Rules'***

We have seen then that for the young people in this study there were both positive and negative aspects associated with their experiences in the familial field. For example, although the field represented for many a site of comfort, support and identification, it was, conversely, also identified as a site of intense regulation and control. Often, however, there was a sense of ambiguity in the conversations regarding this issue, with the young people seemingly caught between conformity and resistance, i.e.



resisting the limitations to personal freedom while acknowledging that their relative lack of power within the field necessitated conformity. It is struggles such as these, Bourdieu has argued, that lie at the heart of field relations.

‘That is what I mean when I describe the global social space as a field, that is, both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure’ (Bourdieu, 1998b p.32)

The resistance of the young people to parental attempts at control could be viewed simply as deviant behaviour or a disregard for the ‘natural’ social order, an opinion that is often endorsed through popular stereotypes of youth<sup>5</sup>. However, the young people were generally compliant with the regulation exercised within the family seeing it as largely constructive and protective, and in those cases when they did challenge their parents it was because they felt that such governance was either unjust or transgressed the boundaries of parental obligation. Parental regulation commanded significant social capital within the field of family where parents occupied positions of relative power, but this did not translate so favourably into other fields, such as peers or media, in which the young people had greater authority and other sources determined legitimacy of capital. As the following extracts suggest.

RH So in what kind of ways have your parents influenced you?

Simon: They tell you what times you’ve got to be in, and when I was younger they told me if I said I was going out with like a mate or something and they didn’t like them, they would tell me not to see them or something. But they don’t bother any more because they know I’ll just go out anyway. They can’t really stop you from doing anything out of the house, but they can tell you what time to be in and stuff.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

Amadaia: My dad, when he tells me what to wear, like if he says ‘you look really stupid’ then I go ‘yeah well you haven’t got any fashion sense, what would you know’.

(SACS, wk 5a)

In addition to the agency afforded the young people by the structure of other fields, the issue of age would also appear to be important here and could be seen in some ways to function as a form of capital. Although there was some suggestion that the nature of their relationships with parents improved over time, with the young people



granted more responsibility and their opinions given more credence, it was clear that this situation was not consistent. Parents did not always equate the young people's increase in age with an increase in social maturity, still positioning them as 'children' and treating them in the same way as when they were younger. It is perhaps as a repercussion of the delayed transition to adulthood that young people now face in contemporary society, that efforts by young people to exercise a degree of control over their own lives are viewed so suspiciously. It is argued that in a less reflexive modernity young people would have made the transition into work or marriage at an earlier age, decreasing the time in which they were subjected directly to parental authority (Côté & Allahaar, 1996; Adler & Alder, 1998; Miles *et al*, 1998; Kelly, 1999, 2001). By increasing their time within the family home, then, young people are prevented from being able to reposition themselves adequately as 'adults' because their parents retain the dominant positions within the field and the power to determine legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1985b).

The tension between conformity and resistance provides a key theme then, and is one that runs, to varying degrees, through most issues discussed in relation to the familial field. As has been mentioned, for the most part the home was regarded as a site of compulsory attendance and the young people bowed to the regulation of their parents in this particular space within the field. The authority of parents allowed them to 'tell you what you can and can't do', via ways such as organising young people's time (when they are allowed to go out, with whom, and when they have to be back home) and determining standards for appropriate behaviour (respect for parents, not smoking or drinking, and working hard at their studies). Parents, it seemed, could determine 'acceptable' behaviour which then became the norms to which the young people had to conform, if they weren't to leave themselves open to parental disapproval. This was a dangerous situation for young people to chance, as parents were seen to have the power to remove privileges and dispense punishment. As Mike said, 'if you upset them they don't speak to you and they don't give you your allowance, and they ground you, and they do horrid things'. This awareness of parental power within the familial field is an important lesson for young people and is generally learnt early, ingrained within the habitus as a result of early socialisation experiences. For this reason the young people acknowledged that it is often better to have parents 'on side' than to antagonise them – at least on matters in which they have potential (capital) to



act. In this way, as Amadaia suggested, parents afford young people a degree of freedom and are less likely to intervene.

Amadaia: I think that guys can get, what you said before about having a boyfriend. I think if you're going out with someone, I mean I'm on the phone every single night for about two hours to Luke, seriously. Right well that's ok, but you have to make sure that they don't sort of overtake your school work. Because my mum doesn't think that (with Luke), my mum would think that if it was Jack (an ex-boyfriend), if I was still going out with Jack that's what my mum would say. She would say 'you have to get on with more of your work'. But because I'm going out with Luke, and she absolutely adores Luke, because she's known him for ages and he's like an altar boy at church. She's like 'oh yeah, he's a nice guy' and she likes him coming over and stuff like that. So if it's Luke she doesn't say that about my work, but if it was somebody else I think she would.

(SACS, wk 5)

#### 4.8.2 *Being Hypocritical or Employing Double Standards.*

In addition to defining legitimacy of practices and behaviour the young people also deemed their parents to have ultimate control over the constitution of capital within the familial field, and hence the ability to influence the means by which they themselves could acquire and safeguard social capital. However, it was clear that parents themselves were sometimes unsure as to the status of young people within the family, as is evident in the following extract of conversation.

RH So how can it be bad then, your family, because you were saying 'sometimes it's ok'?

Lara: Sometimes they don't understand what you're going through, and it's just hard to make them understand.

Katie: 'You don't want those sort of clothes you should wear this knitted jumper'. (laughing)

Mia: And they can sometimes be over-protective.

Katie: Yeah, you can't stay out later than half past ten.

Amadaia: And your age always comes in to it.

Mia: All the time.

Katie: Yeah, it's just the way they go 'You're nearly 15 you should be able to do that' (pause) 'You're only 14 you shouldn't be going out like that!'

Mia: Yeah, they change their minds.

(SACS, wk 1)

This issue of parents being hypocritical was also mentioned by another group, who expressed dissatisfaction at the double standards often employed by parents.

Zoe: It's like yesterday my mum goes 'clean your room because the cleaner's coming'. I was like 'Huh! It's my room I can do what I want with it. That annoys me, they always tell you to clear your room, it's your room why can't you leave it how you want it? And then their room is just as bad and they never have to clean it do they? They just have more places to put it, like open the cupboard and shove it all in. My cupboards already full so I just put everything on the floor, and then mother goes 'Zoe!'  
(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

In these extracts we can see that parents' treatment of their children is not always uniform, and this in itself provides a major point of contention among the young people. Whether they would look with more tolerance on parental regulation if it were always consistent, however, is another question.

#### 4.8.3 *Parental Control over Financial Issues.*

The implication inherent within this section so far is that young people's submission to the authority of their parents is due to the elevated position that parents occupy within the field. This elevated position is due to the accumulation of various forms of capital, none more important, or so it would appear, than economic capital. There was an underlying belief that as parents were the primary possessors of economic capital within the familial field, they were somewhat entitled, whether young people liked it or not, to a degree of authority. Whether it was in buying clothes, paying for schooling, or funding leisure activities there was a sense of obligation on the part of the young people to be grateful and make the most of the opportunity. As Katie explained, some degree of parental pressure could be understood, if not appreciated, where there was a significant investment on the adults' part.

Katie: My dad goes 'Katie, I don't think you should be going out shopping until you've started devoting more time to your music'. It's supposed to be relaxation! But to be fair to them it does cost them a hell of a lot. It's about, it's nine pounds a lesson for my guitar lesson my flute lessons are about a hundred pounds a term so that's like about eight pounds a lesson, and then I have theory lessons which are about five pounds a lesson. So that's like, that is a lot a week.  
(SACS, wk 4)

This helped to explain the importance that some of the young people gave to the concept of paid work, because they had more 'ownership' of the economic capital that



they acquired in this way. This offered them a degree of the freedom they so desired, and a sense of control in that they could determine how the money could be used. More often than not it allowed them to buy clothes and music that equated to social or cultural capital within the peer group, something that it has been established is of primary importance to young people (Miles *et al*, 1998). As the following extract shows:

Lara: If you can't get money off your parents or you don't want to ask for it, it's a lot easier to work for it.

Mia: I mean, I find it better to work for it because then it's like your money and you can do exactly what you want with it.

Lara: Yeah. It's not like you're spoilt by being given it or your parents have got restrictions on how you spend it.

Katie: Well they can't possibly say 'oh you've wasted that money now', because it's not their money. It's something that you've earned, and I think it gives you like, you want to go out and spend it on something nice then as well, because you think 'yeah, I worked hard for that money, and I'm going to use it in whatever'.

(SACS, wk 2)

#### ***4.8.4 Over-Commitment to the Parental Role: A Concern for Present and Future Security.***

Although some concern on the part of the family was understood and tolerated, there was a perception that much of the regulation constituted parents being 'over-protective' and restricted the young people's independence. In some ways this could indicate an over-commitment to the parental role. It is interesting that this belief was expressed primarily by the girls, suggesting that societal representations of females as more vulnerable and at-risk have influenced the degree of personal freedom afforded to young people by their parents (Güneri *et al*, 1999). Furthermore, as mentioned in the first section of this analysis, the differentiation in treatment that males and females receive within the familial field can also be seen to contribute implicitly to the formation of a gendered identity. Parental concerns were seen to cover issues such as security and safety outside of the home, as well as ensuring young people's physical health and safeguarding their future prospects. In relation to the first of these it was often the case that in order to go out with friends, an individual must first satisfy a number of criteria. As such, although there was a degree of independence for the young people, it was contingent upon other factors.

Amadaia: I know, my parents don't really like me -, they don't mind me going out with friends and stuff, but they don't really like me going out by myself.

Mia: Yeah, my parents don't like that especially.

Amadaia: They don't, unless I've sorted transport and everything totally, just everything sorted out, then I can't go. I can't just say 'alright, I'm going out tonight' and get the bus, I wouldn't be allowed to do that.

(SACS, wk 1)

One way around this situation, as Mia pointed out, was for an individual to lie to their parents about where they were going, what they were doing or whom they were with. She even suggested that mobile phones acted as effective pacifiers for parents because although they allowed them to keep in touch, the contact was indirect. This option was not accepted by all of her group, however, primarily because it was felt that the concessions made on the part of parents in allowing young people to go out should be repaid with a degree of trust on their own part. It perhaps also serves to indicate once again the elevated position of parents within the familial field.

RH So you'd lie about going out?

Mia: Yeah.

Amadaia: I can't, I couldn't do it.

Katie: I can lie about stuff like 'have you seen my lipstick Katie?' and I go 'no', I can lie like that. You know, about things that aren't very important, 'have you done your homework?' 'no'. But I couldn't lie about where I'm going.

Amadaia: I couldn't lie to them about what I'm doing.

Chloë: Imagine if they were trying to contact you though, they might get the wrong information.

Katie: My parents would be so, because we were watching Coronation Street the other day and this girl was going out and she lied to her parents or something. And my mum was disapproving and she goes 'if you ever did that I'd be really upset because we wouldn't know how to get hold of you if there was a problem'.

Mia: Get a mobile. You've got a problem though when they ring you up and you're not where you're supposed to be!

Katie: But I mean how do you get around saying 'oh mum I'm not really at Amadaia's, I'm at the local pub'?

Amadaia: I find it easier to be truthful with my parents. Because even if it's like bad they'd rather know. My mum was like the other day said 'well if you ever lie to me and I find out about it I'd be really upset'.

(SACS, wk 3)

As mentioned earlier in the discussion, parents were often concerned with protecting young people from harmful practices such as smoking, drinking or taking drugs. Although often viewed as an example of parental inhibition, this restriction of young



people's behaviour can also be interpreted as a concern for their physical health. This concern was expressed in relation to the pressures facing young people in other social contexts (particularly with peers and in the media field), and is perhaps indicative of the perceived loss of influence that parents feel here. For example, the potential harm of dominant images of attractive bodies, promoted to young women via the media and endorsed within societal norms (Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Frost, 2001), was an apparent source of worry for some parents. It was a particular cause for concern for Mia's parents because her elder sister had suffered from anorexia, and consequently, though to Mia's annoyance, they tended to monitor her own eating behaviour closely.

Mia: My sister had anorexia for a bit, about six years or something.

RH Is she older than you?

Mia: Yeah, about seven years.

RH Is that something that you feel under pressure to consider?

Mia: Yeah, it's like my parents every time I skip a meal because I'm not hungry and then it's just like 'you're not going to be anorexic are you?'

They get really like stressed out, and I'm like 'oh god'.

(SACS, wk 3)

Bourdieu (1998b) has referred to families as 'corporate bodies' who tend to perpetuate their social being through 'reproduction strategies'. In relation to this he identified a particular link between the family and the school, the latter being seen by the former as a key context for the accumulation of cultural capital. This view would certainly help to understand the interest that families took in young people's education, a concern that was not always appreciated, however, being seen more as an additional external pressure in what is already a highly regulated field. Whether it was providing encouragement to revise for exams, making them practice musical instruments, or demanding that they stay in until they get their homework done, the family was seen as promoting the need for young people to learn. This concern can be seen as a means of ensuring that the young people acquire enough cultural capital to translate into other forms of capital in the future (Harker *et al*, 1990), but it is also a means of passing on family traditions. As Lara said 'my granddad's favourite question is what are you going to do when you leave school?', a question that is loaded in some ways with the expectations of older generations. These expectations were most apparent with the young people from the private schools, where the importance of job status and tradition are perhaps an important part of the class habitus. It has been suggested

that this notion of tradition can be linked to earlier conceptions of identity, when an individual's life trajectory was determined by the 'clan' to which they belonged and their position within it (Kellner, 1992; Giddens, 1991). As such, there was a much greater association between familial identity and professions or social roles. The implicit (and occasionally explicit) pressure to follow in others footsteps and uphold family tradition, for example going into medicine, or joining the armed forces) was something that the young people were often aware of, and at times created a degree of tension when it conflicted with their own aspirations. As the following extract show:

Katie: I *really, really* want to be a teacher but -

Amadaia: Everyone says that you should do that, but your parents told you not to didn't they.

Katie: Yeah, I don't think my mum's mad keen on the idea, I think she wants me to, I mean she says that she doesn't mind what I do, but I think that she really is keen on me going into medicine or something like that.

(SACS, wk 4)

The hopes and aspirations of parents for their children do not go unnoticed then, yet the degree to which they can realistically influence behaviour here is questionable. Certainly from the conversations that the young people had, there was an indication that the decisions they made concerning careers would be their own. However, the strength of the habitus is perhaps an influence that cannot easily be discounted.

#### 4.9 SUMMARY

It is clear from this discussion that the familial field is an interesting and intricate context, and that it represents a significant influence within the young people's social experiences. The degree of involvement with the field was reflected in the fact that it was evidently considered important by all of the participants, yet their experiences within it were something that they found surprisingly difficult to articulate. This in itself can be associated with the length of time that the young people have spent in the field, exposed to the particular practices that take place within it. As the primary field within the early years of life the family plays a central role in shaping individuals' tastes and practices, reproducing class, gender or cultural values and hence influencing the development of habitus. As such, it can be seen to play a significant role in shaping young people's constructions of self. It was evident that the participants perceived something official and undeniable about familial influences on



their identities, and the taken-for-granted nature of this belief again endorsed the fact that some of the deepest dispositions of habitus are ingrained within the familial field. The identity work undertaken by the young people within this field was neither straightforward nor unproblematic, however, for it was clear that the various positions occupied by individuals within the site necessitated that they constructed multiple identities in order to present themselves appropriately in these different situations. Although their families were identified as important, there were also many contradictions and paradoxes in the participants' conversations regarding this field all seemingly grounded in an underlying tussle between freedom and constraint. It was evident that some of this tension reflected the young people's resistance to parental authority, and their attempt to be granted a greater degree of autonomy. This issue is an important one to bear in mind now as we move into an analysis of the data relating to the field of peers, as it is this context that is seen to provide an opportunity for young people to attain an element of independence. Despite its growing displacement as a central site in young people's social experiences, however, the familial field remains significant, as the discussion within the following chapters attests.

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<sup>1</sup>Issues that relate to this concept, for example the gendered nature of school experiences, the promotion and reproduction of gender norms and ideals through media channels, and the disparate characteristics of male and female friendships, are explored in more depth in the additional field analysis chapters.

<sup>2</sup> It has been argued that the processes of reflexive modernity have led to a situation in which traditional parameters of society, including class, gender and family co-ordinates, have been receded (Beck, 1992; Kelly, 1999, 2001). Authors such as Giddens (1990, 1991) and Kellner (1992) have noted that modes of family life have changed over the past few decades, and have proposed traditional kinship ties are being dissolved through processes such as global migration and divorce to be replaced by more transient and reflexive relationships between individuals. Population statistics show that the UK has one of the highest divorce rates in Europe, with thirteen divorces per 1000 of the population in 1999 (ONS, 2002). Although there is now some evidence to suggest that the rate of marital breakdown has levelled off in recent years, the incidence of separation among cohabiting couples remains high (Moynagh & Worsley, 2000). These increases have been attributed to various factors such as the increased financial independence of women, a decreased respect for the institution of marriage, and, most importantly, significant legal changes that have made divorce considerably easier and less costly for individuals of all social groupings. In their study of young people's leisure and lifestyles, Hendry et al (1993) highlight fractious family relationships as being significant factors in structuring young people's social experiences. Moreover, they cite a number of studies that have identified an association between family break-up and social class, implying that intact nuclear families are more likely to be represented among the middle and upper classes with divorced or reconstituted families more evident within the lower classes. This belief is backed up by research conducted by the Family Policy Studies Centre, which has suggested that 'people in disadvantaged circumstances are more at risk of marital breakdown and lone parenthood' (McAllister, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> This issue is discussed in more detail in chapter five, when it is proposed that the use of narrative and stories are important means by which young people can construct self, particularly within the field of peers.

<sup>4</sup> It is suggested within this study that religion is another context that can be seen to function as a field. There are definite norms and ideals presented through the various religious creeds, and individuals adopt a habitus that brings them in line with these standards. In some cases there are also particular

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demands made regarding clothing, deportment and ritual activities. The field of religion is also discussed in relation to the fields of peers and school in chapters five and six.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these issues are discussed in more detail in chapter seven.



## Chapter Five

### **‘Standing Out’ and ‘Fitting In’: Contradictions and Complexities in the Field of Peers**

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter highlighted some significant associations between the fields of family and peers, and identified an apparent trend for the latter to gain some degree of ascendancy during the adolescent period. The field of peers has been heavily researched in recent years and its centrality to the social experiences of young people is well documented (Corsaro, 1985; Erwin, 1993; James, 1993; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Ungar, 2000). The peer group has been identified as particularly important in the lives of adolescents, as they seek to assert some degree of independence from the family and establish their own sense of self among their contemporaries (Harris, 1995; Jenkins, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1998). The significance of friendships was certainly a key feature of the data generated within this study, and seemed to frame a large percentage of the participants’ social experiences. This chapter now moves on to look in more detail at the field of peers, again examining the relationship with the familial field *yet also* identifying its links with the other social fields. The discussion begins by examining the centrality of the field of peers in the participants’ social experiences, exploring the notion that friendship groups can represent a significant support network and influence an individual’s perception of social comfort. It then moves on to look at the young people’s viewpoint that the field is a place of freedom from parental authority, before addressing the fact that it is, nonetheless, a site heavily subject to alternative rules and regulations. This involves an examination of the norms and ideals espoused and upheld by an individual’s peer group, which are made manifest through their management of behaviour, tastes and attitudes, and which can be seen to influence their presentation of self. It was evident that the nature of young people’s friendships is not uniform, however, and so the discussion also touches on the dynamic and contextual nature of peer relationships, highlighting the role of the interaction between fields and the importance of shared

social experiences. It then concludes by identifying and addressing some of the gender distinctions, relating to both the nature and practice of young people's friendships, apparent within the data. In summary, the following discussion identifies some of the key themes within the field of peers, and seeks to explain the ways in which the participants' manage to negotiate the intricacies of what can be seen to be an incredibly complex social context. Moreover, it aims to explore and examine the belief expressed by James (1993), among others, that 'children's experience of both having and being friends plays a critical part in their acquisition of social identity and selfhood' (p.201).

## **5.2 PEERS AS A SUPPORT NETWORK: 'I mean, what would you do without your friends?' (Bob)**

### ***5.2.1 Friends as a Source of Social Comfort or Emotional Security.***

It has already been established that the field of peers is perceived to be an important social context for young people, and the individuals in this study reaffirmed this significance when they each identified it as a major source of influence within the topic discussion task. There has been a great deal of research into the role of peer groups in young people's lives, with some suggesting that they can often represent a source of tension and pressure (Adler & Adler, 1998). However, although these aspects featured within the discussions to a certain extent<sup>1</sup>, more often than not the participants agreed with Ungar (2000) that the peer group was not inherently destructive, but rather provided a means of support and security. As such, the value that the young people gave to their friends, and their desire to spend a great deal of time with them, appeared to be grounded as much in the need for companionship and social contact as a compulsion for conformity or competition.

It has been noted that with the demands of school, part-time employment and a delayed transition to adulthood, there is an increasing pressure being placed on young people in contemporary society (Adler & Alder, 1998; Miles *et al*, 1998; Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 1999; Kelly, 1999, 2001). Moreover, it is argued that the relationships that individuals have with one another can be important in helping to deal with these stresses (Dean & Lin, 1977). For the individual's involved in this



study it was clear that some of their most important relationships were with both family and friends, a trend that has also been reported within the research of Simmons & Wade (1984, 1987) and, more recently, Bromnick and Swallow (1999). Some participants suggested that these individuals helped to increase their confidence within social situations by allowing them to behave more ‘naturally’, negating to an extent the need for conscious management of behaviour. As Mia pointed out when talking about her friends, ‘I think I can be myself when I’m with people that I know aren’t going to judge me’. She also raised this notion of social comfort within other conversations, such as the following:

RH If you’re with friends, what kind of things do you think about?

Amadaia: Boys.

Mia: I don’t know, it depends who you’re with.

Katie: It depends what you’re talking about doesn’t it (pause) I have to think what I’m talking about, if I’m talking about homework then I’m going to think about, it’ll probably come into my head ‘oh my god, I’ve not done my RE or something’. And if you’re talking about your friend’s love life you think (pause) ‘how bad is mine’.

Mia: Yeah, you think ‘damn it!’ (laughing) I think if you’re comfortable in the situation then you don’t really think as much, but if you’re uncomfortable you think ‘oh shit, I’ve got to get out of here’ you know.

(SACS, wk 3)

It would seem, then, that in some cases friends can help to provide a degree of support and solidarity for young people by engendering a sense of acceptance and belonging (James, 1993; Wight, 1994; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Morrow, 2001). This idea of peers as ‘emotional security’ was frequently mentioned within the focus group discussions, and is summed up in one of the many quotes that Amadaia had written on her work folder: ‘friends are like angels that help you when you can’t remember how to fly’. Furthermore, Liz’s belief that ‘if you don’t have any friends you become a sad person’ also indicates the importance of having (or being seen to have) friends. Apart from ensuring that individuals have company for engaging in various activities, it would appear that peers provide a more significant barrier against loneliness. It was certainly a common belief among the young people that having a social life was important for personal happiness, and that the prevalence of your friends determined, in part, your social standing within the peer group. Katie in particular seemed to take this belief on board, often bemoaning the fact that ‘I don’t do anything...my social life extends to going home on the bus!’. Given that popularity can be thought of as one of the

strongest dimensions of life that young people wrestle with and that it can be seen to function as social capital among the peer group (Adler & Adler, 1998), the importance of contact with friends can readily be understood.

### 5.2.2 *Peers as a Source of Affirmation and Advice.*

It was evident that the perceived emotional support provided by friends was due, at least in part, to their role as a source of affirmation and advice. Ungar (2000) has suggested that the closer the identification with the peer group, the more likely an individual is to seek their help or follow their advice. However, it would also appear that the more social capital an individual is perceived to possess, the more likely their opinions are to be valued. To take an example from the data, Katie often sought advice from Amadaia (her 'best friend') because she believed her to be more socially experienced than herself. The following extract is taken from a conversation in which the two girls are discussing Katie's new (and first) boyfriend. As it is close to Valentine's Day, Katie is keen to make sure that she buys an appropriate gift and seeks her friend's advice, because Amadaia has had a number of boyfriends and is thus seen as being vastly more experienced.

Amadaia: What are you going to buy him for Valentine's Day Katie?

Katie: I don't know. I thought a squidgy teddy with a heart (very excitedly). But then I thought, I don't know. What do you think?

Amadaia: It's hard.

Katie: I could just send him a rose.

Amadaia: I would never send a boy roses, because I don't think they like roses, I don't know why.

Katie: I should ask him.

Amadaia: It's like a rose is a girls' thing really.

Katie: Shall I ask him?

Amadaia: Don't send him a rose because that's like his, that's him for you I think. He'll send you a rose. You could get him aftershave, that's what I'm getting Luke.

(SACS, wk 5a)

It is perhaps fair to say that some of her need for affirmation can be linked to Katie's seemingly generic lack of self-confidence (e.g. concerning her looks, her academic ability or her perception by others), but it also reflects a genuine desire to learn new social skills. The peer group can then be a site in which learning and the sharing of



information takes place (Smith, 2000), particularly in relation to those things that young people find it difficult to discuss with parents.

### 5.2.3 *An Additional Need for Personal Space.*

It is evident that young people value the cohesive nature of the peer group and regard their interactions with friends as a central part of their social experience. Despite this role of the field as a site of support and solidarity, however, there was also some suggestion that it could at times be claustrophobic. As Zoe pointed out, 'sometimes it's good to like get away from your friends if you've seen them too much'. Given the frequency with which this type of comment was made, it would appear that the occasional need for personal space is a fundamental feature of peer relations, and indeed of any field with which young people engage for a significant period of time. It was evident in some cases that time away from the peer group represented a break from the often-intense regulation and conformity required of individuals. Katie, for example, suggested that it was often difficult and tiring to maintain an appropriate presentation of self over time (Goffman, 1990b), saying that 'I'm only *ever* myself when I'm completely *by* myself'. There is an indication here of some conflict between individual and collective identities, although Ungar (2000) suggests that this itself is not necessarily an overriding or unavoidable trait of fields. Indeed he suggests that one of the primary advantages of the peer group is that it allows for both the construction of a collective identity and the development of personal power and agency. However, this power may be more readily accessible for some than for others as it can be equated to the amount of social capital an individual is able to acquire and accumulate, and hence determines their position within the hierarchy of the field.

For some, then, friends provide a place of security, a haven from conflict, and a means of escape from other claustrophobic situations (such as home and school). As the following section shows, however, this field can also be a hostile environment and competition for capital (status or kudos) among young people can render it a 'survival of the fittest'. There is perhaps more of a risk involved here than in other fields, but nevertheless it remains a social arena in which young people often actively choose to spend time.

### 5.3 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF PEERS AND FAMILY: ‘With your friends you can do what you want’ (Lloyd)

#### 5.3.1 *The Degree of Association between the Fields.*

It was evident during the discussions that some of the young people had regarding peer relations, that there were significant overlaps with other social fields. One of the main associations was with the familial field, and it was these two fields that were identified as the most influential and important by the majority of individuals. For example, following a question that asked the participants to consider who the most influential people in their lives were, Lara responded by saying ‘I think it’s half your friends and half your family’. Mia qualified this by suggesting that it is relative to the amount of time you spend engaging with each field, and it is clear that this notion of time is an important one. The more time that an individual spends in a field, the more the structure and practices of that field will be able to exert an influence on them. In the early stages of life the family is the primary field for young people, providing for their needs and guiding their growth to maturity (Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999). It has been suggested, however, that during adolescence this centrality of the family lessens and more importance is assigned to the role of peers within young people’s lives (Harris, 1995; Jenkins, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1998). For the young people in this study the field of peers functioned as a bastion of independence against the regulation and governance of other fields (primarily school and family), however at times they appeared unsure as to the degree of association between the two sites.

For some participants the field of peers was viewed as an agreeable alternative to the familial field, and a means of excusing them from the direct control of their parents. As John said, ‘you can go places with (friends), because it’s boring going with your brother or your mum and dad’. In this case, a definite distinction was drawn between these two significant fields and the young people attempted to maintain some degree of separation between ‘peer time’ and ‘family time’. Interestingly, it was mainly the boys that mentioned this view and who typically strove to maintain distance between their friends and their family. Wight (1994) has related this importance of friends to the notion of solidarity among peer groups, and has argued that such relationships allow young men ‘for the first time to transcend family membership and to have a



position that is not institutionally inferior, that is dependent on parental authority' (p.709). This notion is a significant one and is discussed in more detail towards the end of this section, but it was not always the case that the participants wanted to keep the fields of peers and family so clearly defined. For some young people the boundaries between the two were somewhat indistinct, and it was occasionally difficult to differentiate between them. It was the nature of these particular relationships and the perception of comfort that was seemingly important here, so that it was possible to hold the view that close friends could be regarded in the same way as family. As Amadaia pointed out, 'I think that friends are like your family as well, well they can be'. Again there was a gender difference here, although this time it was the girls who mentioned this overlap between these two core fields. These traits in gender specific attitudes were not completely exclusive, however, although they did seem to reflect some of the differences that have been noted in the nature of male and female relationships (see section seven).

The overlaps between the fields of family and peers were also evident in more explicit ways. For example, the young people discussed socialising with their friends within the home, indicated the importance of their families acceptance of their peers, and mentioned that some friends had been made through the familial field, being children of their parents' friends (James, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998). There was also some suggestion by the young people that the relative importance of each of these fields was not fixed but dynamic, influenced by both situation and context. For example, Laura says on the one hand 'sometimes I can't tell my friends things', while on the other claims that 'I think sometimes with friends you can keep bigger secrets, like from your parents and things'. The following extract taken from Bob's individual interview also indicates the fluctuating roles that these two fields play in young people's lives.

[He is discussing his initial topic discussion rankings, and speculating as to whether he should change any of them]

Bob: I mean I could swap these round I suppose (friends and family, previously 2 and 1 respectively) I could rearrange them now, these two would definitely change. Because right now my family's a bit hectic because our kitchen's just been demolished. Everyone's being horrible to me and I'm being horrible to them, so I think friends would be more important now.

RH Is that just situational then? So if I came and you'd had a really bad day with your mates, or you'd just had a row or something, that would

move it down?

Bob: Yeah, because then I'd want to be with my family. Because it's really weird they're usually in a good mood when I'm in a bad mood with my mates, and when I'm in a good mood with my mates my family's usually a bit stressed.

(individual)

### 5.3.2 *The Field of Peers: An Opportunity to Act Agentially?*

For the young people in this study, the field of peers was often their 'field of choice' i.e. where they would most like to spend their time. Various reasons were given for this, but one of the main motivating factors was the perception that 'you have to be good around your parents' (Mike) but that 'with friends you can do whatever you like' (Lloyd). Traditional views of young people have tended to afford them little status within society, positioning them as adults-in-waiting and failing to interpret their behaviour in socially meaningful terms (James *et al*, 1998; Woodhead *et al*, 1991; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000). More recent approaches, endorsed by this study, challenge this notion and argue that 'children are deeply implicated in the social world as active agents' (Wyness, 1999 p.354). As an influential context in the social experiences of young people, and one relatively free from external regulation, the field of peers can be seen to offer them an opportunity to act agentially (Ungar, 2000). It is perhaps easier to identify a degree of freedom for young people in this 'their own' social context, rather than in other fields where granting them a degree of independence may challenge accepted boundaries or require re-negotiation of appropriate subject positions. Rather than simply allowing young people a degree of freedom, Jenkins (1996) has argued that the notion of agency can also be thought of as 'central to selfhood' (p.49). Kivel (1998) suggests that opportunities for young people to be 'agentic' are important for developing self-confidence and motivation, and 'are critical for ensuring their successful transition from adolescence to adulthood, and their transition from the world of play to the world of work' (p.37). In this way, a chance for young people to make their own decisions, and prove themselves capable of doing this, can allow them to acquire social capital that also bears significant currency in other fields.

Given this perception of the field of peers as a site of some freedom from external regulation, it is hardly surprising that the young people spent a great deal of time



discussing the issue of socialising with friends. Whether it was at sports clubs, shopping centres, the pool hall, or simply just ‘hanging around’, time with peers was valued as a break from other social fields. As Lara explained ‘it’s just nice to see (friends) out of school and not have to be pressurised by everyone else around us’. There was a financial drawback here, however, and it brought into question the degree of freedom and choice that the young people had to determine their actions in this field. All of the young people in this study mentioned the issue of money in some way or other, and it was seen to represent a significant limiting factor.

Katie: If I was going out, I’d have to pay to go myself.

Mia: Yeah, so would I.

Katie: So say I was going to somewhere like Zanzibar which costs five pounds to get in. I’d have to either get a friend to take me or get a taxi, and taxi’s are too much and I get fifteen pounds a month, and that is like the *whole* of my money gone on one night out. And I don’t see the point in that, I might as well save it and get something that I really want.

(SACS, wk 1)

The amount of economic capital that an individual was able to mobilise could potentially restrict their actions within the field of peers, and limit their ability to generate social capital by joining their friends on these social occasions. There was some suggestion that, because of this, individuals had to rely on their parents’ assistance (either financial or practical) which of course reinforced their lack of independence. One way in which the participants attempted to overcome this problematic situation was to take a part-time job, in order to try and generate their own economic capital<sup>2</sup>. In this way, as indicated in chapter four, there was a sense of ownership regarding the money that was earned, and the young people felt that they were more able to invest this capital in whatever way they liked.

Lara: But it helps because if you can’t get the money off your parents or you don’t want to ask for it, then it’s a lot easier to work for it.

Mia: I mean, I find it better to work for it because then it’s like your money and you can do exactly what you want with it.

Lara: Yeah. It’s not like you’re spoilt by being given it or your parents have got restrictions on how you spend it.

Katie: Well they can’t possibly say ‘oh you’ve wasted that money now’, because it’s not their money. It’s something that you’ve earned, and I think it gives you like, you want to go out and spend it on something nice then as well, because you think ‘yeah, I worked hard for that money, and I’m going to use it in...’ whatever.

(SACS, wk 2)

It can be seen then that there is an aspect of both freedom and constraint in young people's experience of the field of peers and its overlap with the field of family. It is evident that the two fields impact upon each other significantly and that the relationship between them is extremely complex, being both situation and context specific. It has been shown that the field of peers can allow young people to experience some sense of independence and autonomy, although there are often limitations regarding the extent to which this can take place. Nevertheless, whatever the degree of freedom experienced by young people there, the field of peers can still be seen to offer them the best chance of freedom from adult regulation. This does not mean to say that it is free from all regulation, however, and in the following section we move on to explore the rules and norms that govern young people's behaviour within the field of peers.

#### **5.4 RULES AND REGULATIONS IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: 'Normal is nothing too extreme...you just stay quiet and go along with the crowd' (Mike)**

##### ***5.4.1 The Field of Peers as a Structured Space with Norms and Ideals.***

It has been shown that part of the appeal of the peer group for young people lies in its relative freedom from adult regulations. However, it has equally been established that social fields are indeed structured spaces characterised by struggles between individuals for its available resources, their success being determined by their relation to the dynamics of power (Bourdieu, 1993a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002). It would appear evident, then, that inherent within the structure of the field of peers there are implicit and explicit norms that serve to guide young people's behaviour in this context. Through conformity to the dominant norms and ideals of the peer group young people are able to affirm their group membership and gain some degree of peer acceptance, both of which are important for an individual's understanding of self (Adler & Adler, 1998; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Walker & Kushner, 1999). The peer group then is an important reference group for young people and plays a crucial role in their identity formations, confirming or denying the constructions of self that an individual presents to the group (Goffman, 1990b; James, 1993; Jenkins, 1996).



The rules and standards that governed behaviour in the field of peers appeared to be a curious combination of both dominant societal and cultural norms and those generated within the peer group itself. The former were those widely accepted ideals, generally produced and reproduced through various cultural channels such as the media<sup>3</sup>, which determined, among other things, dominant cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, as well as issues of fashion and popularity. The peer group generated norms were heavily based on these ideals, but often included an interpretation that was specific to a particular group. The reason for this overlap is undoubtedly associated with the power of societal norms to pervade all fields and, as a result, impact the generation of an individual's habitus. In this way, similar understandings of appropriate social behaviour can be perceived in different fields. Take for example the notion of an 'etiquette of friendship' that was implied by some of the young people in the study. On several occasions the qualities of trust, loyalty and reliability were mentioned as desired traits in peers, and it was clear that there were unwritten rules regarding appropriate ways to treat a friend. These values were perhaps indicative of a more generic basis of habitus, developed initially through the familial field and endorsed through the field of school. They were largely transferable from one field to the next although context-specific conditions could also be applied (as with Alex's belief that honesty is admirable unless it incriminates a friend) and needed to be taken into account.

#### *5.4.2 'Normal', 'Different', 'Cool' or 'Sad': Positioning Individuals in the Field of Peers.*

In addition to these norms governing behaviour, there were also standards that were associated with the tastes and interests of the young people. In order for an individual to position themselves in a certain desired way, they first had to ensure that they had significant capital and that came through conformity to the ideals associated with that position.

RH Why do you think people try to impress others then? Why impress your mates?

Lloyd: Sometimes you feel like if you don't impress them, then they won't be your friends any more. If you're too boring or something they're not going to like you..

RH What kind of ways do you try and impress people?

Lloyd: Well I wasn't the one that started the Garage music off for



example, my friend listened to Garage music so I decided to listen to Garage music as well (pause) because different people like different things  
(individual)

It was Lloyd's belief that in order to impress his friends he had to identify with their interest in Garage music. Storey (1999) has remarked that 'what we consume and how we consume it says a great deal about who we are, who we want to be, and how others see us' (p.136). However, as Frith and Gleeson (2001) have argued, 'it is not enough to identify with a particular identity, one has to take it on and carry it off...(and this) involves values, ideals, positions and so on' (p.3). An individual's adoption of certain tastes, whether they are related to music, fashion<sup>4</sup> or physical activities, represents a significant investment and an indicator of commitment to the group. Furthermore, the young people involved in this study were all too aware that their tastes and group affiliations also held significant implications for accumulating capital and their position within the field of peers in general. There were certain standards of legitimacy within the field that established the relative value of particular tastes, interests or images, and labelled them as 'cool', 'sad', 'normal' or 'different'. These labels appeared to be used by the young people as a way of justifying their conformity to the norms of the field, and as markers of appropriate behaviour. Furthermore, they were a means by which they could judge and position others within the peer group, determining the degree of social capital that was associated with particular actions, tastes and images. Although some have highlighted the danger of classifying individuals in such a way (e.g. Roberts, 2000), Jenkins (1996) has argued that 'stereotyping is a routine, everyday cognitive process upon which we all to some extent depend' in identifying others and establishing normality and difference (p.122). Some participants appeared to use these two concepts, 'normal' and 'different', as taken for granted assumptions regarding the acceptability or value of particular characteristics or traits. When challenged on this issue, however, it was clear that the concepts functioned as powerful ideological tools within fields (Hacking, 1990). The boys from Thornhill school highlight the complexity of this issue in the following extract.

RH But what is normal?

Mike: Normal is nothing too extreme.

Bob: No-one is normal.

Mike: No it's nothing too extreme, you just blend in. You're scared of



voicing out in any way. You just stay quiet and go along with the crowd.

RH So would you all want to be considered normal? Is it a good thing to be normal?

Mike: It depends. It depends what your definition of normal is.

Bob: It's really hard to explain. You can't explain it really.

Mike: I wouldn't want myself to be described as like a sheep, but I wouldn't say that I'm like strange.

Bob: But normal could be anything.

Mike: Not really.

Bob: It can, it can be anything...because you could say that normal is one thing but it could be another.

RH OK, so if you're not normal (pause), what are you?

Bob: Different.

RH Do you think that there's any pressure to be different or not?

Bob: Again different could be anything.

Danny: I think that on some issues people don't mind being normal, but on others they might *want* to be different or might *want* to be normal. In different things people might want to be normal.

Mike: Yeah, because like music for me, I wouldn't say that I listened to *normal* music, I don't know, like Stereophonics or something. I don't listen to them. So people think that I don't listen to normal music because I don't listen what the majority of people listen to.

(TBS, wk 2)

In addition to highlighting the difficulties faced by young people in articulating deeply ingrained elements of their social practice, this conversation suggests that the notion of normality is not fixed, but is one that can be both situation and context specific. For the boys, being 'normal' involved conformity to the rules and ideals accepted by the majority of people in the group with which they themselves identified. In this way, it was possible to be 'normal' in one context but perceived as 'different' by those outside of that context, which explains in part the apparent contradiction between the desire of young people to both *stand out* and *fit in* within the peer group (Miles *et al*, 1998). The norms that governed behaviour within particular groups were largely determined (or at least reproduced) through the 'popular' individuals within that group. The label of 'popular' was somewhat paradoxical, however, as their peers did not always hold these individuals in high esteem ('they think they're it and take over things' - Amadaia). The positioning of certain individuals as 'popular' appeared to refer more to their quantity of social capital and consequent elevated situation within the field, than to a sense of their personal acclaim or admiration by others. It was these individuals who possessed enough social capital to be in a position of relative power (in relation to defining 'normal' and 'different'), and who provided the criteria against which others perceived they should measure themselves.

RH So who decides what is normal and what is different?

Mike: Cool people. The people that are considered cool are the people that can like make what people should think is normal (Pause) So if you are like considered cool, you don't have anything to worry about. You can do what you like because no one will take the rip or anything. It's when you're not like in the cool group that you can like, you'll get called weird and stuff.

(TBS, wk 2)

### 5.4.3 *The Perceived Danger of Non-Conformity.*

To go against this majority decision, then, is to risk losing status among your peers as Bob's response to the question of what makes something 'sad' indicated; 'it's if you're the only one who likes (something) and no one else thinks it's good because they don't like it'. Bob's understanding of this concept is particularly astute, perhaps, because he often appeared to be on the receiving end of this state of affairs within the group conversations. For example, on one occasion Mike and Danny ridicule Bob because he had at one time been a fan of the computer game 'Tomb Raider'. In response to this derision, Bob attempts to distance himself from this former interest saying that 'everyone else thinks it's sad so I've just latched onto that'. Jenkins (1996) makes the point that 'the peer group is definitely political' (p.66), and some of the other young people in the study also made reference to this notion of being 'under pressure' to act, dress or behave in certain ways.

RH What kind of things can you feel peer pressure in, or feel under pressure to do?

Mia: To dress right, and stuff.

Amadaia: To have boyfriends, you know everyone's like -

Lara: To have the modern things.

Amadaia: And be in with the latest.

Lara: Basically you need to have money to do all of that though.

(SACS, wk 1)

These comments obviously refer to some of the norms and standards expected of young people in the peer group, although, as Lara implies, their degree of conformity is often restricted by the amount of economic capital they have. Given the importance of the peer group to young people, and its role in their conceptions of self, there are obvious implications regarding this lack of economic (and hence social capital) for individuals (Miles *et al*, 1998). Frith and Gleeson (2001) have suggested that 'material resources have an important part to play in young people's social inclusion or



exclusion from peer groups', and that this lack of capital can limit an individual's ability to distance themselves from 'stigmatised identities' (p.7)<sup>5</sup>. The young people were aware of those identities that carried little social capital among the peer group and in general sought to avoid them, although there were times when some individuals felt that they couldn't do this and were in a no-win situation. For example:

Katie: It's hard to be a religious teenager though because, no like, I mean if people, if I said to someone who goes say to Redhills<sup>6</sup>, 'I go to church'. I don't know, I wouldn't ...

Amadaia: You wouldn't.

Mia: No, you wouldn't dare.

Katie: I would get my face hit.

(SACS, wk 1)

Katie was aware that identifying herself as someone who went to church had different implications depending upon the context in which it was done. Among peers within her own school it would be accepted, and perhaps even acclaimed, because of the religious standards that are attached to that field. However, among other groups and in different contexts it was likely to leave her open to ridicule, because she perceived that religious beliefs did not carry significant social capital within the field of peers in general.

The field of peers can be seen to be a complex context full of contradictions, summed up perhaps in the apparently conflicting notions of 'Standing Out' and 'Fitting In'. It is a situation that has been discussed by several authors, and is generally viewed as indicative of an attempt to balance the construction of both individual and collective identities (Brettschneider, 1992; Widdecombe & Wooffitt, 1995; Miles *et al*, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). Jenkins (1996), however, suggests that social identity is as much about similarity as it is about difference, and that a collective identity is simply concerned with how different people are similar to each other. In other words, the concepts of 'Standing Out' and 'Fitting In' are not necessarily distinct, but can work in conjunction to frame an individual's constructions of self in different contexts. It would appear that young people would ideally like to be perceived as one *in* the crowd rather than one *of* the crowd, i.e. to have the collective association without losing their sense of individuality. Having said this, however, the perceived necessity to conform to norms and standards is one that cannot be discounted, and in

the following section we move on to look at the influence of these peer regulations on an individual's presentation of self.

## 5.5 PRESENTING THE SELF IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: 'It's all pretence really' (Mia)

### 5.5.1 *Conforming to the Perceived Expectations of Others.*

We have seen then that there are various norms and ideals that help to structure an individual's tastes and interests in the field of peers, and that these have implications for the ways in which they manage their presentation of self (Goffman, 1990b). The participants were very aware that the way in which they conducted themselves varied from one field to another, or between different situations within the same field, and that this modification of behaviour and appearance was caused by the perceived expectations of others. For example, Alex commented that 'I think I behave better when I'm at school and (with my) family...but when I'm with my friends I sometimes act badly'. The girls at the convent school often discussed this tendency to act differently and the following conversation provides an insight to their views regarding this issue.

RH Do you find that that happens a lot then, that you have to act differently in one situation compared to another?

Mia: Yeah, it's all pretence really.

Lara: But you always act around different people in different ways (general agreement) like if you've met someone for the first time and you talk to them for a bit, and you go back home afterwards and you realise that that's not what you're usually like...you realise that you change.

Katie: And you regret it as well don't you.

Mia: Because you have to go back the next time and be the same again, and it just gets complicated.

Lara: Yeah, or you try and like change it so they know who you are, but it gets confusing...I think it's just kind of an unconscious thing that you do in your mind, because you don't mean to at all.

Mia: No, that's right.

Amadaia: No, it just happens and you just go along with it you know.

RH Does it make you feel more uncomfortable doing that?

Amadaia: No, I think it's a comfort thing...I think you do it to comfort yourself, to make yourself feel more comfortable.

Katie: To make yourself be liked as well.

Mia: Because you're not comfortable with who you are really.



Amadaia: Because you don't think that people will accept you for who you really, really are so you come across as if you're like, somebody you're not.

Chloë: Definitely yeah.  
(SACS, wk 1)

This extract highlights a number of issues that are important to consider here. The first is the perceived incongruities between an individual's own understanding of self and the construction of self that they present to others. As Lloyd remarked in another conversation, 'you try to impress people, like your friends to be like them, but in reality you're not like that really'. Giddens (1991) has argued that 'all human beings, in all cultures, preserve a division between their 'self-identities and the 'performances' they put on in specific social contexts' (p. 58). In his work, Jenkins (1996) has also drawn a distinction between personal and social identity, and suggested that it is 'in the relationship that is struck between self-image and public-image' that an individual's conceptions of self are generated (p.71). Another point of interest is the apparent unconsciousness of this management of self by individuals. The girls mentioned that it wasn't always an intentional action on their part, but that it was often an automatic response to a particular context. These comments indicate the role of habitus in this presentation of self, in providing a basis of appropriate social norms and ideals that can be drawn upon in new or challenging situations. Habitus is a particularly useful concept to employ here, because it 'is both collective and individual, and definitely embodied' (Jenkins, 1996 p.21). Furthermore, the deeply ingrained nature of habitus helps to account for the young people's occasional inability to articulate aspects of their management of behaviour.

A third point to note is that an individual's presentation of self appears to be grounded, at least in part, in their perceived judgement by others. As we have seen in the previous section, the degree of success that young people have in meeting the expectations of the group can impact their capacity to acquire social capital, and hence influence their position within the field of peers. In order to maximise their potential to accumulate capital within the peer group, the young people were aware of the need to present an image of self that would afford them more status among their friends. A final point to draw out from the girls' conversation then is that, perhaps ironically, this perceived obligation to manage the presentation of self is seen to increase an individual's social comfort in a particular situation. Conformity to the 'norm', it

would seem, ensures that an individual is unlikely to stand out from the crowd and hence reduces the chance of being subjected to unfavourable judgements by their peers.

There were three central themes that arose from the young people's discussions regarding the presentation of self, and these will be discussed now; the management of behaviour, the management of appearance, and the drawing of comparisons between self and others.

### ***5.5.2 The Management of Behaviour.***

The desire expressed by some of the participants to 'impress your mates' has already been mentioned, but it is perhaps worth noting again here because of the implications that it holds for an individual's behaviour and actions. The need for an individual to acquire and accumulate social capital necessitates their assumption of those practices, tastes and characteristics that symbolise status among their particular peer group. Lloyd's new found interest in Garage music, Jill's choice of horse-riding as a hobby, and Mike's engagement with the 'grebo' skate culture can all be seen as attempts to generate capital among their peers. Furthermore, it was clear that the use of language also played a part in the presentation of self with jargon being a means of identifying both with peers and with the young generation more widely. Terms such as 'cool', 'wicked', 'sad' and 'gay' were frequently used within the young people's conversations, and held agreed symbolic meaning. This influence of others was not always positive, however, and there was some suggestion that the quest for social capital could potentially encourage individuals to take part in harmful behaviour.

Sophie: There are some groups that like you know make people smoke, I mean it doesn't really happen at this school but it used to happen. That kind of thing when they used to make people smoke and that.

Laura: They probably get it from the older lads, like the eighteen year olds and things like that...because they'll take the mick out of you, like if you haven't done things that they've done when they were our age.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 2)

Peer pressure then, to a greater or lesser extent, does appear to play a role in determining an individual's behaviour within the field of peers. It also highlights the importance for them of conformity, but more precisely conformity that is appropriate



to the particular group with which they identify. Some of the comments made by the Thornhill boys, however, suggest a degree of resistance to such apparent congruity, and express a tension between their personal view of self and the presentation of self that they offer to others. In addition to highlighting an element of conflict that has been identified by some as a characteristic of boys peer relations (Wight, 1994; Connell, 1996; Walker & Kushner, 1999), this once again demonstrates a discernible conflict between an individual's desire to both *stand out* and *fit in*. Take, for example, the following extract from a conversation among the boys' group concerning the notion of being different.

RH So what do you think about being different? Do you think that's a good thing?

Bob: If you weren't then, if no-one if everyone wasn't different then it would be boring wouldn't it.

Lloyd: You try to impress people like your friends, to be like them, but in reality, you're not like that really.

RH So is it important for your own personal identity?

Mike: Yeah, because there's no point in going with the crowd. I don't agree with it. It's just like, it shows that you're a bit of a coward, and that you can't stand up for your own beliefs.

RH Do you find that sometimes you have to do that? Have you ever found yourself in a situation, when you've had to go against what you think is -?

Mike: Sometimes you have to do it. Say you know something but you don't want to tell your friend because you know it'll upset them, you like have to lie. But other than that, no.

(TBS, wk 1)

As this excerpt indicates, the boys are keen to ensure that they fit in with the peer group but preferably without losing their own perception of individuality. The field of peers undoubtedly presents individuals with a need to conform, yet it would appear that allegiance to specific groups within the field also offers them an opportunity to exert some degree of difference i.e. they are able to 'find their own *individual* identity, yet still have the support of *group* solidarity' (Brake, 1980 p.149). All of these different aspects of an individual's engagement with the peer group, then, can be seen to impact their many conceptions of self.

### 5.5.3 *The Management of Appearance.*

In addition to these issues relating to conduct, there is also a necessity to present an appropriate visual image of self. Jenkins (1996) has suggested that 'style is an arbiter

of youth identities in industrialised western societies' and that it is determined, among other things, by the categorisation of clothing, music and people (p.87). The importance of clothing as capital, also discussed in the thesis in relation to the fields of media and family, is evidently something that is of particular importance in the field of peers (Widdecombe & Wooffitt, 1995; Miles *et al*, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). Frith and Gleeson (2001) have noted that 'far from being frivolous or trivial, young people's concerns about their appearance and dress form part of a complex interplay between friendship, popularity and acceptance among peers which is so central to adolescents' lives' (p.8). Some of the young people in this study also echoed this belief, and suggested that the visual has a crucial part to play in determining the way that you are perceived by your peers.

RH What kind of things do you think other people judge you on?

Katie: The way you look, definitely the way you look.

Chloë: Looks, yeah.

Lara: How you act.

Katie: If I went in to a disco wearing a knitted sweater with a bee on the front (laughing) and a pair of flowery leggings, people would be like 'urgh', and go to the other end of the room and you'd be left by yourself.

Mia: Yeah, they'd judge you. (laughing)

Katie: I might be a really cool person, except that I told my mum I was going (pause) shopping. Not that that's what I wear to go shopping.

(SACS, wk 1)

An individual's choice of clothing, and the capital that is (or is not) associated with it, would appear to influence directly their acceptance by peers and determine their position within the group. As Mia explained, '(it's) just because that's the first thing that people see about you if you meet them, so it's just like, you get a lot from what you look like really'. The fact that appearance appeared to be such a major issue for the majority of the participants, and in each of the schools, was evident particularly in their resistance to the school rules and uniform.<sup>7</sup> These externally imposed ideals were resisted because they conflicted with the various norms and ideals presented through the fields of peers and media with which the young people aligned themselves. For some of the girls, the regulations imposed by the school were seen as limiting their potential to acquire and accumulate social capital among the peer group.

RH Going back to this issue of wearing make up then, why would you want to wear make-up?

Alex: 'To impress the lads, so that they don't ignore me'. (as if



answering for her)

Liz: Our teacher said that the boys could go and wear make-up if they wanted to.

Carl: Wicked!

Alex: The thing is that the boys want the girls to wear make-up as well.

RH Why?

Alex: Because otherwise they don't look nice. (laughs)

RH So if you two (girls) were outside of school, would you wear make-up?

Jill: Yeah.

Liz: Yeah, but you're not allowed at school.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 2)

In this extract, the girls' belief that in order to conform to the dominant notions of femininity they need to make themselves as beautiful as possible, i.e. wear make-up, is reinforced by Alex's comment. There is a definite sense of agreement concerning the social capital that these dominant images afford individuals, yet this also indicates the relative lack of power that girls have to challenge the current situation. The extent to which these ideals have become a part of each girls' habitus is evident in their apparent acceptance of the situation, and more subtly in Liz's suggestion that it is somewhat unnatural for girls not to wear make-up.

#### *5.5.4 The Practice of Comparing Self with Others.*

The notion of comparison was evident both implicitly and explicitly within the focus group discussions, and seemed to be used by the individuals as a means of ensuring that they were presenting an appropriate identity and judging themselves against significant others. As Mike said, 'you get a feeling of satisfaction when you can do something that your friends can't, especially if you can do it in front of them'. Oliver and Lalik's (2000, 2001) work with adolescent girls also serves to highlight this importance of the peer group as a forum in which individuals can compare and contrast themselves with others, and in particular identifies the crucial role of the body in this process. This study, however, along with others, indicates that the comparison process is not always as positive as the example cited above. A number of studies have suggested that individuals are acutely aware of the gaze of others (Foucault, 1991; Tait, 2000), and that, among the peer group in particular, great significance is placed upon the perceived reactions of others to body image (Frost, 2001; Dunkley *et al* 2001; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2001). As such, taking into account the societal messages concerning dominant cultural bodily ideals, individuals are encouraged to

exercise self-governing strategies or practices in order to ensure that they conform appropriately to external expectations (Pini, 1997; Tait & Carpenter, 1999). It is within these processes that the notions of comparing and contrasting can be perceived as useful evaluation tools. In order to illustrate this point I draw upon an example from the study that concerned the topic of food. As can be seen in previous sections, the girls' from the convent school were particularly concerned with issues regarding the body and consequently, in relation to this, frequent references were made to food. As with the young women in Oliver and Lalik's (2001) study, several of the girls mentioned being unable to eat in front of others, particularly boys, because they felt self-conscious. Furthermore, it was apparent that in comparing their food intake with others some of the girls were monitoring and evaluating their own behaviour.

[Amadaia has a chocolate biscuit and asks if anyone else will eat half of it]

Chloë: Just eat it! (laughs)

Amadaia: I never eat my own food, I always give stuff away.

Chloë: Does anybody want any chocolate, because I've got one?

Katie: Oh I could never eat chocolate ever again.

Amadaia: No, I've already had about three bars today.

[SACS, wk 5a]

This conversation suggest that, for the girls, eating chocolate is seen as being a bad thing because it is associated with being overweight. As such, they felt the need to 'own up' to this behaviour or indeed share out their food in order to lessen the feelings of 'guilt'. Through their comparisons with each other they were able to determine that their behaviour was comparable to that of their peers, and as such they were more content. It can be seen, then, that the norms and ideals of the peer group can influence young people's behaviour. Given the dynamic nature of friendships, and the myriad social contacts that young people can have, it is evident that this process is incredibly complex, determined in part by both situation and context. It is this notion of contextual friendships that provides the basis of the following section.

## **5.6 DIVERSE FRIENDSHIPS IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: 'we have busy lives you know' (Mia)**

### ***5.6.1 A Dynamic and Multi-Contextual Field.***



The field of peers, like that of family, is one with which young people have a long history of engagement, although unlike the familial field the field of peers is more dynamic and changeable. Although there are individuals with whom young people keep contact, it is likely that the landscape of this field will alter significantly over time. As such, it is lived more for the 'here and now', an ephemeral, transient field, with a changeable climate and shifting boundaries. The field of peers incorporates numerous groups of individuals, among which there are varying degrees of contact. These 'pockets' within the field arise when individuals have different friendship groups based upon distinct areas of their social experience, in other words friendship groups are both situation and context specific. The young people in this study were obviously engaging with numerous social contexts in their day to day lives, as evidenced by Mia's comment that 'we have busy lives you know'. Each of these contexts involved contact with different groups of people (even if some individuals were known from more than one context) and involved the young people being positioned and positioning themselves in a variety of ways according to the degree of capital they possessed in each situation. Dillon and Moje (1998) have endorsed this view that young people occupy different subject positions, and engage in different practices, depending upon the social context in which they find themselves, and suggested that this can account in part for the dynamic nature of friendships. There are clear implications here for an individual's constructions and understanding of self, and a great deal of research points to the development of multiple identities for distinct social contexts (Giddens, 1991; Brettschneider & Heim, 1997; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Bers, 2002).

'Young people have many identities and live within a variety of contexts – all of which contribute to their development of self. They come to develop their world view and understand themselves, their relationships with others and the world through the contexts of religious institutions, schools, their families, peers and friends, and their leisure'  
(Kivel, 1998 p. 38)

This belief was endorsed by the young people in the study, who were seemingly quite conscious of their changing presentations of self from one situation to the next. Peers were seen to play a key role in this state of affairs, for as Lara's pointed out 'your friends make you who you are...they become part of you'. Given this importance of peer relations to young people's conceptions of self, it is interesting to note the factors

that influence their choice of friends. As we shall see in later sections, closer friendships are generally built upon shared tastes, values, or interests (Adler & Adler, 1998), although more superficial and tenuous acquaintances are made with a larger number of individuals with whom some time is spent (e.g. class mates, team mates, extended family etc.). This would appear to link with the distinction that James (1993) draws between 'being' and 'having' friends, or indeed Adler & Adler's (1998) description of 'close' or 'casual' friendships, determined as they are by the degree of association and perceived closeness of the relationship. For the young people involved in the study there were a number of contexts in which they had established friendships with others.

RH Where do most of your friends come from then?

Alex: All around the Midlands.

Liz: Leicestershire, Derbyshire and places like that.

Carl: Well I meet most of mine like through sport, when I go to training sessions and trial sessions. And a lot, most of them are from school.

Alex: A lot of them come to this school, from everywhere. Because this is like from a wide area (unclear) but you meet them from outside of school as well don't you.

Liz: I've got friends in South America for heavens sake.  
(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

### 5.6.2 *Constructing Friendships in the Field of School.*

As well as indicating the personal interests followed by some of the young people in the study, this extract also points to one of the most significant influences in relation to the structuring of friendships groups; the field of school (Smith, 2000). School was mentioned by all of the young people in the study as a major source of their friendship groups, and as a social context in which young people are required to spend significant amounts of time this is hardly surprising. The field of school not only brought young people into contact with other individuals, however, it also structured their interactions within the field by segregating them by year, forms, and even gender. Although individuals were obviously free to choose who they would like to be friends with, the influence of this externally imposed separation was that 'you become more friendly with the people that are in your groups' (Lara)<sup>8</sup>. The kind of school attended, whether private or state maintained, single sex or co-educational, also influenced the sort of individuals that young people came into contact with and the nature of the social interactions that took place. As it has been established, this has



implications for individuals' identities. For the young people who attended the single sex schools, there was a belief that they were, in some way, missing out on an important aspect of social learning by not being in mixed sex peer groups. In other words, they had restricted access to the skills that could provide them with social capital. As Katie and Amadaia pointed out:

Amadaia: It is sort of positive in the way that you don't have boys around you to like annoy you or distract you, but it's negative in the way that you don't know how to act when you're around boys unless you have boys as friends outside of school.

Katie: I've got no brothers, so it's like really embarrassing, I don't know what to do (around boys).

(SACS, wk 3)

Similar conversations took place in the focus groups with the Thornhill boys, and it is significant that both they and the girls from the convent school highlighted the need to have friends both in school and out, as well as contact with school friends in other social arenas. The complexity of this network of peers is highlighted in the following extract:

Mike: There's some friends that you only know in school you don't like see them outside of school, well I don't know whether it's the same for everybody but it's true for me. And then there's friends at school that you will see out of school. But then you've got friends out of school that you don't see in school, if you know what I mean.

(TBS, wk 1)

This was not so much of an issue for the young people at the community college, perhaps because they were able to have mixed sex friendships within the school environment. It certainly appeared to be the case that the boys and girls in these groups were comfortable interacting with each other, and that their conversations dwelt less on talking about the 'opposite sex'.

### ***5.6.3 An Increasing Perception of Shared Tastes and Interests.***

It has been suggested that the nature of peer relationships changes over time, so that with an individual's growing social maturity friendships become increasingly significant, as well as more complex and emotionally involved (James, 1993; Dillon & Moje, 1998; Walker & Kushner, 1999). In their research, Adler and Adler (1998) noted that young people extended their reference group as they got older, suggesting

that ‘in this way they separated and differentiated their social circles and established more distinct facets of their selves and identities’ (p.156). The young people also mentioned the notion of friendships as dynamic, as the following conversation between the girls group indicates.

RH So do you think that friends change over time then?

Amadaia/Katie: Yeah.

Mia: I think, because we change as well, you just grow up I suppose.

Lara: Yeah, they like change with you. In fact I know loads of people who have changed since we started this school...that are totally different now.

Katie: I used to be friends with someone that I’m not friends with any more, and Amadaia and I were worst enemies...in junior school we really were at each other’s throats.

RH So is it just that as you change you kind of feel the need to be with different people?

Lara: Not always, sometimes you find with friends...that they change with you, and then there’s people who you just seem to not get on with as well as you used to.

(SACS, wk 1)

For these individuals then the changes in friendship groups are attributed, in part, to a natural maturing process, linked to an individual’s increasing perception of personal tastes and interests as well as their identification with others who share similar characteristics. In relation to this issue, another social context that proved to be influential in establishing peer relations, at least for some of the young people in the study, was that of religious institutions. As Chloë and Katie suggested, these contexts provided contact with like minded individuals as well as a means of learning or reinforcing religious tastes and practices as part of the habitus.

Chloë: I suppose if you go to like a church or a Mosque or somewhere, you also have like a social life outside school as well. Because you meet up and you can talk to people there.

Katie: Because I go to my church youth group, and I’ve just made like a load of friends outside school through that.

(SACS, wk 1)

Their religious orientation was something that a small number of the young people mentioned as being important for their understanding of self, and the affiliation between individuals on the basis of religious belief was evident to some extent in the overlap between the fields of peers and school<sup>9</sup>. It could be seen, from observations recorded in field notes and through conversations with some of the young people, that



the Asian students at both the convent school and Thornhill school tended to form distinct groups in the field.

RH So what kind of people would you hang around with then? (to Lloyd)

Mike: Indians (laughing) No, I'm not just saying that, it's just they like hang around in -

Lloyd: Yeah I do, I hang around with Indians, what's with that?

Mike: Nothing I'm just saying (laughs) Do you have to be the same religion?

Lloyd: If they want to be they can.

Mike: (laughs)

(TBS, wk 3)

In both independent schools Asian students were a minority group, and as such some of this tendency to stick together can perhaps be understood as a form of solidarity. However, the reason for this grouping of individuals by race and religion can also be associated with the issue of tastes, and linked to aspects of a cultural habitus. For these young people their experience within the field of family will have exposed them to different cultural norms and practices, and led to the development of a specific, culturally relevant habitus. Their tastes, attitudes, beliefs, and comportment will all provide a degree of cultural capital that can be translated to social capital through interactions with others. It may be, then, that this transformation is more successful among individuals who share a recognition of the value of these cultural characteristics, and that the choices made by young people regarding peer group affiliations reflect, in part, an attempt to maximise the currency of their capital within the field.

This section has highlighted the fact that the field of peers consists itself of numerous peer groups, and that an individual can move between numerous groups with varying degrees of affiliation to each. It was evident from the data, however, that there were some friendships that were stronger than others, and that these were often, though not always, those that had been built up over a longer period of time. The importance of a shared history in peer relationships is the subject of the following section.

## 5.7 THE IMPORTANCE OF A SHARED PAST IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: 'Do you remember when...?'

### 5.7.1 *The Use of Narrative to Construct Self.*

Adler & Adler (1998) have pointed out that the very notion of a friendship group implies some degree of identification between the individuals involved, and for most of the participants in this study commonality of experiences, both past and present, were perceived as important. It was often the case that the longer that friendships had been in existence the stronger they were deemed to be, for in these cases there was a shared biography that provided an immutable link between individuals. It is not so surprising then that much of the young people's discussions regarding the field of peers involved the telling and sharing of stories, and was grounded in a great deal of nostalgia. A growing number of researchers are proposing that narratives can play a central role in mediating between the diverse aspects of an individual's experiences, allowing for the presentation of a coherent life story to both themselves and others (Greene, 1995; Sparkes, 1997; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Tsang, 2000). When talking about past experiences, Bers (2002) has argued that 'we can't access the facts, all we can access are stories about those facts' and, as such, narrative can be seen to function as a 'fundamental constituent of human memory, knowledge and social communication' (p.5). The importance of personal history is significant, therefore, because it plays a fundamental role in the shaping of self and is drawn upon by individuals in their constructions of identity (McAdams, 1985; Giddens, 1991; Rogers, 1991; Sparkes, 1997; Bers, 2002). As Mia so perceptively explained, 'it's what makes you up...you carry it with you in everyday life'. The general opinion was that in order to have an 'accurate' understanding of who people are in the present, you should have some knowledge of their past experiences and achievements. For example, when asked the question 'what kind of things do you think it is important for people to know about you?' Lara felt that one of the most significant things to mention was the heart operation she had undergone as a baby. Her reason for this was that it had been a critical moment in her life, and that there had been serious implications for her future development. It can be seen then that individuals draw upon aspects of their biography in order to construct a narrative of self in their interactions with others. The particular aspects that are chosen, however, are likely to be determined by the particular field in which the interactions take place, or to which



they are specifically referring. For the young people in the study, the stories that they told and the narratives that they employed varied depending upon the field under discussion, but it was evident that their shared experiences in the field of peers, and with peers in the field of school, often predominated here.

### 5.7.2 *The Significance of Shared Experiences.*

The importance of a collective history was evident in a number of ways, none more so than in the ways in which the participants knew each other so well. There were many examples within the data of individuals answering for their friends or guessing the responses of individuals who were absent, the extent of the time friends spent together seemingly enabling them to gain an in depth understanding of each others general tastes and dispositions (i.e. habitus). The young people also indicated that this depth of knowledge had important implications for identity, as it was often drawn upon in the formation and allocation of nicknames to individuals. The value of common experiences was also evident in the preponderance of stories that were shared, told and re-told among friends, and which seemed to comprise a significant practice within the field of peers. Stories, it seemed, could carry significant social capital, particularly if in the telling they included some aspect of ‘code’ that was not known outside of the peer group. As an ‘outsider’ I was often excluded from the private understandings of peer group discussions, and was reliant on the young people for an explanation of hidden meanings within their conversations. For example, in two of the focus groups at Thornhill school the phrase ‘elbow someone in the head’ was used in relation to Danny, once by himself and once by Mike. Although there was some laughter and meaningful glances here no further explanation was given, and so in Danny’s individual interview I asked him whether he could explain to me what this meant. His response was as follows:

Danny: Right, I was playing rugby and I was on the floor. I got tackled, and this guy was behind me and he was just kicking me in the back with his studs. So I just turned round and went ‘stop it’ like that (demonstrates turning around with his elbow leading) and I didn’t actually know he was there or anything, and it got him right on the nose. But I didn’t actually mean to get him in the face, he was just there and it was in front of the ref so he sent me off. Then another time in football this guy tripped me up...and it just annoyed me or something so next time the ball was in the air I went up for a header and I lead with my elbow. It hit

him in the face and I got a yellow card for that. I just lose my temper.  
(individual)

This story that Danny told was known to his friends and obviously represented a significant memory for them. There was also an implication that Danny's behaviour had earned him considerable status among certain circles within the field of peers, perhaps because it had conformed with dominant notions of masculinity (Wight, 1994; Walker & Kushner, 1999). In relation to this issue, the perception of stories as signifiers of capital meant that the young people often elaborated on events, or drew upon accounts with which they had little direct contact, in order to gain recognition among their peers.

### *5.7.3 Using Stories to Revisit and Reminisce Past Experiences.*

Stories then, play an important role in peer relations, allowing significant memories to be re-visited and providing an opportunity for reminiscing about the past. As mentioned above, the young people spent a considerable amount of time talking about past experiences, and much of this was framed by a notion of nostalgia. Turner (1995) has suggested that nostalgia has emerged 'as a crucial product of modernization', and sees it as a reaction to the rapid and frequent changes that can be seen to occur within society (p.7). Giddens (1991) has also mentioned the need for ontological security in an 'unstable' society, and argues that an individual's biography and narrative can play an important role here. Some of the stories that the young people shared seemed to refer to those aspects of their lives that had offered them a sense of routine, and can perhaps be seen as an attempt to provide a degree of stability for them. These stories included the traditions of Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, and although the young people themselves were aware of their social construction and reproduction, the memory of their belief in them remained significant. In addition to this wistful regard for past customs, however, Robertson (1995) has also identified what he terms 'wilful nostalgia' as central to the development of contemporary traditions and practices. One such practice, mentioned by the boys from Thornhill school, was that of 'birthday beats'.

[Mike had mentioned that he wouldn't want his birthday to be widely known]

RH Is it a good thing that you managed to avoid telling people your birthday?



Mike: Yes! You get birthday beatings. Do you not have birthday beatings?

Danny: If it's your birthday, you get beatings.

Mike: Depending on how old you are.

Danny: So if you're 15 you get 15 beats off people.

RH Is that anyone?

Mike: Yeah, anybody can just come up to you and hit you. You just don't tell people your birthday.

Bob: Anyone can hit you 15 times, so you can get so many in one day.

Mike: Generally 16, because they'll give you one for luck as well.

(TBS, wk 2)

These stories and traditions help to structure the interactions that take place between friends, and shape in part the social experiences of young people. Moreover, they help to frame an individual's understanding of self in a particular context, allowing them to position themselves in various ways depending upon the degree of capital afforded to them. The sharing of stories and the recalling of memories among the peer group was a feature of both the boys' and girls' discussions, and it has been shown throughout the course of this discussion that there are also many other similarities in young people's experiences of the field of peers. Having said this, however, there were also many instances where girls' and boys' differed in their attitudes to and their behaviour with friends. Some of these gender differences in relation to the field of peers are discussed in the following sections.

## **5.8 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: 'getting on, showing-off, and going out'.**

### ***5.8.1 The Nature of Male and Female Friendships.***

Connell (1996) has suggested that 'the peer milieu has its own gender order, distinct though not fixed' and suggests that peer groups themselves can be 'the bearers of gender definitions' (p.219-220). One of the most noticeable distinctions in relation to gender within the study was the nature of the boys' and girls' friendships. Although there were individual differences, the girls on the whole seemed to have a smaller number of close friendships, referred to as 'best friends', whereas the boys alluded to having a wider network of general acquaintances or 'mates'. Research has suggested that female friendships are generally more intimate than male ones, with girls more likely to share thoughts and feelings with friends, seek them out for advice and

support, and engage with them in long periods of dyadic interaction. Conversely, it has identified more conflict in male friendships and suggested that boys tend to spend more time than girls in organised or co-ordinated activity such as sports teams or youth organisations (Adler & Adler, 1998; Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 1999; Güneri *et al*, 1999; Black, 2000; Frost, 2000).

In order to understand some of these characteristics it may be useful to draw upon the gender differences regarding popularity issues noted by Adler & Adler (1998) among others. These issues determine the nature and value of cultural capital among peers, and thus influence the behaviour of individuals in the field. If capital can be thought of as the different forms of power that determine an individual's hierarchical position and their relative distribution within the social spaces of a field (Bourdieu, 1985b), then such 'gendered dispositions appear to be thoroughly akin to the embodied state of cultural capital' (Laberge, 1995 p.138). For boys, popularity has been linked to athletic ability, toughness and resistance to authority, in general any trait that endorses the dominant view of hegemonic masculinity. As such, they engage in activities that will allow them to conform to these ideals, such as RAF or Army cadet groups, rugby, boxing and football, to highlight but a few examples from the study. For girls, on the other hand, popularity has been associated with factors such as physical appearance, social status and academic performance. This means that whereas boys tend to carve out and conquer space, girls tend to fashion an inner-space (Young, 1990; James, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998) leading to what some have described as the 'bedroom culture' (Frith, 1978; Frost, 2001).

### ***5.8.2 The Intricacies of Male-Female Friendships.***

This is not to suggest, however, that there is no association between the sexes in terms of peer relations. The importance of communicating with the 'opposite sex' and the value of mixed sex peer groups was a huge topic of conversation within the focus group discussions, and the mixed focus groups themselves were a valuable insight into the nature of communication between adolescent males and females. Adler and Alder (1998) have proposed that young people's gender relations progress through being 'integrated', 'separated' and 'reconnected' (p.10) as they approach adolescence, and several of the participants in the study mentioned a similar maturing process. The



value in mixed friendships appeared to be based upon the fact that they provided an alternative to or break from single sex friendships, and that they were often less stressful or competitive because the value of social capital related to different characteristics for males and females. This belief that male-female interactions lacked some of the competition inherent in same-sex friendships did not mean, however, that they were without particular intricacies themselves. If anything, these interactions were perceived to require even more management of self, if an appropriate image, compliant with dominant cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity, was to be presented.

RH Do you act differently with girls than when you're with your mates?

Danny: Yeah I probably try and show off more when I'm with the girls, I don't know, yeah probably...just try and act more sensible...when I'm with girls than I do with boys. When I'm with boys I like mess around a lot and do stupid things, but when I'm with girls I'm a bit more sensible  
(individual)

The need to show-off or impress was also mentioned by some of the other young people in the study, both male and female, and can be understood as an attempt to display appropriate social capital or at least not show yourself to be lacking it. In this way Alex's apparent habit of taking his top off when girls are around, Liz and Jill's declaration that they would wear make-up all the time if allowed, and even the convent school girls' discomfort at eating in front of boys can all be understood as efforts to present a construction of self that is appealing to their chosen audience (the 'opposite sex').

The issue of relationships between males and females was very much a point of interest to young people, although in reality these seemed to be something that occurred on an infrequent basis and were not as established as single-sex friendships. It was something that was mentioned more by the young people from the private schools, perhaps because of the added complication that this context presented to forming mixed sex friendships, and particularly by the girls<sup>10</sup>. It has been suggested that having a boyfriend or girlfriend can improve an individual's status among the peer group and may in some way 'serve as a positive validation of self-identity' (Güneri *et al*, 1999 p.541). In addition, Walker & Kushner (1999) found in their research that 'the idea of dating had some currency' for boys (p.48), although it has

also been suggested that the interest for boys lies more in the thrill of the chase than in establishing a lasting, stable relationship (Wight, 1994; Frost, 2001). Among the peer group, then, status for boys comes from the number of associations made with girls – take for example Frederick’s comment that he was currently ‘playing the field’ – and for girls it comes from having a steady boyfriend i.e. ‘someone to go out and share with’ (Katie). The importance for the girls of ‘going out’ with a boy was evident in the way that those with boyfriends kept track of the exact amount of time that they had been going out. For example Amadaia commented that ‘I’ve been going out with Luke three months, two weeks, one day...actually one day at five twenty’. In addition, taking up the position of ‘girlfriend’ also afforded these individuals a means of acquiring social capital, as it appeared to be held in some regard among their female peers. It also helps to understand in some way the effort that the girls seemed to invest, or be aware that they needed to invest, in making themselves attractive to boys (Oliver & Lalik, 2000, 2001; Frost, 2001).

### *5.8.3 Conformity to Gender Stereotypes.*

These aspects of the girls’ behaviour can perhaps be thought of as their conformity to expected standards of femininity and, in a comparable fashion, this ‘doing gender’ was also a significant feature of the boys’ behaviour. It was particularly evident in the behaviour of the boys’ group, and manifested itself in a struggle to show and gain social capital via a process of conformity to dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity. Although Danny believed that he was most comfortable with his construction of self ‘when I’m with the boys’, the interactions between the group were grounded in constant attempts by individuals to outdo, challenge, or prove themselves in relation to their peers (Wight, 1994; Walker & Kushner, 1999). The stories that were told by the boys appeared to be used as a means to acquire social capital, and to confirm their conformity to dominant gender stereotypes. As Frederick’s comment regarding a visit to a swimming pool with some friends indicates:

Frederick: We went diving there in the diving pool, it was wicked...we kept on like running off, and like pushing each other off and stuff. If no-one dared to jump it we just like grabbed them and threw them off.  
(TBS, wk 3)



The implication here is that courage is a masculine trait, and that for an individual not to jump would be for them to lose face in front of their peers. The boys' attempts to present an overtly masculine identity also seemed to necessitate an obligatory element of resistance to external regulation, whether in relation to the fields of school, family or official government policies (Wight, 1994; Renold, 2001a). There was a great deal of swearing, suggestive comments, and references to partaking in prohibited activities such as smoking and the consumption of alcohol. For example, when describing what he had done over the holidays Danny claimed that he had 'been to a few parties, had a few drinks and got wasted'. In addition to this implied flouting of regulations, there was also a more explicit resistance evident in the behaviour of the boys. Their behaviour was often disruptive, involving a great deal of 'messing around' and attempts to get each other into trouble. As the following extract indicates:

[Frederick is finishing off his geography homework in the focus group session and his teacher walks through the room in which we are talking]  
 Mike: (loudly) Frederick have you done your geography homework yet?  
 Frederick: What?  
 Mike: Have you done your geography homework yet? (laughs)  
 Frederick: Why, haven't you?  
 Mike: I don't do geography. (laughs)  
 [the teacher goes out of the room, and Frederick hits Mike]  
 Mike: Argh, what was that for?  
 Frederick: He could have heard that.  
 Mike: I know. (laughs)  
 (TBS, wk 3)

Mike was often at the centre of much of this disruption and seemed to take up the position of the 'bad boy' of the group, attempting to present himself as knowledgeable and experienced to his peers (Walker & Kushner, 1999). His behaviour often rewarded him with the attention of the rest of the boys, and hence appeared to confirm his status among the group, although his attempt to gain dominance wasn't completely uncontested. On several occasions the other boys challenged Mike's opinions or attitudes, which resulted in his retaliation and disputation due to the importance of saving face in front of his friends (Walker & Kushner, 1999). Connell (1996), however, has pointed out that there is clearly a 'collective dimension of masculinity' and that 'boys who create trouble in a group by aggression, disruption, and harassment, that is, an exaggerated performance of hegemonic masculinity, can be cooperative and peaceable on their own' (p.220). This would certainly seem to be true in



Mike's case, because in his individual interview he proved himself to be more reserved, less confrontational, and willing to discuss his previous comments. This section has highlighted how the behaviour of individuals within the field of peers can be influenced by their gender, and has drawn attention to some of the main aspects that appear to characterise social practice in this context. One such aspect in particular, however, reveals itself to be worthy of further discussion and that is the use of humour among the peer group. It is to this notion that we now turn.

## **5.9 THE USE OF HUMOUR IN THE FIELD OF PEERS: 'trying to be funny'** (Sophie)

### ***5.9.1 The Veneration of Humour in the Peer Group.***

Paton *et al* (1996) have suggested that the 'culturally central nature of humour seems greater than ever' (p.1), and as an issue that was touched on in all of the focus group discussions it certainly appeared to hold some significance for the young people in this study. As has been shown in other studies, the art of 'being funny' and the capacity to amuse others are highly regarded skills among the peer group, affording individual's significant social capital or status and hence influencing their position within the structure of the field (Walker & Kushner, 1999; Crozier & Skliopidou, 2002). Although the veneration of humour appeared to be a universal trait within the field of peers, it was evident in this study that the boys made both more comments regarding it and more tactical use of it in their peer interactions. Several studies have also noted the characteristic and competitive use of comedy and jocularities in boys' friendships, and have suggested that they play an important role in the construction and confirmation of appropriate masculine identities (Chapman *et al*, 1980; Connell, 1996; Walker & Kushner, 1999). It has been proposed, for example, that the employment of humour can function as a coping strategy allowing individuals to deal with the stresses of this negotiation of identity in the field of school (Woods, 1990; Renold, 2001a). The intimation here is that 'having a laugh' or 'messing around' signifies a resistance to school regulation, and is an attempt by boys to deflect attention away from their academic effort or success<sup>11</sup> (Mac an Ghail, 1994).



For the boys in this study, joking and banter appeared to form a significant part of their social interaction and their presentation of self to their peers. Making people laugh with jokes or witty comments was perhaps so revered because it guaranteed, at least temporarily, the attention of the group (Chapman *et al*, 1980). Successful attempts at humour, secured an individual the respect of their contemporaries, and acted as currency within the field of peers (Walker & Kushner, 1999).

Danny: 'I think she should stick to maths' (reading the comment on Lloyd's poster relating to a provocative picture of Carol Vorderman)

Lloyd: It's a good one yeah?

Danny: That's quite a good comment that, witty.

(TBS, wk 4)

The accumulation of such social capital aids individuals in their struggle for popularity within the peer group (Adler & Adler, 1998) and allows them to take up the respected position of 'joker' or 'clown' in this context (Chapman *et al*, 1980). Positioning themselves in this way also helps to guard against being positioned negatively by others, e.g. as 'geek', 'swot', 'sad' or 'gay' (Renold, 2001a). Within the boys' group the position of 'joker' was taken up by Lloyd, whose comments frequently entertained the others in the group. In his individual interview Lloyd suggested that this desire to make others laugh was, in part, associated with a need to overcome his perceived disadvantage in terms of physical stature. As he himself put it 'as you can see I'm not very tall'. This particular use of humour was also evident in some of the interactions involving the girls in the study. For example, Katie and Zoe were generally the ones to make others laugh within their respective groups, although it was often at their own expense with self-deprecating humour. In both of these cases, the attempt to gain the attention of others in the group and to invoke some form of response was plainly evident.

### 5.9.2 'Taking the Mick'.

In regard to this issue of humour in peer relations, one practice in particular emerged as being ubiquitous in young people's social experiences. The notion of 'taking the mick', and the variant forms of the phrase used by different individuals<sup>12</sup>, was to all appearances a universal peer group practice that represented an almost taken-for-granted aspect of the friendship group. 'Taking the mick' is something that individuals appear to use as a matter of course within their social interactions with friends and, as

such, could be regarded as a constituent part of their habitus. Having said this, however, it should also be noted that this particular practice was often employed strategically in peer relations, and that the unwritten rules concerning it were both complex and extensive. As the boys from Thornhill school attempted to explain:

RH What do you think the point of taking the mick out of someone is?  
Why do people do it?

Mike: It's because they're scared. Or, yeah I think it's because they're scared, or like they don't approve of it themselves really.

Danny: I don't think it's because they're scared, I think it's just because they don't agree with it, and they don't reckon that that's the thing to do.

Bob: They think they're better than you.

RH Do they do it to have a go or do they just do it to -

Mike: They do it to embarrass you if they don't like you. If they don't like *you* personally then they'll be doing it to embarrass you.

Bob: They only do it in front of other people. They won't do it if you're just with them or on your own.

Danny: They do it to show off mainly.

Bob: Yeah to show off...they have to show that they are bigger than everyone else, more important.

Mike: There's a difference between it being malicious and then like being friendly between two mates.

Bob: You take the mick -

Mike: Out of my friends.

Bob: Yeah, that sort of thing.

Mike: But I don't generally do it to hurt people, I don't think.

[TBS, wk 1]

There are number of issues to highlight in this extract, the most significant perhaps being the importance of the perceived intention behind an attempt to 'take the mick'. Although somewhat dated, the work of Chapman *et al* (1980) provides some insightful observations in relation to this contextual issue of young people's use of humour. As they have pointed out:

'Common experience suggests that instances of humour can simultaneously serve a number of functions for the individual and these can differ according to the social context; jokes and other forms of humour may have multiple and variegated effects on their initiators, targets, and bystander recipients' (pp.143).

The practice itself has a number of purposes, and the effects can vary depending on the context in which it is used. In some ways it can be viewed as a tactic for 'attacking' individuals, bringing them into the social glare and thus exposing them to ridicule from others. The reasoning behind this appeared to be an attempt to gain,



show or maintain status among peers by showing yourself to be better than others, consolidating your own social capital while decreasing that of your target. The idea that 'taking the mick' was concerned with individuals' attempts to show-off was mentioned by a number of individuals, and is exemplified in Bob's comment that it is only done 'in front of other people'. Although 'taking the mick' offered individuals a means of accumulating social capital, it was also evident that a certain amount of capital (popularity or status) was needed to successfully employ the practice. Furthermore, the possession of significant prior social capital was seen to provide a degree of protection against attempted ridiculing by others. As Mike pointed out 'if you are considered cool you don't have anything to worry about, you can do what you like because no-one can take the rip or anything'.

It was interesting that when describing the negative aspects of 'taking the mick' the young people always referred to other people, distancing themselves from such behaviour. It was not necessarily that they overlooked their own use of the practice but there was a definite tendency to phrase it much more positively, justified, as Mike suggested, by the pretext that it is generally done with friends and is not intended 'to hurt people'. There is a difference, then, between the use of 'taking the mick' by and with friends or strangers. The closeness of peer relations appears to negate some of the negative aspects that can be associated with 'taking the mick', primarily because of this implicit understanding that there is no intention to cause harm.

RH What do you feel like when someone takes the mick out of you?

Mike: It depends. If they're like, if they say it like jokingly, like if they're your friend I don't care. It's if someone that I know doesn't like me, but they just, like make that more obvious by insulting you like in front of people, it's just you want to hit them.

[TBS, wk 1]

As such, Katie was able to laugh off her friends suggestion that she was weird because of her tastes in films and music, and Carl was able to jokingly agree with Liz's suggestion that he spent more time socialising with his cricket ball than he did with his friends. These particular examples of individuals being made fun of were not deemed problematic because it was understood that they were only to be taken as a joke. As Crozier and Skliopidou (2002) have suggested, such humour 'is integral to teasing, mitigating the threat to the recipients desired social identity' (p. 114). At

times, however, this aspect of humour can be missing or taken too far, as Sophie implies 'it's alright to have a laugh now and then, but when it puts someone else in the spotlight it's not very nice'. Walker and Kushner (1999) have alluded to this in their study looking at the construction of masculine identities, and have pointed out that 'despite it's humour, from outside boys' group culture can appear to be almost brutal – a ruthless business of cutting members down to size' (p.52). The boys at Thornhill school certainly spent a great deal of time 'taking the mick' out of each others' tastes and interests, which explained their desire to avoid being associated with anything that lacked status among the group. As a result of a comment made in one of the early focus group discussions Bob found himself ridiculed for having a former interest in the 'Tomb Raider' computer game, a topic that was brought up in every subsequent meeting. The repetitive use of 'taking the mick' in this way gradually lost its humorous element, and eventually caused Bob to claim that 'if anyone says that one more time, I'll split'.

#### 5.10 SUMMARY

This discussion has highlighted the fact that an individual's engagements with the field of peers can be an important and influential element of their social experiences. Often a field of 'choice', it is perceived to offer opportunities for independence and self-direction, although this discussion has also identified it as a highly regulated space demanding conformity to rules and regulations, generated both within the field and through wider cultural channels such as the media field. An individual's choices in relation to the field of peers, then, influences their constructions of self by necessitating their adoption of particular tastes and practices in order to accumulate appropriate capital. This capital then allows them to be positioned and position themselves positively within specific peer groups, and avoid a loss of status that would result from non-conformity to group standards. These are important issues to take into the following chapter in which we discuss the young people's perceptions of the field of school. As this chapter has shown, the field of peers represents a space in which young people spend significant amounts of time in various different contexts, and the school environment represents perhaps the most notable of these. As a field in which young people are obliged to spend long periods of time with their peers, the school represents an interesting context in relation to the nature and development of



individuals' friendships. On the one hand, their shared subjugated position of students can be seen to provide a degree of coherence and commonality, an element of support that has been identified in this chapter as significant to young people's friendships. However, being a social space in which behaviour, appearance and actions are heavily regulated, the school field can also be seen to limit an individual's ability to present a construction of self that is valued within the peer group. These issues, among others, are now addressed within the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> These 'aspects' refer to issues such as conforming to standards of behaviour or beauty, or keeping up with the latest fashions or trends, and are covered within other sections of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> The most popular job mentioned in the study was that of 'babysitting', and although predominantly undertaken by the girls it was also mentioned by some of the boys. Interestingly, the young people at the independent schools were those who mentioned having part-time jobs in order to generate funds for their social activities whereas the young people from Fenburgh seemed to rely on an allowance from their parents. Although surprised at first by this distinction, it was explained in part by the fact that the individuals from the independent schools had more exclusive and expensive tastes than the college students in terms of their social activities i.e. going out to pool halls, leisure centres or entertainment venues rather than simply going round to a friends house or 'hanging' around the streets. Furthermore, the opportunity to work often appeared to present itself through neighbours, friends and family, and it was clear that the social networks of the young people at Thornhill school and the convent school would be in a financially stronger position to do this.

<sup>3</sup> For a more specific analysis of the role of the media in the reproduction of dominant cultural norms refer to chapter seven.

<sup>4</sup> Frith and Gleeson (2001), among others, have proposed that the issue of clothing is an important one in regard to peer relations and in the construction of identities. Some of the issues relating to fashion, status, and clothing as capital among the peer group are discussed in more detail in the media analysis chapter (chapter seven).

<sup>5</sup> Although researchers such as Miles *et al* (1998) and Frith and Gleeson (2001) have proposed that there are also inherent implications here in relation to class divisions and familial economic capital, these weren't born out in the data generated in this study.

<sup>6</sup> Redhills is a local community college that appears to have a particularly poor reputation among the individuals at both the convent school and Thornhill school. It is a state-maintained institution that takes students of all abilities, and is perceived as having a poor standard of discipline and academic success by the private school students.

<sup>7</sup> The issue of school uniform, and the participants resistance to the image that it afforded them, is also discussed within chapter six.

<sup>8</sup> The field of school was not purely a disrupting influence for the young people, however, in fact for some it was evidently a source of stability. This was particularly true for the pupils of Fenburgh community college, many of whom had known each other from pre-school age and had progressed through the school system together. This also meant that they lived relatively close to one another, and were therefore more likely to spend time together after school. For the private school pupils, who came from a much larger area, it was often more problematic to see their friends outside of the school environment and certainly required a lot more planning.

<sup>9</sup> This was a particular trend, perhaps understandably, at the convent school and is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

<sup>10</sup> This issue of gender relations in relation to the field of school is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

<sup>11</sup> Working hard is often regarded as a 'feminine' trait, a belief that has been used to understand boys' ridiculing of girls' efforts at school (Renold, 2001b). This issue, along with others concerning gendered behaviour in the field of school, will be discussed in more detail in the school analysis chapter (chapter six).

<sup>12</sup> Most of the young people used the phrase 'taking the mick', but there were also alternative expressions such as 'taking the rip' or 'taking the piss' which, although different, was understood to carry the same meaning.



## Chapter Six

### **‘Blue Tights and Friday Pants’: Freedom and Constraint in the Field of School**

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

‘The institution (school) in which young people of both sexes spend a highly significant part of their lives plays an important part in the circulation of meanings and messages about what a young person can and should be, as well as serving to generate and reinforce elements of this identity. Relations of power, control and resistance are highly visible in these hierarchical settings, and the policing of behaviour and attitudes undertaken formally by staff and informally within group and pupil inter-relations is evident’ (Frost, 2001 p.111).

As noted in chapters one and two, a principle tenet of this research is that young people shape and are shaped by their engagement with various social fields, their conduct and practices being influenced by the particular structure and organisation of these sites (e.g. Tait, 2000). It is evident, both from the data generated in this study and from the vast body of relevant literature in this area, that the field of school is an important and influential social site for young people (Adler & Adler, 1998; Kirk, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). As a context in which it is obligatory for them to spend much of their time during what are perhaps the most developmental years of their lives, it is perhaps unsurprising that the school can be seen to play such a formative role in the lives of young people (Wren, 1999; Wyness, 1999). The discussion that follows identifies some of the key issues within the data that relate to the field of school, and provides an indication as to how this field is structured, and hence experienced, for and by young people. It looks at the hierarchy of positions evident within the field and the way in which young people are encouraged to ‘play the game’ through conformity to rules and regulations that direct and control their behaviour. Building upon some of the issues discussed in the previous chapter, however, this discussion also examines how the peer group can allow individuals to exercise agency in negotiating such a complex environment, and ultimately find their place within the field of school. It is suggested in this chapter that the management of



young people in school is influenced by the intense regulation of bodies, space, and time, and that the embodiment of these influences can lead to the development of 'school-relevant' elements of habitus. Other issues relating to learning and peer interactions are also highlighted, and throughout the discussion an underlying tension between resistance and conformity is seen to frame young people's behaviour in the field of school. In order to provide a degree of contextual information that may help to frame the rest of the chapter, the discussion begins by outlining the structure of the field of school.

## **6.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: 'I think that school is way different' (Laura)**

### **6.2.1 *An 'Artificial' Environment.***

The focus group discussions indicated that the field of school was obviously an important context in the young people's social experience, and as such served to reinforce a vast body of research in this area (e.g. Connell, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1998; Kirk, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). Indeed Bourdieu (1998) suggests that, as an institution, school helps to significantly structure the social space through the way that it 'contributes to the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital' (p.19). However, the field of school does not stand alone within society but is embedded within a larger system of social relations (Hamilton, 1977; Wren, 1999; Wyness, 1999; Modell, 2000). As such, in a society in which 'schooling constructs much of young people's social and cultural environment' (Jarvis, 2001 p.257), it is important not to discount 'the complex social, cultural, political and environmental contexts in which schools operate' (Kirk, 1999a). The experience of school is a complex one for young people, as they enter a highly organised site and seek to find their place within its structure. This experience necessarily influences their constructions of self, as 'identity formation in school is a process in which young people bring resources, find new ones and constantly work to make sense of their positions relative to others' (Soudien, 2001 p.314).

The young people in this study regarded the field of school, more than any of the other fields, as a highly specific and inimitable. It was, in Laura's words, considered 'way different' from the other social fields in which they spent time, and there was a

conscious awareness that it was a fabricated environment constructed for the specific purpose of learning. Jackson (1968) has pointed out that there is definitely something unique and highly uniform about the school context, but indicates that the extensive contact that young people have with the field cause them to become accustomed to what may at first appear to be irregular aspects of its structure. As he has said, ‘all of the sites and smells become so familiar to students and teachers alike that they exist dimly, on the periphery of awareness’ (p.7). The following extract mirrors this perception of school characteristics, and indicates how they can become ingrained to an almost unconscious level within a student’s habitus.

Simon: It (school) smells different though doesn’t it (laughing) you don’t notice it now but when you first came to the school it stunk for about a week until you got used to it.

Sophie: It did actually, like cleaning stuff.  
(FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

### 6.2.2 *A Space of Structured Positions.*

In a study of open-plan schooling, Hamilton (1977) used the term ‘structure’ to mean ‘the way in which separate elements of a school (e.g. curriculum, methods, design, administration) can be envisaged – in theory or in practice – as comprising a coherent but dynamic system’ (p.3). Although the study itself is somewhat dated, it is a helpful understanding of the term as it highlights many of the key aspects of the field that are evident within the data, and that make up the ‘organisational climate of the school’ (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989 p.425). However, it doesn’t allow for a complete appreciation of the concept because it overlooks the structural organisation of individuals within the site. This is, in part, why Bourdieu’s theory is so useful in relation to this study, because in the notion of fields there is a concept that allows for an understanding of social sites as spaces of structured positions (Bourdieu, 1993). Outside of the physical structures of the school environment, the hierarchical arrangement of positions was perhaps the primary way in which the field was organised for the young people. The various labels of ‘head teacher’, ‘form tutor’, ‘teacher’ and ‘pupil’<sup>1</sup>, and within this the distinction between years and forms, identified individuals within the field and determined the subject positions that they were able to occupy (Davies & Harré, 2000)<sup>2</sup>. This structure of positions was based upon relative power, and as it was the adults within the field who possessed the



majority of relevant cultural and symbolic capital (e.g. age, qualifications, status, knowledge etc.), this afforded them the authority to determine legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1985a). It is also through the maintenance of this process that the school contributes to the reproduction of social structure over time, and the 'transmission of culture between generations' (Connell, 1996 p.229).

The 'complex web of power relations constituting school' (Frost, 2001 p.111) therefore continues to create a distinction between children and adults (Postman, 1994). Wyness (1999) has suggested that the school environment affords young people little agency, precisely because they are positioned in this way as 'incompetent social actors' (p.358). In this way young people rarely have a say in which school they attend, or how that school is run, and are required instead to be passive recipients of the already established structure (Dillon & Moje, 1998). The young people in the study were certainly aware that they had little input in relation to the structure of the school, although they had many ideas and suggestions for improvements. For example, on one occasion Alex mentioned that the response of his teacher to suggestions made by the pupils had been 'I've been working for twenty-five years, and I'm not going to be told things by kids'. It was clearly a source of consternation to them that they were treated as 'children' within the field, and it was something that was resisted quite strongly. As Lara points out in relation to the issue of rules concerning dress, 'that's what I really hate about the uniform, it makes me look my age'. A number of the young people expressed a desire to leave school, as Bob pointed out 'I hate it so much, I just want to leave'. Bourdieu (1993a) suggested that much of young people's aspirations to leave school are concerned with a desire to gain adult status, and on the basis of their position within the wider structure of the field this is perhaps not too surprising.

It can be seen, then, that young people's position within the field of school is somewhat subjugated. However, as Jackson (1968) has suggested, 'obviously some kinds of control are necessary if the school's goals are to be reached and social chaos averted' (p.13). The next section of this discussion moves on to look more specifically at the role that the field of school plays in the regulation of young people's behaviour.

### 6.3 THE REGULATION OF BEHAVIOUR IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: 'Playing the Game'

#### 6.3.1 *The Hidden Curriculum.*

Dillon and Moje (1998) have suggested that an individual's behaviour will not only vary according to situation and context, but also in relation to their relative position within that context. Bearing in mind young people's lowly position within the official structure of the school, it is not surprising that in this context they quickly learn the advantages associated with 'playing the game' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002). As Frost (2001) points out '*all* social contexts have these kinds of rules of demeanour and behaviour, which people do learn both consciously and unconsciously, in order to gain social acceptance' (p.114). The young people in the study were aware that they behaved differently at school in comparison to the other fields, and suggested that this was due primarily to the expectations that were associated with the position of 'student'. For example, Laura suggested that 'with school you've got to be on your best behaviour and things' and, in a similar vein, Alex noted that 'I think I behave better when I'm at school and (with my) family, but when I'm with my friends I sometimes act badly'. It is evident that the rules and regulations, both implicit and explicit, that comprise and construct much of the school environment for young people, have a significant influence on their behaviour within the field.

Although the young people themselves discussed the issue of school rules, it was also evident from simply observing the behaviour of other individuals in the field that it was indeed a highly regulated site. The relative order within classrooms and the coordinated movement of large groups of young people were themselves testimony to this, and indicated the degree to which the written and unwritten rules of the field were adhered to. It has been suggested that through a conformity to the rules of the school, and perhaps more importantly an embodiment of its implicit values, young people develop an appropriate habitus which allows them to function effectively within the site. This 'hidden curriculum' is distinguished from, but complementary to, the explicitly stated aims of the school, and is viewed as an effective means by which young people can assimilate the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the school (Seddon, 1983; Kirk, 1992; Wren, 1999). Indeed, Jackson (1968) has proposed that there are various factors within the school experience that give 'a distinctive flavor to



classroom life (and) collectively form a hidden curriculum which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school' (pp.33-4). In combination, these elements create a general school ethos and impress on young people the importance of a certain classroom etiquette (Jackson, 1968; Wren, 1999). In addition to the general compliance evident within the behaviour of the young people, there were also signs that they had, to an extent, embodied the hidden curriculum at a deeper level. In other words, the implicit and unspoken values of the school system had become ingrained through years of almost unconscious conformity to them. As such, it is perhaps easy to understand why the young people at Fenburgh naturally walked on the right hand side of the corridor, why the girls from the convent school would not enter the interview room until I was there, and why a number of the young people inadvertently referred to me as 'Miss' or raised their hand before asking a question.

### 6.3.2 *Developing a 'School-Relevant Habitus'*

Wyness (1999) suggests that the structure of the school field in terms of rules and regulations reduces the creativity of young people, because 'their school lives are more or less determined by curricular and behavioural rules and structures' (p.356). However, these regulations also mean that young people know what to expect, and what is expected of them, and can therefore be seen to provide a degree of consistency and regularity (Jackson, 1968). As such, the field of school could perhaps be considered as an important site for symbolic work, in which young people simply measure what they can and can't do (Soudien, 2001). This conflict of opinions once again highlights the tensions that exist between conformity and resistance for young people within the field of school, and is illustrative of the sentiment expressed in the following extract:

RH Do you find that there's a lot of regulation and stuff at school?

(general yes)

Laura: I don't think it is really, I think you've got to...

Zoe: But some of them are just really stupid.

Sophie: Yeah some of them are stupid, and as you get older you want more freedom and things and you can't get it. So it will be better when we go up to the next school because you get more freedom.

Laura: But I think it is good that sometimes that we have got rules and things. (FCC, gp 2 wk 2)



Although there was often dissatisfaction with the rules of the school, the young people were aware that they lacked the social and cultural capital to challenge them and, as such, they were obliged to conform with the regulations presented to them. As a result of this conformity, the young people can be seen to develop characteristics that allow them to successfully engage in the field, i.e. they generate 'school-relevant' elements of their habitus. In this way, they come to learn and take for granted what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour i.e. they are aware of 'the right kind of thing to do' (Alex). The notion of habitus is useful here, because it allows for an understanding of the unconscious element in young people's behaviour within schools, and the way in which these norms and ideals become written into the body (Kirk, 1993, Francis, 2000). As Bourdieu points out, habitus is 'not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is...(it) implies total investment and deep emotional identification' (Bourdieu, 1990b p.167). Wren (1999) has suggested that accumulated capital, in the form of internalised social norms, can often allow young people to function more effectively within the more specific context of the school, because it provides a general knowledge base for them to draw upon. However, the discourses that surround young people within the school environment are also ingrained over time, and help to shape and position them as 'students' capable of 'doing school' (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989; Dillon & Moje, 1998). The habitus required by young people within the school is not, then, wholly unique to that field, although there are elements that will be more context specific, but reflects more broadly an embodiment of the norms and ideals of society in general (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Bourdieu, 1998b; Kirk, 1999b). The particular nature of the school environment is therefore important to consider, as the reproduction of their values and norms via the habitus will influence young people's constructions of self in relation to issues such as gender, religion and class (Shilling, 1991; Connell, 1996, Kirk, 1999b). It is perhaps significant, then, that the mission statements for both Thornhill School and St. Agnes' School highlighted their prestigious status as private schools, and the Christian ethos in which their approach was based.

### **6.3.3 *Teacher/Student Relations.***

It has been suggested that the process of schooling the body involves an element of corporeal regulation, and as such the embodiment of structure and regulations by



young people can be seen as a way of constructing bodies that are productive yet controlled (Foucault, 1991; Kirk, 1993; Kirk, 1999b). The power relations evident within the field are a key factor in this control, as they afford teachers a significant degree of authority over the students. As the gatekeepers to significant cultural capital teachers have the capacity to have a strong impact on the young people that they teach, although this has not always been shown to transcend the school context (Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). This can perhaps be explained by the fact that, for the young people involved in this study, the relationships with teachers were a source of considerable tension. It was often perceived as a case of ‘them and us’ (Dillon & Moje, 1998), with teachers being described as people who ‘take the pee basically’ (Liz), ‘put you down for stupid little things’ (Bob), or ‘don’t treat people fairly in lessons’ (Alex). Although the rules and regulations of the school demanded that young people recognise the authority of teachers, and refer to them deferentially as ‘Sir’ or ‘Miss’, the young people often perceived a lack of reciprocal respect by teachers for the young people (Coleman *et al*, 1997)<sup>3</sup>. It has been suggested that teachers take for granted young people’s compulsory attendance at school, and see nothing amiss with the lack of agency that they are afforded there (Marsland, 1993; Wyness, 1999). Although Jackson (1968) compares the teacher-student relationship with parent-child relationship, he points out that there are important differences in relation to the degree of intimacy. As such, whereas young people may have more freedom and involvement within the familial field, this same opportunity is not generally afforded them within the school.

#### **6.4 THE REGULATION OF TIME IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: ‘It takes all your time up’ (Lloyd)**

##### ***6.4.1 A ‘Defining Feature of Schooling’.***

It has already been established that school is a structured field in which both explicit and implicit norms closely govern young people’s behaviour and actions. Conformity to these organising features helps to ensure that a sense of order is maintained, and thus increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the field. It has been suggested that a key factor in this structuring of the school experience, and the regulation of those individuals located in it, is the precise management and organisation of time (Jackson,

1968; Marsland, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998; Kirk, 1999a). Indeed Kirk (1999b) has suggested that, as an institutional practice, the use of space and time to regulate young people's behaviour can be perceived as a 'defining feature of schooling' (p.184). The young people in the study were acutely aware of the role that school played in organising their social experience and practice, and whenever the field was mentioned as an influence on their constructions of self it was primarily associated with the issue of time. For these individuals, school was perceived as a field in which it was not only compulsory for them to spend time, but to spend significant amounts of time. As Danny begrudgingly pointed out during his individual interview, 'I just spend so much time there'. It was largely taken-for-granted by the young people that the extent of time they spent in the school environment itself, or indeed under the implicit regulation of the field in other social contexts, inevitably effected their behaviour, attitudes and practices. As Katie explained:

Katie: Well, you're here five days out of the seven, it can't *not* influence you! And then you go home and spend the majority of your weekends and evenings doing homework, so it would influence you.  
(SACS, wk 1)

The compulsory nature of schooling was often decried by the young people as being unjust and unfair, an infringement on their own free time. In his discussion of problematic issues within education, Marsland (1993) suggested that this 'compulsory seizure of free time from children and adolescents is taken for granted remarkably glibly' by schools (p.114). He went on to suggest that the contradictory perceptions of teachers and pupils – 'of course you should be at school' and 'why are we here?' – lie at the heart of much of the tensions apparent within the school environment, and that it should be recognised that 'school is not what (young people) of their own choosing would want for their own sake to be doing' (p.114). This is an interesting proposition and may perhaps improve teacher pupil relations, though the fact remains that school is compulsory and, by its very nature, time-consuming.

#### **6.4.2 *The Embodiment of Time Regulations.***

Although the young people voiced considerable resistance to the time regulations imposed by the school, they also, conversely, accepted them as being an inescapable reality. Indeed, it was evident that the young people had embodied the structuring of



time, and that it formed an integral part of their 'school' habitus. The time maps that were completed by the young people give an indication of how closely their time was regulated during the school day, and reflected largely the daily arrangement of time via timetabling. Several researchers have highlighted the timetable as a significant feature of the school environments, and an effective tool for disciplining and regulating bodies (Hamilton, 1977; Foucault, 1991; Kirk, 1999a). Adler & Adler (1998) have suggested that timetables and rules help to formalise the lives of children within schools, and as such help to shape their experiences of the field. For the young people in the study, their days were scheduled by administration periods, lessons and break times, and this routine gave structure and coherence to their time within the field. Thanks to the timetable, young people were able to know where they should be, at what times and with whom, in order for appropriate activities to take place. As Jackson (1968) has said, 'school is a place where things often happen not because students want them to, but because it is time for them to occur' (p.13). In this way, it is possible for the school management (i.e. teachers) to keep order with a large number of individuals.

The young people's embodiment of these time regulations was evident in a number of ways. Firstly, it was inherent in their communication with peers via comments such as 'what do you have last lesson?' or 'I have history at two o'clock'. It was also clear that phrases such as 'break time', 'lunch time' and 'home time' represented precise times for the young people, and although they were not specifically referred to as such the meaning was clear to those with inside knowledge of the particular school environment. Another way in which the regulation of time was linked to the body, particularly for the girls at the convent school, was via the issue of uniform<sup>4</sup>. The girls mentioned that they had both a winter and summer uniform, and that there was a specific date when they had to change from one to the other. This specific point in the school year therefore held a special significance for the young people, particularly in relation to their conception of how close they were to the summer holidays. The control and organisation of time within the field of school could also be seen to influence the body clocks of the young people, as Simon's comment indicates.

Simon: With school, I don't like waking up and having to go...but you get into a routine and like on weekends you start waking up at like seven o'clock and you're like 'oh, I want to lie in'. (FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

Here it can be seen that the habit of getting up early for school is something that literally becomes embodied for Simon, so that even in his free time the influence can be seen.

### 6.4.3 *The 'School Time'/'Free Time' Distinction.*

The distinction between 'school time' and 'free time' was a key feature of the young people's conversations regarding the issue of time within the field of school, and the balance of the two represented a significant source of tension. For the most part, 'school time' was regarded as negative, thanks to its compulsory nature, and perceived to transgress too heavily onto the more valued notion of 'free time' (Marsland, 1993). The demarcation of time on the basis of these two concepts is evident in the following conversation, in which the girls' group is discussing how much of a social life they are able to have outside of school.

RH Do you think that you have much time for a social life?

Lara: Not on week nights. Week nights are always taken up by school stuff.

Katie: I make time.

Chloë: Yeah, I could normally make time to do stuff.

Lara: Yeah, Friday and Saturday are kind of like, Friday evenings and Saturday are like my day, and then Sunday's for school work.

Chloë: Sunday's for homework.

(SACS, wk 1)

It is clear from this extract of conversation, as well as from other comments within the data, that many of the young people involved in the study view the time spent at school as 'work', part of their 'daily grind' (Jackson, 1968). Marsland (1993) also notes that young people can perceive their experience at school as 'labour', and this is supported by Katie's comment that 'we have a forty-two hour week, that's slavery and we don't get paid for it either!'. It is also important to note, however, that a number of the young people also made reference, albeit reluctantly, to the school as a constructive use of their time. The negative connotations attached to 'school time', and the perceived lack of freedom that it represented, appeared to serve to elevate the concept of 'free time' in the minds of the young people. This notion was regarded as particularly valuable because the young people themselves had relative authority in deciding how it was used, e.g. what they did, where they went, and how they behaved. Within the school environment this free time took the forms of breaks (between lesson



periods or at lunch time), and represented a time when young people could meet with their peers away from the direct regulation of teachers<sup>5</sup>. The free time experienced outside of the direct school environment, however, was often deemed more important because it constituted a longer period of independence. As such, weekends and holidays were of particular value to the young people because, as Lloyd remarked, 'you don't get told of and ruled by the teachers'. It also helps to explain why, in the week following a half-term break, Lara and Mia were already counting down to their next school holiday.

For the young people in this study, their time spent at school, scheduled precisely into units of time, was a source of annoyance, yet it could be tolerated because it was perceived as obligatory. However, severe objections arose when it was felt that school trespassed upon their free time, primarily through the guise of homework. This was a major source of contention for all of the young people, who felt that this infringement on their free time, and the policing of it by the school, was unwarranted. The boys at Thornhill school were particularly vocal regarding this issue with Lloyd suggesting that 'it (homework) takes all of your time up'. The boys mentioned that it was school policy to give them 'three homeworks a night and five at the weekends' and, bearing this in mind, it is perhaps easy to appreciate other comments within the data suggesting that school can severely limit the potential for a 'social life'. For example, Carl remarked that 'it's school that actually stops me from doing most of my sport...I had to quit some things for school'. In addition, the time constraints imposed on the young people by the school were seen to limit their capacity to have paid work. This, in turn, influenced the degree to which they could acquire and accumulate economic capital, an important factor in relation to young people's interactions with the peer group (Adler & Adler, 1998; Miles *et al*, 1998; Frith & Gleeson, 2001)<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, with the advent of SATS and GCSEs the young people noted that it was becoming increasingly difficult to combine work and study. As such, several of the young people mentioned that they often earned money by babysitting, because in this way they were able to get their work done while also earning money. Despite the general dissatisfaction voiced by the young people, there was also some ambivalence within their attitudes regarding homework. This was due to an evident tension between conformity and resistance, as the following extract indicates.

Danny: At the weekends when you, well that's probably the bit where you can have a bit of a social life, you get more homework. So you've got more time but they give you more work at the weekends... I don't mind doing the work, it's just when you've got a lot and it gets a bit...

Frederick: But it's important.

Danny: Oh yeah, you need to do it, but I would prefer it if you didn't get as much. I know that you need to do like homework and stuff but I reckon everyone would enjoy school loads more if they didn't get homework to do.

(TBS, wk 1)

It can be seen, then, that although homework is seen as a restriction to free time, it is also a means of acquiring cultural capital that is valued within the field of school. This capital, acquired through the accumulation of knowledge and learning of specific skills, is important not only for determining the young people's experience of the school field but also for equipping them for the future. It is to the issue of the acquisition of capital and the school as a site of learning that we now turn.

## 6.5 THE SCHOOL FIELD AS A SITE FOR LEARNING: 'It educates you' (Lloyd)

### 6.5.1 *A Site for Accumulating Capital.*

One of the main issues that the young people associated with the field of school was its function as an educational medium. It was generally accepted that school was a site of learning, intended to teach young people the things that they need to know to be successfully integrated into adult society (Harker *et al*, 1990; Postman, 1994; Wren, 1999). As the following extract shows;

Amadaia: Well I mean school plays a major part in your life, because it's like when you're growing up ...

Mia: Well it is your life until you leave isn't it.

Amadaia: Well yeah, but you're going to use it aren't you and like it teaches you and you learn and stuff.

Katie: How well you do at school (determines) how well you're going to do later (pause) It kind of effects the whole of your life.

(SACS, wk 1)

There are a number of points raised in this excerpt of conversation that are worthy of further clarification. The first is the significant role that school is seen to play as a site for acquiring specific skills through the shaping and provision of a tailored program of activities. Viewed in this way, the field of school bears many similarities to Lave and



Wenger's (1991) concept of 'communities of practice'<sup>7</sup>, and can be perceived as a site in which young people are provided with 'the tools of culture' that allow them to learn and acquire knowledge (Modell, 2000 p.84). It should also be noted, however, that the knowledge acquired by individuals within the field of school sits alongside that amassed in other fields, and several authors have pointed to the importance for schools of recognising this situation (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). A second point to note is the implication that an individual's engagement with the field of school allows them to acquire and accumulate significant cultural capital (e.g. qualifications, knowledge) that can then be converted to economic capital when they enter the adult world of work (Harker *et al*, 1990; Wyn & Dwyer, 1999; Light, 2001). Bourdieu (1998b) regarded the school, along with the family, as a major site for the accumulation of transferable capital by young people, and this is echoed by Lloyd's comment that 'it gets you a job when you're older'. A third and final point to note is the apparent acceptance by the young people that their degree of accomplishment at school directly determines their future success outside of the field. In this conviction the 'school habitus' is clearly evident, and the embodiment of school values is apparent even within the attitudes of the students.

### ***6.5.2 A Need to Achieve: School and Familial Pressure.***

Despite the esteemed role that the field of school has in the shaping and educating of future generations it is both a regulating and regulated environment, and is often blamed for wider social problems (Connell, 1996; Frost, 2001). This may, in part, explain some of the comments made by the young people involved in this study that schools placed pressure on students to achieve and succeed. One of the key issues in relation to this notion of pressure was that of assessment, and the importance that the school was perceived to attach to examinations. It was evident to the young people involved in this study, however, that there was also an element of competition involved here between one school and another. As Lara and Katie suggested;

Lara: There's pressure to keep up the reputation of the GCSE results, because they go towards a public poll.

Katie: Especially because we're competing against the High School, and every time the league tables come out the High School, because they're so selective, they always get higher than us.

(SACS, wk 1)

It is fair to say that assessment is certainly an important practice in the field of school, and that it is a significant marker of achievement and worth (Jackson, 1968). The importance attached to examinations by the school, whether it be perceived as for the benefit of personal or school achievement, can serve to affirm their value as a signifier of capital to students and, as such, can, both explicitly and implicitly, become a source of pressure. Katie in particular unquestioningly accepted the significance of exams and it was often an intense form of stress to her, as the following extract indicates.

Katie: I feel that if we've got exams coming up and I'm out shopping with my friends I feel so guilty. I feel like I should be at home revising. I feel guilty if I've not done my homework, I feel sick.  
(SACS, wk 3)

The concern with exams was largely, although not solely, expressed by the girls involved in the study, and there is some research to suggest that girls have a stronger allegiance to the norms of the school than do boys (Jackson, 1968; Davies *et al*, 1998; Francis, 2000; Renold, 2001b). This is not to say that the boys disregarded the importance of exams, but that they were more likely to perceive them as inconvenient or annoying rather than stressful. An additional reason for the ambivalence in young people's attitudes to working hard in school is made evident in the tension that exists between acquiring cultural capital via qualifications, and losing social capital through being positioned as a swot within the peer group (Dillon & Moje, 1998).

In addition to the pressure that comes from the school regarding examinations, there was some indication that the expectations of the family could provide an additional source of stress. As Katie pointed out, 'I feel that if I don't get good marks in my exams, my mum will go up the wall'. This pressure could be seen to combine with that of the school, although there was also an element of tension here with some of the young people resisting what they perceived to be an intrusion of their parents into the field of school. As the following extract indicates, young people can perceive the concern of parents regarding academic achievement as negative, an additional source of anxiety.

Zoe: It also puts like stress on you though because your mum and dad are like, well my mum and dad are anyway, 'oh you've got an exam, revise, revise, revise'. I'm like 'what!'...I'm petrified of my dad at the moment, he's like 'Zoe why haven't you got an A?' . (FCC, gp 2 wk 2)



### ***6.5.3 The Role of the School in Structuring Opportunities: Reproducing Inequalities?***

For the young people involved in this study, then, examinations were associated with the acquisition of capital, which in turn was seen to influence their future prospects within society. There was an interesting distinction between the three schools in relation to this notion, and one that can perhaps be interpreted as a reflection of their particular academic and class-based structures. Several of the young people from the two independent schools mentioned that they had been encouraged to think about their future, and in particular which universities they wanted to attend (with a definite emphasis on the Oxbridge institutions). Indeed, Amadaia claimed that she had already identified an institution and course of study. Furthermore, when Frederick was late for one of the focus group meetings he explained that it was because he had been having a voluntary interview with the school careers officer. On the other hand, however, few of the young people from Fenburgh appeared to have plans for the future, and for those who did there was no expectation that these would include further study. In this way, it is perhaps easy to understand the belief that the field of school can play a key role in the reproduction of social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Adler & Adler, 1998; Light, 2001).

Whether young people are heading for further education or not, it is believed that an important element of their 'career training' within schools is to prepare them to be responsible individuals within society (Postman, 1994; Meredyth, 1997). This 'citizenship' is now explicitly, as well as implicitly, taught in schools, where it is intended to enhance moral development, increase young people's knowledge of their duties and rights, and inform them as to how they can play a more active role within society. This notion of 'citizenship' can once again be seen to be associated with the development of an appropriate habitus, and as a means of policing the population, instilling in individuals an invaluable tendency for self-regulation (Foucault, 1991; Kirk, 1999b; Tait, 2000; Soudien, 2001). It is also possible to see how this process contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities mentioned above, via the expectations that are embedded within the structure of particular schools. For example, one of the main aims for both of the private schools was to send out individuals who could 'make a positive contribution with their lives' (Thornhill

School) or 'become informed and contributing citizens to future society' (St. Agnes' Convent School). This is perhaps linked to the notion that the private sector of education has traditionally provided the future leaders and key players within society, and can account, in part, for the fact that citizenship was much more of an issue for the young people at the independent schools. The implicit regulatory nature of the concept, however, did not completely go unnoticed by the young people, as Mia's comment that 'it's all about politics, it drives me mad' indicates. Davies *et al* (1998) have suggested that young people don't often have an input into the content of citizenship within schools, and propose that this situation needs to change if the program is to be effective.

Although it has been established that the field of school is a valuable site of learning, it was clear from the data that there were significant differences between the experiences of the young people in the three schools. For example, it was evident from their facilities and grounds that the two independent schools were more affluent than the state maintained community college, and the conversations of the young people themselves hinted at the differing opportunities open to them. The particular nature of a school environment, then, necessarily structures the experiences of the individuals positioned within it. Bourdieu (1993a) associated this issue to class differences when he referred to the educational system as 'a vehicle for privileges' (p.99), and highlighted the way in which it maintains its pre-existing order by sorting those with more cultural capital than others, and particularly those with inherited cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1998b). The value of their own history was certainly something that was deeply embedded within the structure of both the independent schools, a fact that had not escaped their students who talked of the 'importance of tradition' (Katie). The young people linked the notion of tradition to issues such as uniform, academic status and even sporting activities, with Danny suggesting that the traditional, upper class nature of the school was the reason why they spent a great deal of their physical education lessons playing rugby and cricket. The young people at the community college on the other hand made no reference to the notion of tradition, suggesting that it was not a key factor in structuring their school experience. This is not to suggest, that the young people at Fenburgh were disadvantaged by the 'lower class' status of their school. Indeed, they believed that the facilities available to them were generally



good, and were particularly appreciative of the free internet and email service that the school provided for its students.

#### ***6.5.4 The School Ethos: An Influential or Inhibiting Factor?***

In addition to this notion of tradition, and the implicit association made with class, the field of school can be seen to structure the experiences of young people through the specific curricular that different schools offer. It has been suggested, however, that these can be restrictive, because they rarely allow for young people to contribute their opinions as to how they are constructed (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Wyness, 1999; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). As such, the particular school that an individual attends can structure the capital that they are able to accumulate, by determining the knowledge that is made available to them. For example, Lara mentioned the restricted choice of options that she had for GCSE's at the convent school meant that she was unable to take GCSE physical education as she would have liked to, and, furthermore, the compulsory option of religious education reduced the already limited selection down even further. The girls at the convent school frequently discussed the issue of religion, and it represented yet another way in which the school environment was seen to structure their experience of the field. The convent school, as might be expected, was a site in which there was a strong and perceptible Christian ethos. Indeed, their mission statement professed that 'as a caring community, we aim to help our students develop their full potential within a Christian atmosphere and environment, irrespective of their personal faith'. However, the girls at the convent school felt that the focus on Christianity restricted their ability to learn about other faiths, and prevented students of other faiths practising their religion within the school. As the following extract shows:

[in a discussion about what jewellery the school allows students to wear]

Amadaia: Yeah, you're allowed a cross right.

Mia: But you're not allowed anything else from any other religion.

Lara: Who was it? Was it Zhara who had her bracelets on from the Sikh religion, and she got told to take it off...and she goes 'well it's part of my religion'.

Chloë: It's not fair.

Mia: Yeah (the teacher) said 'you can go to another school if you want to wear that'.

Amadaia: That's definitely wrong.

Chloë: That is just somebody dissing another religion.

Amadaia: Because if you (Chloë) wanted to wear a necklace with a god on it or something.

Chloë: Yeah, I wouldn't be allowed.

(SACS, wk 3)

There are implications here for individuals of other faiths, who may struggle to align various aspects of their identity, e.g. Muslim, Hindu, with the structure of the school environment. In this situation, Chloë found that the cultural capital she had within the field of family, and the habitus associated with her position in that field, was not valued within the field of school. As such, she had to develop an alternative habitus, or alternative aspects of habitus, that would allow her to conform to the norms and values of the school field. This issue of school and religion is also discussed in the following section, in which we move on to look more closely at the role of the school in the regulation of the body.

## 6.6 SCHOOL UNIFORM AND THE REGULATION OF BODIES: 'It's like a badge that identifies you' (Chloë)

### 6.6.1 *The Embodiment of School Identity.*

The association between school, bodies and identity represented a significant theme within the data, and reflects a growing research interest in the area of schooling and embodied identity (e.g. Kirk, 1993, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). Given that adolescence is considered a time in which the body is deemed to be particularly important, and that the school is perceived to play a constitutive part in disciplining and regulating the body, it is possible to understand the significance of this field for young people's construction of embodied identities (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Connell, 1996). It has already been established that the movement of individuals around the school is closely controlled via the organisation of time and that these regulations, embodied to an almost unconscious level, are manifested through the habitus. In this way, the bodies of young people in school can be seen to reflect the structure of the field and their relative location or position within it (Giddens, 1991). For the young people involved in this study, one of the main themes in relation to the issue of school and the body was that of 'uniform'. It was a topic that was raised independently in each focus group discussion, perhaps due to the fact that all three of the schools had a uniform of some sorts. There were considerable



differences between the schools, however, which appeared to reflect the relative wealth and status of the schools and the economic capital of the young people (or more specifically their parents) who attended them. For example, whereas the independent schools had extensive uniforms with many accessories, such as ties, blazers, hats, coats etc., the young people from Fenburgh had only a basic colour scheme of black and white. These differences could be thought of as providing individuals with distinct forms of physical capital, based on factors such as class or gender, the volume and composition of which will determine its conversion to other forms of capital outside of the field (Shilling, 1991; Bourdieu, 1998b). The girls group also suggested that the values of the convent school were reflected in their uniform, 'it's a take off of a nun's uniform' (Alex), and that its long history<sup>8</sup> accounted for the dated nature of the clothing, 'it's just so Victorian isn't it' (Katie).

The link between the uniform and the values of the school was significant because it allowed for the literal embodiment of school identity. The young people were aware that their uniform allowed them to be identified, and, conversely, for them to identify others, as allied to a specific school. In addition, it could also identify individuals more specifically as located within a particular space in the field of school. For example, the lower school at St. Agnes' convent had a slightly different uniform than the upper school, the sixth formers at Thornhill wore different coloured blazers in order to distinguish them from the other years, and the prefects at the latter school wore special ties. The capacity for uniforms to identify specific schools was not always welcome, however, as it often resulted in stereotypical attributes being associated with the individuals wearing them. As the following extract indicates:

Lara: People stereotype us, being at the Convent because we pay for our education.

Mia: To them we're either snobs, lesbians or nuns.

Katie: I mean, I walk down the road and I get loads of abuse from the kids that go to the school in my village, and they swear and stuff at you just because you wear a uniform.

Amadaia: Yeah. I was, they had seen me in my uniform these girls that live up the road, and they don't come down to the school obviously but you see them like smoking and stuff and you just walk past them. I was playing football and they were just like taking the mick out of me for absolutely no reason, and then one of them goes 'oh, we go to a private school, we're snobs' and stuff like that. It sort of really upsets you because they don't know what it's like...and you don't say anything back

because you know it's not worth it because they don't care. They're not religious either and I am, and that really offends me when they take the mick out of the school, because it's like a religious school. And one of them goes 'oh, go and ask her if she's a nun' and all that sort of stuff, so I just left.

(SACS, wk 1)

### 6.6.2 *Conformity or Resistance?*

The issue of uniform was one about which the majority of the young people felt extremely strongly and, although compulsory, there was considerable resistance to the regulation it imposed and the authority of teachers to reinforce it<sup>9</sup>. Adherence to the rules regarding uniform was certainly policed quite strongly Thornhill school, where I had observed students being told to tuck their shirts in, straighten their ties and generally 'smarten up'. It was felt that the rules regarding uniform were generally too strict, and that many of them were trivial and insignificant. In relation to the issue of whether they wore trainers or shoes, navy tights or black ones, or chose to wear make up or jewellery, a number of the young people echoed Mike's question of 'what difference does it make really?'. The following extract highlights some of the frustration that the young people felt in relation to this issue.

Lara: They're having a massive uniform check at the minute. Everything that's not to do with school uniform you can't wear.

Mia: You can't even have a coloured bag on Friday, when you've got your own clothes and stuff.

Lara: Yeah, you can't have plastic bags, you can't have colourful things in your hair, they have to be blue, black or white.

Mia: Yeah, we all started wearing flowers in our hair and they kept telling us to take them out.

Lara: And they started saying that you had to wear navy tights, I mean, I'm not wearing blue tights!

(SACS, wk 5b)

This extract also indicates how far the image that the uniform affords young people is from the 'ideal' image that counts for physical, and hence social, capital in the field of peers (Frost, 2001). Although there were some beneficial points attached to the existence of a school uniform, such as reducing complicated decision-making on a school morning or decreasing competition between peers ('nobody can laugh at what you're wearing' - Zoe), most of the comments in relation to this topic were negative. A lot of the young people's dissatisfaction with the uniform appeared to stem from its ability to position them as subordinates within the field of school, identifying them in



a collective group as 'students'. These concerns are illustrated in Lara's comment that 'I look my age in my uniform, I think that's the one thing I hate about it', and Mike's conviction that the intense regulation of appearance in school is due to the fact that 'they don't want us to be unique, they want us all to merge in'. This concern of restricted individuality was also echoed by the girls from the convent school, who pointed out that their uniforms made them all 'look the same'. It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that this concern should be expressed about 'a school where the individual is highly valued' (school website).

Dillon and Moje (1998) have suggested that young people's resistance within school represents an attempt by them to seize power in a situation in which they are powerless. This notion would certainly seem to account for the young people's opposition to the uniform, and their attempts to exert their own style on it within peer groups. As Amadaia pointed out 'I think there's still pressure there (in the peer group) over uniform, well not uniform as such but how you wear it, if you know what I mean'. So the trend at the convent school of wearing flowers in their hair, or of the students from Fenburgh privileging branded polo shirts over plain ones, can both be seen to represent a resistance against the authority of the school. Whereas the boys group were particularly vocal in their resistance to the uniform, regarding it as an outmoded relic of tradition and an outright challenge to individual identity, the girls involved in the study were generally more subtle in their approach. For example, Laura happily explained the rules regarding jewellery at Fenburgh while taking care to hide the (prohibited) rings that were on her fingers, and Mia overcame the rules about dyed hair by making the transition very slowly.

Lara: They had a go because her hair was red. They tried to make you change it...

Mia: Yeah, they tried to make me change it, but I didn't. They've forgotten about it now

Lara: Yeah, they were so dense because it was that red before when she had it done

Mia: I had it dyed brown for a bit and then I went back

Lara: And they've not noticed

Mia: And they haven't noticed. I'm like 'ha, ha!' (laughing)

(SACS, wk 5b)

Despite the opposition that was evident in relation to the regulation of bodies by the school, there were also indications of a belief that such resistance was in fact futile. So although Katie suggested that the school should canvass student's opinions regarding the uniform, and Fenburgh's student council approached their headmaster with ideas for modification, there was also an acknowledgement that they lacked the cultural capital necessary to bring about any significant change.

Katie: It is, it's too strict now isn't it. They've still got a completely Victorian attitude about the way we look.

Lara: Well to be fair to them they do, you know, they're not totally strict on us.

Katie: No but they should relax it a bit.

Lara: But that's just the way the school's been for ages and we can't change it because...you know this is the way the uniform has been and there's no point changing it because this is tradition, and it's not that old fashioned.

Katie: It is.

Lara: Well, yeah but there's no point complaining about it because we're never going to be able to change it, they won't let us.

(SACS, wk 3)

### 6.6.3 *Regulated Freedom: 'Own-Clothes Days'*

Another useful illustration of the tensions associated with the issue of uniform and the embodiment of school regulations is presented by one of the topics discussed at the convent school; 'own-clothes days'. These occasions often took place at the school on Fridays, particularly at the end of a school term, and were 'when we get to wear what we like, with guidelines of course' (Mia). This particular school practice appeared to present the girls with an opportunity for authorised deviance to the regular school norms (Hopkins, 1999), although the school maintained the right to monitor and manage this apparent freedom from regulation. The guidelines that the school imposed were perceived by the girls as an attempt to ensure that students appeared 'respectable' (Lara), and continued to embody the principles of the school, particularly in public.

RH So they tell you that you can wear what you want, but then -

Amadaia: Yeah, there's regulations.

Katie: Yeah, because like you've got really nice outfits, like a skirt up to there (indicating) and a pair of big boots, and that's not considered acceptable. Why on earth not?

Amadaia: That's what I wear outside of school.



Mia: I mean we should be able to wear what we want for one day, at least.

Katie: Like we're allowed, the last day of term, that is this end of term, it's an own clothes day. But they say, 'you've got to wear a suit because we're walking through town'. But we walk through town at the weekend as well.

Lara: But that's like out of school hours, they can't do anything out of school hours. They're only in charge of us during school hours.

(SACS, wk 3)

As can be seen this regulation by the school was contested quite strongly, for while the girls were obliged, even willing, to conform in 'school time', their 'free time' was deemed their own, and they resented attempts to influence their behaviour outside of the immediate school environment. As noted in chapter two, Bourdieu (1993a) has suggested that the limits of fields can best be conceptualised as those areas in which the effects of the field are felt, and, when viewed in this way, the field of school can be perceived as a pervasive and influential field in young people's lives. The 'own-clothes days', however, were generally regarded positively by the girls as a means of achieving some independence and autonomy within what was ordinarily a highly regulated field, and were perceived as part of their structured school experience. There is a strong association here with the young people's incorporation of time regulations, as there was some evidence to suggest that the girls had embodied the 'freedom' associated with these days through their attitudes to Fridays, and end of term periods, in general.

[explaining one of her picture choices, a pair of briefs with a 'Friesian cow' pattern]

Mia: They're cool! They're Friday pants.

RH OK! Why 'Friday pants?'

Lara: Because Friday's a cool day.

Mia: Yeah, Friday's the best day.

RH Is that because it's the weekend?

Mia: Yeah, and we get to go out.

(SACS, wk 5b)

The sentiment expressed in this extract, which was echoed by a number of individuals from all three schools, illustrates the complex and often implicit association between the regulation of bodies and the concepts of space and time. The role of the field of school in regulating both time and the body has already been discussed, and in the following section the third concept, the regulation of space, is addressed.

## 6.7 THE REGULATION OF SPACE IN THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: 'It's like a prison, ain't it' (Alex)

### 6.7.1 *Determining the Boundaries of the Field.*

It has been established that the field of school is a structured environment in which there is significant regulation of young people's time and bodies. The precise organisation of the physical environment, the hierarchical arrangement of positions within it, and even young people's stratification by years and forms, combine to constitute the general structure of a particular school. However, a field is more than a distinct space or locality and thus the field of school, continuing the analogy, is more than just the physical environment of a specific school site. The field of school is one in which a large number of young people spend a great deal of time within a relatively confined area, and as such a need for the organisation of children's bodies in terms of space can be understood (Jackson, 1968; Kirk, 1999b). This necessity is reflected in the fact that there are 'so many regulations' (Mike) governing student's behaviour in the field, both within and beyond the physical boundaries of the school. The young people involved in the study were aware that the field of school was able to influence their behaviour in this way, yet, as mentioned earlier, there was clearly tension here in terms of conformity and resistance. On the one hand, the embodiment of school norms and principles via the habitus was evident in the young people's concern to present an appropriate and acceptable image outside of the immediate school environment. As the following extract shows, this instilled in the young people a necessity for acting sensibly.

Katie: When you're in uniform as well, you know when you're out say like if you walk through the town after coming out of school, the pressure to have to act...

Mia: Sensible.

Katie: Sensible, yeah.

Lara: To keep up the reputation of the school.

Mia: Yeah, and you can't say anything (that might damage it).

(SACS, wk 1)

On the other, there was a strong resistance to this covert regulation and the invasive way in which it reached beyond the locality of the school site into other areas of their lives. This was evident in the sentiment expressed by Lara that 'they can't do anything



out of school hours, they're only in charge of us during school hours', and in the following extract:

Mike: I don't think you should be made to wear a uniform because it doesn't affect the way you work.

Lloyd: They make up all this crap about representing your school and everything, but it doesn't really matter that much.

Mike: I mean if we weren't in uniform we couldn't embarrass the school because they wouldn't know what school we were from but we get told off all of the time for like messing around outside of school whilst in uniform.

Danny: Perhaps they make you wear a uniform you don't mess around as much.

Mike: Yeah but it doesn't matter does it, they can't control us outside of school.

(TBS, wk 1)

It is evident from these comments then, that the regulation of space within the field of school can be both explicit and implicit.

### ***6.7.2 The Explicit and Implicit Regulation of Space.***

The overt aspect of this regulation can be thought of as the restrictions inherent within the organisation and structure of the school site, and which directly govern young people's movements within the physical boundaries of that context. For example, the restriction of students to particular areas, such as classrooms, dining halls or playground facilities, or, as the following extract suggests, even to specific spaces within those areas, for example sitting at particular desks within classrooms (Jackson, 1968; Kirk, 1998).

RH Do you find that you're restricted at school?

Alex: Yeah, I find we're very, well quite restricted. I mean I think PE is the only thing where we're not restricted, because we're like out there playing football on our own. In some lessons we can basically do what we, well not literally do what we want like go rob a bank or something (laughing) but at least we know what we can do.

Liz: In class you just sit at a table and wait to be told what you can do.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 2)

In addition to this confinement of the young people to particular spaces, there were also places in the school that were deemed 'out of bounds', such as the staff room or school office. These 'official' spaces were the preserve of the teaching and secretarial staff, and the young people were well aware that they lacked the necessary cultural

capital to enter them. The arrangement of young people's bodies via the regulation of both space and time within the school allows for those with power in the field (i.e. teachers) to maintain a degree of order and control (Foucault, 1991; Kirk, 1999b; Tait, 2000). For the young people involved in the study, this corporeal control within the field was an integral part of the school experience. However, the intense nature of this regulation was also perceived as a restriction of their freedom, particularly in relation to the fact that permission was required in each of the schools before they could leave the premises during the official school day. For the young people at Fenburgh, this made the school seem 'like a prison'; an effect that was accentuated by the security measures visible around the school grounds. As the following extract indicates:

Liz: School's just like a big joke basically.

Carl: If you go around the school I bet you'll only find about ten people who like this school.

RH You don't like the school?

Liz: No, it's just you can't do anything.

Alex: It's getting really bad, it's like a prison ain't it. Security cameras everywhere, massive steel whatever, gates with spikes on the top...six security cameras.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

Whereas this explicit management of bodies via the regulation of space was a major issue for the young people, it was the implicit regulation exerted within the field of school that was resisted more strongly. Once again the issue of uniform appears to lie at the heart of this covert regulation, as it is through this regulation of the body that the controlling authority of the field can transcend the physical boundaries of the school and influence individuals in their 'free time'. With echoes of Foucault's (1991) notion of 'surveillance', the young people talked of the pressure they perceived to 'act sensible' (Katie) and 'keep up the reputation of the school' (Lara) when wearing their uniform in public, because their actions were deemed to represent the principles of their particular institutions. Kirk and Colquhoun (1989) have pointed out that there has been 'a shift in the locus of social control within capitalist societies from mass, external control of the body to an individual, internal mode of corporeal control' (p.418). The perceived pressure that the young people talked about represents this shift, and identifies the way in which the school habitus can encourage them to engage in a process of self-regulation even when not in the physical site of the school (Kirk, 1999b; Tait, 2000). This has implications, however, for young people's constructions



of self, because the distinct structures of different fields, and the value and composition of the capital inherent within them, can mean that there is often a tension between aspects of individuals' identities in each context (Frost, 2001).

### **6.7.3 *Creating Space within the Field of School.***

Wyness (1999) has suggested that although young people are positioned by and within the structure of the school, they also create their own distinct spaces within the field away from official regulation. In this study, these 'back regions', for example common rooms, toilets, or corners of the playground, all represented relatively 'private' spaces where young people were able to get away from the impression management required by the school habitus (Goffman, 1990b; Giddens, 1991). This is not to say that these spaces were completely free from control, but rather that they were subject to different forms of regulation. In the school environment these regions are a major site for peer interactions, and the norms and ideals associated with the field of peers can be seen to influence young people's constructions of self in this context. As Katie indicated, 'at ten minute breaks, it's like into the toilets and hair, hair, hair'. There was a gender difference apparent in relation to the young people's comments on this issue, in that the boys were more likely to go out and engage in physical activity during their break times, whereas the girls liked to find a place to sit and talk. These differences have also been noted in other studies, and reflect the tendency for boys to occupy space and girls to confine it (Young, 1990; James, 1993; Connell, 1996; Frost, 2001). The young people appeared to perceive the implicit regulation of space in the field of school so negatively, because it often represented an invasion of school authority into their 'free time'. As has been established, the distinction between 'school time' and 'free time' was particularly important for the young people in this study, and, more often than not, this 'free time' equated to 'peer time'. It is to the associations between the fields of peers and school that we now turn.

## **6.8 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF SCHOOL AND PEERS: 'it's a place where you see all of your friends' (Lara)**

### **6.8.1 *The Role of the School in Structuring and Nurturing Friendships.***

For the young people involved in this study, the field of school was as much a place to meet and interact with their friends as it was a site of learning (Adler & Adler, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1998)<sup>10</sup>. In fact, the field of school was identified as the primary contexts in which friendships were made, and the progression of young people through the same school system allowed for these contacts to be nurtured and maintained (James, 1993; Dillon & Moje, 1998). As Zoe pointed out, ‘most of my friends I met at playschool actually’. Having said this, however, there was also an acknowledgement that it was important to ‘have friends both in school and out’ (Amadaia). The importance of peers to young people’s experiences in the field of school reflected the way in which they offered an alternative focus to the educational aspect of the field, and a means of solidarity against the regulations imparted on them by the school authorities. As individuals who were all located in the same relative position within the field, i.e. ‘students’, there was a shared understanding and sense of collective identity among the young people. In addition, however, the time spent with peers was deemed significant in terms of acquiring and accumulating social capital. As the following extract indicates, in order for individuals to have currency among their friends they needed to be aware of the most recent events and opinions in the peer group.

Sophie: But wherever the school is, like this one’s Fenburgh, it’s like people who live where the school is, all the gossip and stuff revolves around them and like life sort of, it’s always to do with people in Fenburgh. So in Stepford we’re going to sort of, well we won’t be outcasts but we’ll have to make friends with people in Stepford to be in with them...because like on Fridays (at the moment) everyone comes here, but on Fridays when we go to Stepford we’ll have to go to Stepford and stuff.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

Given this value attached to peer interactions, it is possible to understand the reactions that some of the young people had to the organisation of individual’s within the field of school. The field was seen to structure the contact that was possible between friends by grouping individuals into forms and subject classes, and, on occasion, this necessitated that peer groups were segregated and new peer contacts made. As Lara commented, ‘you become more friendly with the people that are in your groups’. The hierarchy of positions in the structure of the field of school has already been established, yet the field of peers is also stratified in relation to the possession of



relevant capital (Soudien, 2001). Young people are organised into groups and sub-groups on the basis of social types and interests (e.g. the ‘Slipknot lads’ at Thornhill school<sup>11</sup>), and the location of these clusters in relation to the dominant cliques can strongly influence their social experiences (Adler & Alder, 1998)<sup>12</sup>. In choosing a group of peers that share similar tastes or characteristics, young people increase their chances of acquiring cultural and social capital. As such, hobbies, fashion, particular tastes in music, and even race are all factors in stratifying peer groups, and help to construct and reproduce elements of an individual’s habitus. Soudien (2001) has suggested that the almost instinctive self-segregation of young people on the basis of race within the school environment can reflect the embodiment of both societal and cultural norms. When viewed in this way, it is possible to account for the observation of a convent school teacher that the Asian girls tend to sit together despite efforts to integrate them, and Mike’s comment (and indeed Lloyd’s verification of it) that the latter ‘hangs around with Indians’ at school.

### ***6.8.2 The Significance of Shared Experiences: A Collective School Identity.***

The length of time that young people spend in the field of school, and hence in the company of their peers, is significant because it engenders a wealth of shared experience that is used within peer interactions. Significant memories and knowledge of key events act as social capital that is meaningful between friends, but which excludes those outside of the peer group (including, in the field of school, teachers). One particular way in which this was evident among the young people involved in this study, particularly the students from Fenburgh, was in their use of nicknames. These names, which were generally allocated to individuals by their peers on the basis of particular events or characteristics, were significant because they were seen to strengthen interpersonal bonds and contribute to the construction of social identity (Crozier & Sliopidou, 2002). The stories that the young people told within the focus group discussions were often nostalgic accounts of past experiences, but they also represented a particular ‘code’ that I, as an outsider, was unable to decipher. School trips, special events, and sporting occasions were all topics for this process of reminiscing, and framed a significant amount of the peer interactions within the focus groups. In addition to highlighting their achievements or indicating their possession of social capital (in the form of knowledge or status), however, these stories also often

revealed young people's construction of a collective school identity (evident through their use of pronouns such as 'we' or 'us'). As the following extract, in which Lara and Mia reminisce about a previous school trip, indicates:

Lara: The last school trip I went on was a French cuisine thing. It was actually really good because we were in our room, and apparently the manager hated us and he said that we were hanging out of the window with barely anything on, and so he cut the power off to our room! And when we told the teachers about it they were like 'well you were being really disruptive'...

Mia: Oh yeah.

Lara: Oh my god he hated us, because you know we were being really disruptive in his hotel.

(SACS, wk5b)

### 6.8.3 *Gender Issues within Peer Interactions in School.*

It has already been shown that there are gendered elements to young people's behaviour in the field of school, and the nature of peer interactions would appear to be a major factor here. It has been suggested that the structure of the school, and the individuals positioned in it, can impact the construction of gendered identities, and influence the behaviour of young people in the field (Connell, 1996; Francis, 2000; Frost, 2001). There is certainly evidence in the data to suggest that the young people were conforming to dominant societal and cultural notions of masculinity and femininity. For example, whereas the girls expressed concern over their appearance and the importance of working hard, the boys were more likely to display disruptive behaviour and distanced themselves from a focus on academic achievement. This situation would certainly appear to be reflected in the research suggesting that boys have a weaker allegiance to the norms of the school life than do girls, and the statistics showing that girls' achievements frequently surpass those of their male counterparts (Davies *et al*, 1998; Francis, 2000; Harker, 2000; Myhill, 2002). It also helps to explain, in part, the centrality of the body to the girls' experiences of the field of school. Whether they were reading fashion magazines at break times, worrying about how much food they were seen to eat, or comparing the size of their legs during PE lessons, it was evident that the girls were using their bodies to position themselves in the school context (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2001).



For the boys on the other hand, the nature of their peer interactions, grounded as they were in the competition for status and power, often manifested itself in the form of disruptive behaviour. These occurrences of ‘doing gender’ were constant attempts by the boys to out-do each other, and gain and maintain dominance among the peer group (Wight, 1994; Connell, 1996). There were obviously some differences between the schools in relation to gender issues, although the importance of interacting with the opposite sex was identified as a key theme in each site. There was a general perception that mixed sex schools offered a valuable opportunity for interaction and learning between genders that was not afforded individuals at private schools. However, some individuals at the two private schools also suggested that single sex education was more conducive to academic learning and achievement, and reduced some of the concern with the ‘opposite sex’ that young people around the age of adolescence are perceived to experience (Adler & Adler, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Frost, 2001). As Katie and Amadaia explained:

Amadaia: In some ways I wouldn’t like to go to a mixed school. I have been to a mixed school before.

Katie: I wouldn’t want to now really, would you?

Amadaia: Not in the respect that you can’t talk about certain things...and you’d be like totally obsessed by what you look like in the morning.

Katie: Yeah.

Amadaia: Well I am anyway because I see my boyfriend in the morning anyway, but I mean I’d be worse.

(SACS, wk 5a)

The presence of peers within the field of school presents yet another source of tension and conflicting objectives for young people to navigate their way through. These contradictions, which have been a key issue within each theme of this discussion, are now summarised in the final section.

## **6.9 CONTRADICTING VIEWS OF THE FIELD OF SCHOOL: ‘The best times of your life?’**

### **6.9.1 *Ambivalent Attitudes.***

This discussion has highlighted from the data some of the main themes associated with the field of school, and the young people’s experiences in it. An underlying issue throughout the discussion has been the ambivalence evident in the attitudes of the

young people to this field and, in conclusion, this final section attempts to clarify the main aspects of this debate. There were many issues upon which the young people had alternative views, and these differences of opinion were more often than not dependent on situation and context. For example, the attitudes of the young people to their teachers varied according to the personable nature of the interactions and degree of respect they were perceived to give the students (Coleman *et al*, 1997). In addition, for every constructive comment that was made in relation to the field there was generally an accompanying negative one to counteract it. Several authors have remarked upon the inconsistencies prevalent in young people's opinions of school, which are believed to be grounded primarily in the perceptible discord between individual desires and institutional goals (Jackson, 1968; Kirk, 1993; Marsland, 1993; Epstein & Johnston, 1998; Morrow, 2001). As such, it has been suggested that young people emerge from school with constructions of self that are 'the end products of a form of social compromise' (Soudien, 2001).

### ***6.9.2 A Dialect of Conformity and Resistance.***

A recurrent theme that was evident throughout the discussions regarding the field of school was that of conformity and resistance, which represented a characteristic feature of the field. The young people's conformity was most evident in their compliance to, and embodiment of, the school rules and norms, exemplified in the development of what could be considered a 'school-relevant' habitus. Their resolve to 'play by the rules' was not necessarily caused by an uncritical acceptance of school authority, but rather the fact that it reflected the most effective way of accumulating significant cultural capital. Through conforming to the demands of the field, the young people were able to develop a construction of self that was appropriate to the school environment. As an individual does not shed one subjectivity when they put another on, however, it is possible to see that there can be both conformity and resistance in the same situation (Widdecombe & Wooffitt, 1995; Dillon & Moje, 1998). There was certainly a great deal of resistance expressed by the young people regarding to the field of school, particularly in relation to its attempts at influencing their behaviour outside of the physical school environment. As Mike's comment indicated, 'they can't control us outside of school'. Given that 'none of us ever fully occupies only one subject position at a time' (Dillon & Moje, 1998 p. 217), it is possible to appreciate



that young people can simultaneously be positioned as ‘students’ and as ‘peers’ in the field of school. This situation can once again contribute to a tension between conformity and resistance, as young people attempt to follow the often conflicting paths that lead to being perceived as a ‘good guy’ or a ‘good student’ (Jackson, 1968).

### **6.9.3 *A Love-Hate Relationship?***

The field of school can be both positive and negative, enabling and constraining, and this can result in what Soudien (2001) has defined as ‘a profound ambiguity of self’ (p.325). On the one hand, for example, the young people expressed their dislike of the school because of its compulsory nature, obligatory uniform and intense management of their behaviour. Their lack of relative power within the field, and hence their capacity to bring about change, added to this sense of dissatisfaction and alienation (Fensham, 1986; Simmons & Wade, 1987). As Bob’s response to his father’s comment that school days should be thought of as ‘the best times of your life’ indicated, ‘I just *hate* it so much, I just want to get out of school’. On the other hand, the young people regarded the school as an important field because it equipped them for the future by providing them with the potential to accumulate cultural, and hence the potential for economic, capital. Furthermore, there were times when the young people assented to being proud of their schools, and indicated their commitment to a school identity by using terms such as ‘we’ or ‘us’ to describe the school as a whole in relation to others (Obidah, 1998). Despite the young people’s dissatisfaction with numerous aspects of the field there was also a concession, albeit reserved and often unconscious, that school was also an influential and important context. As a comment on Katie’s identity poster subtly revealed, ‘School takes up a lot of my time...I actually quite like school’.

## **6.10 SUMMARY**

The above discussion has highlighted the significant role that the field of school can be seen to play within the participants’ social experiences. It has also identified the field as a unique social environment in the eyes of these young people, being one that is artificial in nature, possesses official authority, and demands compulsory attendance. The chapter has outlined the field of school as a highly structured and regulated environment, in which the participants’ lowly position as ‘students’ was

seen to deny them the opportunity for autonomous action. Conformity to the rules and regulations of the school represented the best way for the young people to achieve appropriate capital, yet it also contributed to order and control within the field. Although the substantial overlap with the field of peers afforded the individuals an opportunity to attain a degree of independence (at least from official authority) within the back regions of the school site, the ultimate need for cultural capital, offered by the school and valued within society, necessitated a general degree of conformity. This situation was borne out in the ambivalent attitudes that the participants had regarding the field of school, and represents a dialect of conformity and resistance that is evident in each of these five analysis chapters. The school field was also shown here to play a significant role in the development of habitus and the construction of identities, through the participants' embodiment over time of the regulation of their movement, behaviour, and appearance. However, discrepancies between the required 'school identity' and their selected constructions of self within different fields were identified as a major source of contention, as the value and composition of physical capital varied from one context to another. This issue is returned to in chapter eight, when a discussion of the field of physical culture highlights the participants' negative reaction to school regulations regarding clothing for physical education lessons. Before that, however, it may be useful to look more closely at some of the issues relating to societal and cultural norms and ideals that have been highlighted as significant within the last three chapters. As such, we turn our attention to the media field, for as a pervasive context in which bodily ideals are produced and reproduced through various cultural channels, it presents itself as an important influence in relation to young people's construction of embodied identities.

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<sup>1</sup> There was also an evident hierarchy among the peer group, but this issue will be covered in section seven of this discussion. It is also examined in more detail in chapter five.

<sup>2</sup> While young people are positioned in a specific way within the field of school, they continue to hold those positions that they occupy outside of the field (Dillon & Moje, 1998). As such, they show themselves to be 'like people with multiple subjectivities elsewhere, adept in several, often discontinuous, environments' (Soudien, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> The issue of respect, and its importance to young people, is also discussed in chapter seven.

<sup>4</sup> A more detailed discussion of the issue of uniform can be found in section five of this analysis, when the regulation of bodies within the field of school is considered.

<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed later in this chapter, this time is often deemed important for accumulating capital in the peer network.

<sup>6</sup> The importance of economic capital, and its conversion to other forms of capital, within the peer group is discussed in both chapters five and seven.

<sup>7</sup> Lave and Wenger's (1991) perspective on the concept of learning outlines a situation in which the learner is seen to play an active rather than a passive role. Adopting a relational view in which agent, activity and world are interrelated, learning is viewed as an inherently social experience, i.e. it is



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situated, and the learner is thus perceived as a practitioner in a particular 'community of practice'. Through their ongoing membership, then, they are able to acquire knowledge concerning the skills, discourses and techniques central to the practices of the community (e.g. school), and hence establish an identity within the broader setting of that social context.

<sup>8</sup> The convent school, as with Thornhill school, could trace its history back a few hundred years.

<sup>9</sup> Although it is discussed more thoroughly in the 'physical culture' analysis section, it should also be noted that the girls at the convent school also expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the uniform that they were required to wear for their physical education (PE) lessons. Their PE kit was perceived to consist of 'gym knickers' and 'really short skirts' which were 'embarrassing' (Lara) and 'exposing' (Katie), and it made the young people extremely conscious of the gaze of others (Young, 1990; Kirk & Tinning, 1994). This issue has been the subject of much research in recent years, with the general belief that a more positive and constructive environment is required if young people are to benefit from their physical education experience (e.g. Vertinsky, 1992; Ennis, 1999; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> The significance of the overlap between the fields of school and peers is evident in the interconnectedness of the young people's experiences in both sites. As such, there are numerous overlaps between the 'peers' and 'school' analysis chapters (five and six).

<sup>11</sup> Slipknot are an American metal band who are prevalent within contemporary popular culture, and who are particularly popular among young people who would position themselves as 'grebos', 'skaters' or simply 'non mainstream'. The 'Slipknot lads' referred to those individuals within Thornhill school who listened to this music and who were positioned and positioned themselves as a distinct group on the basis of this trait.

<sup>12</sup> The popularity of specific groups or individuals in the field of peers is influenced by the field of media, which is often instrumental in determining the dominant norms and ideals that are used within the former field to decide the value of particular characteristics and resources (Anderson & Miles, 1999; Ralph *et al*, 1999). These normative values help to establish what is 'cool' and 'sad' in the field of peers, and among particular peer groups, and influence the positioning and practices of individual's in those sites. Those individual's with significant amounts of capital in these context have the potential to define and determine the legitimacy of particular tastes and practices, which tends to lead to the reproduction of dominant norms and ideals over time (Bourdieu, 1985a, 1986). These issues are discussed in more detail in chapters five and seven.

## Chapter Seven

# **‘It’s Just like There all the Time’: The Pervasive Influence of the Media Field in Shaping Young People’s Social Experiences**

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

‘Media today saturate our daily lives... (and function) as the cultural nervous system of modern society...Popular media today operate on a scale of inclusiveness unimaginable in earlier generations...(they create) the environment where identities are formed’. (Real, 1989 pp.13-15)

The previous three chapters have all highlighted the significance of societal and cultural norms and ideals in relation to the participants’ construction of self in different contexts. These norms and ideals have been shown to be produced and reproduced, in part, through the pervasive influence of media representations, and this chapter is intended to look more closely at this role of the media field as well as its influence within the social experiences of the young people more generally. The pervasive influence of the mass media within society has been well documented (Giddens, 1991; Kellner, 1992; Ralph *et al*, 1999; Scannell, 2000), and the media field was certainly seen to overlap, both implicitly and explicitly, with each of the other fields of interest to this study. For example, the participants shared information about films or television in school, clashed with their parents over a particular choice of music or clothing, conformed with peer group norms by buying into a particular ‘image’, or discussed sporting events that had been viewed on television. These issues, among others, are discussed within this chapter which aims to examine the identity work that is undertaken by young people within the media field. Given the extensive presence of the media in the lives of young people in contemporary society (Jenkins, 1996), and its unquestionable capacity to generate and present ideals and norms (Dillon & Moje, 1998), the potential to impact the construction of self is one that can neither be denied nor ignored. The following discussion is divided into eight main themes which deal with issues such as the young people’s use of the media, the



degree of autonomy that they have in this process, notions of conformity and resistance, and the generation (and appropriation) of images, ideals and stereotypes. It begins, however, with an examination of an issue that perhaps provides a basis for all of these others, i.e. the pervasive and ubiquitous influence of the media field in the social experiences of young people.

## **7.2 THE CENTRALITY OF THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘it’s just like there all the time...you’re just like susceptible to it’ (Mia)**

### ***7.2.1 The Pervasive Nature of the Media Field.***

There was a shared belief among the young people involved in the study that because the field of media influenced and informed almost every aspect of social life its importance was somehow irrefutable. Several researchers point to the way in which the field of media (in all its myriad forms) helps to structure reality for individuals, and affirm its central role in framing the everyday life of contemporary societies (Kellner, 1992; Jenkins, 1996; Scannell, 2000). The mention of contemporary society here is significant, for in an age of such global technological advancement the field of media can be seen to be a major potential influence and power, able to impact on more and more social contexts (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1996; Livingston, 1996). This situation creates a context that has implications for the construction of identities, because the mass of information generated by the media increases the available resources that young people can draw upon in this process. So just as contemporary notions of identity are characterised by fluidity and transience (e.g. Jenkins, 1996), the many and varied sources of information offered by the media are able to align themselves with the concept of complex, multi-faceted, and changeable identities desired, and indeed required, by individuals. As Kellner (1992) has said, ‘television and other forms of mass-mediated culture play key roles in the structuring of contemporary identity’ (p.148). The introduction to media resources from an early age has obvious implications for habitus because, as Livingston (1996) has argued ‘habits and ideas learned early in life are self-perpetuating and so disproportionately influence future development’ (p.318)<sup>1</sup>.

It can be seen then that the media field is a potentially powerful means of influencing the attitudes, tastes and behaviour of young people, in part thanks to the variety of mediums that make up the generic 'media'. The importance and centrality of the field to the young people in this study was made evident through the course of the focus group sessions, as they discussed television programmes, films, music, magazines and books, as well as media technology such as computers, mobile phones, internet sites and email. The media was a topic to which all individuals contributed, due perhaps to the fact that, thanks to its ubiquitous nature, this is a field with which all have some degree of experience and expertise<sup>2</sup>. Young people in contemporary Western society have grown up in something of a 'media age', when the development of new and improved media technology seems to be taking place at an ever-increasing rate (Ralph *et al*, 1999). As a result, they are often au fait with technological forms of media, and their engagement with it becomes second nature (Scannell, 2000). Data generated in this study would certainly seem to agree with the view of Holland (1996), in suggesting that young people can often surpass adults in terms of media awareness and technical competence. For the young people I talked to, this was viewed positively because they were able to take on the role of the 'expert' with their parents, their technical knowledge in a way providing them with a form of capital that allowed them to adopt this uncharacteristically elevated position. The following extract outlines a conversation in which this situation is discussed.

Carl: I actually kind of teach my dad on the computer because he's useless. We've got one of the newest kind of computers, it's the millennium edition and it's the newest.

Liz: I teach my mum.

Alex: My mum's useless...we got our (computer) for Christmas and my mum is just like, thick. She didn't know how to turn it on basically. It's like 'you press this big button here, and you press this'.

Liz: I was like 'mum, this is your keyboard. This is where you do most of your typing. This is a screen, you look at it'...you're like 'you do not touch this, this, this or this. Or we have no computer left'.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

Though the attitudes are at times patronising and condescending, the knowledge base of the young people comes through quite strongly. It is clear that they (almost) take for granted what are in effect quite specialised skills for an older generation, and find it hard to believe that others struggle with them.



### 7.2.2 *Informed Consumers of Popular Culture.*

Many of the young people's conversations in the focus group discussions seemed to negate the concerns expressed about the potential harm of the media to young people, by indicating that they can often be both knowledgeable and skilled users of the media (Gillen & Hall, 2001). The centrality of media to young people's experience cannot be denied, however, and in relation to this study the infiltration of aspects of popular culture into their peer group interactions confirms this fact. A great deal of discussion centred around what was 'in' and what was 'out', and there was generally agreement between the young people regarding this. Pahl (2001) has suggested that in this way popular culture can act as a form of cultural capital within the peer group, allowing individuals to gain status by possessing or aligning themselves with the most up-to-date topics, goods or opinions. It is perhaps not surprising then, given the interactive nature of the data collection process, that the young people spent some time discussing the previous night's episode of *EastEnders*, the latest antics of the inmates in the Big Brother house, or the likelihood of receiving a PlayStation 2 for Christmas. Even in those cases when they expressed dislike for the latest fad or phenomenon, there was no disputing the popularity of the craze. As the boys from Thornhill school explain in relation to the 'Harry Potter' books:

RH Well what's the hype about that then, because they're really big aren't they?

Lloyd: Everyone loves it, I don't know why.

Mike: I don't know. Because everyone says how well written they are, but I tried to read the first one and I found it the most boring book I've ever read.

Frederick: Everyone was going crazy weren't they.

Danny: And I know there's adults that like to read it.

Mike: I know. My friends dad likes to read them.

Lloyd: There's a new book that's just come out and there's a mile long queue just to get it.

(TBS, wk 1)

The pervasive nature of the media can also be seen in the way that young people don't have to have come into contact directly with something in order to understand what it is about. This was evident when I introduced the 'This is Your Life' biography task to a group at Fenburgh Community College, and although none of the group claimed to watch the programme they were able to explain the usual format of the show.

Likewise, Frederick was able to draw inspiration from a film that he had not actually seen.

RH What kind of things do you think are important?

Frederick: Just do what you can, seize the day.

RH It's like the film -

Frederick: Dead Poets Society, yeah.

RH Have you seen that?

Frederick: No, I've heard about it though.

(individual)

This section has presented, briefly, some of the factors that makes media a field central to young people's social experience, and has suggested that there is some value to be gained from an extensive engagement with the field and the resources that it has to offer. For example, it can allow young people to indulge and sustain their interests (e.g. supporting sports teams), help to produce and reproduce reality ('sometimes you can relate to stuff that's on TV' - Amadaia), and offer a means of improving the less attractive demands of other fields (e.g. homework). Young people's experiences in the media field would appear to be an important point of consideration in relation to the construction of identities, as from the focus group discussions in this study it was evident that much of the individual's leisure time was spent engaging with media forms (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Livingston, 1996). This engagement was both conscious, in terms of the amount of television watched, and unconscious, being implicit within their conversations regarding shopping, reading books and magazines, listening to music, texting friends and so on. The reference to peers here is pertinent, for the young people's experiences within the media field were very much part of an interactive process involving significant others. In relation to this issue, one of the main themes that arose from the data was the idea of the media as a means of establishing or maintaining contact between individuals. It is this notion of communication that is explored within the following section.

### **7.3 THE MEDIA FIELD FOR COMMUNICATION: 'If I don't have (my phone) then I feel that I've like lost contact with everyone' (Mia)**

#### **7.3.1 Mobile Communication.**



Through the young people's conversations regarding computers, mobile phones and the internet, there was a definite concern expressed regarding the need to keep in contact with other people. This was particularly true regarding keeping in touch with friends, and serves to highlight the importance of peer relations to young people (James, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998; Mota & Silva, 1999; Ungar, 2000). One of the central means of communication mentioned by the young people were mobile phones, which were seen to be useful for communication and management of social activities. Lara and Mia in particular talked a great deal about the benefits of mobiles, suggesting that they somehow help to establish a feeling of security.

Lara: I'm hooked to my phone...every time I go out I have to take it with me.

Mia: Oh, so do I.

RH Why is that?

Mia: I don't know, it's like communication. If I don't have it then I feel that I've like lost contact with *everyone*.

Lara: Yeah, in case anyone calls you or texts you.

Mia: Yeah because if you get a text and someone wants to call, someone wants to know where you are like to meet up or something then you know. I feel really isolated without my phone, or without *a* phone.

(SACS, wk 5b)

In this extract it can be seen that access to a mobile, or indeed any form of telecommunication, helps to provide a direct link to a support network. There are echoes here of Giddens' (1990, 1991) work regarding abstract systems, and the need by individuals for ontological security in a social climate that is seemingly ever-changing and unpredictable. Other researchers have also noted the influence of the changing nature of society on the degree of security encountered by young people, suggesting that in such a 'risk' society they can no longer rely upon traditionally 'stable' reference points when attempting to make sense of their experience (Beck, 1992; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). In this way, Lara and Mia's reliance upon their phones can be understood as an attempt to provide a degree of stability and reassurance. However, as mentioned above, it can also be perceived as a means of indirect regulation, establishing the whereabouts and social activities of peers and keeping individuals informed about important events via relationships that do not require co-presence. Given that knowledge of peer group affairs can act as significant social capital, it would appear as though mobiles were something of an essential tool for the contemporary adolescent. It is perhaps significant then that none of the young

people from Fenburgh owned their own phone, a situation that could be seen to reflect their lack of economic capital in relation to their independent school contemporaries. The implication could perhaps be drawn that these young people are somehow disadvantaged because they are unable to have such direct access to the peer group, but from their conversations it was evident that this was not necessarily the case. Instead it appeared that they simply worked with the resources that were available to them (email, landline telephones, increased direct contact with peers etc.) to create a similar communication network.

### *7.3.2 Computer Literate Individuals.*

The use of computers featured highly in young people's discussion of the media, and among their many functions was communication by email. All of the young people had some access to a computer, either through the home or school, and all mentioned being well versed in the art of emailing. In the following extract, Bob talks about the value of email as a form of communication, and also the need to keep up with developing communication technology.

RH Do you use email or anything like that?

Bob: Yeah, all of the time...it's really good. My mum has no clue how to use it. She keeps saying I should give her a class over the summer, but every summer she just sort of, she doesn't bother. She should though, because it's really important.

RH What is? Email?

Bob: Yeah. I think it is, because it's just so widely used now.

(individual)

This comment once again indicates that young people are often at the forefront of technological advances, but also suggests that the development of such skills can provide an individual with essential and transferable capital (e.g. economic capital in the workplace). Such capital can potentially influence an individual's future prospects, by impacting upon the habitus and hence framing the subject positions that are open to them and which they are able to occupy (Davies & Harré, 2000). An added advantage of advances in media communication is the ability to communicate over distance, and Giddens (1991) has pointed to the ability of contemporary technology to separate the dimensions of space and time, thus allowing for the articulation of disembedded social relations. The young people seemed to take these advancements for granted, and so, for example, Mia thought nothing of talking to her sister in Australia using the



internet, or texting her friends early in the morning when she couldn't sleep. The ability to communicate in such a way is legitimised in the minds of these young people because it forms part of their everyday experiences, and as such the skills and understanding form part of their habitus.

### 7.3.3 *Identities 'Under Construction'*

In addition to communicating with known individuals the internet can also provide young people with an opportunity to interact with strangers. There are implications here for the presentation of self (Goffman, 1990b) because such indirect communication affords individuals the opportunity to determine the nature of the information that is given. A conversation with the girls from the convent school demonstrates this point.

RH Would it be easier do you think to be honest about yourself if you're not face to face with someone?

Chloë: Mmm.

Mia: Yeah.

Katie: No, because I go into the chat rooms and I just lie, constantly.

Lara: Well I know but it's like fun though to make up who you are.

Katie: I once told someone that I was a model in a magazine (laughs). But to be fair to me that was only because he had told me that he was a member of a famous band (laughing). He wrote back and said 'that's great, we're both famous' and I said 'yeah, we're both liars as well'.

(SACS, wk 2)

This extract suggests that the medium of internet communication provides an opportunity for young people to take on alternative identities through the conscious and explicit construction of self, giving them a degree of agency that is not afforded in face-to-face interactions (Chandler & Roberts-Young, 2000). As Turkle (1997) has proposed, the internet can function as 'a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self' (p.180), and one in which individuals can move between an almost infinite number of potential identities. It perhaps opens up a way of allowing young people to occupy social positions that they would otherwise never have access to, and so in a way overcome the limitations of habitus (i.e. through disembodied interaction). In addition to this identity experimentation, the internet can also offer young people a means of expressing their own 'authentic' constructions of self, for example via personal web-pages or indeed through more discerning use of chat rooms (Turkle, 1997; Chandler & Roberts-

Young, 2000; Hodkinson, 2001). In this way individuals can use internet space to share their interests and opinions with others, although it must be remembered that identity is an ever-shifting medium in contemporary society and that these constructions of self are reflective of a particular context and time. As Chandler and Roberts-Young (2000) have proposed:

‘Web sites are frequently sign-posted as ‘under construction’, but the construction involved is, at least in part, that of their makers’ identities’  
(p.1)

An example from the data that illustrates the complexities of this involved a web-site created by Bob, one of the Thornhill boys. The web-site was concerned with Lara Croft, a character from ‘Tomb Raider’ which had, at one time, been Bob’s favourite computer game. However, although Bob’s website reflected his interests and identity at the time, the cultural environment had moved on. ‘Tomb Raider’ had lost its status (and hence social capital), in the eyes of the peer group at least, and it no longer aligned itself accurately with Bob’s reconstituted interests and attitudes. In fact, he was at some pains to distance himself from this topic because as a result he was exposed to the condescending attitudes of his (merciless) peers<sup>3</sup>. Although Chandler and Roberts-Young (2000) have suggested that the concept of personal homepages are well-adapted as a tool for the purpose of identity work in adolescence, there was some concern expressed by the young people as to the security of this medium in relation to sharing information about themselves. As Bob pointed out, ‘it’s a bit creepy having all your information there’. From this comment it is clear that there wasn’t a complete degree of trust in such ‘abstract systems’ (Giddens, 1991), and that the young people were expressing caution regarding communication with strangers that is not vis-à-vis others. This ‘unknown audience’ (Chandler, 1998) is a problematic variable, and seems to bring into sharp relief the immensely public nature of internet communication. However, despite this concern it was clear that the young people would continue to use these media resources, because in addition to enabling them to interact with one another they also allowed for the communication of knowledge and information (i.e. significant cultural capital). The transmission of information in the media field forms the focus of the following section.



## 7.4 THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE MEDIA FIELD: 'It's a fact that....'

### 7.4.1 *Being Informed by Media Resources.*

It has been established that contemporary society is characterised in one respect by the pervasive influence of the media. Consequently, a ubiquitous display of images, ideals and knowledge is ever present within the social experience of young people, providing an almost limitless source of information (Dillon & Moje, 1998; Smith, 2000). Some researchers point to the negative influence of this on young people, suggesting that an exposure to what can often be an unregulated wealth of knowledge, ultimately contributes to a loss of innocence and the 'disappearance of childhood' (Postman, 1994). Whether this view, based perhaps on an idealistic or nostalgic view of childhood (Hodge & Tripp, 1986) is wholly accurate, or if in fact young people are discerning users of media resources (Gillen & Hall, 2001), one factor remains indisputable; the media provides a major source of information for young people in contemporary society. Moreover, the data generated through this research appears to confirm the view held by Messenger-Davies and Machin (2000), among others, that young people actively seek education from the media.

RH How do you know all of this stuff?

Amadaia: I watch and read, I read loads that's why. I read so much, everything I can get my hands on at the minute. Magazines, newspapers, books, anything. I actually bought a newspaper for me, personally, at the weekend. I was like 'oh my god what am I doing?'. I bought two magazines and a newspaper.

(SACS, wk 5a)

It was a common perception among the young people that some aspects of the media were intended for education, and there were a number of illustrations of this within the data. For example, television programmes were occasionally seen to give an insight into social life in other cultures, keep individuals in touch with current affairs, or provide information on how to behave in difficult situations. The potential value of media forms mirroring young people's experiences in this way has been highlighted by a number of authors, who perceive it to represent an important socialising influence (Cranny-Francis & Gillard, 1990; Messenger-Davies & Machin, 2000, Jarvis, 2001). Furthermore, media resources also allowed the young people in this study to gather

knowledge about topics that were of importance and interest to them. One such example for the girls at the convent school regarded the issue of body image, and more specifically the concept of anorexia<sup>4</sup>.

Amadaia: Lena Zavaroni, she was anorexic at like ten...she died of (it). I watched a documentary on her it was really scary actually.

Katie: She was anorexic?

Amadaia: Yeah she had really bad anorexia because she was a really famous kid and she was on 'Opportunity Knocks' and everything like that. She was really, really good and she had like an amazing voice, but she died because she went into hospital for this neuro brain surgery thing to help her, because she felt that she wasn't really on earth or something like that, weird. And then unfortunately after the operation she got a problem with her lungs and because she was like anorexic and really really skinny, she couldn't fight off the infection so she died...I read this book about a girl who got (anorexia) when she was four and thought she was fat, and she had it until she was twenty-two.

(SACS, wk 3)

In this extract it is evident that Amadaia has been informed by her engagement with particular media resources, and there were many other examples of this media education within the data. On one or two occasions, however, individuals made statements beginning 'it's a fact that...', suggesting that the media field was being viewed not only as a provider of information but as an authoritative source of knowledge (Livingston, 1996). Indeed, the fact that the information had been acquired via this field was often perceived as a means of confirming its validity. As such, Mike was able to claim with confidence that David Beckham 'wears Posh Spices' knickers' because 'she said it on the Big Breakfast'. Humour aside, however, an inordinate belief in the material presented by the media has been identified as a cause for concern, and has led to a belief that young people are being duped by what they see and hear (Nava & Nava, 1990). One example of this from the data involved the belief in star signs by the girls at the convent school. This source of information was seen not only as an indicator of possible future events, but was also linked to their understanding of self through a perceived connection with their 'natural' personality. As the following extract suggests:

Katie: Oh, can I read that after you please? (referring to a particular magazine) because I want to get my star sign thingy out. I quite agree with star signs, because mine are always right.

Amadaia: Mine are.

Mia: Yeah mine are.



Katie: I mean it's really freaky. My mum goes to me 'it's only because that they're not written for each person, they're written so they can apply to anybody', but I don't think they are. I think they're good...My friend was reading something to me last night about the kind of person I was, this star sign, and it was *so* the same as what I am. It's really scary.  
(SACS, wk 2)

#### 7.4.2 *The Value of Media Generated Information within the Peer Group.*

That the young people assimilated information from the media has thus been established, but what use did they make of this information? To a large extent, the knowledge acquired via the media acted as a form of cultural capital that was translated into social capital within the peer group. In other words, much of the information gathered via television, magazines, books, or music was 'stored' for use within peer conversations. A number of researchers have discussed the importance of media use among friendship groups, and have suggested that it can help to create a 'common language' within peer interactions (Adler & Adler, 1998; Anderson & Miles, 1999). Whether it is gossip regarding the activities of celebrities, the outcomes of sports matches, or the latest fashion news, it can generally be aired and shared within the peer group. In addition to being an indicator of the extent to which an individual is 'up-to-date' with the latest trends, if this information is something that is not known by others it affords a degree of status in which the individual is able to take on the role of the 'informer'. Amadaia appears to be positioned by Katie in this role, when she explains that 'Amadaia is just in with the gossip, I get it from her'. In this way, the informer is guaranteed the attention of the group, at least if the information that they claim to have proves to be valid and interesting.

The ideas and messages presented through the media can thus help to inform a young person's constructions of self, both collectively (i.e. in relation to the peer group) and individually (their own identity work) by providing resources with which this can be done. In this way, however, it offers young people a degree of autonomy. For, despite some adult attempts to regulate access to 'negative' aspects of the media, young people often have a greater amount of freedom in this field compared to those that are more closely guarded e.g. family and school. Young people are therefore able to learn from material that adults may find inappropriate, and as such become informed about issues that they would otherwise be prevented from knowing. The following

conversation illustrates this, and also indicates the satisfaction that the young people gain from having access to 'adult' information.

RH How do you think that (music) influences you?

Alex: Because I get to learn most of my stuff off songs.

Carl: Yeah I do.

RH So what kind of things do you learn from songs?

Alex: Have you ever heard of TuPac? He died in 1996. He's like, I've just learnt a lot of stuff because of what he raps about.

Carl: Yeah, it's a bit rude so we can't mention it.

Liz: So like with Eminem you learnt swear words if you don't already know them.

Carl: And with Limp Bizkit. Their songs are like cool but -

Alex: They're classic, I love them.

Liz: But don't play them round your mum or dad.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

The peer group can again be seen to perform an important function here, by providing a space in which young people can share such 'illicit' knowledge. For some of the young people the peer group was the only place in which this could take place, either because of parental regulation (parents not allowing children to own music with explicit lyrics) or limited economic capital (not having the money to buy music, magazines etc. themselves). Once again the issue of unequal access to media resources is raised, along with the accompanying implication that restriction to important cultural resources can decrease the capital that young people are able to accumulate and hence limit the particular positions they are able to occupy within the peer group (Frith & Gleeson, 2001). On the other hand, those with greater access to these resources (a greater degree of freedom) are able to transfer this cultural capital into social capital and occupy more influential positions in peer interactions. Having said this, a number of authors have queried the extent to which young people are able to have the freedom to direct their own leisure pursuits (Rojek, 1989; Griffin, 1993) and the influence of adult authority and regulation is an issue that cannot be over-looked.

This section has highlighted how the media field educates and informs young people, and has begun to explore the value of this information as capital within social interactions. The following section takes up some of these issues now, with a tightened focus on the visual information that is transmitted through the media field.



## 7.5 THE PROMOTION OF IMAGE IN THE MEDIA FIELD: 'what you should wear or how you should look' (Simon)

### 7.5.1 *An Image Saturated Era.*

Postman (1994) and Fiske (1996), among others, have argued that we live in an image-saturated era in which we are constantly bombarded by cultural ideals and values. Given this situation, and the important role that the visual is deemed to play in the social experience of young people (Berger, 1972; Tinning & Fitzclarance, 1992), it is perhaps unsurprising that the individuals in this study made so many references to media representations. The pervasiveness of media images makes them universally accessible and recognisable, and as such provides a useful means of illustrating conversations. For example, when Frederick refers to a boy at their school as 'the Matrix guy', the others in the group are able to identify the individual concerned because of a coat that he wears that is similar to that worn by the actor Keanu Reeves in the film 'The Matrix'. The identity poster research activity provided a useful way of tapping into the young people's opinions regarding this aspect of the media, and helped to highlight the role that it plays in promoting specific images and influencing the construction of identities.

### 7.5.2 *Being Fashion Conscious.*

One area that was obviously influential for the young people in this respect was that of fashion. Fashion was both something that the young people were acutely aware of, and in which they invested a great deal of personal and economic resources. Ever since marketing people in 1940's America 'invented' the 'teenager', there has been an increasing awareness of the spending power of young people, and consequently companies and organisations have begun to target the 'teenage' population with advertisements for their products (Gunter & Furnham, 1998; MacQueen, 2000). The conception of young people as consumers is one that has received much attention (and indeed continues to do so), and has led to the belief that consumption provides a primary source of self-expression and identity in contemporary society (Giddens, 1991; Kellner, 1995; Miles *et al*, 1998; Anderson & Miles, 1999; Ralph *et al*, 1999). Kirk (1993), for example, has suggested that 'media in consumer culture plays a crucial role in the formation of subjectivities, of people's sense of themselves' (p.18).

As a result of such media attention, young people have become extremely skilled at reading these representations and keeping up with the latest trends (Frith & Gleeson, 2001).

RH So what's fashionable at the moment?

Mia: Stripes and bright colours, and big necks.

Lara: Yeah and there's quite big stuff, like jumpers with big roll down necks, and big coats and things.

Amadaia: Hats as well actually.

Mia: Yeah, stripy hats and stripy scarves that match. (laughing)

Lara: I think people are going back to like the seventies, like flares and platforms and stuff.

Amadaia: I like that, I like flares. I've got some jeans that are flower power jeans, they're really cool. So I ripped holes in them and made them look trendy...I just got some scissors and cut it, and then you have to rip it and make it look like, I don't know, it's just been done.

(SACS, wk 3)

The importance of 'getting it right' when it came to fashion and clothing was heavily connected with the presentation of self within the peer group (and wider social contexts) and the value of physical capital. Clothes, body image and even hair colour it would appear, are imbued with cultural meaning (implying status, value or particular lifestyle choices) and provide a means by which an individual can acquire (or indeed lose) capital within the peer group (Adler & Adler, 1998; Frith & Gleeson, 2001; Frost, 2001)<sup>5</sup>. In order to acquire (or consolidate) this physical capital an individual has to present an image that is considered 'cool', which often means purchasing those products or brands that are currently in fashion. As McKendrick *et al* (2000) have said, 'children's clothing...is not merely a functional necessity, but also provides, through the 'right' label, a sense of identity and esteem' (p.296). Given this importance of image in the development of both individual and collective identities, and the necessity for visible capital in the peer group (Miles *et al*, 1998), there are once again implications for the unequal access that young people have to media resources. As the young people pointed out, clothes and music are expensive and they often don't have the material resources to purchase them. Indeed, the money that they do have often comes from their parents, and as such they don't always have complete freedom in saying how it is spent. The young people from Fenburgh discussed such a situation in relation to the issue of sports clothing, explaining what happened if their parents (who were perceived to be out of touch with peer culture norms) were in charge of the purchasing.



Liz: I can't trust my mum with clothes or anything, she'll go and buy me something 'really nice and pretty', but it's something like I used to wear when I was five years old. God don't go there!

Alex: That's about the only thing I can't trust my mum with, trainers.

Carl: Yeah.

Alex: She'd come back with something like Matchmakers.

Liz: Yeah some brand you've never heard of.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 2)

Frith & Gleeson (2001) have suggested that individuals' constructions of self are limited by their access to economic capital (money), and that this in turn influences the degree to which they can acquire physical capital (clothing) that can be translated into social capital i.e. status within the peer group (Shilling, 1993). Smith (2000) also voiced this concern when he suggested that, in a society where identities are increasingly being determined in the global market, an individual's limited access to such a key resource can clearly present problems. Following the argument presented here, a situation in which young people are denied access to relevant physical capital could reduce the subject positions that are available to them, and ultimately restrict the constructions of self that they are able to build.

### *7.5.3 Affiliation to Image Cultures and the Construction of Self.*

This promotion of fashion, however, is not simply a case of promoting brands or selling products. The representations offered by the media do not stand alone, but are imbued with meaning and attempt to produce specific identities through association with certain traits and values (Kellner, 1992; Anderson & Miles, 1999). In this way, the images can be thought of as offering potential subject positions for young people to occupy, and concepts such as fashion can function for young people as an expression of identity (Kellner, 1992; Pietrass, 1999). The reflexive organisation of the self has come to be viewed as an important feature of contemporary social life, and due to the falling away of traditional signs of identity (such as class or biography) increased importance is given to embodied identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993). The role of the media in this process is alluded to by Pietrass (1999).

'The reflexive organisation of the self becomes increasingly important as a feature of social life – not because it did not exist previously...but because the tremendous expansion of mediated symbolic materials has



opened up new possibilities for self-formation and placed new demands on the self in a way and on a scale that did not exist before'. (p.212)

The media thus offer an almost endless amount of information to individuals, an immediate and accessible resource to be utilised in the construction of identities. Not only do young people assimilate information from the media in this construction of self, however, they also buy into (literally) media generated 'image cultures'. These 'identity packages' were mentioned by the young people, and seemed to represent a virtual reference group. Some research indicates that these groups function as 'teenage tribes', and the media seems to promote them as contemporary youth subcultures (Daily Telegraph, 2002). The images that were foremost in the conversations of the young people were those of 'grebos', 'townies' and 'goths', and these represent interpretations of youth cultures that are currently highly visible in society (Hodkinson, 2001). Affiliation with these groups meant conformity to particular norms and ideals, and influenced among other things an individual's idiom, attitudes, choice of clothing, and musical tastes, all of which took on symbolic meanings (Miles *et al*, 1998; Widdecombe & Wooffitt, 1995). As Simon suggested, 'whatever you do it kind of shapes how, I suppose how you dress in a way and how you act'.<sup>6</sup> In effect, affiliation with a particular 'image culture' required the adoption of a specific 'habitus', although this affiliation is perhaps somewhat more superficial and intentional than Bourdieu's definition of the concept. It is a case of individuals conforming to set ideals in order to acquire the necessary social and cultural capital to position themselves in a specific way. The legitimacy of this social positioning is determined by the confirmation of others in the same position that certain criteria have been met (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Goffman, 1990b; Jenkins, 1996).

#### 7.5.4 'Grebos' vs. 'Townies'.

In order to illustrate some of these issues it may be useful to draw upon the examples of Mike and Danny, who described themselves as 'grebo' and 'townie' respectively. In order to affirm the 'grebo' aspect of his identity Mike explained that he was 'into' in skateboarding (spelt 'sk8'), liked Rock and Metal music, and wore baggy trousers, skate shoes ('because that's what you wear when you skate') and t-shirts of his favourite bands (Slipknot, Korn and Machine Head). Danny's 'townie' identity on the other hand, meant that he liked to go shopping and clubbing, listened to 'normal'



Dance or House music, and dressed 'a bit smarter' in labelled goods. The commitment to the image is displayed in more than these visual signs, however, as the following conversation illustrates.

Danny: I think that on some issues people don't mind being normal, but on others they might *want* to be different or might *want* to be normal. In different things people might want to be normal.

Mike: Yeah, because like music for me, I wouldn't say that I listened to *normal* music, I don't know, like Stereophonics or something. I don't listen to them. So people think that I don't listen to normal music because I don't listen what the majority of people listen to.

(TBS, wk 2)

Mike's insistence that he doesn't listen to 'normal' music can be seen as an extension of his 'grebo' or 'skater' image, which is promoted as being one that emphasises individuality and resistance of the norm (Beal, 1995). It is evident then that the commitment to particular image 'cultures' can be quite strong, although those within and outside of them do not always view them in the same way.<sup>7</sup> The media are quick to recognise and promote the most popular aspects of youth culture, but their promotion of them is not always wholly accurate and can lead to stereotyping. Given that the media field has been known to play a major role in the problematisation of 'youth' (Garratt, 1997), it is perhaps not surprising that its representations of youth cultures are potentially inaccurate. The individuals in this research were themselves very aware that as young people they were stereotyped and judged by adults. For the most part the belief was that they were judged to be either evidently or potentially deviant, an accusation that was strongly refuted.

RH Does it annoy you that papers and things like that talk about young people of today -?

Mike: Yeah, I think it's a joke, because generally the editors or the people who put the stories out, they're like about fifty and they don't have a clue about what they're talking about. Some of the stuff they come out with is just funny. Some of the things they say, it's just like so stupid.

RH What would you say to them then, if you had the chance? If you had the opportunity to put them straight, what would you say, what kind of things would you talk about?

Mike: I don't know, it's just they don't seem to understand anything that's actually happened with the majority of people. They just like talk about like the one percent that they know about. They don't talk about the whole country.

Danny: You can't really talk about the whole of the youth because

everyone's so different. You can't talk about the youth of today being really bad or something, because some of it is maybe but some of it isn't.

Mike: The majority of us are actually quite civilised people.

Danny: You can't talk about every young person in the same way.

Mike: It's like some of the stereotypes people have as well, are really bad.

RH How do they stereotype young people?

Mike: Well, I skateboard and I listen to the music I listen to and I dress like I do. And some people just think that I'm going to hurt them or something, because of what I do. It's just like I won't, but people think that. In my village there's lots of old people, and I don't know. I don't know if they're scared of me or what.

(TBS, wk 1)

This issue of stereotyping is not straightforward, however, but appears to be full of contradictions. For example, they are both media generated and media condemned, young people are happy to buy into them but dislike the implication that they have no autonomy, and although they dislike being stereotyped themselves they are happy to employ such beliefs to stereotype others. Perhaps the issue here is concerned with who is doing the labelling, for if young people choose to position themselves in a specific way it appears to be much more acceptable than if someone else positions them. This would seem to suggest that the concept of stereotyping is not wholly negative. Indeed several researchers have made this point, and suggest that stereotypes can in fact help to provide young people with a sense of belonging (James, 1993; Jenkins, 1996).

The images presented through the field of media then have a powerful influence on young people's construction of identity. As such, there is a general concern regarding the quality of information that is made available. A vast body of literature exists concerning the 'media effects debate', and while the majority of academic research detects little or no direct influence of 'anti-social' images on the behaviour of young people (Buckingham, 1993; Livingston, 1996; Gunter & McAleer, 1997) the general secular opinion tends towards 'moral panic'. Despite acknowledging that the media is often the 'scapegoat for cultural anxieties' (Livingston, 1996), there is some concern over its capacity to reproduce dominant cultural ideals. This is particularly true in relation to gendered ideals of body image, and it is to this subject that we now turn.



## **7.6 THE PROMOTION/REPRODUCTION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘no matter what people say, everybody judges people by the way they look’ (Lara)**

### ***7.6.1 Conforming to Gender Stereotypes regarding Image.***

In the previous section we have seen how media representations regarding image provide an extremely influential resource for young people in their constructions of self. The nature of the discourses offered to young people is therefore an important point to consider, particularly in a society that places such emphasis on embodied identity. The messages offered in relation to body image obviously vary for males and females, as do the meanings that are associated with them via chains of signification (Williamson, 1978). The way in which young people are positioned in the market place is heavily gendered, with advertisements and products often being specifically designed and targeted at either males or females. Concern has been expressed over the role that the media plays in the construction of such meanings, particularly given that they generally promote and reproduce existing social order, i.e. masculine domination and female subordination (Kellner, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Frost, 2001). It has been suggested that this reproduction of social ideals can serve to increase an individual’s ontological security, by allowing them to confirm things ‘as they have always been’ (Frost, 2001). Within the focus groups, there was a definite sense of young people conforming to these norms and ideals, and this seemed manifest itself in two main ways; the boys’ objectification of women and concern with affirming their masculinity, and the girls’ concern with body image and their conformity to dominant definitions of beauty.<sup>8</sup>

### ***7.6.2 ‘Normal’ Male Behaviour: The Boys’ Objectification of Women.***

Both in the selection of pictures and in the conversations within the focus groups, there was an indication of the boys’ objectification of women. For these young people, there was very much an implication that this represented ‘normal’ behaviour and that, being male, they were expected to view women in such a way. Indeed, the nature of male magazines certainly seems to make this belief a logical conclusion to draw. Female images within the media, and particularly in forms of media specifically designed for men, have tended to position women in a sexual manner as objects of the

male gaze (e.g. Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Frost, 2001). These opinions can be seen to be reproduced through the comments of the boys, which were generally concerned with how sexually attractive they believed particular women to be. The language that they used was often derogatory, terms such as 'fine', 'dog' and 'ho' being some of the main labels used.

[in reference to American singer Jennifer Lopez]

Lloyd: See how fat her arse is, it looks like she's got the hugest arse in the world.

Mike: Jennifer Lopez is fine.

RH Fine?

Mike: Yeah, she is.

RH Now fine, is that -?

Mike: Fine as in *fine* (elongated)

Lloyd: Fine as in *yeah* (elongated)

(TBS, wk 3)

The use of such vocabulary can perhaps be understood in this case as an attempt to gain status within the peer group (after all it would be considered 'choice' language to use in front of a female visitor to the school), but also as a public confirmation of heterosexual masculinity. Many of the boys' discussion involved a rejection of homosexual behaviour (hence the negative connotations when something was labelled 'gay'), and an attempt to distance themselves from anything that may lead to a questioning of their sexuality<sup>9</sup>.

### **7.6.3 'Normal' Female Behaviour: The Girls' Concern with Image.**

The issue of body image was the primary topic of discussion with the girls involved in this study. The use of the magazine exploration task was particularly useful in terms of exploring this particular area, as magazines can act as 'cultural channels through which meanings of women's bodies are constructed and communicated' (Oliver & Lalik, 2001 p.309). This may, in part, help to explain the centrality of body image in the girls' discussions, although there is a great deal of research that helps to confirm the general importance of this issue to young women (e.g. Vertinsky, 1992; Bordo, 1993; Frost, 2001). The significance of image here is tied in to the issue of identity, and the importance within contemporary society of the body as a site for constructing an understanding of self (Bordo, 1993; Shilling, 1993; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). The girls often talked of the importance of appropriate presentation of the self and first



impressions in social interactions, indeed it appeared to be a central part of their habitus. As Lara commented, for example, 'no matter what people say, everybody judges people by the way they look...even if they don't mean to do it it's just how they think'.

Given this concern to present an 'appropriate' and 'acceptable' image, it is easy to understand the significance that the girls give to the media. As a pervasive and image-based field, it provides an influential and accessible cultural resource to which they can make reference in their identity work. As mentioned above, however, the images offered to women by the media are not equally valued and those given most significance tend to reproduce and reinforce dominant notions of femininity. Such notions determine concepts of beauty and perfection, and highlight the need for a slim, attractive and flawless body (Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Frost, 2001). This socially determined ideal body is then imbued with status, and serves as a model of perfection to which women can compare themselves. In this way the body can be understood as a form of physical capital, with individuals seeking to maximise the amount of such capital available to them in order to ensure a favourable conversion to social capital (Shilling, 1991). The implication of this situation is, however, that those who are unable to live up to these ideals are limited in terms of the physical capital they can acquire. The concern expressed by many authors is that in this 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1983) the majority of young women are unable to conform to the unattainable images of perfection promoted via the media, and as such are in danger of viewing their own bodies as somehow deficient (Oliver & Lalik, 2000, 2001; Frost, 2001). As such, the body becomes a 'project' (Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993) and women feel compelled to undertake the practice of 'body work' in order to bring themselves in line with the 'norm'. Linking with Foucault's (1980, 1991) notions of power and discourse, this encouragement of bodily self-regulation can be understood as a form of implicit governmentality and as indicative of an internalisation of the locus of corporeal control (Kirk, 1994). Much research concerned with analysing girls' and women's magazines has suggested that the images and behaviours promoted are those which help to promulgate traditional sex roles and definitions of femininity (McRobbie, 1982, 1994; Tait & Carpenter, 1999; Tait, 2000). As such they function as a form of corporeal control, encouraging young people to manage their appearance and behaviour in order to present socially



acceptable and docile bodies (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989). One example from the data that highlights this point quite well is Amadaia's reference to what she called a 'girls' night in tin'. It emerged that this was in effect a box of beauty products (nail varnish, beauty treatments, cosmetics, etc.) commercially packaged and specifically designed for girls to use in collective body work. Building upon the notion of the nature of girls' friendship groups and the 'culture of the bedroom' highlighted in chapter five (Frith, 1978; Frost, 2001), this (typically astute) move by the media encourages young women to engage in work on the body and helps to perpetuate stereotyped images of beauty.

#### *7.6.4 The Girls' Reading of the Media Field: Ambivalence regarding the Perceived Degree of Influence.*

In order to illustrate some aspects of this theory it may be useful to draw upon examples from the data. Several researchers have highlighted the significance of the body to young women, particularly in light of the changes that occur during adolescence, and refer to the importance of comparisons with others (Oliver & Lalik, 2001). Comparison with others was certainly a practice that the girls engaged in, both within and outside of the peer group, and appeared to be as much of an exercise in judging relative amounts of physical capital as anything else. This consequently allowed them to position themselves and others appropriately within the social context. It was clear that the girls were influenced by media representations of beauty and physical attractiveness through their conversations, which often alluded to a desire to be thin and beautiful ('I'd love to look like her', 'I'd kill for hair like that', 'she's so pretty' etc.). However, there was also an evident note of discord that seemed to condemn the power of the media to influence individuals in such a way.

RH Do you think the media influences you?

Katie: Yeah they do because they get a model and like this model has got the latest clothes, she's skinny that's why she's a model, she's got the best make-up and the best hair...it advertises you to buy it.

(SACS, wk 3)

Despite this assertion that they disapproved of media attempts to coerce them, however, the girls seemed to buy into the norms and ideals that it promoted.

Liz: If you go up to a girl and go 'hi, what's your look?' she'll go 'thin',



and you go 'why?' and she says 'I just want to'. And you go 'what would your ideal figure be?' she'll go 'big tits and really thin'.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 2)

In some cases this acceptance of representations was stronger than in others, and on occasion had lead to some interesting interpretations of 'reality'.

RH Is it good then to be thin then?

Amadaia/Katie: Yeah.

Lara: Well, I don't like people who are *really* skinny because they're -

Mia: It's stereotyped though, to be skinny.

Katie: No not really skinny but a nice shape with no hips.

Lara: No! Because I actually think, in a way I kind of think that having curves actually is attractive.

Katie: No but it's not, it's not.

Amadaia: There's a point to having wide hips, because it means you can have children better.

Katie: I know, but you can't have children unless you find a boyfriend can you, and you're not likely to find a boyfriend with huge hips.

Mia: Yeah, but you can still have children if you've got small hips.

Amadaia: No, but you can have children easier.

Lara: But I mean if you just had like a straight body, then it wouldn't be, you wouldn't be able to like, I don't know. I just think that having like curves can be quite appealing.

Mia: I just think it's a bit weird, because hips like go in and then they're (thin people) like straight, and you're like (that's not right).

Katie: I don't know, I think I'd rather have no hips, because you can't wear anything if you have hips. (laughing)

Mia: That's true actually, if you have big hips and a small waist then you can't get any trousers to fit, they don't make them.

Katie: I can't, right you know New Look, New Look in my size is just right in the waist but too small over the hips. And then if I get a size bigger it's just right over the hips and too small round the waist, so I can't win really.

(SACS ,wk 2)

Within this conversation a number of issues are raised. On the one hand it indicates a complete acceptance by Katie of the discourse that equates beauty with being thin. However, it also shows that these dominant definitions of femininity and physical attractiveness are seemingly in conflict with their understanding of the 'natural body'. In fact, the media representations are deemed 'normal' (possessing legitimate capital) and hence render an individual's own body deficient (lacking legitimate capital). Some concern has been expressed over this tendency for girls to denounce the 'natural' body, and the implications that this has for their behaviour (Oliver & Lalik,



2000). Within the above extract, the other girls attempted to reason with Katie, suggesting that her view was inaccurate. However, Katie's response was to indicate that in order to maximise social capital (i.e. by having fashionable clothes, being physically attractive, or getting a boyfriend), it is in fact essential to conform to media ideals.<sup>10</sup> The perceived compulsion to view the body as an unfinished project can be seen to some extent as an unconscious response by the girls, for the way that people treat their bodies is indicative of 'the deepest dispositions of the habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984). Taking this into consideration, many have expressed concern over the potential danger of what are often unattainable and highly gendered images available within the media. The cause of contention here is perhaps related to the degree to which young women are deemed able to critically evaluate the ideals presented. There was some ambivalence in the data regarding this issue, with the girls on one hand claiming that they themselves decide what is beautiful or attractive:

RH Who decides what's pretty and what's not though, because some people have different ideas?

Mia: I don't think anyone decides.

Amadaia: No, nobody *decides*.

Lara: You decide yourself.

(SACS, wk 2)

While on the other each expressing remarkably similar conceptions of these issues to each other. It is perhaps in its ability to promote cultural images in such a subtle way that the real power of the media field lies. The girls, although extremely responsive to media generated images, were still aware of the manufactured and contradictory nature of the field. As Mia pointed out in a discussion concerning media promotion of being thin as ideal.

Mia: But I mean it's really hypocritical because in magazines they talk about how the media uses too many skinny models and how everyone's anorexic now. And then yet you know you turn the page and they've got like a fashion spread of this like really stick insect girl, and it's like, you know (shakes her head).

(SACS, wk 5b)

It is evident then that young women still possess a degree of control, at least in the interpretation of media representations concerning body image. However, the key issue still remains the degree to which they are able to exercise resistance to these dominant ideals and, perhaps more importantly, the desire that they have to actually



do this. As Frost (2001) has suggested, it is clear that girls gain some degree of satisfaction and self-confidence from engaging in technologies of the self, and as such cannot be regarded purely as the victims of a repressive regime.<sup>11</sup> In the light of such a complex situation it has been suggested that, instead of an outright condemnation of the current climate, there is a need for promoting critical reflection among young women regarding the reading of media discourses of image (Cranny-Francis & Gillard, 1990; Ang & Hermes, 1996; Oliver & Lalik, 2000, 2001; Frost, 2001). It is hoped that this approach, in addition to the promotion of more realistic images of bodies through the media, can help to promote a healthier attitude of young women towards the issue of body image. It is to the notion of role models, implied here, that we now look.

## **7.7 CELEBRITIES AND ROLE MODELS IN THE MEDIA FIELD: ‘People you model yourself on’ (Mia)**

### ***7.7.1 The Value and Appeal of Role Models.***

A central feature of much of the young people’s discussions within the focus group, whether the topic was related specifically to the field of media or not, was references to celebrities or role models. These were individuals, primarily from the music, film or sporting worlds, who the participants particularly revered or admired. In this respect the media field represents a useful point of reference, as it provides a means of easy ‘access’ to these individuals. Sarobol and Singhal (1999) have suggested that identification is a key feature when looking at role models, and argue that this identification is enhanced when role models are perceived as being attractive or similar in some way to the individual concerned. However, it would appear from the comments made by the young people here that, in addition, this attraction also lies in a desire to follow their example. Such a situation of identification and emulation was expressed through comments that the individuals made concerning people that they ‘worshiped’, ‘idolised’ or ‘modelled’ themselves on. The media certainly satisfies young people’s apparent need for such role models, and it has been suggested that many of the popular icons are ‘specifically created’ to catch the attention of young people (Smith, 2000).



Role models mentioned in the study seemed to have been chosen (or not, i.e. adverse role models) based upon the degree of capital they were perceived to have (or not have) themselves *or* the degree of capital that they offered the young people. In the first case, factors such as popularity, looks or talent afforded the celebrities a certain amount of cultural capital in the eyes of the young people and thus afforded some degree of legitimacy to their visibility in popular culture. In the second case, however, the amount of social capital they offer to young people is of primary importance. In other words, how well this role model (or in fact the image that they represent) fits in with the image adopted by an individual or group (e.g. Grebo or Townie). The importance of aligning yourself with the ideals of the peer group has already been discussed in chapter five, and this choosing of role models is linked strongly with the issue of constructing a specific identity. The importance of not only presenting an accurate and appropriate identity, but also of having this identity validated by those with authority, is central to an individual's acceptance into specific group contexts (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Goffman, 1990b; Jenkins, 1996). As such, choices of what music to listen to, what magazines to read and what individuals to revere are all significant for young people in contemporary society.

RH So Garage music is your thing is it?

Lloyd: To me it is yeah, I listen to it quite a lot.

RH Do your mates listen to that as well?

Lloyd: Yeah a few of my mates do, it's like not that popular at school.

RH So who do you like listening to then? Which bands?

Lloyd: They haven't really got, well they've got a few bands, but mainly I just listen to DJs like when they're mixing, because they make tapes of when they're in clubs and stuff. So I like listening to them I suppose.

(individual)<sup>12</sup>

The visibility of role models was obviously a contributing factor to their evident appeal. As such, the 'identity poster' research task was a particularly useful way of identifying individuals that the young people found significant. As mentioned above, this significance was not always positive, and more often than not a celebrity was named because they were seen to be lacking capital in some way. Quite often this was connected with their perceived ability and hence the legitimacy of their success. A number of celebrities did not have the respect of the young people because, as Mike pointed out, they were 'trying to be something they're not'. The selection of and identification with role models, then, can assist in young people's construction of self



by both highlighting who they do *and don't* want to be. Given this, it is perhaps important to consider the type of individuals (and hence ideals and images) that are being used as such important influences.

### ***7.7.2 Identifying and Selecting Role Models: Some Gender Distinctions.***

There were definite gender differences between the girls' and the boys' posters, and very different reasons given for the choices of celebrities. When the boys selected images of men it was to indicate (or refute) abilities such as musical talent, humour, sporting prowess or simply just fame. When they selected pictures of women however it was for their beauty or sex appeal. Comments such as 'fine' or 'foxy' accompanied these pictures and frequently the poses of the women were provocative and semi-clad. Several authors have written about the objectification of women by the various forms of media, and noted how such representations help to perpetuate notions of masculine domination and feminine subordination (Kellner, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Frost, 2001). Although there were some pictures of males on the posters of the girls, it was interesting to note that the majority of the images selected were of women. Where images of males were used it was generally to indicate that the girls thought these individuals to be attractive or 'cute' (in line with dominant definitions of attractiveness). There was a notable exception to this rule, however, in that Chloë's poster consisted only of male images. The reason for this lay in her 'obsession' with sport (particularly football), and all of the pictures showed professional sportsmen.<sup>13</sup> The majority of pictures were chosen by the girls were done so because 'I would love to look like her' (Amadaia), or because 'I'd love my hair to look like that' (Katie). In this way they could be seen to be encouraging the girls to conform to these ideals of perceived 'perfection', indicating in some way that their bodies were at present somehow deficient (Frost, 2001). This topic has been covered in more detail in earlier sections, but its occurrence here indicates its importance. The implication is that the girls associate social capital with these images of beauty (i.e. physical capital) and see themselves to be lacking in comparison to them. The danger of this situation, as Frost (2001) has contended, is that 'if the role models are only ever those who achieve success and fame via a beautiful body and face, then it is likely that girls who do not have these will find it harder to rate highly other facets of themselves' (pp. 100).

The influence of role models however is not completely negative. For example, some of the female role models identified by the girls were selected specifically because they represented resistance to the dominant notions of femininity. Such examples can be seen to be empowering images for these girls, and indeed some studies have called for the promotion of such images to young women (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). It is not just females, however, that can be compelled to buy into gender stereotypes. As the following quote indicates, boys are also influenced by the images presented via media role models.

[talking about his ambition]

Alex: What I'm going to do right, I'm going to go really slow so that people try to take over me. When they try to take over I'm going to speed up so that when another car comes that way they they're going to try and slow down and pull back behind. And I slow down again and then they'll crash into them, and I'll (wave at them).

Carl: I think Alex's going to be more like Eminem, he's going to be a real gangster.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

Here we see Alex buying into the 'gangster' image, with its arrogant indifference and disrespect for social rules. It is very much a 'masculine' image, and by sharing this information with the group he is affirming and asserting his masculinity (Connell, 1983). It should not be assumed, however, that young people are incapable of interpreting the images and ideals presented by role models. Although role models are admired, revered and even idolised, the young people in the study indicated that they were more than able to separate fiction from reality in terms of media discourses.

RH Do you think that you are influenced by music and stuff like that then?

Amadaia: Well I wouldn't just start taking drugs or that, or like that person who committed suicide because of Eminem. But he doesn't, he doesn't say 'commit suicide'. He just goes on about his life, because he had such a bad life...so I don't get it when people say 'oh it's Eminem's fault that that guy committed suicide'.

Katie: No of course it's not.

Amadaia: My uncle said that, he bought me a CD and a poster, and he goes 'why are you getting Eminem, he's a really bad person', and I went 'no he's not a bad person'.

Katie: He's not a bad person, he's just a bit messed up.

Amadaia: He's messed up because of his life, he can't help it. I love Eminem, he's wicked.

Katie: I think he needs some help though.

Amadaia: I think he needs some help, but he's cool. (SACS, wk 5a)



### 7.7.3 *A Desire to be Famous.*

Role models then provide young people with points of reference and identification, whether this identification is viewed realistically or not. Part of their appeal, however, may lie in the fact that these icons are famous, and represent a world which young people yearn for but are highly unlikely to ever experience (Pietrass, 1999). The issue of fame was one that was alluded to in a number of conversations, and certainly any contact that the young people had experienced with the ‘official’ communications media (i.e. television, radio or newspapers) granted them a serious amount of status (social capital) among their peers.

Alex: I’ve been on TV.

RH What was that for?

Alex: Opening my mouth (laughs)

Liz: Because he wanted to become a footballer.

Carl: Yeah because he went to Pride Park and someone said ‘look at me, I’ll be number 2’ wasn’t it ‘2 in 2002’.

Alex: 2006! It was something to do with the World Cup, and one or two of us got some free Derby stuff which is quite cool.

Liz: Yeah and he got to show off, which he likes doing.

Alex: Of course I showed off, wouldn’t you?  
(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

This conversation seems to affirm the belief of Bromnick and Swallow (2001) that ‘today’s young people appear to dream of fame and fortune’, and that in some way the media attention of celebrity figures encourages this (Clement, 1995). However, it would also appear that young people are not simply stuck in this ‘dreamland fantasy’, but are in fact realistic about their chances of success. This notion of reality is important here, and surely it is the key to determining how influential or potentially damaging specific role models can be. In addition, it has been noted that young people do not just experience an environment of manufactured role models, but that they encounter in other social contexts the real-life examples of family or friends (Frost, 2001). As Katie commented, ‘I find now that I don’t model myself on pop stars or famous people as much as I use to, I model myself on people that are around me now’.

This section has highlighted a situation in which the young people in this study were influenced by media representations and stereotypical gender behaviour. However, it has also made reference to times in which they exercised autonomy and individual

choice in their identification of significant role models. This is yet another example of a balance between compliance with structural influences on the one hand, and defiance of them through individual action on the other, that was a characteristic feature of the young people's engagements with the various social fields. With specific reference to the media field, these processes of conformity and resistance provide the focus for the following section.

## **7.8 RESISTANCE AND/OR CONFORMITY IN THE MEDIA FIELD?: Being 'Cool' not 'Sad'.**

### ***7.8.1 Conformity to Peer Norms and Ideals in the Media Field.***

As we have seen, much of the engagement that young people have with the media field is in association with the field of peers, thanks to the centrality of both of these sites in the social experience of young people (Livingston, 1996; Anderson & Miles, 1999; Ralph *et al*, 1999). Moreover, the combination of these fields often represented for the young people in this study a means by which to subvert or resist the control imposed by fields such as family and school. This section is intended to examine more closely association between the fields of media and peers and, in particular, the ways in which it affords opportunities for resistance and conformity both individually and collectively.

Engaging with the media is a common practice within the peer group, but it is not necessarily a straightforward affair. There are ideals to take note of and rules to be followed in what is essentially an ever-changing environment. On the one hand then, this notion of conformity is based upon a desire to fit in with the ideals of a particular group. In order to achieve this successfully however, an individual must know what the unwritten codes are that define status within that particular context. This means understanding what is deemed 'cool' (that which possesses or offers the potential for acquiring capital) and what is considered 'sad'. These codes are determined partly by the current cultural climate, but also by those individuals occupying positions of relative power within the group, i.e. the 'cool people' (Lloyd). Bourdieu (1985a) has suggested that this elevated position is due to the possession of significant capital and that it affords individuals the opportunity to determine legitimacy. These 'rules' lead



to the creation of a collective identity, and the sharing of tastes among peers; in effect the creation of a group habitus. The importance of reading the 'right' magazines, listening to the 'right' music or wearing the 'right' clothes can then be understood perhaps as a sign of commitment to the group identity. In some cases this can help to distinguish one group from another, as indicated by labels such as 'the Slipknot lads' mentioned by the boys from Thornhill school and noted within chapter five. There can however, also be a degree of compulsion here that some may perhaps refer to as peer pressure (Ungar, 2000).

RH So would you say that you act differently when you're at home, say to when you're at school?

Lloyd: Yeah probably, because sometimes people are trying to impress their friends. I know I do that a bit...sometimes you feel like if you don't impress them, then they won't be your friends any more. If you're too boring or something they're not going to like you.

RH In what kind of ways do you try and impress people?

Lloyd: Well I wasn't the one that started the Garage music off for example, my friend listened to Garage music so I decided to listen to Garage music as well.

(individual)

Given that the consequence of not aligning yourself with the ideals and norms of the peer group is a loss of social capital, an individual may decide that taking on the interests of a group of people who they actually want to spend time with, as Lloyd did, is no real hardship. As such, the awareness of what is 'sad' is perhaps just as important as an understanding of what is 'cool', for it pays to make note of what the majority opinion is in terms of 'what's in and what's out' if you want to avoid ridicule and loss of status. As this extract illustrates:

RH So what changed then? Why are you no longer in to Lara Croft? (a computer character)

Bob: Because it's really, really sad.

Mike: It's Donkey Kong (laugh)

Bob: Well, everyone thinks it's sad so I've just latched on to that.

RH What makes things sad then?

Bob: It's if you're the only one who likes it, and no one else thinks it's good because they don't like it.

(TBS, wk 2)

Having said this, the solidarity arising from this group conformity also has its benefits. Principal among these, perhaps, is the way in which it can provide a buffer to other external regulating influences such as the school or family.

### *7.8.2 Peer Use of the Media as Resistance to Adult Authority.*

It was evident that there was a tendency among the young people to use their engagement with the fields of media and peers as an attempt to regain a degree of control in the face of expectations placed upon them in other fields (namely family and school). Furthermore, by forming their own media tastes and ideals within the peer group young people are able to put some distance between themselves and adults. This 'generation gap' was clearly demonstrated through the young people's conversations regarding their parents, as explored in chapter four, and was characterised primarily by a lack of understanding about the labelling and distribution of capital. As the following extract indicates:

Lara: My dad's trying to go trendy at the minute, but he likes Fat Boy Slim and Robbie Williams so -

Katie: My dad likes the Corrs and Emerson Lake and Palmer, I'm like (laughs)

Mia: Oh, my dad likes the Corrs, he thinks he's like so cool, I'm like (pause) mmm!  
(SACS, wk 2)

Attempts by parents to transgress the boundaries of peer groups were resisted by the young people, but they were also prevented from doing this by their lack of social/cultural capital and insider knowledge of the specific group dynamics. In some cases, however, the use of the media as a resistance to adult control came close to being vetoed by the over-ruling authority of parents, as illustrated through parental concerns relating to the appropriateness of the material that their children had access to. In the following extract, Mia and Amadaia acknowledge the disapproval of their parents and imply that they have to be careful not to overstep the mark when it comes to resisting parental norms.

Mia: Your parents sometimes try and listen to the stuff that you're into and they're just, you can see their faces, it's just so funny.

Katie: I tried to make my mum listen to Eminem, and I don't think she was very impressed.

Mia: My mum was like really shocked when she heard it, she started



listening to the words, I was like ‘uh oh’.

Amadaia: Oh my god, my mum came into the room when it was on and it was on full blast, and it’s like the uncut version, and she goes ‘what is this?’.

(SACS, wk 2)

The appeal of the fields of media and peers, and the activities that take place there, lies in the fact that they allow young people an opportunity to exercise a degree of choice. However, just how much freedom do they actually have? Ultimately, it would appear that individuals have to conform to the rules of the dominant group in any particular context, whether these be peers, parents, or marketing moguls.

### *7.8.3 Negotiating Resistance and Conformity.*

This situation of conformity and resistance is not a straightforward one, and indeed there is some suggestion in the data that young people are often caught somewhere between the two. Although there was a desire, even a need, to fall into line with group ideals the young people also articulated an aspiration to develop their own tastes.<sup>14</sup> They were aware of a need to exercise caution in exerting this, however, in order to ensure that their social standing didn’t suffer. To a certain extent the degree to which you could go against group ideals was dependent upon the amount of social capital you already possessed. In other words, an individual who was considered ‘cool’ or ‘popular’ could perhaps get away more easily with expressing an opinion that contradicted the ideals of the group, although it would still be a risky move. In order to avoid a potential loss of status, then, a number of strategies could be employed. For example, on one occasion Mike used humour to test out the response of the group on something that he knew could be considered ‘sad’ or contradictory to his chosen image. His comment, ‘I’m ashamed to say that I like some rap music’, thus acknowledged that this particular form of music could lack cultural capital and allowed him to maintain a degree of distance from the image it represented in order to prevent any loss of status among his peers. Another strategy for avoiding a loss of face, and avoiding the somewhat merciless peer group practice of ‘taking the mick’ outlined in chapter five, was to employ secrecy, i.e. hiding from friends those personal tastes or behaviours that may contravene group norms, or not acknowledging them within the group context. As Mike explained, it’s like everybody when they get home,

they'll turn the TV on and there'll be Blue Peter, and they'll sit down and watch it, but nobody admits to it'.<sup>15</sup>

Having discussed the main aspects of young people's engagement with the media field, a number of themes can be seen to form a common thread running through the analysis. One of the most significant themes appears to involve the degree to which individuals are able to manage, interpret and evaluate their engagement with the field of media. The participants themselves tended to view this field as one in which they has a great deal of freedom, freedom to choose what they engage with, when they do this, and how they give meaning to the messages inherent within the communication. This is often in contrast to the view purported by adults, however, in which young people are seen to be susceptible to the information generated and transmitted via what they perceive to be an indiscriminate system designed with a 'for-anyone-as-someone' structure (Scannell, 2000). The following section attempts to shed some light on this ambiguity by looking more closely at the argument, and asks whether there is perhaps an element of validity in each of these apparently conflicting opinions.

## **7.9 'DECEIVED DUPES' OR 'CLUED-UP CONSUMERS'? : 'you have to go by fashion, well you don't *have* to...' (Laura)**

### **7.9.1 *Young People as 'Deceived Dupes'.***

There is some suggestion, both in the literature and in common parlance, that young people in contemporary society are in danger of being taken in by media representations (Nava & Nava, 1990; Postman, 1994). It has been noted that young people are often positioned as being vulnerable to media influences, and as such are considered an important target population by media advertisements (Messenger-Davies & Machin, 2000; Smith, 2000). As we have seen within the previous discussion here, there is certainly some suggestion that the individuals involved with this research were heavily influenced by the media field. Regardless of their denial (and perhaps even because of it), their acceptability as 'fact' of information garnered from the media, their evident susceptibility to advertisements, and their buying into dominant notions of image and fashion, all tended to affirm the belief that the media



field had a strong impact upon their understandings of self and society. Moreover, as Mia and Lara suggested, the centrality of the media field meant that its degree of influence was somehow undeniable.

RH The media is obviously quite an important thing for you both. Why do you think that it is?

Mia: I don't know. I suppose it's just like there all the time you know, you're just like susceptible to it all the time aren't you.

Lara: It's like no matter where you go, it's around you.

RH Is that a good thing?

Mia: I don't know, because we all believe in the adverts and stuff, because we all go and buy it don't we. I don't know. It's probably not a good thing, but -

Lara: But I don't know, it's just like it's always there whether you're at home or if you're out, or you're at school.

(SACS, wk 5b)

An underlying factor to this concern regarding the influence of the media, however, would appear to be the potential that it has to encourage young people's resistance to existing social order. This in itself stems from the belief that young people are unable to resist harmful images presented through the media and, as such, are at risk of developing deviant behaviour. The threat of the media to adult authority is a primary cause of concern for many in contemporary society (Postman, 1994), and has reached such levels that major international organisations are now debating not *if* but *what* action should be taken. For example, a Council of Europe document looking at the issues of television and children opened with the following:

'Considering the place of the press in modern society and stressing its impact on juveniles...wishing for a more detailed study of the influence of the press on the behaviour of children and adolescents and the adoption of suitable measures to enable the press to perform an educational function in relation to juveniles and, by eradicating the baneful influences that can be exerted by certain kinds of literature, to contribute to the prevention of juvenile delinquency, recommend... that research should be encouraged into the mechanism by which the press influences children and adolescents...that a series of enquiries should be made into specific ways and means of implementing measures for the protection of juveniles' (Council of Europe, internet source)

This kind of view, then, tends to deny young people's potential to be discerning consumers of media information, and argues that adult control and intervention is required in order to shape the nature of media communication in ways that are perceived to be socially acceptable.

### 7.9.2 *Young People as 'Clued-Up Consumers'*

Several researchers have disputed this 'pro-effects' view, claiming that it stereotypes young people who, far from being 'duped' by media representations, are capable of both receiving and perceiving media discourses (Willis, 1990; Livingston, 1996; Ralph *et al*, 1998; Anderson & Miles, 1999). Some have suggested that the anxieties expressed regarding young people and the media actually reflect broader social concerns, and that the media field, to a degree, simply provides a suitable and convenient scapegoat (Buckingham, 1993). Additionally, it has been argued that young people should not be deemed incapable of reading media messages simply because of their 'immaturity'.

'We may believe that the mass media has a tremendous amount of power over impressionable people. But simply because an audience is young does not necessarily mean that they do not have the experience to read media products in a mature manner. We all understand the media based on our own experiences and shouldn't assume that simply because a person does not possess certain demographic characteristics that he or she is incapable of understanding things in a logical manner.' (Hayne, 1999 p.237)

Such a belief is illustrated many times over in the data, as the participants show themselves to be aware of the ubiquitous nature of the media, the 'tactics' that it uses to make its messages more persuasive, and its potential for intrusion, fabrication and exploitation. As the Thornhill boys explained during a conversation about how certain aspects of popular culture become 'crazes'.

RH That's strange isn't it, because sometimes everything gets really hyped. What do you think that's trying to do?

Frederick: It's just for the money really. They just want -

Danny: In media and entertainment everyone's interested in money, so they do as much as they can to make as much as they can.

Frederick: Like advertising.

Mike: The thing is, pop music now is more about your image than what you actually sing. You don't have to be a good musician, you just need to have the right image.

(TBS, wk 1)

From this extract it would appear that the boys are incredibly perceptive about the structure of the media field, and that they are not at all taken-in by the fabricated images. As has been mentioned, young people are immersed within this field from the



moment they are born and so, as such, it is perhaps understandable that by the age of fifteen they are adept at reading and interpreting media messages. Such skills, it could be argued, form part of the repertoire of their habitus, and can be called upon in the practice of media interpretation.

### 7.9.3 *Not Gullible but Ultra-Responsive?*

It is clear that there is much debate as regards the influence of the media on young people, with some perceiving a significant influence (e.g. Nava & Nava, 1990) and others arguing that the effect is limited (e.g. Gunter & McAleer, 1997). However, I would argue that these two situations are not mutually exclusive, but rather that some individuals often operate along a continuum between the two. This suggestion arises from comments made by some of the young people in the focus group sessions, in which they alluded to a perceived necessity to conform to media promoted ideals despite an understanding that this was, in some way, a limitation of their agency. On the one hand, then, they show themselves to be experienced and skilled interpreters of the media, but on the other they remain vulnerable to a desire to fit in with the latest trends. As MacQueen (2000) has argued, young people may not be gullible when it comes to the media field but they do tend to be ‘ultra-responsive’. Research conducted by Evans (2001) has also indicated that some young people can feel ‘manipulated’ by media marketing strategies to buy into a product in order to be ‘cool’. This belief was echoed by some of the participants in this research, particularly in relation to the concept of fashion as something that they were compelled to follow.

RH So in terms of the various types of media, do you think they influence you in any way?

Sophie: No, I just wear what I like and listen to what I like. I don't care what people (think).

Laura: It's what *you* like really.

Zoe: It depends also where you shop though, because if you go for clothes and everything it depends on what the shop sells, because they always sell what's in fashion anyway...so you've got to (buy fashionable things).

RH So is fashion something that you - ?

Laura: Have to go by, yeah. Well, you don't *have* to.

Zoe: Well you don't *have* to, but it's just where you go.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 2)

Although there is a strong assertion from Laura here that the choices made are individual ('it's what *you* like'), Zoe's comment leads to the qualification of this initial statement. Media generated ideals then are something that some individuals do buy into, although not unconsciously nor without consideration.<sup>16</sup> If young people are considered 'dupes' then they should perhaps be viewed as 'conscious' or 'informed' ones, when their decisions to conform are made on the basis of both choice (because it is what they 'like') and necessity (to fit in with their peers). For, as Smith (2000) has contended, 'children are not simply compliant, and they are not routinely predictable. They reflect aspirations inspired by consumerist messages, but they are not necessarily uniform or conformist' (pp.8).

## 7.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has identified the media field as a dynamic, pervasive and powerful context, one that plays an influential role in shaping the social practices and experiences of young people in contemporary society. The discussion here has also allowed some of the issues discussed in the previous three chapters to be explored and examined in more detail, and has identified the central role that media resources can be seen to play in influencing the choices, beliefs and perceptions of individuals. The majority of the participants in this study perceived the media field to be significant as it was seen to offer various resources that facilitated communication between individuals and the transmission of information regarding tastes and fashions. In this way, the field represented a significant influence in relation to the construction of identities, particularly through the production and reproduction of specific images and bodily ideals. The apparent perception of this field as an authoritative source of knowledge, also meant that it was somehow able to construct 'reality' in the eyes of the young people and define the value of capital that was associated with particular media representations. Although the participants felt able to make their own decisions and choices within this field, and hence valued it as a context in which they had some degree of control over their social practice, it was clear that they were also heavily influenced by the dominant societal and gendered bodily ideals transmitted through the various cultural channels of the media field. The importance of the media as a cultural tool for creating an understanding of self, and in particular an embodied understanding of self, has been clearly demonstrated through this discussion.<sup>17</sup> Before



moving on to consider the implications of this situation, however, the following chapter looks to build upon some of the issues raised within this and the previous analysis chapters through an examination of a context that has been identified as a significant space for the construction of embodied identities. We turn now to an analysis of the data relating to the field of physical culture.

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<sup>1</sup> This notion of habitus will be discussed in more detail in later sections of this chapter. For example, section four ('Media Promotion of Image') refers to the notion that media promoted images can influence young people's tastes and, in addition to section eight ('Deceived Dupes or Clued-Up Consumers?'), makes reference to the so-called 'media effects debate' (Livingston, 1996). The degree of young people's engagement with the field of media, and indeed the quality of content experience, is something that has become of increasing concern in recent years, particularly in relation to the potential influences that this could have on attitudes and behaviour (Cook, 2000; Jenkins, 2000). Using the notion of habitus, the implication is that the influences that young people are exposed to when younger will help to frame a great deal of their beliefs, attitudes and opinions later in life. Bearing this in mind, then, if there is a desire to challenge and reduce negative influences from the media, it is important that this takes place through those avenues of media representation with which young people have most contact.

<sup>2</sup> There were few differences apparent between the individuals from the three schools in relation to this issue of media knowledge, although some element of 'class' distinction, reflected in the varying amounts of economic capital possessed by the young people, was implicit within their discussion, or indeed lack of discussion, regarding access to specific resources. For example, none of the young people from Fenburgh college owned a mobile phone whereas the majority of the independent school students did (see section 2).

<sup>3</sup> This issue has been explored in more detail in chapter five, where it is also seen to relate to the notion of humour within the peer group and the gendered nature of peer interactions.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver and Lalik (2001) have also noted that the young women in their study appeared extremely knowledgeable regarding the issue of eating disorders and made the connection between this knowledge and the media. However, they also asked the question of the potential influence of this information on individuals in a social climate that equates thinness with beauty. This question will be re-visited in more detail in section 5 ('The Promotion/Reproduction of Gender Stereotypes'), though perhaps in relation to the issue of informing young people the danger lies not in the exposure to this information but to the acceptance of it as 'fact'.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver & Lalik (2000) have reported that the young women involved in their study also highlighted fashion as a significant theme in relation to their construction of embodied identities, and their work contains some particularly useful material in relation to this issue of clothing as physical capital. Within their study, the girls identified the corresponding themes of 'Fashion In' and 'Fashion Out' to represent those images that were acceptable and those that lacked physical capital within the peer group. This sentiment is mirrored within this study through the analogous concepts of 'cool' and 'sad'.

<sup>6</sup> This notion is expanded upon in chapter eight, when the role of clothing and accessories as physical capital is discussed.

<sup>7</sup> Tait's (2000) exploration of youth studies, 'Youth, Sex and Government', alludes to this situation through a critique of traditional notions of sub-cultural theory. He has argued that the tenet of 'youth-as-resistance', central in this theoretical framework, has caused young people to be viewed as a homologous group, defined and labelled by external forces, rather than individuals with potential, capacity and aptitude. Using theoretical input from authors such as Foucault, Rose and Bourdieu, Tait has proposed that power within contemporary society is based on governmentality rather than direct social control, and that young people, as such, are able to define their own interpretations of their social practices.

<sup>8</sup> These behavioural trends can also be seen to reflect the gender differences that were apparent in the young people's engagement with the media field. In relation to this study, although there were some aspects of this engagement that were uniform across the sexes, such as the general enjoyment of music, television, and films, there were also some significant differences in the boys' and girls' selection and use of media resources. Where the boys played computer games, and talked of sports events or particular image cultures that they affiliated with, the girls were more likely to read magazines together, talk to or text each other on their mobiles and discuss issues of body image. This may in some way



relate to the differences that have been noted in chapter five as characteristic of male and female friendships. As this discussion showed, boys' peer groups have been found to consist of a large network of general acquaintances, often characterised by a high degree of overt competition, whereas girls' peer groups are generally more intimate, consisting of several 'best friends' who provide mutual support (James, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Wight (1994) also noted similar behaviour among the young men in his study, and identified it as a trend of male peer relationships. He commented that 'sometimes boys acknowledged in group discussions the constraints they felt when talking about sex in front of their peers. At other times the groups seemed to exaggerate their sexist obscenities in a parody of what they believed was adults'/authority's stereotype of young men's sexuality. Conversely, in individual interviews it is likely that many boys modified their sexual histories according to what they thought were my expectations or moral opinions' (p. 706). This issue is also discussed in the chapter five in relation to the gendered nature of peer interactions.

<sup>10</sup> This reference to 'having a boyfriend' is one that appeared in a number of conversations with the girls group, and is discussed in more detail in chapter five (5.8.2). Suffice to say the media can be seen to play a role in encouraging this concern, with a great deal of attention placed upon the importance of finding (and then keeping) an appropriate partner in girls magazines (McRobbie, 1982; Tait & Carpenter, 1999). The girls laughed over articles they found entitled 'is he your hunk?' or 'are we compatible?', but at the same time acknowledged that having a boyfriend afforded an individual significant status within the peer group.

<sup>11</sup> Pini (1997) has also made reference to this situation, and has noted that 'it is important to recognise therefore, that regulation does not simply 'come down' on young people from above. They regulate and manage their own bodies, experiencing them as sites of both pleasure and resistance – sometimes with the effect of producing the selves expected of them, sometimes with the effect of challenging those expectations' (p.165-166).

<sup>12</sup> As mentioned in the discussion of methodology in chapter three, this situation provided an example of a *faux pas* that highlighted a lack of cultural capital on my part in relation to this particular aspect of popular culture. For Lloyd, the role models that he identified within the Garage music scene were not the music performers but the DJ's who mixed the music.

<sup>13</sup> This situation begs the question, did Chloë select these pictures because they were men or because of the lack of female role models? Several studies have suggested that sportswomen are disproportionately represented in the media, and it could be speculated that this is due to the fact that the female sporting body does not always conform to dominant definitions of femininity (e.g. Rintalla & Birrell, 1984; Creedon, 1994; Shifflett & Revelle, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> This issue of 'Standing Out' and 'Fitting In' in relation to the peer group is expanded upon in chapter five.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that both of the examples used to illustrate the issue of losing status within the peer group involve conversations with the boys. This is not because this situation was not an issue for the girls however, but rather that the degree to which difference was tolerated within the peer group appeared to be greater with the girls than the boys. These particular gender differences may perhaps be related to the more intimate nature of female relationships (Adler & Adler, 1998; Black, 2000), offering young people a greater degree of security in their social capital. This proposition is expanded upon in chapter five.

<sup>16</sup> It was interesting that these types of comments were repeated within the other focus group conversations at each of the schools, suggesting that there were no specific gender or class distinctions here and that this particular issue was a common aspect of young people's engagement with the media field.

<sup>17</sup> There are implications for the construction of habitus in the way that young people's ideals, tastes and opinions are influenced from an early age. It has been shown in this chapter, however, that not all of these influences are positive for young people, and so questions are raised as to how such harmful messages can be challenged and made safe. This issue, along with other questions generated through the analysis of data, is addressed in the final chapter of the thesis.



## Chapter Eight

# **‘Love It?’ or ‘Hate It’?: The Role of Habitus and the Configuration of Fields in Shaping Young People’s Perceptions of Physical Culture**

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Before moving into an analysis of the data generated in relation to the field of physical culture, it may be useful to first briefly reiterate the way that this particular social context has been defined within the study. The field of physical culture is perceived as constituting a range of practices and corporeal discourses relating to the categories of sport, physical recreation and exercise, which are concerned with the ‘maintenance, representation and regulation of the body’ (Kirk, 1999c p. 66). As such, it is identified as being as a primary site for the construction of embodied identities (e.g. Kivel, 1998; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Light, 2001). It has been suggested that ‘sporting activities, sporting orientations and accessories of sport have become increasingly important elements within the pluralization of youth cultures’, and that sport can now be seen to occupy a primary position among young people’s choice of leisure time activities (Brettschneider, 1992 pp.538-9). In relation to this study, sport and physical activity were certainly recurrent topics of conversation in the focus groups, and the following discussion reflects the opinions and attitudes of the participants regarding various aspects of physical culture. The following discussion looks at the fields of family and peers in relation to the young people’s engagement with the field of physical culture, and highlights the influential role that these sites can play in shaping an individual’s habitus through the promotion of tastes and interests, or through the provision of opportunities. It also identifies an important link with the media field, and shows how the norms and ideals generated and reproduced via this pervasive context can impact young people’s perceptions of bodily ideals within the field of physical culture. These perceptions, which extend even to the issue of sports clothing, are seen to shape the participants’ attitudes to specific forms of physical culture and, in particular, influence

their opinions of school physical education (PE). References to the field of school, and the young people's experiences of physical culture within it, are prevalent within this discussion, although the comments often highlight contradictory or ambivalent attitudes. Another key issue is their perception of physical culture as a 'field of choice', and the importance of having the freedom to determine the nature of their own involvement with it. The final part of the chapter addresses some of the gender issues inherent within the previous sections of the chapter, looking in particular at the gendered nature of activities and the influence of social or cultural stereotypes on the young people's choices and attitudes within the field of physical culture. The chapter begins, however, by examining the significance of the field of physical culture to the young people's understandings of self, and highlights the varying ways in which this field can be seen to impact the construction of embodied identities.

## **8.2 THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AS A SITE FOR CONSTRUCTING A SENSE OF SELF: 'It's kind of my life' (Alex)**

### ***8.2.1 Constructing Understandings of Self in the Field of Physical Culture.***

As has been mentioned, there is growing body of evidence to suggest that young people's leisure time is increasingly being played out in the field of physical culture, and that their choice of recreation activities can shape and influence their multiple conceptions of self (Adler & Adler, 1998; Hendry *et al*, 1998; Kivel, 1998). It was evident from the focus group discussions, and the completion of the various research tasks, that some of the young people perceived their engagement with the field of physical culture to be significant in their constructions of identities. For example, Chloë's responses to the open-ended questions, used as a journal task in week four at the convent school, highlight the centrality of physical activity to her understanding of self.

*I like....my family, my friends and sports.*

*I'm most confident when...I play sports.*

*People think that I...am very sporty.*

*I am concerned about...my health.*

*I could best describe myself by saying...I am sporty and thin.*

(Chloë, wk 4)



For the majority of the young people involved in the study, the tastes and interests that they had developed in the field of physical culture were evidenced through their 'hobbies' i.e. the particular activities and practices that they regularly took part in. The list of their interests cited within the data was both extensive and diverse, and included activities such as football, horse-riding, boxing and ballet, as well as more 'extreme' sports such as skate-boarding, skiing and snow-boarding. This finding appears to support the view expressed by authors such as Brettschneider (1992) and Roberts (1996), that young people's conceptions of physical activities now tend to move beyond an institutional understanding of sport, to encompass those activities that would previously have been considered 'non-athletic' or 'informal'. Bourdieu (1978) has suggested that an individual's choice of sporting activities can be influenced by their possession of cultural or economic capital, and that they are underpinned, fundamentally, by a class-based habitus. There was some evidence of this within the data, although it should be noted that there was by no means a clear distinction. For example, whereas the private school students mentioned trying activities such as skiing and snow-boarding on school or family vacations, the college students' involvement with physical activities was generally restricted to school or community-based organisations where any equipment required was provided for them. There are various underlying issues here, although they can generally all be seen to reflect the availability and affordability of opportunities i.e. the possession of economic or cultural capital. Having said this, however, there were also some activities, such as skate-boarding, that were of interest to the young people in all three schools, and these appeared to reflect not so much class-based distinctions as the pervasive influence of media promotions and representations regarding popular culture (Miles *et al*, 1998; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999; Ralph *et al*, 1999).

Another example indicating the significance of physical culture to young people's constructions of self is provided by Alex's response to the biography task<sup>1</sup>, which was used as an ice-breaker in the first meeting with his group at Fenburgh college. In addition to identifying his love of sport, and highlighting his somewhat audacious personality, this comment of Alex's also provides an insight into his positioning within the peer group.

Alex: 'My name is Alex, I live in Fenburgh in England on the Earth, which is a round thing in space (laughing). People call me Brownny because of my last name. I like women, football and alcohol'.

Liz: Haven't you missed something out there Alex?

Alex: And all sport.

(FCC, gp 1 wk 1)

Not only does the extract indicate the central place that physical activity holds in Alex's own understanding of self, but Liz's comment also illustrates that his engagement with the field of physical culture is a key marker by which he is identified, and positioned, by his peers. Several researchers have suggested that there is a distinct overlap between the fields of physical culture and peers, and that the physical and cultural capital generated in the former can translate to significant social capital in the latter (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998; Connell, 1996). Hendry *et al* (1998) have argued, for example, that leisure contexts can provide valuable opportunities for identity development during adolescence precisely because they allow for the acquisition of important sub-cultural capital. The position of 'sports person' was frequently alluded to by the young people involved in the study, and appeared to be based on the significance that the field of physical culture, or indeed a particular activity<sup>2</sup>, was seen to hold in an individual's overall social experience. Several factors were influential here, none more so than the amount of time and energy that young people were seen to invest in physical activities, the number of different activities that were engaged in, and the possession of recognisable skill and talent. These issues regarding time and experience were both perceived to indicate an individual's commitment to and knowledge of the field of physical culture, and, as such, were significant factors in relation to being positioned (or not) as 'sporty'. As Danny put it, 'I just love sport, I love playing sport, I play like every single sport'. Being positioned as 'sporty' was particularly important for some of the boys involved in the study, and these individuals were generally quite keen to reveal exactly just how much sport they engaged in per week. The following extract is typical of some of the conversations that took place relating to this issue:

RH How many different sports would you say you do?

Danny: Rugby, cricket, football, tennis (pause) I play a bit of golf, not much (pause) squash, badminton, not loads but just a bit, and then I do a lot of little bits and things. Cricket, rugby and football are probably my main ones...I play (for a) cricket team inside school and outside school, rugby team inside school and I'm a member of a tennis club. I used to



play football for a club, but I don't anymore because they kind of packed in, so I used to but I don't any more. And then, that's about it I think.  
(individual)

This trend, and the element of competition that it necessarily involved, is further evidence perhaps, of the significant social capital that sporting involvement and success is traditionally seen to offer males among the peer group (Connell, 1983; Adler & Adler, 1998; Ennis, 1999; Walker & Kushner, 1999). This is not to suggest, however, that the field of physical culture was not an important context for the girls' constructions of self. Indeed, one glance at Chloë's poster, filled as it is with images of football players, sports clothing and references to physical activity, is clearly enough to dispel such a notion. Rather, it was more the case that the girls' comments in relation to the importance of physical culture were generally more reserved.<sup>3</sup>

Another way in which young people's engagement with the field of physical culture was seen to influence their understanding of self was related to the practice of supporting local, regional or national sports teams, and being positioned as a 'fan'. This was seen to indicate their commitment to a particular 'cause', and although it was passive involvement in physical activity it was deemed an active engagement within the field of physical culture, an investment of effort into the construction of a collective identity (Hendry *et al*, 1993). So John's positioning of himself as an Arsenal fan', Chloë's caption on her poster proclaiming 'Leicester City – the team I support', and Frederick's joyful proclamation that 'we beat Pakistan in the cricket yesterday', can all be seen to reflect their constructions of self in relation to physical culture. The influence of the media field was evident here, in generating an interest in national sports teams and providing a means of keeping up to date with events, as was that of the familial field, which will be addressed in more detail in the following section. However, it was also evident that if an individual was to follow a particular sport with any degree of commitment, a certain amount of prior interest was required in that activity. As a comment from Frederick, who did not consider himself a football fan, showed:

Frederick: I don't mind playing (football) to be honest, but I can't be doing with all this sitting around supporting teams...players getting sold for fifty million quid, it's just stupid'.  
(individual)

This indicates that the level of an individual's investment in various activities depends, in part, on the degree to which it constitutes a fundamental part of their habitus.

### ***8.2.2 The Development of Habitus in the Field of Physical Culture.***

The extent to which the field of physical activity had influenced the habitus of some participants was evident in the degree to which their tastes and interests in relation to this field had been ingrained to an almost unconscious level. Danny and Chloë, for example, both had difficulty in articulating their experiences regarding physical culture, and found it hard to explain why this particular field was so significant to them. This response is self-explanatory, perhaps, when it is considered that 'the practical sense or logic of social actors involves...the expression of dispositions that lie at the intersection of the conscious and the unconscious' (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994 pp. 187). It could be suggested, then, that Danny's and Chloë's interest and involvement in sport has become such an ingrained response, i.e. a deeply embedded disposition of habitus, that they no longer questioned why they continue to take part. For some of the young people involved in the study, the embodiment of sporting tastes and interests in the habitus, and their commitment to the field of physical culture, was also reflected in their choice of career. For these individuals, then, it seemed a natural decision to convert the physical and cultural capital accumulated within this field into economic capital within other fields. There were some differences between the schools in relation to this issue, which can perhaps be seen to reflect the class-based distinction between the institutions. For example, whereas private school pupils Chloë and Frederick looked to pursue careers involving aspects of physical culture via the route of higher education (a physical education degree and officer training for the forces respectively), college students Carl and Liz were relying, somewhat optimistically, on the prospect of achieving success as a professional footballer and dancer. This could suggest that the option of higher education was not a feasible proposition for either Carl or Liz (perhaps academically or economically), or perhaps that it was just not an issue of which they were consciously aware. Employing Bourdieu's (1998b) approach to the reproduction of educational inequalities, it could be argued that, as this academic tradition was not evident within an individual's



familial experiences, they lacked both the significant cultural capital and an embedded disposition to take this particular step.

Although the data presented above highlights the significant role that the field of physical culture undoubtedly plays in some individual's constructions of self, it should also be noted that this was not the case for all of the young people involved in the study. In addition to comments expressing a positive association with physical culture, such as Carl's contention that 'it's my life', there were also those that contradicted this viewpoint, such as Katie's assertion that 'I *hate* sport'. For those who did not spend as much time involved in physical activity, who had not developed a sporting habitus, and who did not therefore possess skills relevant to the field of physical culture, it was not a context in which they were able to acquire or accumulate significant capital. As such, it was not a field in which they were able to occupy a position that afforded them a degree of status, and was not generally regarded as being so influential in their constructions of self. It was evident for those who did regard physical culture as important, however, that this was due, at least in part, to the significant intersections between this context and the other core fields. In the following sections the discussion moves on to address some of these influential relationships, starting with the association between the field of physical culture and the familial field.

### **8.3 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AND FAMILY: 'I've been brought up just liking and playing sport' (Frederick)**

#### ***8.3.1 Familial Influences on Young People's Interests in the Field of Physical Culture.***

As custodians during the early years of life, parents generally have considerable potential to structure their children's early social experiences (James, 1993; Güneri *et al*, 1999). Several researchers have taken note of this fact in relation to the field of physical culture, and it is now a well established notion that family members, parents and siblings in particular, can be extremely influential in shaping young people's participation in physical activity (Vertinsky, 1992; Colley *et al*, 1996; Greendorfer *et al*, 1996; Douge, 1999). As Mota and Silva (1999) commented, 'it has been recognized that families determine the quantity of exercise that children can take,

providing a role model, creating access to facilities, and the opportunities to participate in team and sport classes' (p.194). It was also clear from the data that many of the young people involved in the study saw their family as being instrumental in structuring and encouraging their initial engagement with the field of physical culture, as well as supporting their current involvement. Carl, for example, believed that his father's success in playing for Arsenal schoolboys had 'inspired' his involvement in football, while Frederick pointed out that his family had 'introduced' him to various physical activities. In addition, Mike indicated that he enjoyed going skateboarding with his brother, and Laura mentioned that she often went out walking with her mother and grandmother. Danny also expressed a similar viewpoint when trying to explain the origin of his interest in sport:

Danny: I really like sport.

RH What got you into sport then? Why did you decide to take it up?

Danny: Just always. Just when I was little my mum and dad decided to take me to either football lessons or tennis lessons, swimming lessons, and I've just always carried it on, since I was about four or five...and I've always liked it.

RH Are your family quite sporty as well?

Danny: Yeah, they do quite a bit.  
(individual)

It was interesting to note that those individuals who did not indicate a strong engagement with the field of physical culture, were those who did not express this link between family and physical activity. In other words, the lack of contact experienced with physical culture during these formative years meant that sporting tastes and interests did not naturally come to constitute a fundamental part of their habitus. It has been suggested that individuals who develop a habit of physical activity during their youth are likely to continue this trend into adulthood, and that parental participation can be an influential factor in this equation (Sallis *et al*, 1996; Curtis *et al*, 1999; Mota & Silva, 1999). It has already been mentioned that some of the young people involved in the study viewed their parents' participation in physical activity as an example for them to follow. There was a significant and perceptible gender distinction here, however, with the main encouragement being provided by fathers to their sons regarding 'traditional' male sports (e.g. rugby, football, cricket). There were some examples from the girls in relation to encouragement by family members regarding physical activities, such as Chloë's comment that she regularly plays badminton with



her father, but they tended to be few and far between. It appeared, however, that whereas fathers would introduce their sons to activities at an early age, enrol them in sports clubs and teams, and encourage their continued participation over time, the majority of the girls were instead left somewhat to their own devices. This situation can be seen to reflect traditional cultural views relating to 'male' and 'female' activities, and the reproduction of dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity in which men are required to be tough, athletic and strong, and women to be slender, delicate and weak (Vertinsky, 1992; Kirk, 1993; Sparkes, 1997). As such, it is perhaps understandable that the boys were encouraged to participate in physical activity as it provides a means for accumulating significant physical capital, whereas the girls, for whom it does not offer such an opportunity, were not.

For some of the young people sporting tastes were an aspect of their familial identity, accepted rather than contested because they were part of a lifestyle that had become embodied via the habitus. The familial field can thus be perceived to have a key role in the reproduction of tastes and characteristics from one generation to another, a process which helps to determine the relative volumes of economic, physical and cultural capital possessed by an individual (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Bourdieu, 1998b; Light, 1999). For example, Danny's family had clearly influenced his interest in sport, but in doing so they had also provided him with a means of acquiring physical capital, which could then be converted into social capital among the peer group or into the economic capital of wages (Shilling, 1991; Light, 2001). There was also some implication by the young people that the genes passed on from parents to child were seen to provide a distinct form of physical capital. Although they were deemed to play a role in determining the capacity of young people to be successful in physical activity, however, it was conceded that achievement would also be dependent upon these individuals being put into a situation in which this potential capital could be developed.

### ***8.3.2 The Role of Economic Capital in Shaping Engagements with the Field of Physical Culture.***

The issue of economic capital in relation to physical culture was an important one within this study, particularly in relation to the field of school, and had implications

for the structuring of young people's opportunities within the field of physical culture. It was evident that the facilities at the independent schools, institutions founded and supported by private funding, were superior and more extensive than those evident at the college. Furthermore, there was an assumption by the private schools that the majority of students would purchase their own sports equipment, something that was not expected, or indeed deemed feasible, at the college. There also appeared to be a difference in the range of activities offered by the different institutions, which could be seen to reflect traditional class and gender distinctions. For example, there was a perceived focus on rugby and cricket at Thornhill school, and an emphasis on football and basketball at the college, whereas the girls at the convent school bemoaned the fact that they always seemed to be playing netball. Bourdieu (1978) viewed sport forms as codified practices in which the class-based structure of society was inherently encrypted and, as such, he proposed that they could function as markers of distinction. In this way physical culture, as a means of acquiring both physical and cultural capital and influencing the development of tastes and dispositions in the habitus, can be seen as a means of reproducing social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1978; Shilling, 1993).

The volume of economic capital within the familial field can not only direct an individual's choice of physical activities, however, it can also influence the degree to which parents can support and encourage their children's current involvement in physical culture. The provision of transport, purchasing of sports equipment, and freedom of time to spectate, have all been identified as issues of importance in relation to the family's role in supporting young people's participation in physical activities, yet they are all reliant, in part, on the availability of economic capital (Rowley, 1992; Kirk *et al*, 1997; Kirk & MacPhail, 2003). Although not evident in the data, the implication here is that the dominant classes will have both the time and the resources to invest in their children's participation in physical activities, whereas the lower classes inability to do this will put them at a disadvantage. In a similar way, the volume of economic capital available within the familial field can also influence young people's access to physical culture via the media e.g. having Sky television in order to watch sporting events or being able to buy brand name sports clothing.



It was evident, then, that the familial field was an important site in which much of the young people's engagement with the field of physical culture was played out. In addition, it was also clear that 'sporty' parents and family members often provided influential role models for their children. However, it should be noted that this was not a universal trend and that there were exceptions to the rule. For example, Sophie was defined by the Motivation and Self-Perception Survey (MSPS) as being 'highly motivated' in relation to physical activity, and she herself mentioned being involved in activities such as football, basketball, dance and gymnastics, yet she noted that 'my dad hates sport'. In addition to parents being supportive and encouraging, then, they could also be apathetic and outdated in relation to contemporary events within the field of physical culture. As such they were often seen to misunderstand the relevant resources that represented significant capital within the field, particularly in relation to sports clothing (as will be discussed in section four). It is perhaps for reasons such as these that the continued influence of the familial field in relation to young people's leisure interests tends to decrease during adolescence, and is replaced instead by the growing significance of the field of peers (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996; Hendry *et al*, 1998). It is to the association between the fields of physical culture and peers that we now turn.

#### **8.4 INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE FIELDS OF PHYSICAL CULTURE AND PEERS: 'It's quite a social thing to do' (Sophie)**

##### ***8.4.1 Making Friends in the Field of Physical Culture.***

It was established in chapter six that peers play a significant role in young people's social experiences, and several authors have stressed the value of this association in relation to physical activity (Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). In a review of literature relating to adolescent identity formation and physical culture, Kivel (1998) suggested that leisure sites could 'provide young people with opportunities to successfully integrate both personal and social identity' (p.36), and additional research has endorsed the view that sport involvement can provide valuable opportunities for social interaction (Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996; Hendry *et al*, 1998). For the young people involved in the study there was a perceptible overlap between the fields of physical culture and peers,

and physical activity was often considered a vehicle for initiating and maintaining social contacts. As Lara pointed out ‘I’m on the netball team and I do enjoy it, it’s part of my social life’. Carl also highlighted the important association between these two fields when he commented that ‘I meet most of my friends through sport’. This view was reiterated by a number of the young people, who felt that the contact with peers afforded by regular participation in various leisure activities, helped to establish and strengthen friendships based on shared tastes and interests. In this way, it is possible to see that significant peer relations are founded between individuals with similar values and dispositions, i.e. shared aspects of habitus (Adler & Adler, 1998). Frederick refers to this notion in the following excerpt of conversation.

RH So why are you friends with the people you are friends with?

Frederick: Because I play a lot of sport, I hang around with the people that I play sport with. There’s a whole group of you know, all the, the group that I hang with, are just like the sporty lot. Like me and Danny are friends and stuff, and are into sport basically. And we get on, like all the things that we do at home, our interests, like music or television, we get along well with each other quite well.

(TBS, wk 3)

These comments link with the notion of tastes as ‘an internalized social resource or form of capital’, indicative in some way of an affiliation to a group or situation (Kauppi, 2000 p.35). For Bourdieu, tastes are closely aligned with the notion of habitus, i.e. they represent the conscious manifestation of habits, and are thus a reflection of the social and material conditionings that have produced them (Bourdieu, 1990b; Shilling, 1993; Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; Kauppi, 2000). As such, the habitus generated through an engagement with the field of physical culture, and the occupation of specific subject positions within that field i.e. ‘sporty’, ‘non-sporty’, ‘footballer’, ‘skater’, ‘dancer’ etc., influences individuals’ practice and helps to produce distinct lifestyles. In this way, the comparable views of young people engaged in similar physical activities can be understood as inherently social, and as a means of establishing the degree of distinction that they perceive between self and others (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). The significance of this state of affairs for the construction of identities is clear to see, for a notable investment of self is required if individuals are to successfully accumulate capital and hence attain or consolidate their position in a particular field.



### 8.4.2 *The Value of Physical Capital in the Peer Group.*

In addition to the value of shared tastes and experiences, the young people in the study also believed that their engagement with peers in the field of physical culture also represented a constructive use of their time. Several of the girls from both the convent school and college mentioned a concern to 'keep fit', and implied that this helped them to feel more confident and content with their constructions of self (Oliver & Lalik, 2000). As Lara said, 'I like to feel good about myself...as much as I can I like to do things that involve sport'. Friends were an integral part of this equation, however, and the girls appeared to place much more emphasis on participation with peers, rather than against them, than did the boys (Vertinsky, 1992; Ennis, 1999). Given the value of friends as a support network (e.g. Güneri *et al*, 1999), the perceived importance of body image within the peer culture (e.g. Frost, 2001), and the fact that 'adolescent peer-group sub-cultures have a powerful impact on teenage girls' social identities' (Vertinsky, 1992 p.384) this is perhaps an understandable tendency. However, as the following extract indicates, achieving a balance between social interaction and physical activity participation is not always straightforward.

RH Do you think that physical activity would overlap about any of those other fields?

Laura: Your friends probably.

Sophie: Yeah, it's quite a social thing to do. Because you don't just do it inside school, you can do it outside of school, there's quite a lot of clubs to go to.

RH Would you prefer to do physical activity in school or out of school?

Zoe: It depends what it is.

Laura: Yeah, because I like going to youth club and things like that but if I've got like another club to go to, like a sports club, then sometimes I get a bit cross with myself, because I'd prefer to like a club with all my mates than go to like a sports club.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 2)

Another overlap between the fields of physical culture and peers was evident in the view that participation in physical activities offered individuals an opportunity to compare and contrast themselves with others. As Mike suggested, 'you get a feeling of satisfaction when you do something that your friends can't...especially if you can do it in front of them'. In this way, the field of physical culture provides a public arena in which young people are able to demonstrate their physical capital (skills), and potentially convert this into significant social capital (status) among the peer group.

The importance of displaying aptitude among the peer group, and the value attached to sporting ability in general, is illustrated in the following extract, which also deals with the issue of participation with peers. In this particular conversation, the girls from the convent school had been expressing their opinions regarding the streaming process that had just been introduced to their PE lessons at school.

Lara: I feel that it kind of upset me when we were put into groups because last year I was in the top group, and I'm not saying that I should be in the top group because I don't think that. But it's just that when I played with everyone else, you know I just felt that they weren't to the ability that I could play, and that's not anybody's fault but it's just how (I feel). I think even if we should be streamed it should be done a lot more fair, because some people are really unhappy in the groups that they are in, or we should all just be put together.

Katie: It's embarrassing though when people go 'what group are you in' and I have to go 'oh, bottom group' (despondently), and they're just like...because I think people are quite influenced by sport. Especially in the junior school, if you weren't good at sport that was it, that's how I always felt.

Lara: It creates competition between everyone.

Amadaia: And it's like when you did teams, if you got picked last you were like 'oh, what's wrong with me?'

(SACS, wk 1)

### 8.4.3 *Some Gender Issues.*

Although the value of physical ability within the peer group was generally recognised by all of the young people involved in the study, it was the boys who tended to express the viewpoint more explicitly. This gender distinction replicates the findings of numerous other studies, which have suggested that involvement and ability in relation to the field of physical culture can represent important capital among male peer groups (Adler & Adler, 1998; Mota & Silva, 1999; Walker & Kushner, 1999). It has also been noted that 'individuals have different opportunities for converting physical capital into other forms of capital', and that gender is one of the main factors in determining this exchange value (Shilling, 1991 p.656). For boys, the conversion rate between physical capital and social capital is seen to be so significant because the display of overt physicality demonstrates and reinforces conformity to dominant definitions of masculinity (Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Connell, 1996; Ennis, 1999). For girls, however, this is not the case, and as such 'most women tend to have fewer opportunities than men to turn any participation they may have in sports or leisure



activities into social, cultural or economic capital' (Shilling, 1991 p.658). It is evident, then, that the specific sites in which boys are able to engage with the field of physical culture are of particular importance, as they provide a forum in which physical capital can be both acquired and demonstrated. For the boys involved in the study, it was the school environment that was seen to provide the main opportunity for demonstrating their abilities to peers, and indeed Connell (1983) has suggested that sport 'is the central experience of the school years for many boys' (p.18).

This was particularly pertinent for the boys at Thornhill, as there was considerable status afforded to sporting achievement in this site via the associations made with traditional class values (Shilling, 1991; Corrigan, 1988). Whereas this situation was beneficial for those with the necessary physical capital, however, it was problematic for those who were unable to match up to the physical ideals (Connell, 1996). As Mike pointed out, 'you have to be good at the sport you play otherwise you don't get another chance'. School sport was therefore an opportunity to achieve status, both among peers and with certain teachers, as Frederick had experienced when he was elected captain of his school cricket team for their overseas tour. However, there also appeared to be a fine line between being positioned positively as a skilled sportsman and being positioned negatively as a 'show-off'. This concern was evident when, despite the obvious social capital associated with his achievement of such a prestigious position, Frederick kept the information regarding his success from his friends, 'because I didn't really want to brag'. In other words, in order to achieve success among peers in relation to physical activity it is not only important to possess relevant physical capital, but also to retain the respect of the group<sup>4</sup>. Donnelly & Young (1988) pointed to this issue in their study of sport sub-cultures, in which they noted that an individual's acceptance among their sporting peers relied both on the construction and confirmation of an appropriate identity.

The importance of demonstrating physical capital among the peer group was also evident in the significance that some of the young people, both boys and girls, attached to their membership of sports teams. Many of the individuals involved in the study mentioned being part of sports teams, both inside and outside of school, and it was evident that these experiences had helped to generate a shared habitus and collective identities (Light, 1999). It was also clear that the memories of these

experiences were carried forward into peer interactions, and hence functioned as a form of social capital among the peer group. As the following extract indicates:

[the girls were discussing a recent basketball tournament in which they had taken part]

Zoe: Southampton was good though wasn't it.

RH What did you do there?

Zoe: We kicked peoples' ass!

Sophie: Well we played basketball, got lots of freebies.

Zoe: We did win quite a lot didn't we?

Sophie: Yeah we did quite well.

Zoe: We got to the semi-finals.

Sophie: Then we played Manchester who were like, because Greater Manchester are massive and we're like a really tiny school. And Manchester pick people from like the whole of Manchester so it was a really big range of people.

Zoe: It helped that they were about two feet taller than us as well.

Sophie: Yeah they were really tall, and we're a really short team.

Zoe: No that's just you (laughs) Just joking.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

It is clear then that engaging in physical activity with peers can be 'fun' (Lara) and make for a positive experience for young people (Kremer *et al*, 1997; Henley, 1998). Furthermore, the choices that individuals make in relation to sport, physical activity or recreation can influence their constructions of self. As Simon noted, 'whatever you do kind of shapes how you dress and how you act'. It is this viewpoint that is addressed in the following section.

## **8.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOTHING IN THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL**

### **CULTURE: 'Whatever you do kind of shapes how you dress' (Simon)**

#### ***8.5.1 The Association between the Fields of Peers, Media and Physical Culture.***

It is increasingly being recognised that images represented through various facets of the media provide influential reference points for young people's construction of identities in contemporary society (Vertinsky, 1992; Kellner, 1992; Thompson, 1995; Tait & Carpenter, 1999). In addition, research has suggested that physical activity, as a marketable commodity, is now a central feature of these media representations (Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Kirk, 1993). As Kirk and Tinning (1994) have suggested, 'popular physical culture saturates young people's lives and provides both



structure and substance to their attempts to make sense of themselves and others around them' (p.620). Furthermore, the increased spending power of young people within contemporary society has positioned them as a valuable market for the 'commercialized and commodified offshoots of physical culture' (Kirk, 1999c p.71), and as consumers they are able to access valuable resources for the construction of identities (Giddens, 1991; Miles *et al*, 1998; Anderson & Miles, 1999). The body is a key factor in young people's possession and utilisation of these resources via the process of consumption, for it functions as a visual representation of the specific qualities inherently associated with various goods and images (Featherstone, 1982; Kirk, 1993).

As such, there is a need for young people to be astute in their investments regarding commercialised physical culture, because the norms and values associated with particular commodities reflect varying degrees of symbolic capital. The volume and composition of capital possessed by an individual can, in turn, influence the way in which they are positioned, and position themselves, within other social contexts such as the field of peers (Frith & Gleeson, 2001). As mentioned in chapter six, for most of the participants the field of peers was a forum in which the visual representation of self was key in determining status and acceptability, because it was believed that 'no matter what they say, everyone judges you by the way you look' (Lara). As such, it was a field in which the young people, either implicitly or explicitly, judged, and were judged by, their peers on the basis of their possession of physical capital. As Chloë suggested, whether it was obvious or not there was a tendency for individuals to 'look around and compare yourself to others'. This self-consciousness was particularly apparent in the girls' comments, although it was also implicit in many of the boys' conversations, and has been linked by some authors to the significant changes that the body undergoes during puberty (Henderson, 1996; Frost, 2001; Oliver & Lalik, 2001).

### ***8.5.2 Clothing and Accessories as Physical Capital.***

There is a strong association, then, between the fields of physical culture, peers and media<sup>5</sup>, not only regarding the promotion of bodily images but also in relation to broader issues such as sports clothing and accessories (Brettschneider, 1992; Kirk, 1993, 1999c). These relationships were corroborated by the data, which indicated that

for most of the young people material possessions, clothing in particular, were perceived as important and significant resources for constructing identities. Dimitriadis (2001) has suggested that representations of popular culture are inherent in the spaces in which young people spend time, and such exposure is believed to render most young individuals skilled in reading, interpreting, and keeping pace with the latest trends and fashions (Frith & Gleeson, 2001). In relation to the field of physical culture, material resources were deemed particularly important in signifying an individual's tastes and interests, as the following extract indicates:

Simon: Well, whatever you do it kind of shapes how, I suppose how you dress in a way and how you act. If people are into football they usually tend to buy football shirts and -

Sophie: But I'm into ballet and I don't wear tutus all the time.

(laughing)

Zoe: Can you imagine us walking around in our dance stuff!

Sophie: Yeah but for skaters and stuff.

Laura: They wear like baggy trousers.

Sophie: You can tell what their hobby is by what they're wearing.

RH So you can tell by just looking at people what kind of things they're into?

Zoe: Well with Simon you can.

Sophie: Yeah. Well with lads I think it's easier to work out what they're into.

(FCC, gp 2 wk 1)

Although it wasn't a universal trend that the activities engaged in would determine the kind of clothes worn, there was an association that was deemed by these young people strong enough to be thought significant. There are implications here that an individual's image tends to reflect, in some way, their particular choice of activities, and that their apparel could thus be thought of as an important element of their constructions of self. In other words, the strategic selection and utilisation of specific forms of clothing can be perceived as an indication of an individual's commitment to particular lifestyle choices. Bourdieu (1990a) pointed to the symbolic effect of such bodily techniques when he suggested that 'agents classify themselves, expose themselves to classification, by choosing, in conformity with their tastes, different attributes, clothes, types of food, drinks, sports, friends, which go well together and which they also find agreeable, or, more exactly, which they find suitable for their position' (pp.131-2). In relation to the field of physical culture then, it follows that those individuals with a commitment to sporting activities should have more of a



tendency to wear sports clothing that those who don't. The following conversation, an extract from a focus group discussion at the convent school, would appear to substantiate this inference.

RH So do you wear sports stuff, even though it's not -

Lara: For sport, yeah.

Amadaia: Yeah

Mia: No, I don't wear it at all.

Chloë: I don't like wearing skirts, I'd normally wear like sports stuff.

Katie: The only sports stuff I've got is a Nike sweater.

Mia: I haven't got any. (laughs)

Amadaia: I've got a pair of trackie bottoms, a T-shirt and a top, that's it.

Chloë: I've got loads, just go to my cupboard and there's all this sports stuff.

(SACS, wk 3)

It should perhaps be noted that in this particular group, Amadaia, Chloë, and Lara had all been positioned<sup>6</sup>, and indeed positioned themselves, as being motivated towards physical activity, whereas both Mia and Katie had professed a dislike of sport and physical activity. It has already been established that the volume and composition of capital that an individual is able to accumulate allows them to be positioned, and position themselves, in particular ways in the field of physical culture. Taking this into account, it can be seen that for those individuals who position themselves as 'sporty', sports clothing can be seen to represent symbolic capital among the peers with whom they share this position. For those who don't, on the other hand, there is no such value attached to these forms of dress and, as such, they do not form a significant aspect of their visual presentation of self. Another example from the data regarding the significance of clothing, was in relation to the distinct subject positions of 'grebo' and 'townie' that featured so strongly in the young people's experience of youth culture and were outlined in the previous chapter. These media generated lifestyle patterns were part of their visual world, and were associated with particular attitudes, values and musical tastes as well as styles of dress (Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Anderson & Miles, 1999; Pietrass, 1999). As such, Mike's decision to wear skate shoes, baggy trousers and band t-shirts, or Danny's to wear branded sports clothing, reflected not only a personal preference but also a commitment to the 'grebo' or 'townie' image. Fashion, then, can be a way in which young people can express something about who they think they are, and their adoption of particular tastes and styles of dress can be seen as indicative of deep dispositions of the habitus (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994;

Pietrass, 1999). A pertinent illustration of the extent to which tastes are associated with taken for granted assumptions is provided by Mike's reply to an inquiry asking why he liked to wear skate shoes rather than trainers. After an initial pause, in which he appeared to be perplexed by the question, he replied self-evidently 'I wear skate shoes because that's what you wear when you skate'.

### 8.5.3 *Using Clothing Tastes and Appearance to Position Others.*

An individual's habitus, then, and the demonstration of this through their tastes, can be seen to influence their position in a field. However, as Bourdieu (1990a) has pointed out, the habitus implies not only a 'sense of one's place' but also a 'sense of the other's place' (p.131). There were some instances within the data when a number of the young people used the clothing style of others to position them in specific ways. One particular example arose in a conversation at the convent school regarding the issue of fashion, and involved the girls' making assumptions about other young people on the basis of their choice of clothing and in relation to the issue of class. The following extract provides an overview of some of the main issues that were discussed:

[Following on from a discussion on fashion]

Amadaia: I'm into skateboard stuff now.

Mia: Er, I don't know not really. It's a bit Leicester.

Lara: Yeah, townies kind of thing.

Mia: Yeah they wear like short skirts and trainers.

Lara: It's the uniform of Leicester. (pause) Kappa.

Mia: Oh god, Kappa Slapper (laughing).

Amadaia: It's so townie.

Lara: In Leicester, if you walk into Leicester it's like all the young people (laughing) wear sports stuff like Nike, Adidas, Kappa.

Amadaia: It's all townie.

Lara: Yeah it's like the uniform for Leicester, they don't wear anything different.

Mia: They have their hair scraped back and wear like trainers with skirts.

Lara: Scrunchies.

Katie: With their hair scraped back and then curled at the bottom.

Amadaia: Gelled.

Mia: I know, Oh god!

Katie: Gelled? It looks like it's wet. (laughing)

Lara: That's probably because they do have wet hair and they put it back and then it's like 'doh, you should have let your hair dry'.

(SACS, wk 3)



This is another example of how clothing can act as capital within the peer group, conveying relative degrees of status, and how it can be used as a basis for inclusion or exclusion through the judging and stereotyping of others (e.g. Jenkins, 1996). Within this extract the girls make use of the culturally determined label 'townies' to position other individuals, but also put their own interpretation on the situation by referring to it being 'a bit Leicester'. The clothing of these 'townies' is defined as a 'uniform'<sup>7</sup>, a way of identifying those individuals who wear it and associating them with particular values, morals or forms of behaviour. It was evident that the group viewed the style of these young people as ridiculous and embarrassing, or, to use their own terminology, incredibly 'sad'. Furthermore, there was a distinct implication that this particular style was 'common' (Katie) and reflected in some way the 'townies' subordinate class position. The girls then positioned 'townies' as inferiors to themselves, both culturally and intellectually, and used the gaudy fashion choices of these individuals to make assumptions regarding, among other things, their financial status, intelligence and sexual experience. Bourdieu (1984) has suggested that taste makes a virtue out of necessity, and that the choices made by individuals, although voluntary appropriations of interests, are actually rooted in material constraints. As such, the convent school girl's positioning of townies as 'common', and conversely their perceived positioning by these individuals as 'snobs, lesbians or nuns' (Mia), can be seen to reflect the positions occupied by particular individuals within the wider social structure.

It is evident that the definition of 'townie' used here by the girls from the convent school is not in line with that definition used by the boys at Thornhill school. This does not mean to say that one of these interpretations is incorrect, but it does indicate that there are different interpretations of the term that have somehow come to be synonymous with particular class stereotypes. Lara, for example, was careful to indicate that 'there is a difference between what we wear and what Leicester (people) wear, because all the stuff in Leicester is like bright fluorescent green and orange and stuff'. In using a disclaimer, 'let's say they're not my tastes!', she makes sure that she distances herself from this image, and any loss in social capital (status or kudos) that may be associated with such a stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1990a; Frith & Gleeson, 2001).



#### **8.5.4 *Economic Capital as a Determinant of Physical Capital.***

In the above extract of conversation Amadaia also mentions another form of capital, economic capital, and the necessity of this capital in order to buy into the ‘right’ image. As has been mentioned elsewhere<sup>8</sup>, this requirement has ramifications for those without the necessary financial means to acquire physical capital (and hence social or cultural capital), and can thus limit an individual’s access to particular images or identity constructions (Miles *et al*, 1998; Frith & Gleeson, 2001). There are, in theory, obvious implications in relation to social class here, i.e. the lower classes should be at a greater disadvantage due to their lesser financial income, although these weren’t in fact played out within the data. This situation would appear to reiterate the viewpoint taken by Hendry *et al* (1998), who suggest that ‘social class still plays a determining role in the developing lifestyles of adolescents albeit in a more fluid and flexible manner than previously’ (pp.147-8). This is linked, in their opinion, to the process of consumption, and is seen to reflect the increased spending power, across class boundaries, of young people within contemporary society (Gunter & Furnham, 1998; MacQueen, 2000).

Given the above information, it is clear that young people require clothing that is comfortable, in line with their chosen image and constructions of self, and that affords them a significant degree of positive capital. As such, it is perhaps easy to understand why the school PE kit, which loses out on all three counts, was viewed so negatively by the girls at the convent school. This issue is discussed in more detail in the following section, which deals with the association between the field of physical culture and the body.

### **8.6 THE CONSTRUCTION OF EMBODIED IDENTITIES IN THE FIELDS OF SCHOOL AND PHYSICAL CULTURE: ‘You do compare yourself to others’ (Chloë)**

#### **8.6.1 *The Field of Physical Culture as a Primary Site for the Construction of Embodied Identities.***

The close relationship between the physical body and the notion of self is a central concern of this study, and also represents a viewpoint that is supported by a



comprehensive body of theory (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). As a field in which the development and display of bodies can be recognised as a fundamental element of practice, physical culture is understandably upheld as a primary site for the construction of embodied identities (Shilling, 1991; Kirk, 1999c; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Sparkes, 1997). Through their engagement with this field, individuals' learning is shaped by the implicit assumptions underlying various practices, relating to issues such as gender, class or bodily ideals, which then become embodied as an element of habitus (Theberge, 1991; Vertinsky, 1992). One of the key associations connected with the field of physical culture, and with sporting practices in particular, is the link between physical activity, health and fitness (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Vertinsky, 1992; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). This principle was evident in the attitudes of some of the young people involved in this study, who expressed a whole-hearted acceptance of the belief that 'sport keeps you fit' (Alex) and helps you 'keep in shape' (Lara). In this way, the field of physical culture is seen to help young people acquire physical capital through the construction of socially acceptable bodies (Shilling, 1991). As with other studies, there was an evident gender distinction within the data here, with the boys looking to construct powerful and muscular bodies and the girls more concerned with maintaining slim and toned bodies (Theberge, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Kirk, 1993; Buchbinder, 1994; Connell, 1996; Frost, 2001). In both cases, the slender body is exemplified as the ideal and, in addition to fitness, is associated with various social qualities such as morality, self-control and self-worth (Featherstone *et al*, 1991; Kirk, 1993; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). Given these associations, and their influence on the development of habitus, it is perhaps not surprising to see the young people in the study embracing the obligation to take part in self-disciplining physical activities and body maintenance techniques. In this way, young people's involvement with physical activity can be seen to function as a form of self-management, highlighting the shift in corporeal control, from external to internal, that has been identified as a feature of contemporary society (Foucault, 1980, 1991; Kirk, 1994; Tait & Carpenter, 1999; Tait, 2000).

### 8.6.2 *Physical Education as a Connection between the Fields of School and Physical Culture.*

It was evident from the data that the young people involved in this study perceived a significant overlap between the fields of school and physical culture, primarily via the medium of physical education. Several authors have noted that studies of the corporeal are often absent from the general school curriculum, and as such have placed importance on PE lessons as a site for transmitting information regarding the body (Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). In addition, physical activity within schools has traditionally been associated, particularly among the upper classes, with the promotion and reproduction of various character-building values, attitudes and morals (Holt, 1989; Mangan, 2000). Indeed, at Thornhill school there was a strong belief in ‘the value of games, expertly coached and supervised, for promoting self-confidence, co-operation, health and enjoyment’ (school prospectus). For some individuals, particularly those who positioned themselves as ‘non-sporty’, school PE provided a regular contact with physical activity, which emphasises the need for an environment that is both positive and constructive. However, as the convent girls pointed out, the reality of the situation is far from this ideal.

Mia: Nobody really wants to do PE anyway.

Amadaia: Not really.

Katie: No, I don’t think anybody actually *really, really* likes PE.

(SACS, wk 3)

Several other individuals involved in the study, both boys and girls, also had negative perceptions of school physical activity, perceiving it to be too prescriptive and competitive. Moreover, it was not just those individuals with little interest in physical activity that made these comments, for even some of those who positioned themselves as ‘sporty’ expressed dissatisfaction with PE. As Chloë commented, ‘I do like sport, but outside of school’<sup>9</sup>.

### 8.6.3 *A Negative Experience?*

It would appear, then, that school PE does not always provide an encouraging environment for young people, in particular young women, and this is an issue that has been a concern to physical educators for some time (Carlson, 1995; Armstrong & Welsman, 1997; Kremer *et al*, 1997; Henley, 1998; Williams & Bedward, 2001).



Although there were some pessimistic comments from the boys in the study, the majority of the data concerned with negative perceptions of PE lessons were made by the girls, and in particular the girls at the convent school. For these girls, their PE lessons were deemed to be a site for making direct comparisons between bodies, a process that was aided and abetted the ‘embarrassing’ and ‘exposing’ clothing that they were required to wear. This issue has been cited within research as a major factor in young women’s attitudes to PE, yet the practice remains within many schools and many individuals, such as the girls from the convent school, still deem their school sports kit to be inappropriate (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Frost, 2001; Williams & Bedward, 2001). A number of authors have noted the concern expressed by girls over the issue of PE, and have associated these attitudes with the increased self-consciousness that is seen to develop in young women during the adolescent period, as they come to recognise themselves as objects of the gaze of others (Henderson, 1996; Frost, 2001; Oliver & Lalik, 2001). The girls’ group also brought up the notion of puberty in relation to this issue, as the following extract indicates:

Chloë: I think you should have a choice in what you wear (for PE).

Amadaia: Especially at our age, because you-

Katie: It’s embarrassing for us as well.

Chloë: You do look around and (compare yourself to others).

Katie: We don’t want to go parading around in our pants.

(laughing)

Lara: I mean at the age of fourteen, fifteen you -

Amadaia: You’re developing, you’re growing up.

Lara: Yeah, during puberty and after it you’re just really self-conscious of yourself, and you think people are going to judge you on the way that you look, so even if it’s teachers you still don’t want to be like walking around in gym knickers.

Amadaia: I mean you could understand it if we were like five year olds, because when I was like in primary school -

Katie: Yeah in infant school we just did it in knickers and vests. That’s what we did and nobody thought anything of it. But now that we’re growing up you don’t need people going ‘oh, she’s got fat legs’, ‘oh she’s so thin’ (laughing). No you don’t want people, I mean even if they don’t say it, you unconsciously form an opinion of somebody else, and you just think ‘oh, if I do that to so and so, other people do it to me’.

(SACS, wk 1)

The changes that occur in the body as a result of puberty can influence the degree to which an individual’s body conforms with dominant cultural ideals, and, as such, can be seen to influence their possession of physical capital (Shilling, 1991). This helps to

explain the comparisons that are a characteristic feature of young women's collective sporting experiences, and the concerns expressed by the convent girls that their PE kit was too revealing. There were two main activities, gymnastics and swimming lessons, that were referred to as being particularly 'exposing', and in each case the scarcity of clothing, or as Katie put it the fact that they were 'wearing hardly anything', was seen to heighten their position as the object of the gaze. Furthermore, these situations required that the girls take more care over their presentation of self, in order to maximise their physical capital by conforming to the dominant ideal of an appropriate, feminine body (Tsang, 2000). As Katie and Amadaia pointed out:

Amadaia: And you know with gym knickers you've got to, I don't know, it's like waxing or shaving or something.

Katie: Yeah, everybody's going 'oh my god I've not shaved my legs!'.  
(SACS, wk 3)

In relation to this issue of the revealing clothing worn for physical activity in school, however, there was an interesting contradiction within the data. The young people at the college were not required to wear any specific uniform for their PE lessons, and were simply expected to bring along suitable clothing of their own choice. It was surprising then, given the comments expressed by the convent school students above, that the majority of girls in the one PE lesson I observed at Fenburgh chose to wear quite revealing clothes e.g. hot pants and vest tops. There are a number of factors that may be of some significance here, including the extra gender dynamic that is at play within co-ed PE lessons, and the fact that the young people were free to make their own decisions regarding what they were comfortable wearing. The importance to individuals of being self-determining in their social practice was a recurrent theme across all of the fields, and this notion in relation to the field of physical culture is addressed in the following section of this chapter.

## **8.7 FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE: 'I think you should just do whatever you want' (Amadaia)**

### **8.7.1 *The Significance of being Self-Determining***

Despite the concern expressed in recent years over young people's lack of interest and involvement in physical activity (e.g. Armstrong & McManus, 1994), there are



numerous studies to suggest that sport, in fact, has a prime position among the favourite leisure time activities of adolescents (Brettschneider, 1992; Hendry *et al*, 1993; Kivel, 1998). This was certainly true of a number of the young people involved in the study, particularly, although not exclusively, those for whom there was a strong association with the field of physical culture. Alex and Carl, for example, stated that 'doing sport' was the way that they would ideally choose to spend their time, and, in a perfect world, that it would also constitute their chosen careers. This is not to say that the young people's opinions regarding all leisure pursuits were uniformly constructive, but it was evident that they were more likely to perceive activities positively if they were able to define the nature of their participation (Vertinsky, 1992; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). This freedom of choice presented itself as an important pre-requisite for enjoyment in relation to young people's participation in leisure pursuits, as Amadaia indicated when she commented, 'I don't think you should be made to do a sport that you don't want to do...you should be able to choose'. This perspective could also be identified in the young people's views of sport and recreation as a welcome break from the compulsory activities, such as 'homework' and 'chores', which were a feature of their social practice in other fields. As Danny pointed out:

RH So what do you actually like about playing sport? How does it make you feel?

Danny: I just enjoy it ...it's kind of you're either doing sport, or you sit at home or do homework and stuff. So I do as much of it as I can to take my mind off school.

(individual)

The importance of being self-determining in relation to an engagement with the field of physical culture is evidently important to young people, yet the contradictions between school practices and physical culture would appear to suggest that this is something that has not been recognised within the field of school. As Kirk (1999c) has noted, 'while the locus of corporeal power has been diffused, individualized and internalized since the end of the war through new forms of sport, physical recreation and exercise, physical education has altered little' (p.70). It was certainly a major concern of the young people involved in the study that their PE lessons were prescriptive, limiting and ultimately adult regulated, which meant that they had little or no input regarding what was done, when, how or with whom. For the girls at the convent school, for example, there was a regular program of activities that ran through

the school year (principally netball and hockey in the winter, athletics and tennis in the summer), and this program was simply repeated from one academic year to the next. A similar program was evident at Thornhill, and in both cases the activities on offer conformed to dominant cultural notions of gender and even class-appropriate sports (Vertinsky, 1992). As Lara pointed out, 'we don't get to do much other than girls' sports'. This was not so much of an issue for the young people at the college, as PE lessons there were coeducational, yet it was evident that there was also an element of class distinction in the activities 'offered' to the students there. It has been suggested the PE curriculum is out of date and out of touch with the needs and interests of young people, and that in reconstituting the traditional structure of PE lessons over time it ensures that such class and gender distinctions persist (Ennis, 1999; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Williams & Bedward, 2001).

### *8.7.2 School Physical Education as Competitive and Prescriptive.*

Another negative aspect of school physical education mentioned within the data, was its explicit emphasis on achievement and competition that reduced the potential for fun and enjoyment. As Simon, one of the college students, pointed out, 'it's ok when you're just messing about, but when you're in a game it just takes the fun out of it'. Some of the 'sporty' individuals, such as Frederick, suggested that they were 'alright' with this prescriptive and competitive structure of physical education, although the general consensus was that it was inhibiting and increased levels of anxiety. This situation can be seen to relate to the particular resources that an individual is able to bring to the physical education context. For example, the more extensive practical experience of 'sporty' individuals affords them a greater volume of physical capital, in the form of a general knowledge base of physical skills, than those individuals with less experience of physical activities. As such, they are more likely to meet the demands of the task and view the experience of PE positively. On the other hand, those individuals with less physical capital will be more likely to make mistakes, perform badly and regard the situation negatively. The implications of this situation are evident in Mike's comment that 'you have to be good at the sport you play, otherwise you don't get another chance'. In limiting the activities available to young people in the physical education context, schools can be seen to restrict the potential for individuals to achieve, and hence the degree to which they can position



themselves, and be positioned, positively in the field. For Katie, who expressed an intense dislike of school PE and was identified as amotivated in relation to physical activity in the MSPS, this was a particularly significant issue.

Katie: Yeah, because I can play badminton, but we never ever do, well we've done it a couple of times. So you know you can never see the strengths in (people), because you know everyone's good at one kind of sport, and you can't see the strengths and weaknesses in people if you're just doing the same thing all of the time.

(SACS, wk 1)

In addition, given the importance to young people of peer appraisal and acceptance, a situation in which they are exposed as lacking ability (or capital) can be potentially damaging to their status in the peer group (Adler & Adler, 1998). As Chloë and Mia suggested:

Chloë: I used to do like loads of stuff outside of school, like I had football practise and badminton, and it's like I can do that and feel like (pause) I can be myself. Whereas here you have to be really serious and if you get one thing wrong, then that's it, you're stupid for the rest of the game.

Mia: Yeah everyone thinks that you're an idiot.

(SACS, wk 1)

The sentiments expressed here epitomise the core opinions found in the data regarding physical education. In other words, there is a sense of dissatisfaction with the current structure of PE lessons, and a preference for sport and physical recreation outside of the school context (Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Kirk, 1999a). It should be noted, however, that this antipathy towards PE, although widespread, was not absolute, and the opinions of the young people were both context and situation specific. When examined in relation to other school subjects, for example, PE was seen as relatively unrestricted and free from direct regulation, an opportunity to escape the oppressive confines of the school building. In addition, if the lessons involved activities that an individual perceived to be appealing, or if there had been some sense of democratic decision regarding the game to be played, the response to them was more likely to be positive. This particular factor helped to account for the negative reaction of some of the college students when they were asked to miss a PE lesson in order to be interviewed for this study. After an initial outburst in which I heard them ask their



teacher to ‘tell her we’re not here’, they later explained their reaction by saying ‘sorry, but we were disappointed because we’d just picked our teams and things’ (Laura).

Throughout this discussion looking at the field of physical culture there have been many issues about which the boys and girls shared identical or similar views. For example, the unquestioned association between physical activity and fitness, the value of participating in sport with friends, and the importance of their leisure pursuits as influences on their constructions of self. Having said this, it was also evident that there were significant gender differences in the data concerning the field of physical culture. These differences related, among other things, to the value attached to physical culture, patterns of involvement and the choice of particular leisure activities, and in general corroborated the findings of several previous studies in suggesting that young people’s engagement with the field of physical culture can be a heavily gendered experience (Theberge, 1991; Vertinsky, 1992; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). Some of the most significant gender issues are now examined in the final section of this chapter.

## **8.8 GENDER ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF PHYSICAL CULTURE: ‘the lads are like, ‘you can’t play football!’’ (Laura)**

### ***8.8.1 The Field of Physical Culture: A Domain for the Boys?***

Although individuals of both sexes highlighted the importance of physical culture to their constructions of self, whether positively or negatively, it was evident that sport and physical activities played a more central role in the boys’ peer interactions. For these individuals, sport involvement provided the potential to accumulate significant physical capital, which could then be converted to social capital and a degree of status within the peer group (Shilling, 1991; Connell, 1996). Furthermore, it offered a means of actively demonstrating conformity to dominant cultural notions of masculinity, and as such had notable implications for the construction of self (Connell, 1983). These issues can help us to understand the element of competition that was inherent in the boys’ peer interactions relating to the field of physical culture, and their perceived need to publicise their numerous connections with sports clubs, teams or activities. The boys in the study certainly appeared to have more ‘active worlds’ than the girls, at



least in the sense that they claimed to spend more time engaged in informal recreational activities and organised team sports in their leisure time (Walker & Kushner, 1999). As Alex pointed out, 'you have the really important, like serious sport, say if you go to a cup final or something, and then you get the dossing around with your mates on the field'. A number of authors have suggested that an active engagement in sporting activities play a central role in boys' peer interactions, whereas girls' peer relationships are generally characterised by more sedentary behaviour such as conversation, reading and listening to music (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998; Frost, 2001). There was an indication of this trend within the data and, on the whole, the girls in the study tended not to express the same extensive contact with physical activities as their male peers. As the data showed, however, the fact that involvement is not explicitly stated does not necessarily equate to a lack of participation, but rather provides an indication as to the alternative place that physical culture occupies in the lives of different individuals.

### ***8.8.2 Gender Appropriate Activities.***

In relation to the field of physical culture, the tendency for the young people involved in the study to be positioned and position themselves differently on the basis of gender was also reflected in the particular activities that they engaged in. In other words, the forms of sport or physical recreation that the young people were involved with tended to conform to dominant cultural notions of gender appropriate activities (Vertinsky, 1992; Kirk & Tinning, 1994). These pervasive societal norms represent a powerful discourse that informs and influences practice within the 'multidimensional space' of the social world (Bourdieu, 1985b), and when embodied in the habitus allow individual's to position themselves appropriately and effectively in relation to gender. The promotion and reproduction of these ideals via the fields of media, school, peers and family, in particular via the provision of role models, means that an individual comes to the field of physical culture with a habitus that is 'deeply socialised into particular ways of seeing and doing physical activities' (Evans *et al*, 1987). Kirk (1999c) has suggested that 'physical culture may be thought of...as one source of the production and reproduction of corporeal discourse' (p.66). In this way, the field of physical culture can be thought of as comprising various 'communities of practice' in which young people, as participants, are engaged in a process of situated learning, and

acquire the necessary skills to become an informed member in that context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It has been suggested that the gendered dispositions reflected in the tastes and interests of individuals for physical activities, can be seen as a means of acquiring and accumulating significant physical capital within the field of physical culture (Shilling, 1991; Laberge, 1995). In this way, the inclination of the boys' in the study towards boxing, rugby or football, and the girls towards aerobics, ballet and gymnastics, can be understood as an attempt by these individuals to engage in gender appropriate activities, and to construct bodies that conform to dominant notions of masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1983). These stereotypical choices can also be seen to reflect gender distinctions relating to the occupation of space, reaffirming the tendency for boys to invade and occupy space and for girls to conserve and limit their use of it (Young, 1980; Connell, 1983; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; O'Dea & Abraham, 1999). Furthermore, the relatively low status of these 'female' activities is indicative of the limited capital that participation in sport can afford to young women, at least in relation to actual physical abilities, and is another factor that provides a challenge to their engagement with the field of physical culture.

### ***8.8.3 Challenging Gender Stereotypes.***

Although there was evidence within the data that the girls' did participate in what would be considered typically feminine activities, there were also examples of individual's actively challenging these stereotypes. For example, Sophie, Laura and Zoe played for their school basketball and football teams<sup>10</sup>, and Amadaia mentioned an involvement in outdoor activities through the Air Training Corps (ATC) as well as a personal hobby of skateboarding. Theberge (1991) has suggested that although the sport experience is often oppressive for young women it can also be empowering, and there was some indication that being involved in physical activities, and having the opportunity to demonstrate their skills against others, provided the girls with a degree of self-confidence. As Amadaia pointed out in relation to her ATC experiences, 'I just love beating the lads on night exercises'. Furthermore, for the girls at the college, the collective nature of team sports provided a degree of support, which can be seen to provide a buffer against any loss of status that could accompany a challenge to dominant gender norms. The low status granted to women's sports, a lack of visible role models within the media and the association of physicality with masculinity, are



all cited as reasons for the low levels of female participation in physical activities (Theberge, 1991; Mitchell, 1997; Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). These factors and the societal pressure to conform to dominant notions of femininity, all contribute to the construction of an environment in which it is considerably more difficult for the girls to position themselves as sporty within the field of physical culture. There was some indication within the data that the girls were aware of the difficulty that they faced in breaking into the male preserve of sport. For the girls at the college, the main problem was not their unwillingness to participate but rather a perceived lack of acceptance by their male peers.

Laura: Sometimes (at) lunchtimes and things when all the lads are playing football, they're always like if some of us girls want to go on they're like 'oh god you can get lost, you can't play football'. But like me and Sophie and Zoe, we do like football and stuff and they haven't really got a clue...they just get on your nerves and they just shout at you all the time.

Sophie: It's pathetic.

Laura: And if you miss the ball you're like -

Zoe: Oh god, no!

(FCC, gp 2 wk 2)

This extract of conversation indicates that, although the girls possessed a readiness and the necessary skill to take part in a game of football, their capital was devalued because the boys did not perceive it as legitimate. This reaction has implications in relation to the girls' constructions of self, because the confirmation of an individual's identity by others is perceived as a vital factor in determining its relative validity (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Jenkins, 1996). A number of studies have highlighted the significance of gender dynamics such as these in shaping the nature of young people's experience of physical culture, particularly in relation to the context of school physical education. It has been suggested, for example, that boys' domination of coeducational PE, their negative appraisals of girls' competence, and their tendency to over-emphasise competition constitute a primary source of girls' disengagement and alienation from physical activity in that context (Vertinsky, 1992; Ennis, 1999; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). These findings were reflected in part within the data, although there was also a certain amount of ambivalence in relation to the opinions expressed regarding the issue of single sex and coeducational physical activities. A small number of individuals involved in the study, both male and female, suggested that single-sex PE was more preferable, citing reasons such as it maximised



efficiency, increased enjoyment or increased personal comfort. However, it was evident from the data that the majority of the young people appeared to favour coeducational physical activities. Mike, for example, commented that mixed hockey was 'better than playing single sex because there's girls there too', while Laura suggested that co-ed PE 'is better than just girls, because you get to see the lads'. The importance of being able to socialise with friends of both sexes reinforces the significance of peers in relation to young people's physical activity participation, and highlights the increasing value of cross-gender relationships during the period of adolescence (Hendry *et al*, 1993; Bammel & Burrus-Bammel, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1998).

## 8.9 SUMMARY

This chapter has identified the field of physical culture as being a significant context for the young people involved in the study, particularly in relation to their construction of embodied identities. Whether their experiences of the field were positive or negative, there was a clear indication that the participants' engagement with it had influenced, in some way, their attitudes and behaviour in relation to physical culture practices. In particular, their degree of involvement with the field, and the quality of these experiences, could be seen to influence an individual's habitus through the development of various dispositions, tastes, and interests. The fields of family and peers were identified as important in this process, representing initial and continued influences in relation to physical culture choices and participation. The overlaps with these fields, as well as the pervasive and powerful media field, were perceived as particularly important in terms of influencing an individual's ability to acquire, accumulate and mobilise specific forms of capital. The perceived necessity to possess appropriate physical capital was identified as a concern for all of the participants, and was seen to reinforce the importance of this field as a site for the construction of embodied identities. This, in part, was seen to account for the negative attitudes of some of the participants to the experience of school physical education. As a site in which young people have compulsory engagement with physical culture practices, the field of school understandably featured strongly in this chapter. However, the compulsory and prescriptive nature of this environment was seen to restrict the participants' ability to present a construction of self that was compliant with their



tastes or interests, or that was seen to possess physical capital in the eyes of their peers. These configurations between the fields provided a significant theme throughout the chapter, and were indicative of how numerous factors within individuals' social experiences combine to produce a diversity of encounters in relation to the field of physical culture. This once again helps to reaffirm the view, endorsed within this study, that 'if we want to gain a deeper insight into adolescents' sport concepts, their involvement and its underlying orientations, we have to analyse the relevant contexts of the everyday life of adolescents' (Brettschneider, 1992 p.549). This discussion then raises a number of issues that can be seen to hold important implications for the organisers and providers of physical practices for young people. It is to an examination of these issues, in addition to other central themes identified within the field analysis chapters, that we now turn as we move into the concluding chapter of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to make the most of the available time at Fenburgh college the biography task was used within the focus group discussion rather than as a separate journal task.

<sup>2</sup> On occasions the young people used the more specific terms of 'footballer', 'skater' or 'dancer' to position themselves within the field of physical culture. At other times, the more generic term of 'sportsperson' was used to indicate their commitment to, and perceived elevated position within, the field.

<sup>3</sup> The different approaches and opinions expressed by the sexes in relation to the field of physical culture are discussed in more detail in section seven of this analysis, entitled 'Physical Culture and Gender Issues'.

<sup>4</sup> In this respect, the data would appear to challenge some previous studies relating to sport and masculinity in which toughness, success and status are achieved individually at the expense of others (Connell, 1989, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> As such, some of the issues examined here are also discussed in chapters five and seven.

<sup>6</sup> Amadaia, Chloë, and Lara had been identified by the MSPS as clusters 1, 2 and 4 respectively, whereas Mia and Katie had been identified as clusters 3 and 5. In this respect, the opinions of the girls would appear to provide some verification of the questionnaire profiles.

<sup>7</sup> This is an interesting choice of terminology given their views on the regulative properties of the school uniform. These are outlined in chapter six, in particular within section five entitled 'School Uniform and the Regulation of Bodies'.

<sup>8</sup> I refer in particular to chapters five ('peers') and seven ('media'), although the issue is also raised in chapter four ('family').

<sup>9</sup> Although an important comment to consider in its own right, it is perhaps made more pertinent by the fact that Chloë had been identified as 'highly motivated' by the MSPS and had previously professed to being 'obsessed' with sport.

<sup>10</sup> In their paper looking at issues of race and gender in relation to young women's perceptions of physical education, Williams and Bedward (2001) highlight significant female participation rates in football and identify the game as one of the most popular out-of-school activities for girls. As was evident within the data, however, they also note that this interest is not always encouraged or facilitated within the school environment.

## Chapter Nine

### **‘What’s all of this for then?’: Summarising the Key Findings and Implications of the Study**

#### **9.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER**

The previous five chapters have attempted to map out the fields of family, peers, school, media, and physical culture on the basis of the data generated in the study. Moreover, they have aimed to chart the terrain of these particular social worlds, and to explore the experiences of young people as they navigate their way through such complex environments. This process has identified some areas of convergence and coherence between the fields, as well as highlighting characteristics that are apparently unique to each social context. In this final chapter, I now want to return to the research questions that have structured, directed and underpinned this study, in order to examine how this information facilitates understanding in relation to young people’s experiences in the ‘multidimensional’ social space (Bourdieu, 1985b), and the identity work that they undertake there. In addition, I also want to examine some of the key issues that have been identified through the analysis of data, and discuss the implications that some of these findings may have for future research. Before moving on, however, it may be useful to provide a brief reminder of the research questions introduced in chapter one.<sup>1</sup>

1. How do the five fields highlighted in the study function?
2. What relationships and configurations exist between the five fields?
3. What does the data tell us about the ways in which young people construct embodied identities?
4. Does an individual’s habitus contribute to an ‘authentic’ construction of self or merely a ‘persona’ adopted to meet the demands of a particular situation?
5. What are the implications of this study for those engaging in research, practice or policy development with and for young people?



The first two sections of the chapter provide a summary of the general structure and characteristics of fields (research question 1), and highlight how the configurations formed between them are not absolute or uniform, but rather dependent on the specific dynamics at play in individuals' lives (research question 2). In this way, cultural, social, situational, and contextual factors can all be seen to influence young people's social practices, rendering their particular experiences necessarily unique. Having said this, the discussion will also highlight some of the patterns that were evident in the interaction between fields, with particular attention given to the configurations involving the field of physical culture as a primary site in which embodied identities are constructed (e.g. Kirk, 1999c; Oliver & Lalik, 2000; Light, 2002). Having re-examined the structure and characteristics of the interrelated fields, the next two sections move on to address the third and fourth research questions, which deal more specifically with the influence of young people's experiences in these sites on their construction of embodied identities. The third section explores the identity work undertaken by young people within these fields (research question 3) before moving into an examination of the process by which structural influences are written into the body through the notion of habitus (research question 4). This fourth section, then, provides a more specific focus on the nature of this identity construction process, and explores the role and influence of habitus in young people's management of self. It is argued that this conceptual tool has facilitated an understanding of young people's social practices in different social contexts, by affording a means by which the problematic structure-agency binary can be transcended. In other words, habitus reinforces the reflexivity of social experience and helps to demonstrate that individuals both shape, and are shaped by, the social worlds in which they exist, i.e. 'the body is in the social world, but the social world is also in the body' (Bourdieu, 1990a p.190). Finally, bearing all of the above issues in mind, the discussion closes by considering the implications of these findings for those involved in research, practice or policy development with and for young people (research question 5). With particular reference to issues associated with the field of physical culture, it is proposed that the study has highlighted the need for active and respectful engagement of young people in the research context, and an acknowledgement of, and indeed an allowance for, the multiple social worlds that comprise their social experiences.



## 9.2 THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF FIELDS

One of the many reasons why Bourdieu's theoretical approach is so useful in relation to this study is because in the notion of field there is a concept that allows for an understanding of social sites as regulated spaces of structured positions (Bourdieu, 1985a). In relation to the question of how these fields functioned then, it was evident through the analysis of the qualitative data that there were a number of characteristic features to these structured spaces, which reflected and reinforced Bourdieu's conceptual viewpoint. Firstly, there was a clear arrangement of individuals within a field, their relative position reflecting both the volume and the composition of capital that they were able to mobilise in relation to others. Moreover, the overlapping nature of fields necessitated that the young people often occupied more than one subject position at any one time. Opportunities for acquiring and converting capital from one form to another presented individuals with a chance to alter their positions within a field, though more enduring characteristics often limited the extent to which this could take place. For example, a commitment to the rules and an acquisition of knowledge through the education process can allow a young person to gain cultural and social capital within the field of school. However, their position as student within the official structure of the institution (determined by characteristics such as age, qualifications etc.) limits the degree of motility that this capital can offer (i.e. a student cannot be a teacher at the same time). This example identifies a second feature of fields, i.e. the power relations that organise individuals into a hierarchical arrangement of positions. In this way, some positions can be seen to be more valued than others, allowing those individuals occupying them an opportunity to consolidate their own position by setting or maintaining ideals and standards for others in the field i.e. to define legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1985a). These issues of positions and power relations are then implicit within a process of production and reproduction, and the fact that these contexts are so clearly organised in relation to the dimensions of space and time represents another key characteristic of fields identified through the data.

Through the analysis of data, it was also evident that a number of specific themes were being identified as significant in each field. For example, the young people frequently articulated a need to manage their behaviour and appearance in a social context in order to comply with the specific demands and expectations associated with



their particular position within a given field. Although this presentation of self was shaped and determined, in part, by an individual's habitus and their possession of relevant capital, it also necessitated an awareness of both societal and cultural norms. As such, this process frequently reflected gender or class-based distinctions as well as the traditional subjugated position of young people (in relation to adults) within contemporary western society. The active management of their practice in this way afforded the young people an opportunity to increase their social comfort and acquire or consolidate relevant capital. However, the perceived necessity to do this was also, at times, associated with a denial of autonomy by the young people, and their lowly position in relation to adults as indicative of a lack of respect. The tension generated as a result of conflicting desires within fields, i.e. compliance on the one hand and autonomous action on the other, was evident throughout the analysis in a dialect of conformity and resistance. These issues, in association with the generic characteristics of fields outlined above, helped to shape the young people's behaviour and practice within the fields, determined both the nature and quality of their social interactions, and influenced their constructions of self. The following section provides a brief overview of each of the preceding analysis chapters, in order to highlight how the five fields are organised and function in relation to some of the characteristics discussed here. Some of the wider issues are also discussed in subsequent sections of the chapter.

### **9.3 OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD ANALYSIS CHAPTERS**

#### **9.3.1 *Family***

The family was identified as the field with which the young people had the most contact, particularly in their earliest years, and hence was one that had been a significant influence on their development of habitus and constructions of self. Within the familial field the young people were positioned, and positioned themselves, in a number of ways, as child, grandchild, sibling etc., depending upon their biological association to and social interactions with these significant others. This was then reflected in their position within the hierarchical structure of the field. The arrangement of individuals within the familial field was largely connected with age, which meant that parents and older relations were generally those who could

determine and reinforce appropriate behaviour i.e. they could 'tell you what you can and can't do' (Zoe). Although the young people believed that they were granted more responsibility as they got older, the 'generation gap' that they perceived between themselves and their parents was often a source of contention. In relation to the issue of space, the family home was identified as the primary terrain in this field (with compulsory attendance), although the family unit itself could move from one area to another (either temporarily or permanently) and the extended family network could extend over great distances. The notion of parental authority was particularly salient in relation to the family home, with specific 'house rules' regulating young people's behaviour, yet it also transcended these physical boundaries as the responsibility for their children's welfare was passed on to others (e.g. teachers or peers). This field was perceived by the young people to be relatively stable, because although the relationships they had with other members of the field could mature and develop they were largely considered indefinite associations. Even in those instances when individuals mentioned incidence of marital breakdown, the coherence of the family network was perceived to negate any long-term upheaval. The stability and enduring nature of this field was also seen to reflect the reproduction of social and cultural ideals over time, as well as being implicit within a sense of genetic inevitability that was implied by some individuals. Although the young people described this situation humorously as 'becoming like your parents' (Mia), there were more significant underlying issues here in that this process could also be seen to result in the reproduction of social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Adler & Adler, 1998).

### 9.3.2 *Peers*

It was evident that, for some participants, the field of peers had superseded (or at least equalled) the family as the preferred site for support, affirmation and social comfort. This was related to the increased autonomy that the young people perceived in this field for, as Lloyd suggested, 'with your friends you can do what you want'. This freedom was not absolute, however, and the field of peers was also identified as being subject to specific forms of regulation. Influence and status was seen to lie with those individuals who were able to appropriate and mobilise valued forms of capital, in particular social, cultural and physical capital. These resources, which reflected both peer group norms and wider societal and cultural ideals, allowed such individuals to



be positioned, and to position themselves, as 'cool' or 'popular'. This situation of positioning and power relations had significant implications for constructing self in this field, as the perceived pressure to conform to group norms, while at the same time retaining a degree of individual autonomy, required individuals to negotiate the conflicting processes of 'standing out' and 'fitting in'. There were a number of factors that influenced the young people's friendships in this field, and these were related to factors such as gender (the girls with a smaller number of 'close friends' and the boys a wider network of 'mates') as well as the nature, perceived importance, or longevity of the relationship. Thanks to the significant overlaps between this field and others, the young people had a number of diverse friendship groups that represented pockets of spaces within the social landscape (e.g. 'school' friends, 'sport' friends, 'church' friends etc.). As such, the notion of space in this field was more fluid and abstract, and its dynamic nature necessitated that there were considerable changes over time. In relation to the young people's friendships this meant that the notion of time, in association with other social influences, could be both an enabling and constraining factor i.e. it could be both disruptive (friends moving apart) or constructive (friends growing closer or new relationships forming). The strongest relationships were perceived to be those between individuals who shared similar characteristics, tastes and experiences, i.e. similar aspects of habitus, and it was these that introduced an element of stability into what was otherwise a perpetually shifting environment.

### *9.3.3 School*

The young people in this study viewed the field of school as a unique and 'artificial' environment in which it was compulsory for them to spend significant amounts of time. They were also aware that in the hierarchical arrangement of individuals within the field they occupied a relatively subjugated position (that of 'student'), and that their lack of relevant capital meant they were unable to challenge the regulatory power of those in authority (i.e. teachers). This field was identified as a highly structured environment, in which the implicit and explicit regulation of behaviour, space and time contributed to the management of young people's bodies and, over time, led to the development of 'school-relevant' elements of habitus. The norms and values of the school, which reflected class and gender distinctions as well as particular cultural and ethnic values, were produced and reproduced through the structure of the field, as well

as through explicit teaching and the preservation of tradition. This process afforded individuals varying degrees of cultural capital, and in this way the school could be seen to contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1998b). School values and traditions were also perceived to be implicit in the school uniform which, in addition to reinforcing a 'school identity', also represented a means by which the regulation of the field could transcend the physical boundaries of the school site. Whereas the authority of the school was generally accepted within these official boundaries, there was considerable resistance to implicit attempts to control behaviour outside of these confines (e.g. in the home, leisure spaces etc.). The field of school was highly structured in relation to both space and time, yet the young people were able to carve out their own spaces within the field in which they engaged with their peers. Although largely free from the direct control of the school, these 'back regions' of the field (Goffman, 1990) were subject to the regulation of peer group norms. The conflict between school and peer norms meant that it was often a complex process constructing self in this field, and this complexity contributed to the conflicting or ambivalent attitudes (e.g. conformity and/or resistance to school regulation, or the school experience as enabling or constraining) that represented a central theme in the data.

#### **9.3.4 *Media***

The media field was a pervasive and dynamic social context and, because technological advances allowed it to transcend limitations of space and time, it was seen to inform and influence almost every aspect of daily social life. Although there were a few concrete spaces that could be seen to represent this field (e.g. retail centres or cinemas), the majority of young people's engagement with the media took place within other social fields. Thanks to its ubiquitous nature and obvious centrality to the young people's social experiences, this field was perceived to provide significant resources for the construction of identities. Through various media such as television, films, magazines and music, the young people were able to have access to celebrity role models, keep up-to-date with cultural trends and acquire knowledge that could be converted to significant social capital within the peer group. The field of peers was again significant in relation to the media field, because although the power to establish or reinforce norms rested ultimately with media corporations, the acquisition and



interpretation of these norms often reflected particular peer group idiosyncrasies. In this way, the young people could position themselves as knowledgeable and discriminate consumers, although they also conceded that they were occasionally 'susceptible' to manipulation by powerful media representations. The power of the media field was evident in that it was perceived as an authoritative source of knowledge, particularly in relation to determining 'what you should wear or how you should look' (Simon). In this way, the field contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes and inequalities, primarily through the production and reproduction of dominant cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity. Although in this respect there was some continuity over time, the field was characterised by fluidity and perpetual change, with phases, crazes and phenomena constantly emerging and falling away. This dynamic situation meant that the media field was a complex terrain for the young people to negotiate, although it also provided resources that helped to strengthen the associations between fields. For example, the use of communication technology, such as mobile phones and email, enabled individuals to maintain a connection with others without the need for co-presence.

### *9.3.5 Physical Culture*

The field of physical culture was defined as comprising a range of practices, 'concerned with the maintenance, representation and regulation of the body' (Kirk (1999c p.66), which constituted the various categories of sport, physical recreation and exercise. It was identified as a field with significant overlaps with each of the other core contexts highlighted in this study. The young people's engagement with this field was incredibly diverse, taking place in a variety of contexts, in numerous ways, and with differing degrees of commitment. The family was perceived to be a significant influence in relation to encouraging and supporting an individual's engagement with this field in their early years (contributing to the reproduction of familial tastes or interests), with the fields of peers and school providing an increasing influence during adolescence. The young people were positioned in this field in relation to their possession of significant physical attributes and skills, with ability and success affording individuals an opportunity to convert this physical capital into social capital (status or kudos) among the peer group. Wider social and cultural norms contributed to this process of positioning individuals within the field of physical

culture, with gendered bodily ideals and cultural stereotypes influencing the value attached to body sizes or the types of activities identified as 'male' or 'female'. The young people's apparent commitment to achieving these bodily ideals reflected the influence of these norms in the development of habitus, and the difficulties that some individuals faced in challenging cultural sporting stereotypes indicated the deeply rooted nature of reproduced social inequalities. The explicit focus on the body in this field highlighted it as a key site for the construction of embodied identities, and emphasised the importance of ensuring that any engagement here proved to be a positive experience for young people. In relation to the field of school, however, the prescriptive nature of the clothing worn, the activities undertaken, and the degree of competition caused the majority of the young people to perceive this engagement with physical culture a negative experience. It was evident that being able to voluntarily engage in activities, both formal and informal, when, where, and with whom they chose, was a step towards creating a more positive engagement with this field. The field of peers was once again important here, although an affiliation to a particular group in the field of physical culture often necessitated the adoption of a specific image in which relevant clothing, jargon, deportment or attitudes was necessary in order to accumulate significant social and physical capital.

#### **9.4 THE CONFIGURATIONS AND INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FIELDS**

The preceding discussion has highlighted some of the interactions between the five fields, and this section now moves on to look more closely at the relationships between fields and the configurations that were evident between these social contexts within the data. The fields of media and peers were both identified as pervasive social sites, and their centrality appeared to be associated with their ability to transcend different social contexts. As such, there were many associations between these fields and the others, though they often varied in intensity from one individual to another. Although each of the participants' social experiences reflected their particular circumstances, and were thus unique, there was some evidence of similar patterns of experience between individuals. For example, an association between the fields of school and peers was observable for each young person and indicated the degree to which these two contexts are connected. Moreover, the field of physical culture often provided another association here, as the involvement of young people, with their



peers, in school physical education necessitated that they be engaged with each of these fields simultaneously. Although these three fields often formed a central configuration, however, it was evident that the nature of this association varied from one individual to another. For example, whereas Frederick and Katie both identified with this school-peers-physical culture complex, for Frederick the association between school and physical culture was positive and for Katie it was negative. The negative association between school and physical culture was a common trend among the girls in the study, interestingly even among those in the high cluster groups who professed a strong disposition towards physical activity. This issue, in addition to the fact that the only boys who made this negative association were those in clusters 4 and 5 (i.e. the lowly motivated and amotivated groups) raises some important questions concerning the competitive and prescriptive nature of school physical education (see final section).

The negative relationship between school and physical culture wasn't the only example of a gender distinction within the data. For example, the interaction of the fields of peers and family was also a more common configuration for the girls, whereas the positive association between the familial and physical culture fields was a feature more characteristic of the boys' social experiences. In relation to the familial field again, it is perhaps significant that both Chloë and Lloyd (the two Asian students) demonstrated a strong affiliation with the familial field, although the small sample size in this study provides a significant limitation to identifying this as a cultural trend. One shared aspect of these individuals' social practice that could be related to a specific cultural influence, however, was that they were both Muslims. The religious field was identified through the study as another central context in some young people's social experience, although the familial field played a defining role here (as, for some of the convent school girls, did the field of school) in forming and maintaining the association.

Although not comprehensive, this section has highlighted some of the most noticeable patterns of configurations that were identified between fields. However, the fact that there were often exceptions to each 'rule' also indicates the degree to which the unique combination of factors within a young person's social world influences the particular configuration between different fields. Besides being an interesting insight

into the social worlds of young people, however, there are a number of points that these associations raise and which I believe have implications for young people's constructions of embodied identities. Firstly, the field of peers is a significant social context for young people and a site of considerable influence. Secondly, the media field is a pervasive influence that informs almost all aspects of young people's lives. Thirdly, the association between the fields of school and physical culture, although strong for most young people, is not always positive. Finally, and most significantly, not one of those fields highlighted in this study, nor those identified by the young people themselves through the focus group discussions<sup>2</sup>, stands alone within the social landscape. The implications of some of these issues are discussed in the remainder of the chapter, and the following section begins by considering how the findings of this study contribute to an understanding of young people's construction of identities.

## **9.5 YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONSTRUCTION OF EMBODIED IDENTITIES**

Through its examination of the core social fields in which young people spend time and, more specifically, a focus on the intricate relationships between these sites, this study can be seen to represent a contribution to the understanding of young people's construction of identities. The study has shown that an individual's identity work is dependent upon the relationships between a number of factors, the dynamics of which shape the nature of social experience and structure the availability of both resources and opportunities. As such, the particular configuration of fields, the position(s) occupied within the various locales of fields, and the volume and composition of capital possessed (or the potential to acquire, accumulate or convert it) all interact to influence young people's understandings and constructions of self. Moreover, social, biological and cultural factors (e.g. gender, social class, religion and biography) are inherent within this process and contribute to the complex development of embodied identities.

Although complex, however, I believe that this study has generated information that helps to challenge the notion of adolescence as a specific time of instability, turmoil or crisis in young people's identity constructions (Erikson, 1968; Calabrese, 1987). It is perhaps indisputable that the young people's social experiences comprised the complex negotiation of a number of social worlds, and that the conflicting demands,



expectations and ideals inherent within these engagements often created an element of tension. Much of this conflict, however, could be attributed to the struggles that the young people perceived they faced in their attempts to make the transition from child to adult, rather than an inability to make sense of their dynamic and variable social experiences. Furthermore, it was evident that the fluctuating demands of different fields were not necessarily confined to the adolescent period, but were also faced by different generations of individuals (e.g. parental conflict between the young people's parents and grandparents). Just as adults are deemed capable of managing their complex social experiences, so the young people in this study showed themselves to be knowledgeable social agents who, through experience, acquire the skills (embodied in the habitus) necessary to negotiate more or less successfully the variable terrain of their social worlds. Moreover, whereas their conceptions of self were to an extent fluid (Bourdieu, 1993a; Shilling, 1993; Jenkins, 1996), reflexively constructed in relation to the demands of a particular context, there were elements of their identities that were relatively stable and which offered a degree of reliability and 'ontological security' in an inherently dynamic social environment (Giddens, 1991).

Although a dynamic process, these more enduring aspects of young people's identities allowed them to maintain relatively coherent and continuous understandings of self. These deeply embedded elements of self were often related to the familial field, reflecting inherited cultural or physical capital (i.e. name, appearance, nationality), and can perhaps be perceived as comprising a 'core' of identity (though not as rigidly defined as traditional, 'centred' notions of identity). Dynamic and transient aspects of identity, reflecting the demands, expectations or tastes associated with a specific position in a particular field, are then added to these more enduring elements of identity, and help to construct a conception of self that is relevant to that context. Having said this, it was also clear that these 'core' understandings of self were not absolute but could be amended in response to substantial and enduring changes in an individual's social situation (e.g. family break-ups, the establishment of close friends). There are perhaps important issues here for physical education, in that a careful consideration of curricular issues and implementation, particularly in relation to the reproduction of gender stereotypes and bodily ideals, could help to 'interrupt the habitus' and encourage the development among young people of more edifying dispositions and attitudes towards physical activity (Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, in

press). The notion of habitus has been a useful concept to employ in relation to these issues, as it allows for an understanding of identity construction as a reflection of both structured influences and agential action. The following section now moves on to discuss how these insights into young people's construction of identities have corroborated the value of this conceptual tool.

## **9.6 THE MANAGEMENT OF SELF: Becoming Endowed with the Habitus**

One of the core research questions in the study referred to an individual's regulation of their social practice, and asked whether the management of self, in relation to the dispositions of habitus, reflected authentic constructions of self or merely 'personas' adopted to satisfy the specific demands of the field. There was certainly an indication within the data that the young people engaged in a degree of self-management in order to present a construction of self that met situational or contextual demands, or indeed fulfilled the requirements of their position within a particular field. However, although the participants were often aware of this change in their practice, take Mia's comment that 'it's all pretence really', there was also an indication that it wasn't always a conscious process. As Lara said, 'I think it's just kind of an unconscious thing that you do in your mind, because you don't mean to at all'. It would appear then that there is an unwitting element to the management of self, although the awareness of the young people also identifies an element of choice (albeit rooted in the constraints imposed by the necessity to accumulate capital of value). In this way, the study would appear to support Bourdieu's understanding of habitus, and highlights the value of the concept as a means of overcoming, in part, the limitations of the traditional structure-agency binary. Viewing habitus as schemes of perception and appreciation acquired over time, a product of cumulative social experience manifest through the development of tastes (Bourdieu, 1984, 1985a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002), makes it possible to understand how, over time, young people become skilled at reading social contexts and learn, in Alex's words, to 'do the right thing'. However, the dynamic nature of social life necessitates that the varying experiences that young people face over the course of time will demand the acquisition of new skills i.e. new dispositions of habitus. In the study this was evident through the young people's increasing commitment to particular tastes or interests (for example, Ben's rock climbing, Laura's judo, and Katie's guitar playing). In the same way, it was noticeable that these



individuals exhibited dispositions of habitus that were closely linked to their experiences as ‘young people’ within society, experiences that would not always play such a central role in their lives (for example, the influence of the school field). Bearing these issues in mind, it is perhaps necessary to take a more flexible approach to the understanding of habitus, perceiving its development as a continuous process of corroboration and acquisition in which some dispositions or skills are confirmed, and hence consolidated, and others (for example the particular idiosyncrasies of school regulation) are abated when they are no longer central features of an individual’s social practice. This dynamic view of habitus is an issue worthy of further consideration, although it is perhaps beyond the boundaries of this thesis. The final section of this chapter, however, attempts to highlight some of the implications that can be drawn from the information generated through the study.

## **9.7 LEARNING LESSONS, MAKING PROGRESS, MOVING FORWARD:**

### **Implications of the Study**

#### ***9.7.1 Young People as Skilled Agents in a Multi-Dimensional Social Space.***

One of the most significant aspects of this study is that it has highlighted an unequivocal need, when considering the construction of identities, to take account of the multiple social worlds comprising young people’s social experiences, as well as acknowledging the overlapping and contemporaneous nature of these fields. The focus group discussions with the young people made it clear that the fields highlighted within this study were not ring-fenced but interdependent, and formed, in association with a number of other fields, a complex web of interacting social sites that were often experienced simultaneously. As such, for example, it was not possible to talk about the field of school without acknowledging that it was ‘also a place where you see all of your friends’ (Lara). Or when talking about the field of physical culture, it was not uncommon to hear some reference to the promotion of images presented through the media field, or the role that family members have played in encouraging or supporting participation in physical activity. These interactions can often represent a significant challenge for young people, however, as they can occupy numerous positions within different fields and be faced with conflicting demands, both of which result in an ability to mobilise different and inequitable resources at various points in time. My

experiences of working with the young people in this study have also endorsed the view reflected in the new social studies of childhood literature that there is much to be gained from listening to young people and actively seeking their thoughts and opinions (Alderson, 1995; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). As the young people themselves explained, acknowledging them as skilled and knowledgeable social actors in this way (James & Prout, 1995; Mayall, 2000) allowed them to perceive a degree of respect that they feel is often missing in their interactions with adults (Coleman *et al*, 1997).

### ***9.7.2 The Significance of the Field of Physical Culture.***

The evident centrality of the body in the young people's constructions of self has also highlighted the significance of the field of physical culture, and other fields' interactions with it, as a site in which practices are explicitly characterised by work done on, to or through the body. The young people's varying experiences within this field also reinforced the belief expressed in numerous studies that its structure and organisation, and the practices that take place within it, should ensure a constructive and enjoyable experience for young people (Vertinsky, 1992; Oliver & Lalik, 2000). The young people were influenced by numerous factors within the field of physical culture, and these factors helped to structure their practices and determine their perceptions of the quality of their experiences. For example, an individual's economic capital<sup>3</sup>, familial traits and peer relationships could all be seen to play a part in influencing the resources and opportunities available to them, and shaping their dispositions and opinions regarding physical culture. Furthermore, the data clearly indicates that gender has a fundamental role in structuring young people's experience of and attitudes to the field of physical culture. The traditional viewpoint of sport as a male preserve is still seen to underpin dominant cultural norms and influence, among other things, perceptions of gender appropriate sport and bodily ideals. These taken for granted assumptions have informed much of the practice of those with responsibility for organising and instructing physical activities for young people and, some have argued, have played a role in reproducing a culture of healthism, endorsed and reproduced through the media field (Kirk & Colquhoun, 1989; Vertinsky, 1992). In order to counteract this oppressive situation, a number of authors now highlight the need for explicitly teaching a critical analysis of bodily ideals so that young people



can become more critical consumers of corporeal information (Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992; Kirk & Tinning, 1994; Oliver & Lalik, 2000, 2001).

### *9.7.3 Implications for Physical Education.*

Although societal trends relating to physical culture have changed much in recent years, the structure of a great deal of organised sport, particularly that provided by schools, has altered little (Kirk, 1999c; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). Given the dissatisfaction that a number of the young people involved in the study expressed regarding school physical education, it would appear that it is necessary to heed the call for a more culturally relevant pedagogy that takes account of these changes (Ennis, 1999). For some of the girls involved in the study, the perpetuation of gender stereotypes by the boys often created a degree of tension and conflict, and contributed to their negative perception of physical activities within the school context. This would appear to indicate that there is a need for more programs such as 'Sport Education' (Siedentop, 1994), the 'Personal Social Responsibility Model' (Hellison, 1995) and 'Sport for Peace' (Ennis et al, 1997; Ennis, 1999), which are specifically designed to improve acceptance, co-operation, and conflict resolution in coeducational physical education settings. It was evident in this study that the young people had a desire to be actively involved in shaping their physical activity practice and that, if allowed to do this, their enjoyment of the experience was enhanced. As such, offering young people the chance to have their say regarding, for example, the activities undertaken, the clothing worn, and the nature of competition, allows them a more instrumental role and removes the prescriptive element of organised events that is perceived so negatively. In this way, individuals are able to construct identities within the field of physical culture that are consistent with their habitus, and that are ultimately more compatible with their other understandings of self in different fields. In relation to this issue, the centrality of peers within the adolescent period identifies this field as an influential social context and hence significant to take into account when considering issues such as promoting young people's participation in physical activity. Taking into account the importance of peer approval then, the reproduction of social and gendered inequality and the changing value of physical capital are issues that can perhaps be addressed by those within educational settings (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Frost, 2001).



#### **9.7.4 Critiquing the Use of Motivational Constructs.**

A societal concern for the physical health of young people and an alleged increase in levels of youth inactivity (Armstrong & McManus, 1994; Kremer et al, 1997) has led, in recent years, to the development of intervention programs designed to increase participation levels in physical activity. A number of these programs have employed quantitative techniques in order to identify particular characteristics of an individual's attitude or practice, which are then used to indicate the type or degree of intervention required. The data generated by the young people here, however, has raised some interesting questions concerning the nature and focus of these programs and, more significantly given the use of the Motivation and Self-Perception Survey (MSPS) in this study, the use of motivational constructs in policy development for young people. The MSPS was employed in this study in order to cluster the young people on the basis of their motivation to physical activity, in anticipation that this would provide an insight into the development of an individual's habitus. Moreover, there was a supposition that the fields would configure in a way that would refute the assumptions behind the MSPS, and so the study was also seen as a means to examine the validity of this survey. Although there was some indication that these cluster groups broadly reflected the young people's attitudes and affiliation to sport practices (indeed the contact teacher at Thornhill school commented that 'I can see what you've done in grouping the boys') it was evident that they did not necessarily reflect their motivational profiles in relation to other physical cultural practices or in different social fields. So, although Carl and Alex (cluster 1 and 2 respectively) both claimed that 'sport is my life', it was clear that this motivational profile did not extend to participation in other cultural practices and certainly didn't apply to schoolwork. In addition, whereas Amadaia corresponded to some degree with her motivational profile as 'self-determined' and was a keen participant in some physical activities, her lack of confidence and generic self-consciousness did not reflect the high scores in these determinants that were 'characteristic' of her cluster group. In addition, it was also evident that although some of the individuals identified as 'lowly motivated' or 'amotivated' (clusters 4 and 5) did indeed have negative perceptions of traditional sports or school physical education (PE), they did not necessarily have inactive or unhealthy lifestyles. For example, the fact that Katie (cluster 5) claimed 'I hate sports'



did not stop her playing badminton with friends outside of school, and John's (cluster 5) apparent amotivation was certainly not reflected in his weekly cycling expeditions.

Do these irregularities suggest then that the motivational literature is inaccurate? Not, necessarily, though the data generated in this study would appear to suggest that there is a need to exercise caution when employing these motivational variables to classify young people's general orientation to physical activities. The use of these determinants in such an abstract way does not allow for the significance of social context, which has been identified as so influential in shaping young people's attitudes and tastes. The importance of context was also highlighted through the data, because it was clear that the administration of the MSPS in school time had, understandably, led the young people to draw upon their experiences in that field when answering the survey questions. When the focus groups then gave them an opportunity to explore and examine their physical activity practices in other fields, such as peers or family, the pictures that were created of their engagement with the field of physical culture were often quite different. Not only did their levels of participation vary, but when freed from the implicit restrictions of the school field their perception of physical culture practices also broadened. In this way, Mike's skateboarding, Ben's rock climbing, Mia's trampolining, and Liz's dancing were all identified as significant aspects of their engagements with this field, and hence important influences in their constructions of self. Bearing these issues in mind, there is perhaps a need for physical educators and policy makers to readdress their perceptions of physical activity, and encompass a broader definition of physical culture that allows a spectrum of sport, exercise and leisure practices, both formal and informal, to be perceived as overlapping communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Roberts, 1996). This could allow for a more comprehensive, and perhaps more accurate, picture of young people's leisure activities, and provide opportunities in which they can be encouraged to engage in healthy lifestyles without the restrictive and prescriptive guidelines that some individuals in this study perceived to characterise contemporary physical activity programs.



## 9.8 SUMMARY

This chapter has attempted to link the analysis of data with the research questions that were at the heart of this study. As such, it has provided an explanation of the structure and characteristic of fields, as well as indicating how each of those fields highlighted in the study were seen to function for the young people involved. Furthermore, it has examined the configuration of these fields within the participants' varied social experiences, and the influence that these relationships had on their constructions of self and development of habitus. The notion of habitus itself was identified as a valuable conceptual tool for understanding how young people both shape and are shaped by their social experiences. In association with these issues, the chapter has also highlighted some of the key themes that were identified as significant through the analysis of data, and has identified some implications for future research directions.

As mentioned, one of the key values of the study is that it has highlighted, and reinforced, the fact that there are significant interrelationships between the numerous fields that comprise an individual's social landscape, and that these associations influence their constructions of self and contribute to the development of habitus. As such, I believe that the thesis has provided a contribution to the body of literature concerned with young people's construction of embodied identities, and the theoretical framework employed has proved an effective and constructive approach in terms of examining such a complex social process. The study has also recognised the significance for young people of the fields of media and peers, and the importance of the field of physical culture in relation to the formation of embodied identities. Given the importance of the field of physical culture as a site in which embodied identities are constructed, young people's negative experiences within this field, particularly those within the field of school, identifies curricular development, design and implementation an important area for attention. It has been argued that more constructive experiences within this field could help, in part, to 'interrupt the habitus' and encourage the development of more positive dispositions towards physical culture among young people. Moreover, the important influence of the fields of peers and media, as well as the interconnections between all fields, highlights the potential value of a broad and inclusive approach to any such program design. Another key finding is that some of the conflict experienced by young people within the various fields



reflects their reaction against a subjugated position in relation to adults and a desire to be perceived and treated as knowledgeable social agents. In relation to this issue, I found that the methodological approach to this study, and the techniques employed, facilitated the young people's ability to articulate this concern and highlighted the issue as one of importance. The benefits gained in this study through engaging young people in the research process, and actively listening to and respecting their opinions, has demonstrated that this approach can be an insightful, constructive and rewarding experience for adult researchers.

There are obviously limitations to the study (e.g. the limited time spent with the young people, the small number of participants, the problematic yet unavoidable alterations to the research schedule etc.) although these, in addition to the experience of designing and conducting a research project, have provided me with valuable knowledge that could inform future research endeavours. Rather than standing alone then, this thesis is viewed very much as a springboard into future research, and it is hoped that some of the issues that have been only briefly discussed here can be explored and examined more thoroughly in subsequent studies.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed description of the research questions refer back to chapter one.

<sup>2</sup> In this study two other important social sites were highlighted by the young people themselves, 'religion' and 'work', and could be seen to function as fields.

<sup>3</sup> Hendry *et al* (1993) have noted that social class is an important factor to consider when examining young people's leisure activities, though I am cautious to refer to social class here as I had no direct demographic information that would allow me to make such claims. Furthermore, it was evident that there were similarities and differences in the economic capital available to young people both within and between schools. As such, although it was possible to imply an element of class distinction between the three schools I have found it easier, and more representative, to make this distinction implicit through an individual's possession of economic capital.

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## Appendix A

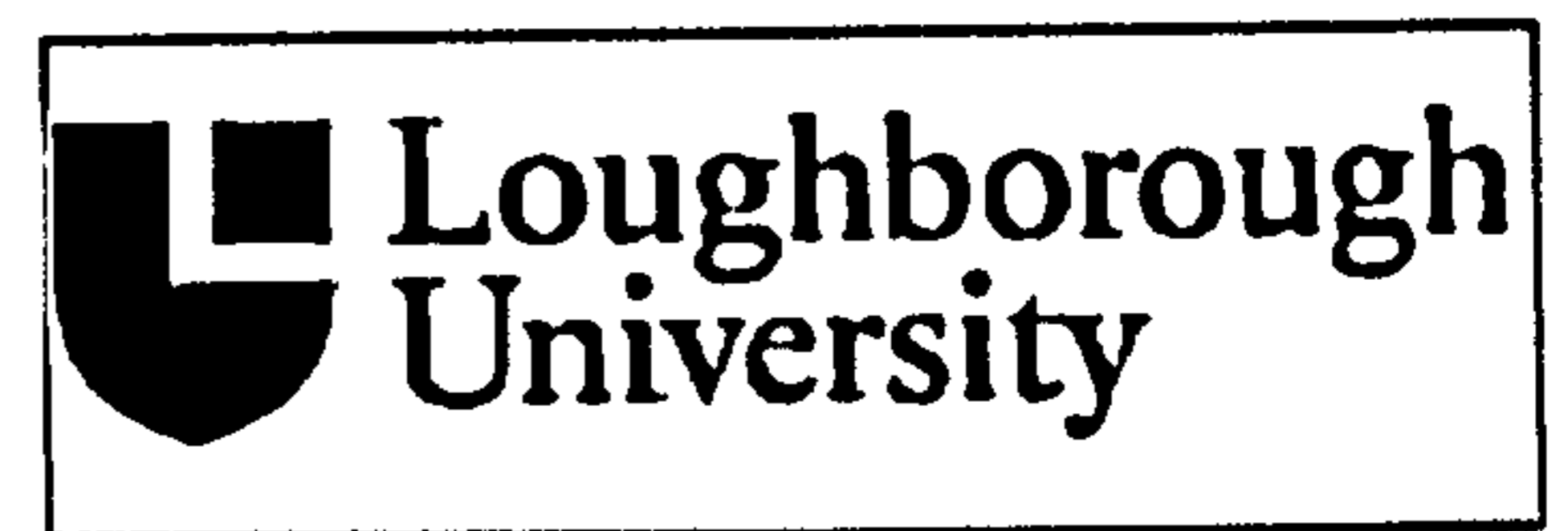
The following document is a copy of the adapted Motivation and Self-Perception Profile questionnaire (Wang & Biddle, 2001) that was given to all year 9 pupils attending Thornhill Boys' School and St. Agnes' Convent School, and all year 8 pupils attending Fenburgh Community College. An analysis of the information generated through these questionnaires was used as a basis for organizing and selecting individuals to take part in the focus group interviews.



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Dear Student

The following questionnaire is part of a study that I am doing and I would very much appreciate it if you could help me by filling it in. It should only take between 10 and 15 minutes and so shouldn't take up too much of your time.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions so all you need to do is answer them as truthfully as you can, it is your own opinions that I am interested in. You will be asked to write your name at the top of the sheet but don't worry, this will be changed for a number later on so that no-one can be identified by what they say.

Thank you for your help.

Rachel Holroyd

**SECTION A: Personal Information**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

1. School / College: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years \_\_\_\_\_ months
3. Gender: Male / Female (please cross the one out that you don't need)

Please tick *one* answer for each of the following questions:

4. Do you intend to play sport or exercise (which will make you out of breath) three times a week for the next two weeks?  
  
 Very Likely!  
 Likely  
 Not Sure  
 Unlikely  
 Very Unlikely!
5. Not including school PE lessons, how often do you play sport (this includes any training and competing)?  
  
 Hardly ever or not at all  
 1-2 times per week  
 More than 2 times per week
6. How would you describe your sport participation?  
  
 Don't play very much  
 Recreational level (for own fun/enjoyment)  
 Competitive level (e.g. for a team/club)
7. Approximately how many hours a week do you spend playing sport?  
  
 Less than 1 hour  
 Between 1-3 hours  
 More than 3 but less than 6 hours  
 More than 6 hours
8. Do you plan to play sport or exercise (which will make you out of breath) three times a week for the next two weeks?  
  
 YES!  
 Yes  
 Not Sure  
 No  
 NO!



**SECTION B: When do you feel successful in sport/PE?**

Read each of the following statements carefully and decide to what extent you agree with it. Indicate how you feel most of the time by circling only *one number* for each statement.

**I feel most successful in sport and physical education when....**

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I learn a new skill and it makes me want to practice more.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I am the only one who can do or play the skill.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I learn something that is fun to do.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I can do better than my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I learn a new skill by trying hard.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	the others can't do as well as me.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I work really hard.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	others mess up and I don't.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	something I learn makes me want to go and practise more.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I score the most points or goals.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	a skill I learn feels really right.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I am the best.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I do my very best.	1	2	3	4	5

**SECTION C: Why do you take part in PE/sport?****I take part in Physical Education and Sport....**

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	because I'll get into trouble if I don't.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	because I want the teacher to think I'm a good student.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	because I want to learn sport/PE skills.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	because sport/PE is fun.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	but I don't really know why.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	because that's what I'm supposed to do.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	because I would feel bad about myself if I didn't.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	because it is important for me to do well in sport/PE.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	because I enjoy learning new skills.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	but I don't see why we should have sport/PE.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	so that the teacher won't yell at me.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	because I want the other students to think I'm good.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	because I want to improve in sport/PE.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	because sport/PE is exciting.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	but I really feel I'm wasting my time in sport/PE.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	because that's the rule.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	because it bothers me when I don't.	1	2	3	4	5



**SECTION D: What are your views on sport ability?**

Please answer each of the questions below. There are no right or wrong answers, we are simply interested in your opinions. Please circle the *one* number for each question which best represents your opinion.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	We have a certain level of ability in sport and can't really do much to change it.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	To be successful in sport you need to have a natural aptitude, i.e. be born with it.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	To be successful in sport you need to learn techniques and skills, and practise them regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	If you are good at sport, you are good at all sports, even if they are very different (e.g. gymnastics, swimming, team games and climbing).	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Even if you try hard, the level you reach in sport will change very little.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The same person can be good at one sport, but not good at other sports.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	You need to have a certain 'gift' to be good at sports.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	You need to learn and to work hard to be good at sport.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	In sports, if you work hard at it, you <u>will always</u> get better.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	In principle, if you are good at one sport, you are good at almost all sports (even if they are quite different).	1	2	3	4	5
11.	How good you are at sport is something which you can improve only with difficulty.	1	2	3	4	5

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
12.	To be good at sports, you need to be born with the basic qualities which allow you success.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	To reach a high level of performance in sport, you must go through periods of learning and training.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	It is not unusual for someone who is good at one sport to experience difficulties in other sports.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	How good you are at sports will <u>always</u> improve if you work at it.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Someone who is good at sport succeeds in any sport.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	It is difficult to change how good you are at sport.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	To be good at sport you need to be naturally gifted.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	You can be very good at one sport and have problems with other sports.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	If you put enough effort into it, you will <u>always</u> get better at sport.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	It is by learning and hard work that you can succeed and be good at sport.	1	2	3	4	5



**SECTION E: What do you think about PE/Sport?**

Please read the following questions and decide how strongly you agree or disagree with them. To show your response please circle the number on the scale that best represents your feelings.

	Not at all				Very much so
1. I enjoy PE and sport very much.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I put a lot of effort into PE and sport	1	2	3	4	5
3. PE and sport is fun.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is important for me to do well in PE and sport.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I would describe PE and sport as very interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I try very hard at PE and sport.	1	2	3	4	5
7. When I do PE and sport, I think about how much I enjoy it.	1	2	3	4	5
8. PE and sport doesn't hold my attention.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I don't try very hard in PE and sport.	1	2	3	4	5

**SECTION F: What am I like?**

Please read the statements below and then circle a number which best describes how much they are, or are not, like you.

		Not at all like me	Not really like me	in between	Quite like me	Very like me
1.	Some people feel that they are good when it comes to playing sport.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Some people feel that they are among the best when it comes to sport or athletic ability.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Some people are quite confident when it comes to taking part in sports activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Some people feel that they are one of the best when it comes to joining in sports activities.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Some people are a little slower than most when it comes to learning new sport skills.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Given the chance, some people are one of the first to join in sport activities.	1	2	3	4	5

**That's all the questions finished!**

**Please check that you have given an answer for every question before you hand it in.  
Thank you for helping me by completing this survey.**



## Appendix B

This appendix presents some of the material that was used within the focus group discussions with the young people involved in this study, and some examples of the data that the various tasks generated. It contains the following information:

1. Provisional timetable for the focus-group sessions.
2. The list used within the 'Topic Discussion' task.
3. Information relating to the 'Time Maps' task.
4. Some examples of the time-maps completed by the young people.
5. Information relating to the 'Open-Ended Questions' task.
6. Information relating to the 'This is Your Life' task.
7. The 'Identity Posters' completed by the participants.

**Provisional Time-table for the Focus Group Sessions**

WEEK	MAIN ACTIVITY	JOURNAL ACTIVITY
1	Ice-Breaker: What is identity? Task 1: Topic Discussion. Task 2: Time-Space Maps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If only task 1 was completed – questions relating to subjective feelings in various situations.</li> <li>• If task 2 was started – construct a general time-space map for each day of the forthcoming week.</li> <li>• Thoughts/reflections from the session.</li> </ul>
2	Task 2: Time-Space Maps (discussion). Task 3: Magazine Exploration (NB. If task 2 was not started last week, reverse tasks 2 and 3 here and introduce time-space maps at the end).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If task 2 was introduced this week – construct a general time-space map for each day of the forthcoming week.</li> <li>• If this was done over the previous week – construct specific time-space maps (a school day and a weekend day).</li> <li>• Thoughts/reflections from the session.</li> </ul>
3	Task 2: Time-Space Maps (discussion). Task 3: Magazine exploration - themes - annotating Task 4: Identity Posters/Personal Web Pages (begin to construct)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some form of personal biography task.</li> <li>• Thoughts/reflections from the session.</li> </ul>
4-5	Task 4: Identity Posters/Personal Web Pages (completion). Discussion of posters and any ideas highlighted from previous weeks discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free-writing/open-ended questions regarding issues relating to their constructions of self.</li> <li>• Thoughts/reflections on the research project.</li> </ul>



# TOPIC LIST

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY/SPORT**  
(including watching sport, buying sport goods and actually doing sport)



**HOLIDAYS**



**FRIENDS**  
(including social events etc.)

**RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES**

**SCHOOL**



**MEDIA/ENTERTAINMENT**  
(TV, films, books, movies, magazines & music)



**FAMILY**

**INTERNET/COMPUTER**



**WORK**



**HOBBIES**



**OTHERS**  
(any other context or topic you think is important)



# Task For The Week

## TIME MAPS

This is a way of looking at our movements from one place to another during a day. It also lets us see what kind of activities we do and who we spend our time with.

Follow the points below to make a time map for each day of next week.

(1) Draw a box, that represents the actual place in which you find yourself (e.g. your house, a particular room within the house, the school etc.)

(2) Then write in the box: what you are doing there, how long you spend doing it & who else is there. You can also show how you feel about being there (whether it's good, bad or OK).

(3) Each time you change location (so when you physically move from one place to another) draw an arrow and make a new box. Above the arrow you can show how you moved from the first place to the second (walked, car, bus, train etc.) & who else was with you.

(4) Then answer the same kinds of questions as in (2).

If there is any other way of doing the maps which is helpful for you, such as drawing pictures or symbols, then that's fine. The information above is just a guide to let you know what kind of things you need to include in it.

Just one more thing! Please remember to label the maps with the date and your initials - this is just to help me from getting confused!!





# Task for the Week

## Open-Ended Questions

This week involves a few open-ended questions, which basically means that you can write whatever you like! The questions will start you off and then all you have to do is just write what first comes into your head in response to it. Don't think too long and hard about the answers, what is important here is just to write your first thoughts down (don't worry about writing or spelling it properly either).

1. I like...

2. I'm most confident when...

3. People think that I...

4. I'm concerned about...

5. I could best describe myself by saying...



## Task for the Week



"This is Your Life"

Suppose that you are going to appear on 'This is Your Life'. Think of just five facts about yourself that would be included in the program.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

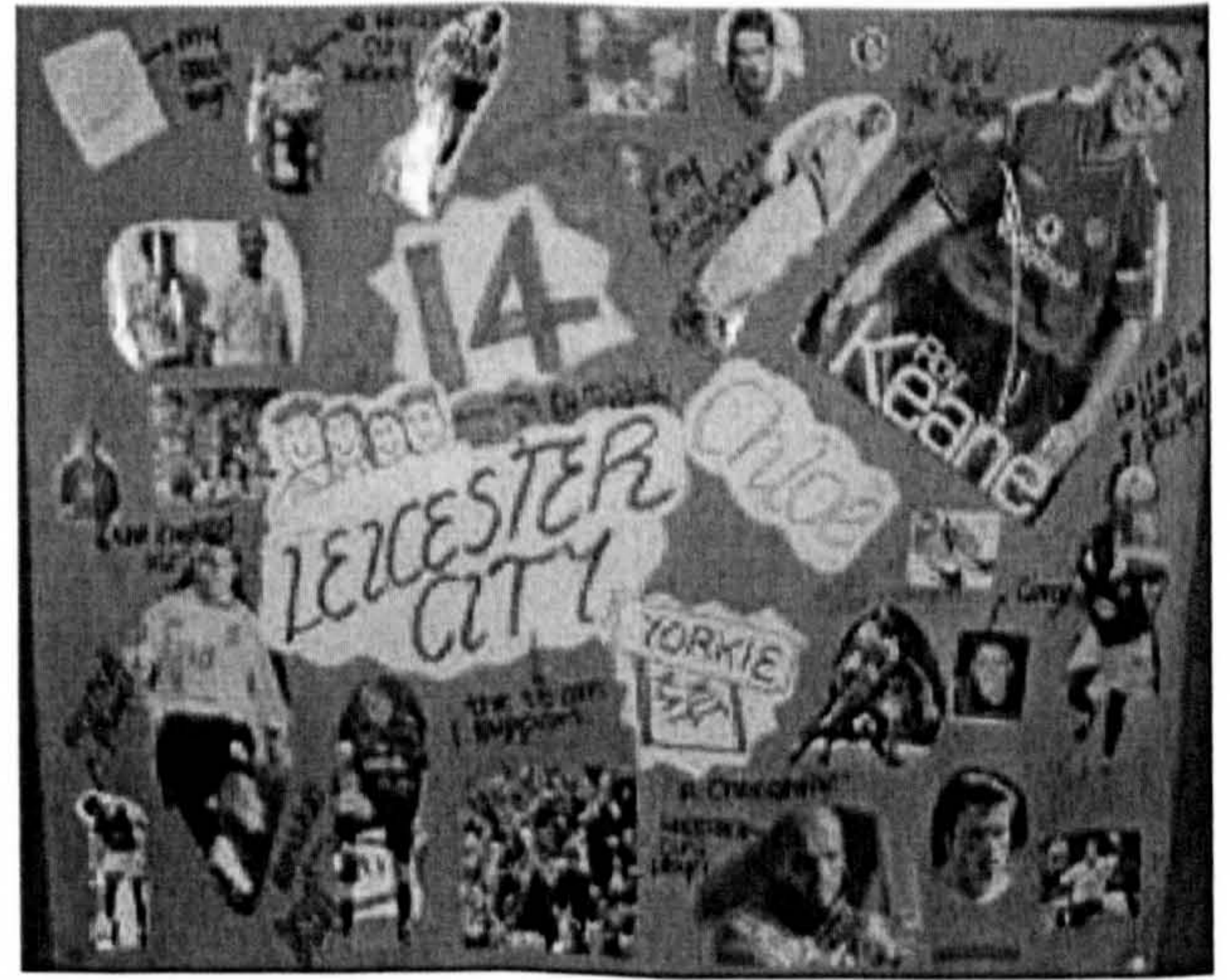
What are the major events in your life so far that would be mentioned?

Who would be the people that are 'surprise guests', and what would they say about you?

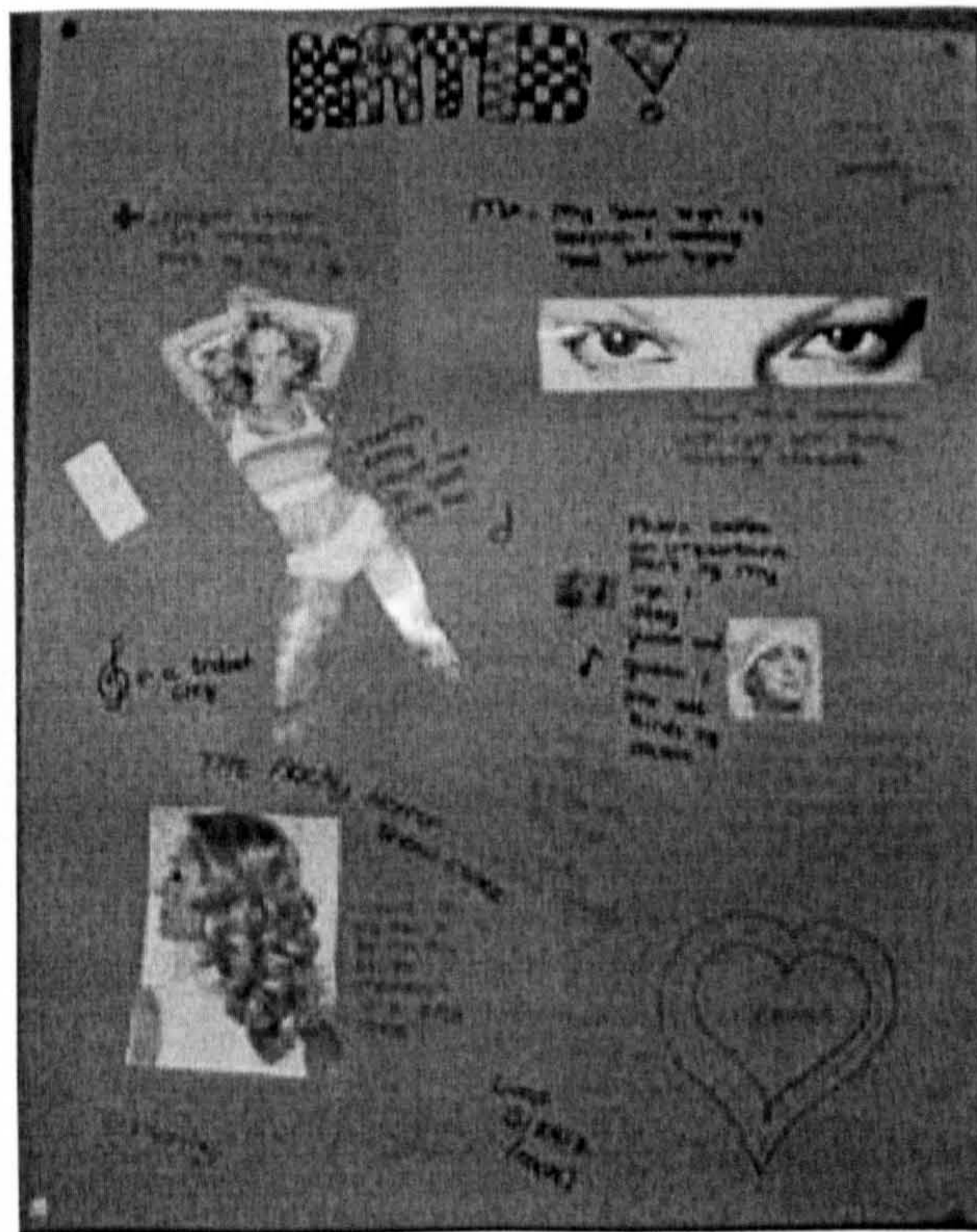




Amadaia (SACS) Cluster 1



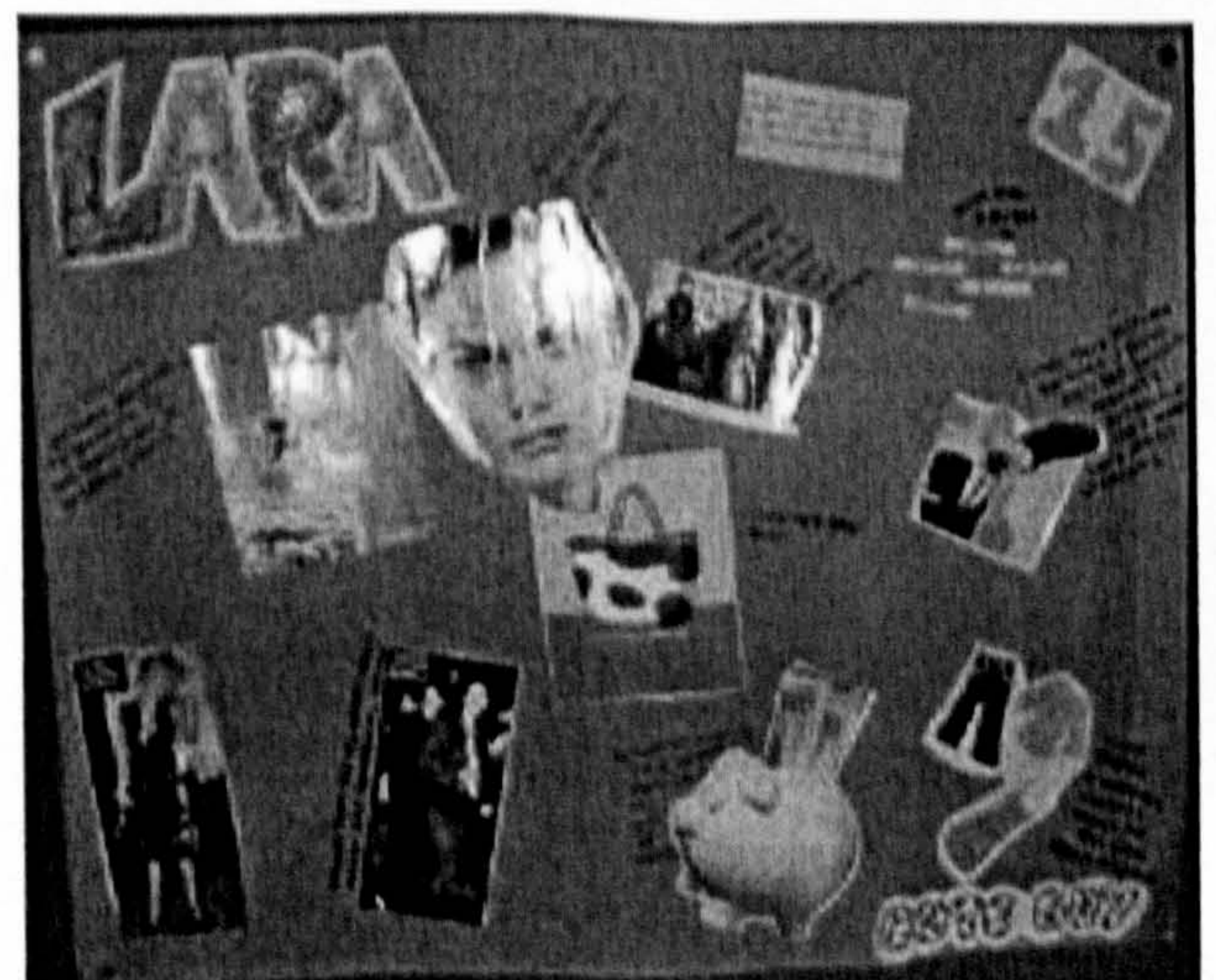
Chloë (SACS) Cluster 2



Katie (SACS) Cluster 5

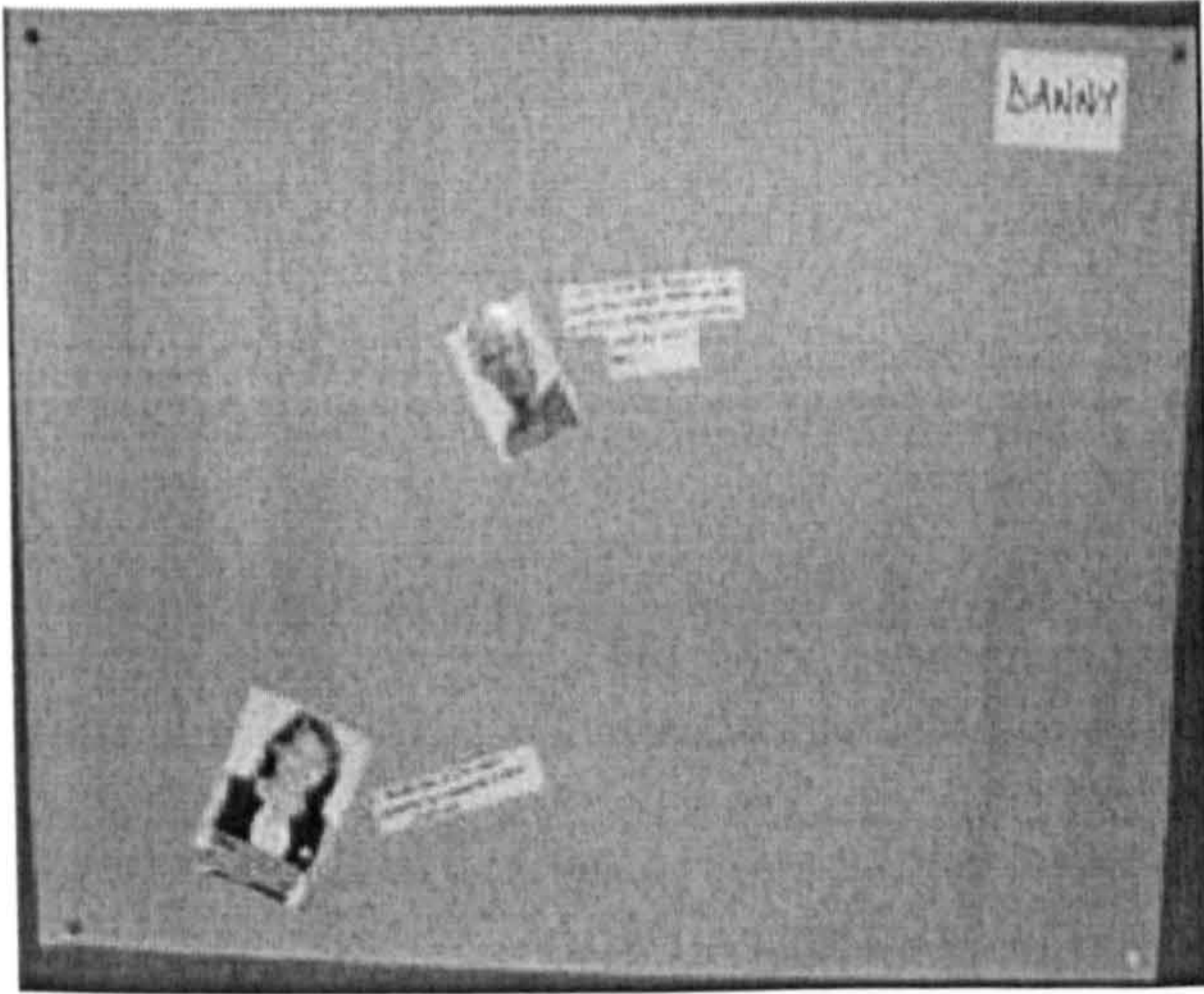


Mia (SACS) Cluster 3



Lara (SACS) Cluster 4

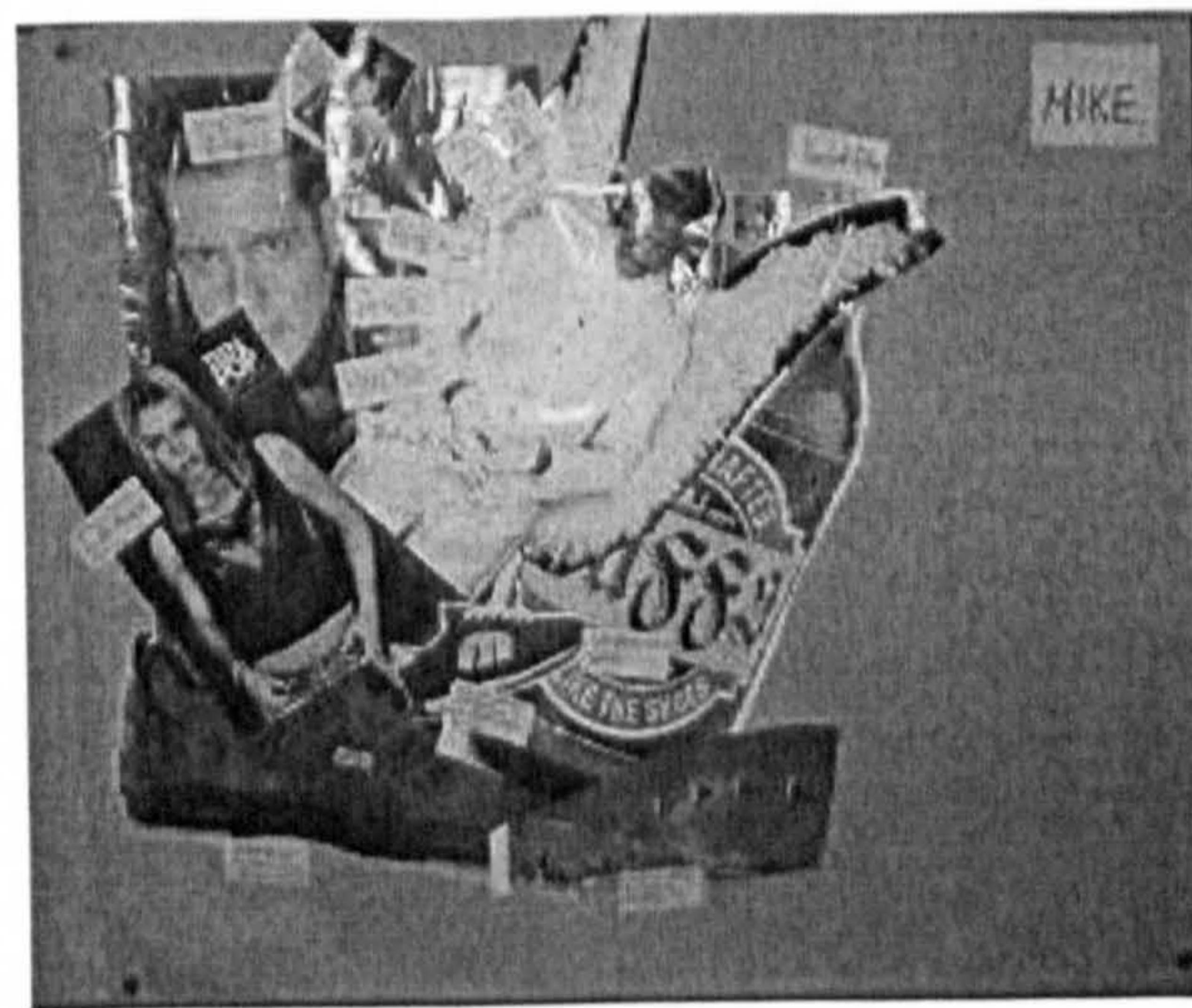




Danny (TBS) Cluster 1



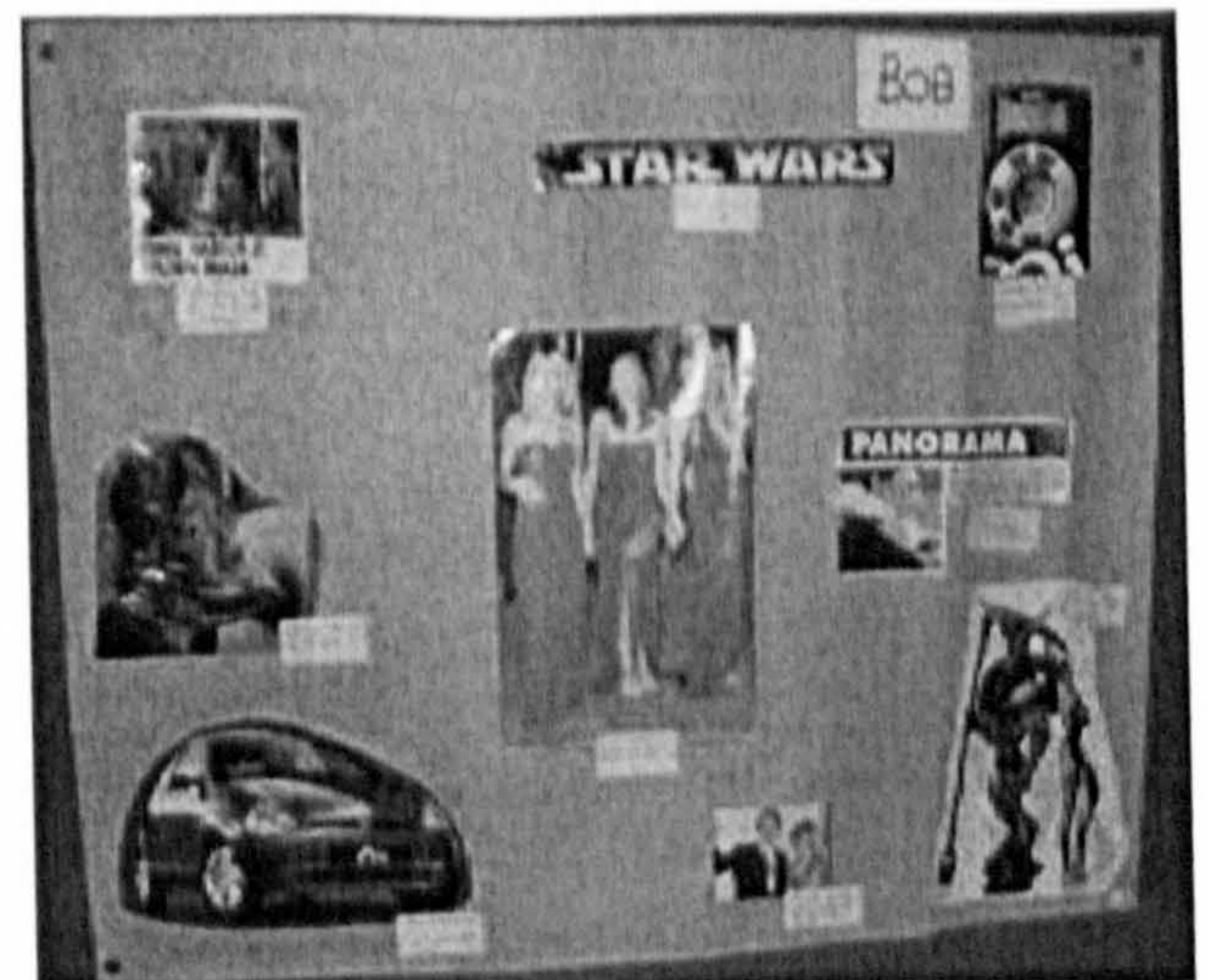
Frederick (TBS) Cluster 2



Mike (TBS) Cluster 3



Lloyd (TBS) Cluster 4



Bob (TBS) Cluster 5



## Appendix C

The following information relates to some of the strategies and techniques employed in the analysis of data generated through the focus group interviews. There are two main sections:

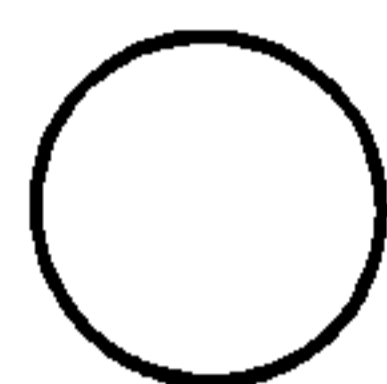
1. A table indicating the relationships between fields that were articulated by the participants.
2. Examples of the diagrams used to indicate the interrelationships and configurations between fields for each of the young people involved in the study.

The following table indicates the relationships between fields (both positive and negative) that were articulated by the participants within the focus group discussions. It does not include those relationships that were either implicit or inferred.

Fields	Cluster 1		Cluster 2		Cluster 3		Cluster 4		Cluster 5		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
PC - F	2		1	1	1	1			1		5	1
PC - P	2	2	2	1		2	2	2		1	6	8
PC - S	2	-2	2	-1	1 -1	2	2	1	1 -1	-1	8 -2	3 -4
PC - M			1	2	1		1		1		4	2
F - P		1			1	2				1	1	4
F - S								1	1	1	1	2
F - M							1	1			1	1
P - S	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	10	10
P - M		1	1		1		1	1		1	3	3
S - M												
R - F		1		1	1					1	1	3
R - P		1								1		2
R - S		1		-1						1		2 -1



The following diagrams are examples of the visual maps used to indicate the interrelationships and configurations between fields for each individual. One individual from each cluster has been selected to provide a representative sample here, and they are identified by name, cluster group and school. The following key explains the symbols used in the diagrams.



Represents a field, the size of the circle indicating the relative importance of that field to the individual. The letters within the circle identify the field, as follows:

PC	Physical Culture
P	Peers
F	Family
S	School
M	Media
R	Religion



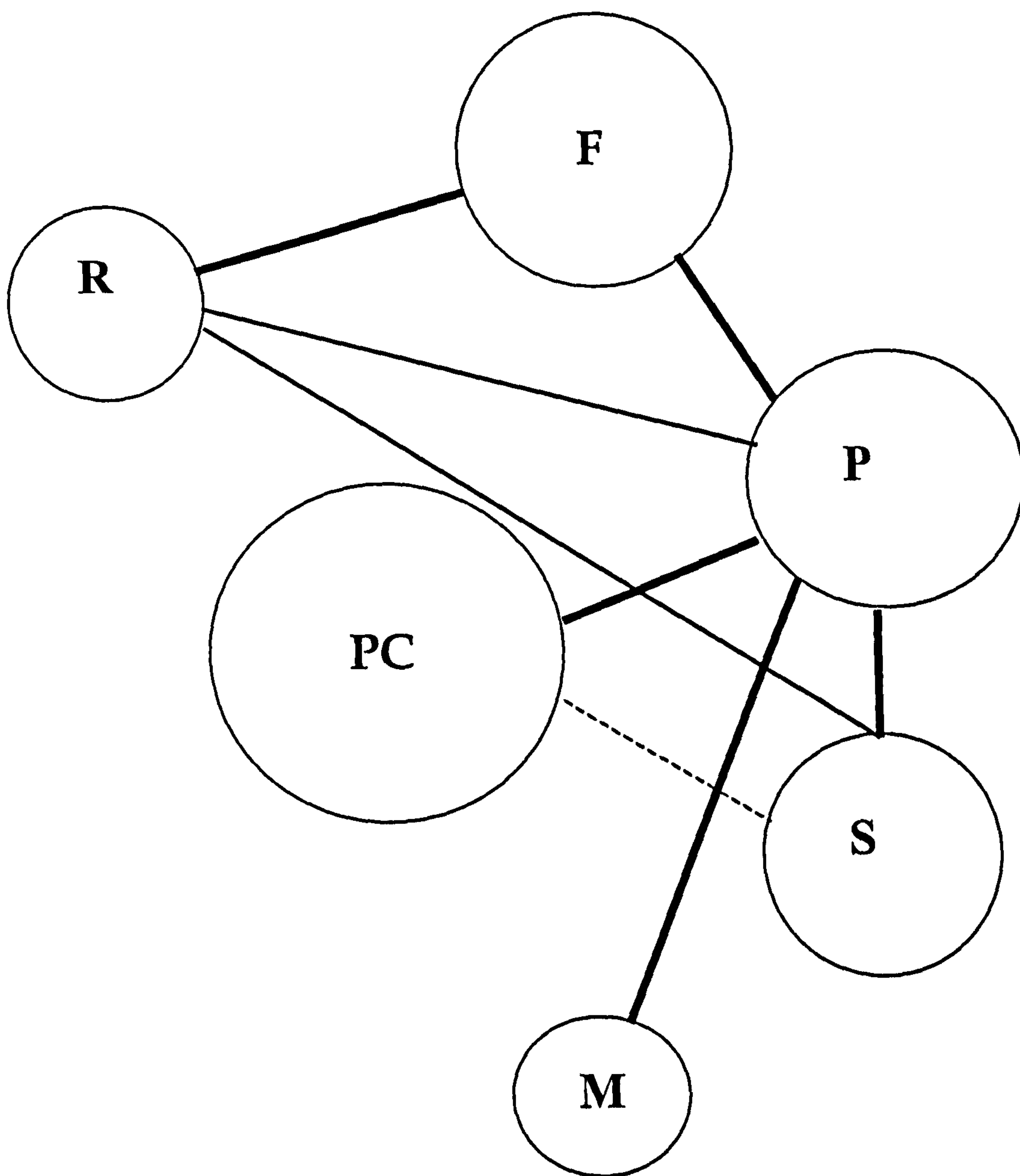
Indicates an association between fields



Indicates a strong association between fields

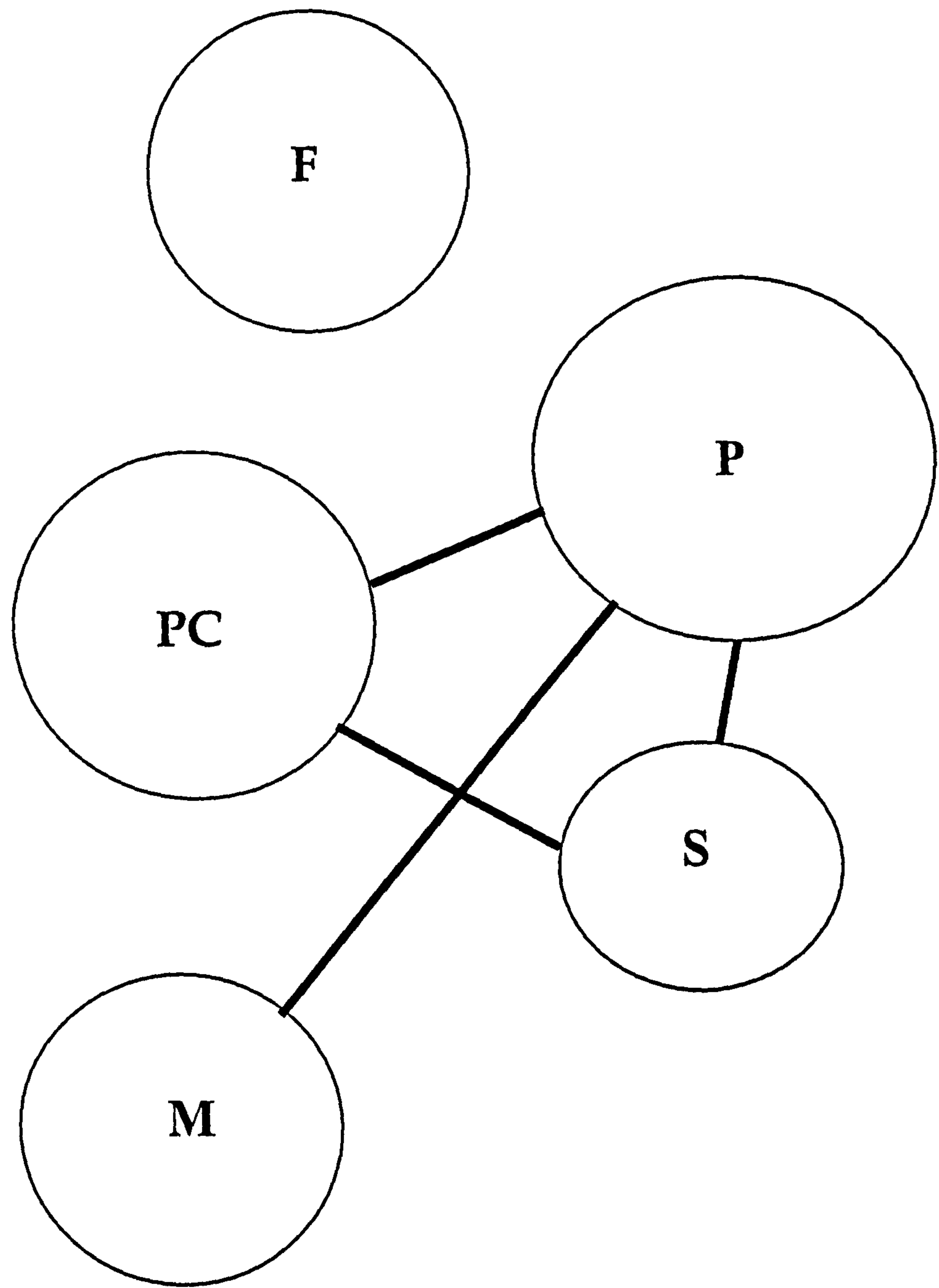


Indicates a negative association between fields

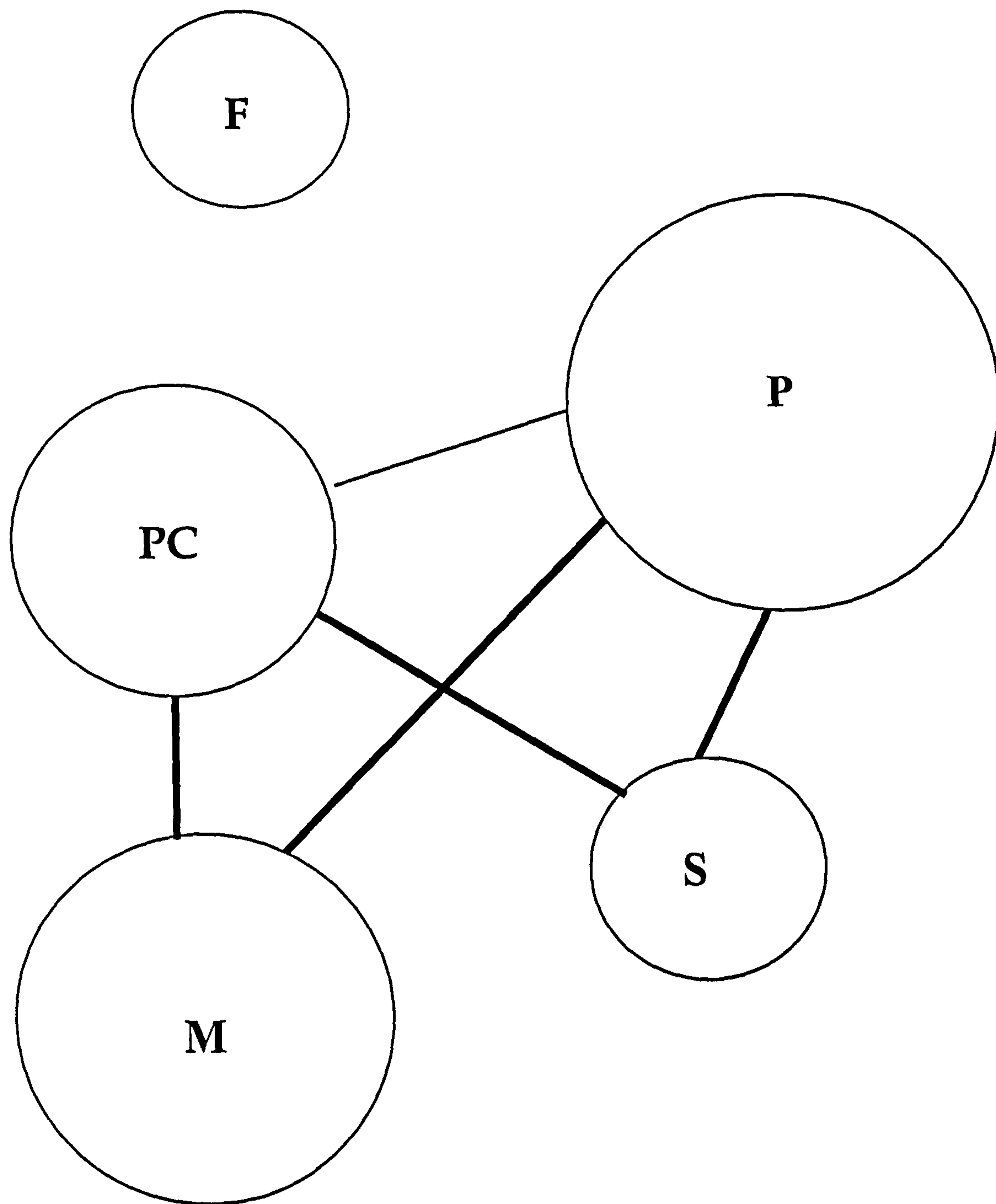


<b>Amadaia</b> [Cluster 1]    St. Agnes' Convent School
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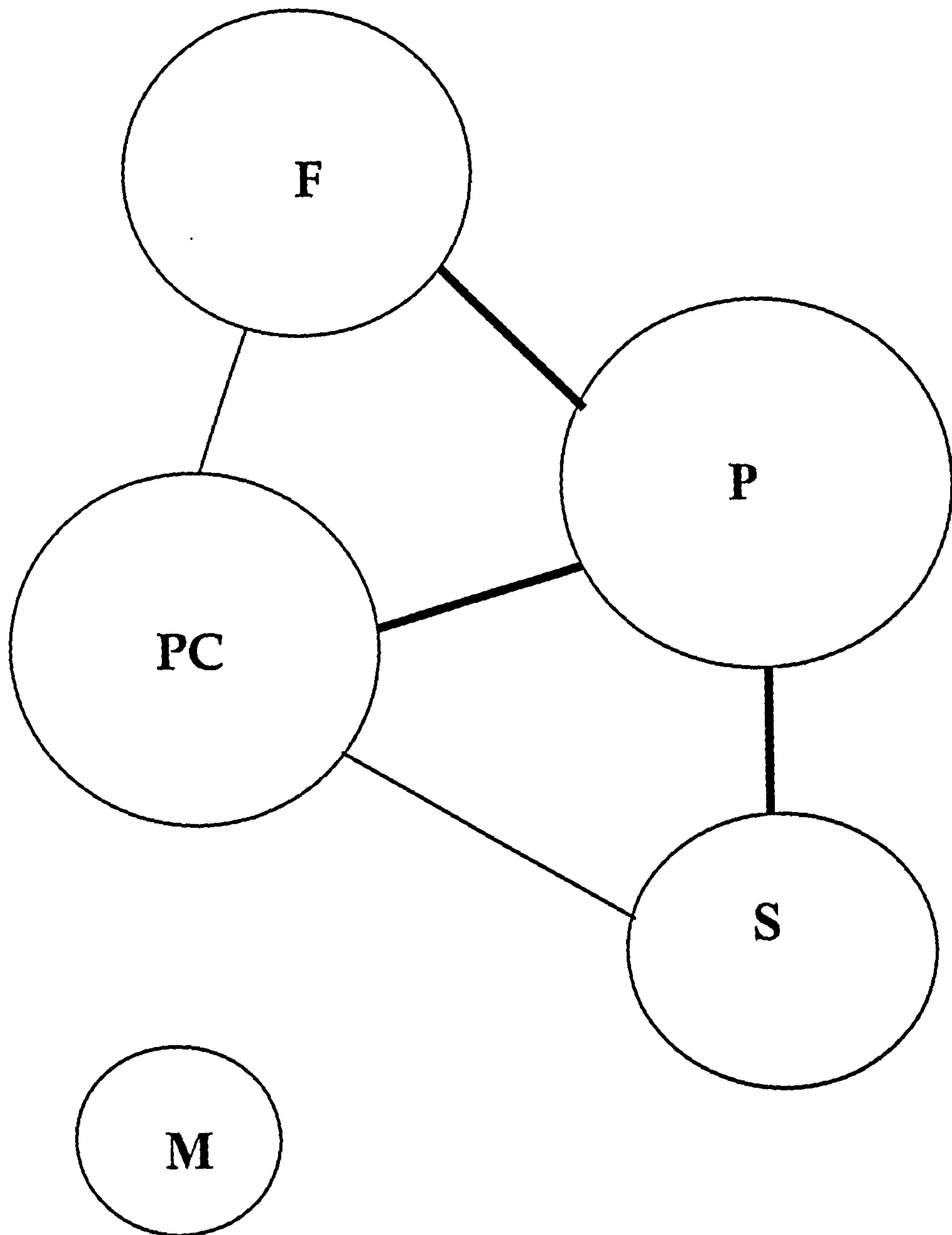


**Alex**  
[Cluster 2] Fenburgh Community College

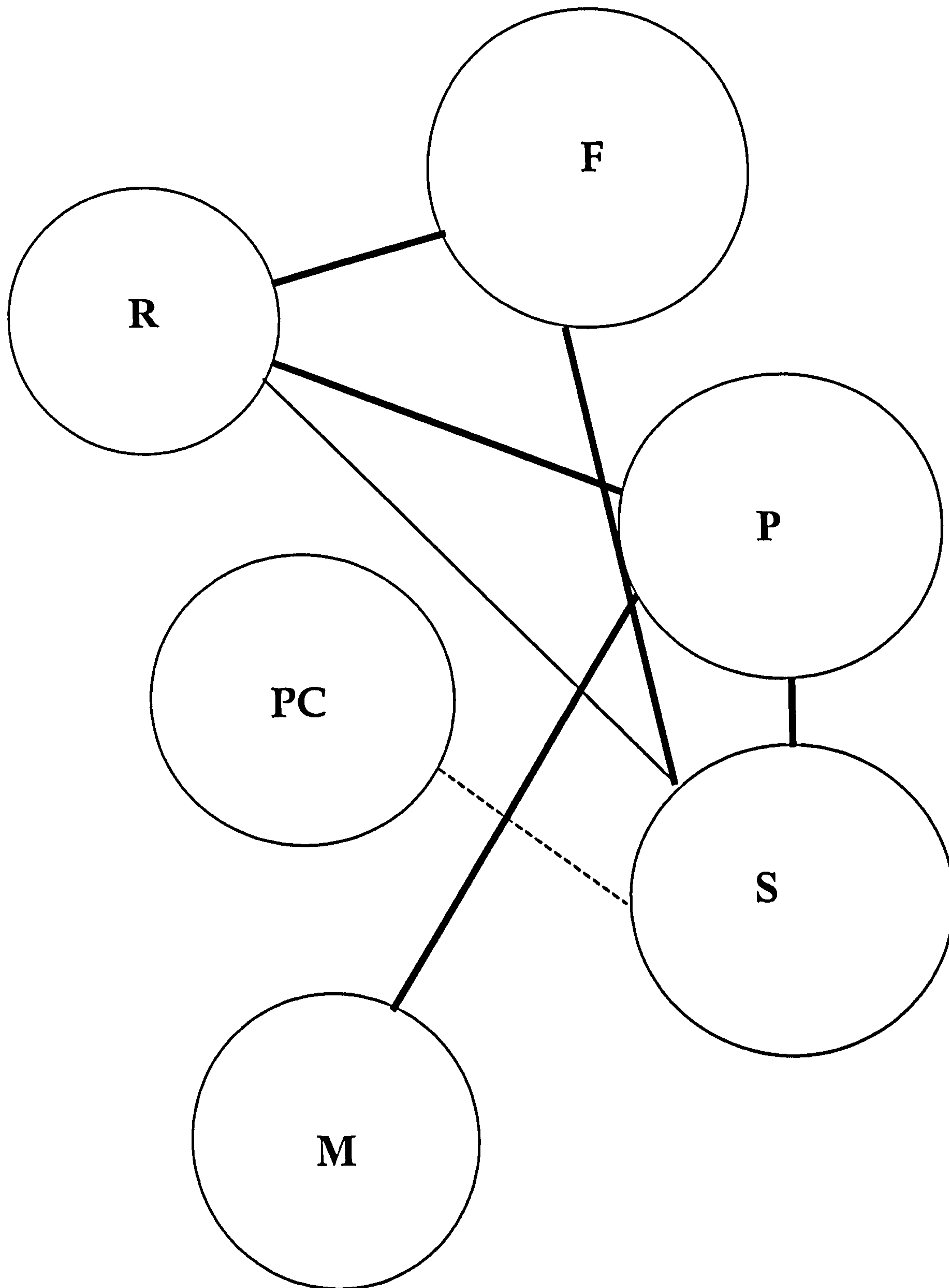


<b>Mike</b> [Cluster 3]    Thornhill Boys' School
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**Laura**  
[Cluster 4] Fenburgh Community College



<b>Katie</b> [Cluster 5]    St. Agnes' Convent School
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