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**‘White British girls on Free School Meals’: power, resistance and resilience at
secondary school transition**

Abstract

This article explores the perspectives of 10 White British girls eligible for Free School Meals as they transfer from English primary to secondary schools. Having identified the discourses relevant to the girls at transition - good girl, girl power, hyper-femininity, authenticity, ‘challenges at home’, ‘friends as family’ and standards - the article uses Foucault to theorise these examples, reflecting on the complexity of associated power, resistance and resilience. The article continues by drawing on the multiplicity of resistance to these discourses to identify the girls’ developing intrinsic strengths, and argues that these should be used both a starting point and a structure for supporting them through discourse negotiation at secondary transition and beyond.

Key words

Girls, Social Class, Femininities, Identities, Transitions and Whiteness.

Introduction

‘I used to like always being well behaved. I used to get, like, loads of smiley faces; used to be, like, a ‘goody two shoes’ till secondary. I don’t know...secondary school changes you’ (Georgia).

The challenges girls face in navigating their position at secondary school (11-18 year olds) have been discussed in the literature for some time, with, for example, acknowledged tensions surrounding high achievement and femininity (e.g. Archer *et al* 2012), and the traditional ‘good girl’ (Jackson, 2006) discourse appearing to compete with newer versions of femininity, such as ‘girl power’ (Jackson, 2006) and ‘hyper-femininity’ (Charles 2010). Girls also have to continue to negotiate the ‘standards’ discourse, where only lip service is paid to the value of effort, alongside the ‘uncool to work’ discourse, where visibly working hard is regarded as ‘...incompatible with popular ways of ‘doing’ boy or girl’ (Jackson, 2006, 23); and all within a context where girls are typically positioned in educational discourses as ‘managing very well on their own’ (Francis 2010, 21), as the discursive ‘unsaid’ (Foucault 1980, discussed in Francis 2010).

Following thematic data coding, I identified the prevalence of the ‘good girl’ discourse amongst case studies of 34 Year 6 (10-11 years old) girls, across four English primary schools (4-11 year olds). I used the ‘good girl’ discourse as a starting point to explore how it was navigated during the primary/secondary transition, which the girls were about to experience. Foucault’s definition of discourse was applied to the data analysis: an instrument and an effect of power (1979), with an acknowledgement that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ (Foucault 1979, 95). My analysis and theorisation of the data revealed that whilst for the majority of the sample the ‘good girl’ discourse continued to dominate, for several girls, other discourses were also at play (e.g. the hyper-femininity discourse) and they had begun to implicitly or explicitly resist the ‘good girl’ identity.

Within this group of girls, a sub-sample of White British girls from lower income families and, therefore, eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) dominated (the school lunch currently provided to pupils aged 7-16 whose family income is below £16,190 and are in receipt of

applicable benefits – see DfWP 2013 for a full description). Recognising this sub-sample as a nationally underachieving (e.g. Ofsted 2013) and an under researched group (Fisher, 2013), their narrative became of particular interest. Therefore, this article focuses on this sub-sample of 10 girls, supplemented with evidence from the 24 girls in the broader sample, where appropriate. I begin by providing a context for the study, identifying key theoretical concepts, before applying these concepts to the girls’ navigation of discourse, with an emphasis on the construction, operation and flow of power, resistance and identified resilience. I argue that the resistance and identified resilience should be utilised to support the girls with discourse negotiation at transition and beyond.

Context

Background

This study focuses on the girls’ transition from primary to secondary school. All children in England between the ages of 5 and 16 are entitled to a free place at a state school (DfE, 2016). Children in England usually attend primary school from 4 to 11 years, where the focus is on the development of basic skills within a broad and balanced curriculum. Children tend to have one generalist teacher, although this can be supplemented with subject specialists. The primary years are separated into Foundation Stage (4-5 years); Key Stage 1 (5-7 years) and Key Stage 2 (7-11 years). At the end of each Key Stage, the children take national tests, with a focus on English and maths. Children then transfer to secondary school, which is divided into Key Stage 3 (11-14 years) and Key Stage 4 (14-16 years). Pupils usually have a tutor group, but are usually taught by subject specialists. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils sit the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE).

White British girls on FSM

The underachievement of White British pupils from low income families has been increasingly discussed in the literature recently (e.g. Demie and Lewis, 2011; House of Commons, 2014; Strand, 2014a; Strand, 2014b; Keddie, 2015). This includes a new emphasis on supporting White British FSM *girls* as well as *boys* (e.g. Fisher, 2013; Ofsted, 2013; Strand, 2014a). The discrepancy between White British FSM girls' attainment and all other White British girls' attainment is evident within the Government's summary statistics (DfE, 2013a/b). This gap increases between Key Stage 2 (10-11 years) and Key Stage 4 (15-16 years), with the statistical data alerting us to the fact that White British girls on FSM are one of the lowest achieving groups (DfE, 2013a/b).

Strand (2014a) also found that the socio-economic status (SES) gap in progress between 11-16 years was significantly larger for White British pupils than for other minority groups (160). Indeed, Perera (2016) suggests that belonging to certain minority ethnic groups – for example, Chinese – is a protective factor associated with greater resilience against low achievement at all levels of deprivation, compared to White British pupils. This implies that attempts to explain White British FSM girls' underachievement in terms of social deprivation (Demie and Lewis, 2011) and poverty/class disadvantage, rather than ethnicity (Keddie, 2015) does not necessarily provide the full picture.

Demie and Lewis (2011) also discuss a legacy of low aspiration and disinterest in learning amongst low-income White British families. However, as Francis argues in a recent House of Commons report which focuses specifically on the underachievement in education of White working class children: '[...] there is a lot of evidence that working-class families have high aspirations. What they do not have is the information and the understanding as to how you might mobilise that aspiration effectively for outcomes for your children. Money makes a big

difference here [...] but also understanding the rules of the game' (2014, 29). There is also evidence that teachers reject White working-class pupils' tastes/appreciations, which reinforces '...the boundaries between students' social and learner identities' (Stahl, 2015, 163). This has the potential to link in with the feelings of marginalisation within communities which many White British working-class people feel (Demie and Lewis, 2011). We also need to remember that the majority of lower income White British children attend failing schools (Stahl, 2015) and there is evidence of low levels of parental education (Demie and Lewis, 2011).

The primary/secondary transition

The primary/secondary transition is recognised, generally, as a difficult time (e.g. Zeedyk *et al* 2003) and can create a dip in educational achievement for almost all children in the short term, and a sizeable minority in the long term (e.g. Galton *et al* 1999). This decline in achievement is recognised more widely than just the UK (e.g. Cox and Kennedy 2008).

Coffey (2013) acknowledges the impact of the potentially different learning styles which secondary school promotes, and other authors have noted the differences in the curriculum (Tobell 2003). Whilst there is evidence that teachers are more concerned with academic issues at transfer (Topping 2011), pupils are more focused on socio-emotional issues (Topping 2011) and potential bullying (Rice *et al* 2011; Smith *et al* 2008; Lucey and Reay 2000), and were also found to grieve for their lost primary friends (Coffey 2013). This research evidence suggests that the prioritisation of social and emotional coping skills (Jordan *et al* 2010) and resilience (Lyons and Woods 2012), prior to secondary school transfer, would be beneficial for many children.

There are particular transitional challenges for children described as ‘lower ability’; those with low self esteem (West *et al* 2010); children who are anxious or less prepared for transition; and those who have experienced previous victimisation (West *et al* 2010). The literature also acknowledges that when primary school sources of comfort, support and trust – for example, teaching assistants (TAs) – are no longer available post-transfer, children with special educational needs (SEN) experience more difficulty adjusting to their new secondary schools (Bailey and Baines 2012, 60).

Evangelou *et al* (2008) also inform us that low socio-economic status (SES) was associated with less positive transitions for children, identifying, in particular, the difficulty in getting used to new routines. Burgess *et al* (2008) also highlight that children entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) find that their primary peer groups are more dispersed at the age of 11, and that they are more likely to attend lower performing schools, which is of particular relevance to the sub-sample I researched. These areas also have the potential to contribute to the significantly larger SES gap in progress for White British students between 11 and 16 years (Strand, 2014a), as discussed earlier.

Transitional concerns have also been found to be more prevalent in girls compared with boys (Rice *et al* 2011) with the maintenance of existing friendship groups, together with the establishment of new groups, high on girls’ agendas (George, 2007). George (2007) also found that the ‘inner city’ girls in her study prioritised friendship ‘as the key for facilitating a smooth transition’ (112)

Although transition has been defined for many pupils as a state of ‘anxious readiness’ (Lucey and Reay 2000, referencing an expression used by Giddens 1991, 44), with many negative transition effects considered temporary (Anderson *et al* 2000), a more recent study highlighted that 40% of children were still struggling after a year in secondary school

(Topping 2011). Such struggles were particularly evident in children from low-income homes, or where parental support was lacking. Indeed, a recent study has demonstrated that the ‘...quality, flexibility, personalisation and commitment with which school-focused strategies were implemented’ (Keay *et al* 2015, 289) differed between schools with, for example, a gap between policy and practice in the area of bullying. Yet there is also evidence that even relatively brief transfer support programmes, focusing on organisation, academic and social areas (e.g. rehearsing what to expect on induction day) can be effective for children, including children eligible for FSM or those who have Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Bloyce and Frederickson 2012).

The body of research reviewed here highlights the emotional, practical and academic significance of transition for almost all pupils, and signals the additional pressures facing those with SEN and those in receipt of FSM. In the following section, I outline the methods and sample information for my study.

Methods and sample

Eight English schools (four primary, three secondary and one special school [catering exclusively for children with SEN]) participated in my study, focusing on girls’ transition from primary to secondary school. The research was funded by the Centre for Research in Education Pedagogy and Policy, University of Roehampton (primary part) and the Society of Educational Studies (secondary part).

I identified primary schools which served catchment areas which had larger numbers of children eligible for FSM, relative to the local authority as a whole. Eligibility for FSM is the ‘...sole indicator of the economic circumstances of the pupil’s family that is collected by schools as part of the School Census ...and is a widely used proxy indicator for deprivation in

Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales' (National Pupil Database, 2015). Since 2012-2013, the Government has used the term 'Ever-6 FSM', which includes children eligible for FSM at any point in the past six years [DfE 2012]), which has given rise to additional funding, per 'Ever-6 FSM' pupil, entitled the Pupil Premium (DfE 2014). However, my study does acknowledge that this can be a crude measure of deprivation (e.g. Hobbs and Vignoles 2010).

All Year 6 girls in the four identified primary schools were invited to participate, with an approximately 50% participant take-up (34 girls). When providing consent, parents/carers were asked to identify the ethnicity and FSM eligibility of their daughters. The final sample was predominantly White British ('White' is capitalised, acknowledging that White people also have an ethnicity [Walters 2012]), reflecting the area the schools were in, but also included Black British, British Asian and mixed race girls. Just under a third of the participants were eligible for FSM, which is a higher proportion than the 21% entitled and 18% registered nationally (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Some parents had been directly approached by teachers, to ensure that there was nothing preventing their participation, and this might have increased the FSM sample size, overall.

The sub-sample of White British girls eligible for FSM (10 girls) was identified early on in the research process, and I visited each school for several days. In my attempt to create data-rich case studies, I engaged in two detailed, individual semi-structured interviews with each sub-sample girl and six classroom observations across six months (June/July of Year 6; and October/November of Year 7), where possible. I adopted a 'minimally participating observer' role, with scratch notes (Bryman 2012), including timings. This approach allowed me some flexibility, if approached by a teacher/pupil, or when I needed to query an aspect of the

lesson. Observations contextualised the pupils' experiences and informed the interviews. However, I was aware that they were 'snap-shots' and particularly conscious of the fact that the behaviour I observed might not be typical. Therefore, interviews were also held with teachers, and school data were also collected, including school reports, and quantitative attainment/progress data.

The same fieldwork timetable was undertaken with the broader sample of 24 girls, although the girls were only observed in a maximum of four lessons, due to the time limitations of this small funded study; and in one primary school, the broader sample had small group interviews, due to end-of-term timetabling. In Year 7, three girls left the study: one girl moved to a different part of the country; two girls, transferring to individual schools, were omitted, due to time limitations. The project continued into Year 8 (12-13 year olds) and Year 9 (13-14 year olds), also funded by the Society of Educational Studies, although this article focuses on data from Years 6-7.

Ethical considerations

BERA's (2011) Ethical Guidelines were adhered to, to ensure that participants (Head teachers, teachers, parents and girls) had been provided with sufficient information to provide informed consent. This included ensuring that they understood: their right to withdraw from the study; how data would be anonymised and stored securely; and how names would be changed. I also made efforts to alleviate some of the disparity in power (Morrow 2005) between the girls and me by allowing them some choice regarding the time and place of interview, and explicitly rehearsing how they could 'opt out' of an interview question, or the interview or project as a whole.

As parents were requested to identify their daughter's ethnicity and FSM status on the consent form (which was returned in a sealed envelope to me), they were made fully aware of my interest in both these areas. However, sub-samples, including the ten White British girls entitled to FSM, were protected from identification or stigmatisation as they were part of a larger group, which was varied and diverse.

Key theoretical concepts

I shall now outline the key theoretical concepts informing the data analysis and theorisation process. I have used Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse to show how the girls took up, resisted and moved between dominant discourses circulating in the research schools. Zittoun (2006) describes transition as a catalyst for change, with this change potentially altering one's sense of self (Beach 1999). Therefore, in explaining the relationship of the self to itself, Foucault (1982) uses the concept of subjectivation (Lawler 2008):

Through subjectivation, people become tied to specific identities: they become subjects...They take up subject-positions – specific ways of being – available within discourse, understanding themselves according to a set of criteria provided by the experts... (Lawler 2008, 62).

I theorise these 'specific ways of being' (Lawler 2008, 62) with a focus upon the relevant discourses associated with the girls: 'good girl', 'girl power' (Jackson, 2006) and 'hyperfemininity' (Charles 2010); 'uncool to work' (Jackson 2006) and 'challenges at home' – e.g. illness or disability in the family, 'looked after siblings', or their family's poor reputation in the community. As discussed earlier, I have defined 'discourse' in a Foucaudian sense, as 'an instrument and effect of power (1979), but I also acknowledge that where power is present, resistance is also evident (Foucault 1979). Foucault (1979) states that resistance is

never exterior in relation to power: an underside which is always passive and doomed to defeat. Resistance is seen as ‘possible’, ‘necessary’ and ‘spontaneous’ (Foucault 1979, 96): ‘...mobile and transitory...fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves...’ (Foucault 1979, 96). This ‘power’ and ‘resistance’ in relation to discourse, both explicit and implicit, will be explored further, including its relationship to the girls’ ‘fitting in’ and ‘standing out’ (Crosnoe, 2011), as well as its relationship to the girls’ individual resilience, which this theorisation revealed as a theme.

Data

The sub-sample of 10 girls

Background

Key information on each sub-sample girl is provided below (Table 1). Some girls’ families received external support (e.g. Social Services), but this is only referred to broadly, to protect individual identifies.

The girls

In introducing the girls, I have split them into two broad groups, for ease of discussion. Chloe, Erin, Lily, Leah and Holly continually discussed working hard, and emphasised the importance of being polite and avoiding distractions: ‘Sometimes I am listening but if someone talks to me, then even though I don’t realise I am doing it, I talk back and don’t realise what I have done and I just shush and start to ignore them’ (Leah). In contrast, Ellie

<i>Name</i>	<i>Compared to the ‘nationally expected level’ in maths and English (as described by the teachers):</i>
Amber	‘working at’
Nicole	‘working at’
Georgia	‘working at’
Bethany	‘working at’
Leah	‘working above’ for English; ‘working at’ for maths
Holly	‘working above’
Ellie	‘working below’, with accompanying SEN/D* (English and maths)
Erin	‘working at’ for maths; ‘working below’ for English, with accompanying SEN/D
Lily	‘working below’, with accompanying SEN/D (English and maths)
Chloe	‘working below’, with accompanying SEN/D (English and maths)

*Special Educational Needs/Disability (SEN/D)

Table 1: an overview of the sub-sample

regularly presented with behaviour which the teachers felt was not compliant to the classroom rules: for example, not following instructions. However, some of this was described as being associated with her SEN. In interview, Ellie did demonstrate an aspiration to be viewed positively, and felt that her teacher would describe her as ‘nice; kind; amazing’.

In the interviews, the girls all placed an emphasis on being kind and helpful, relative to attainment and the English standards agenda, for example: ‘The teacher would say I am a good helper’ (Chloe). The majority of this group were also considered ‘socially vulnerable’ by their teachers, due to the difficulties they were perceived to have in making and maintaining friendships. Compared to the broader sample, it could also be argued that their description of their own behaviour was relatively young and ‘eager to please’, for example:

‘My behaviour is really good because I am really polite and helpful. [I am], like, beautiful, fantastic and polite; helpful’ [Lily].

Further examples of a ‘young’ approach included Leah, who preferred Key Stage 1 (5-7 years old) style games and, together with Lily, the security of playing with younger children; and Ellie who desired to be ‘Princess Leona’ (a fictional character) as a future job, compared to the rest of the sample who had identified specific careers/professions.

The primary teachers generally viewed the six girls’ ‘youngness’ as likely to create negative elements to their transition, such as bullying or organisational difficulties. For example, I was told that ‘Socially, Holly is vulnerable to bullying’ and ‘Leah will be lost at secondary school’. As discussed earlier, teacher concern for the transition of particular children is also evident in the literature. However, concern is less likely to be related to socio-emotional issues (e.g. Topping 2011), demonstrating this group of teachers’ affinity with the girls.

Amber, Georgia, Bethany and Nicole were also described as polite and hard working. Only Bethany was described as having any behavioural issues in Year 6, having had incidents with the teaching assistant (TA), which were described by the teacher as ‘a personality clash’. The four girls’ primary teachers did not generally anticipate any negative elements to their transitions, but there were isolated exceptions. These included a doubt raised about Bethany’s behaviour by Year 8-9 (13-14 years), following incidents with the TA; and Amber’s transition days had revealed her desire to ‘fit in’, as she had discussed with a TA how she had copied other pupils’ negative behaviour, which she now regretted. This desire to ‘fit in’ meant that the primary teachers felt that Amber could be vulnerable to falling in with ‘the wrong crowd’, defined as a group who were not following the school rules and prioritising their academic studies. However, her primary teachers hoped that this would be avoided.

Contesting the 'good girl' discourse

In the Year 6 data, although there was evidence that the standards discourse and credentials discourse (where academic credentials are seen as important to building a successful life [Jackson 2006]) were present, they tended to be overshadowed by the 'good girl' discourse, where hard work, effort and conforming to school rules were valued. Indeed, 'works hard', 'very kind', 'solid girl' and 'teacher's dream' etc were more frequently used by the Year 6 teachers in the study to describe the girls, generally. Comments such as 'risk-taking' and 'natural talent', which tend to be associated with boys within discourse (Walkerdine 1989), were not evident. For example, Tasha was described as 'A model pupil, with wonderful behaviour: lovely; conscientious and caring. A role model for the class'.

Similarly, in interview, most girls in the broader sample focused on their behaviour and their pride in working hard, rather than their current attainment, including those working 'above', 'at' or 'below' 'the expected level' (to use the language which was applied by schools). There was a clear understanding of the classroom behaviour desired by the teacher, which the girls aspired to emulate, described as: putting your hand up; listening to the teacher; and not talking to friends. Therefore, behaviour appeared to be regulated by the girls' understanding of being 'good'. Similar observations were made in Year 7, although there was also an acknowledgement from some of the teachers that many of the girls' attainment had dipped, which resonates with other studies, as discussed earlier.

My observations of primary and secondary schools, however, need to be placed in context: fieldwork in the summer term of Year 6, and in the autumn term of Year 7, when the girls had just moved to secondary school, meant that transition was a key focus. Therefore, it could

be argued that the adults' relative preoccupation with behaviour and attitude could simply indicate that these were the aspects which they felt would be valued in transition. In this period of uncertainty, these were also attributes which the girls knew how to negotiate and, therefore, gave them some security and continuity. However, by focusing on behaviour and attitude, which implied a 'good girl' discourse, the staff and girls could also have been implicitly inferring that this discourse had, and would, contribute towards a successful transition. A 'successful' definition was seen by staff to relate to the girls 'being settled': working hard and making progress, developing their independence, and making friends.

Some of the attributes of the 'good girl' discourse appeared positive from the schools' perspective: hard work; effort; politeness and compliance. From the girls' viewpoint, however, there were possible disadvantages: a potential to be too eager to please, perhaps less adventurous; and to be viewed as a 'diligent plodder' (e.g. Jackson 2006). These disadvantages meant that the 'good girl' discourse could have power over the girls, shaping and influencing the way that they thought and acted, particularly as there is evidence to suggest that this discourse had been particularly celebrated in the girls' primary schools in my study. There was also an indication that despite presenting with the perceived positive attributes of the 'good girl' discourse, some girls in the sub-sample were still predicted to have, and were experiencing, some negative aspects to their transitions. The data suggested that they appeared to be implicitly revealing the inadequacies of a 'good girl' profile and, perhaps, implicitly resisting it (Foucault 1979). There was also evidence of girls in the sub-sample who, although settled at secondary school and generally maintaining a 'good girl' discourse, were also rehearsing or adapting their identity, both behaviour and appearance, suggesting they were drawing on multiple and, at times, competing discourses.

The identified sub-sample of girls was also often navigating the ‘good girl’ profile alongside a ‘challenges at home’ discourse, as discussed earlier. Although the challenges associated with this discourse were not exclusive to this group of girls, they were more evident in this sub-sample, for example:

‘...if I did have a wish outside of school it would be to have my brother not to have [disability disclosed]’ [Georgia].

‘...I am scared that the [secondary] teacher is going to frown at me because they recognised my family when we went to the fun day at [name of secondary school] on Saturday and, umm, I am hoping they are not going to be, like, “Oh not another one; not another annoying person from the family” and stuff like that’ [Nicole].

In addition to these feelings of sadness and anxiety, the ‘challenges at home’ discourse also appeared to have some power over the girls, as it was, at times, overtly used by teachers to provide an explanation for the girls’ difficulties. For example, the discourse was used to explain the girls’ vulnerability to bullying, or their potential to ‘follow the wrong crowd’. Yet the discourse also presented examples of empowerment and an implicit desire to resist the challenges it presented through the creation of a quasi-familial structure/environment, in the form of friends and adult support. In the following section, such examples of ‘resistance’ and ‘power’ in relation to the identified key discourses will be explored in further detail.

‘Power’ and ‘resistance’ - ‘fitting in’ and ‘standing out’ (Crosnoe 2011)

Within the sub-sample, Amber’s re-construction of, and resistance to, the ‘good girl’ discourse started early, following the primary transition days spent at her secondary school:

‘...after, like, the four days I was developing, like, a mood and that. One because I am getting older and two because, like, people I was around at [name of secondary

school], like, older people that were swearing and that...I don't want to be how I am now, but I don't want to be like them. I want to be like half and half...I don't think I would fit in [as I am now]...

In Year 7, Amber continued to rehearse this new identity, dying her hair and displaying differing behaviour according to the lesson she was in (e.g. answering one teacher back in class; at other times complying with school rules - putting her hand up, listening to the teacher and not chatting with her peers). Although Amber acknowledged her 'different personality', her comment that in 'some lessons I think some of them [the teachers] would say I'm bad, but I'm actually not' arguably evidenced the power struggles she was experiencing within the 'good girl' discourse: resisting aspects of it, whilst also rehearsing other discourses – for example, 'hyper-femininity' and 'uncool to work' - which allowed her to trial other identities. Although Amber probably felt that she had found an appropriate balance between different identities, one could also suggest that caution was necessary; after all, in her desire to 'fit in', it could be argued that the new discourses could succeed in exerting similar power over her as the 'good girl' discourse which she was beginning to resist.

Georgia also appeared to resist the 'good girl' discourse in Year 7. In addition to her adaption of the school uniform - dyed hair and a short skirt - she also acknowledged how her behaviour had changed at transition:

'I've had over three or four detentions: once for my uniform, the other ones for talking in class, and one of the other ones is for being cheeky again...'

Georgia discussed aiming to be '... not too good, and not too bad; be in the middle because that's why I got made fun of last time: for being too good'. This inbetweenness implied the emergence of Frosh *et al's* 'middle way' (2002): a focus on school work, but an avoidance of

the label of ‘swot’, as well as a balancing of academic and social demands. However, there was also evidence of a struggle in her new found resistance:

In one way I'm happy with the new me, and one way I'm not happy. Because, like, I'm starting to stick up for myself than I used to; because I used to get a little bit bullied in primary, but now I've been sticking up for myself...I'm not getting bullied... [But] I'm starting to get, like, told off more, and getting grounded because I'm getting told off at school'.

The ‘good girl’ discourse, which made her a target of bullying, needed to be resisted at some level, to enable her to fulfill her perception of ‘fitting in’ socially; but there was also an acknowledgement, on her part, that this resistance brought its own challenges. By emulating a ‘middle way’, either socially, academically or both, it appeared to be an emotionally challenging position to adopt, requiring her to constantly manage her own behaviour. Indeed, there were moments in the interview when Georgia appeared to be grieving for her old self:

I'm [was] more happier there [at primary] because I used to learn more, used to like have a few more friends...'

Although not explicitly grieving for her Year 6 self, Bethany was also reflecting back: ‘I spent the summer trying to be as small as I could’. Although she found it difficult to articulate more clearly what she meant by this statement, it inferred a desire to stay younger for longer, perhaps in acknowledgement of the artificial shift from her Year 6 identity to a new Year 7 identity, which she had re-worked for secondary school. Similar to Georgia, she had also changed her physical appearance, with dyed hair and make-up; she also now had a boyfriend – changes which were unusual in the broader sample and cohort in the first term of Year 7:

I was different at primary: Mum thinks I have changed since being here – I'm not her little girl, anymore. I've changed, but I will always be Mummy's little girl...I see big kids here...I

wear mascara and clear lip gloss...I wear make-up not to be spotty, to be tanned and to hide marks. I wear mascara to make my lashes longer...I had highlights...

This, again, reinforces the concept of a deliberate re-drafting of Bethany's identity, perhaps evidencing the power exerted by other girls in the school in relation to a hyper-femininity discourse: an artificial and rehearsed change - 'I'm grown up now' – which seemed to fulfill Bethany's interpretation of socially 'fitting in'.

Bethany's tutor also discussed how she had reprimanded Bethany regarding her use of make-up, and how Bethany had challenged her mother's authority by running up a large phone bill. Indeed, Bethany now described herself as 'stroppy, with attitude. Sometimes I get moody, if something happens...', which had been apparent in her relationship with a TA in Year 6. She had also developed negative attitudes to homework:

'I don't see the point. We work hard work – six and a half hours per day. Then go home and do loads of homework. I get home at four. I sometimes have two hours to do.'

Several discourses are potentially at play here: the 'good girl' discourse; but also a negotiation of 'girl power' and 'hyperfemininity'. To imply that one is being resisted, whilst another empowers or perhaps limits agency could present a superficial interpretation of Bethany's negotiation. Returning to Foucault, '...there is no single locus of great Refusal...' (1979, 95-96) of power; instead, resistance is an 'irreducible opposite' (Foucault 1979, 96), with mobile and transitory points (Foucault 1979, 96). Consequently, whilst resisting some aspects of the 'good girl' discourse, Bethany was also concerned about missing her homework instructions, whilst in an interview with me; and her classroom behaviour also appeared to be manipulated to avoid a reprimand. Therefore, she was able to resist the power

of the ‘good girl’ discourse by learning to manoeuvre just below the radar of adults (Francis 2005; Lloyd 2005), whilst rehearsing a new identity which represented ‘hyperfemininity’ and ‘girl power’ – having it all and doing it all (Jackson 2006). It would seem that this negotiation was successful at the point of data collection, as Bethany was described as generally a ‘good kid’ by her tutor and she discussed feeling settled. Yet, similar to Georgia, the potential power of the new discourses – girl power and hyperfemininity – is not being challenged and its impact on Bethany over time needs to be explored.

Nicole also acknowledged a re-construction of her identity, with the wearing of make-up and changes to her personality: ‘I’m a bit more cheeky, and I always have an answer to everything, which I actually do like...’ Despite this, Nicole was keen to follow the school rules: ‘In class, I’ll be polite and I’ll always put my hand up. I think I said that last time actually’. There was some evidence of empowerment: resistance to the ‘good girl’ discourse, to ensure her voice was heard; but compliance with regard to her academic work and school rules. However, her sudden and unexpected embracement of aspects of the hyper-femininity discourse, not evident in the broader sample, suggested that in her efforts to ‘fit in’, this discourse was influencing her behaviour, to some extent, and held some power over her. It also suggested resistance to her former, compliant self.

The four girls’ decision to re-position themselves at secondary school, to varying degrees, created a dilemma: they appeared to be happy and settled at secondary school so, arguably, the negotiation and reconstruction of discourse had been successful. They were demonstrating resistance to the ‘good girl’ profile by identifying the restrictive elements and challenging them. It could also be interpreted as representing a ‘...DIY self-invention and [the] ‘girls can do anything’ rhetoric of girl power...’ (Aapola *et al* 2005, 54), with ‘new-

found confidence, ambition and opportunities' (Jackson 2006, 45). Yet the abruptness of the witnessed changes also implied an artificial, even pressurised, re-drafting, where they were perhaps trying to enhance their social inclusion, recognising the need to maintain a '...balancing act in respect of cleverness and femininity' (Walkerdine 2001, 184); and how a failure to 'do' hyper-femininity could influence popularity (Francis 2009). This was also in contrast to the broader sample who, at this stage in Year 7, did not appear to be motivated by these discourses and/or were still influenced by the discourses of 'being yourself' (Francis 2009), for example:

'Yeah, girls in secondary school seem to wear skirts that, like, are really short... I think it's because they want boys to, like, notice them and to be all popular...you don't really have to be fake and what other people want you to be...because you should like yourself for who you are: you shouldn't try to be someone else' (Millie).

Whilst also sharing a desire to 'fit in', Leah, Ellie, Chloe, Erin and Lily [acknowledging that Holly had moved away and could not be tracked in secondary school] were often 'standing out' in Year 7. They were often challenged by peer relationships, both making new friends and bullying; and were also struggling with organisational aspects of Year 7 – for example, managing homework, remembering equipment on particular days and working independently in the classroom. Whilst the data suggested that the 'good girl' discourse remained important to them and continued to dominate their daily lives and interactions, it could be argued that the power of the discourse in Year 6 contributed to shaping at least some of the challenges they faced in Year 7, creating implicit resistance. This will be explored further below.

In Year 6, this group of girls' interpretation of the 'good girl' discourse focused on helping and being polite, and they were often observed inside the school at lunch time, completing

administrative jobs. In an environment where these girls had limited control of the academic standards discourse and the focus on high attainment, being described generally as ‘working below the expected level’, one could argue that the girls could rely on the helping aspect of the ‘good girl’ discourse, to resist the academic school discourses and their subsequent regulative power, and to feel successful. Leah and Lily, in particular, also often preferred to play with younger children and, therefore, also gravitated towards a caring, almost maternal aspect of the good girl discourse, which appeared to be equally valued in the primary context. Again, this allowed them to resist and avoid elements of school which they found difficult – for example, peer relationships.

This resistance towards less comfortable school discourses surrounding attainment and peer relationships was also arguably aided by the use of TAs in the classroom. A TA was assigned to Ellie, and Chloe, Erin and Lily had regular access to one as children with SEN. This provided a further example of where peer interaction could be avoided. For example, in PE, Ellie was shielded by her TA from a negative interaction with a peer; in a further observation, Chloe’s opportunity to negotiate a dominating peer was curtailed by the TA’s well-meaning intervention; and challenging aspects of the Year 6 classroom discourse, which were often related to the standards discourse – following instructions promptly, and developing independent study skills - could be resisted, as the TA was on hand to support. These examples could be positioned as Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development: what can be achieved ‘... under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (1978, 86) could eventually be achieved independently. Yet, when the girls were without TAs at secondary school, this independence was not evident, and they appeared to flounder, which would support evidence elsewhere (e.g. Bailey and Baines 2012).

Therefore, the girls were faced with an environment where the primary school interpretation of the expected enactment of a 'good girl' discourse was less celebrated – arguably a shift from a more quasi-familial environment to an academic-focused environment. To return to Foucault, the girls were implicitly and explicitly challenged by the power of the dominant discourses in their new surroundings, which appeared to celebrate the independent and organised 'good girl', which this group of girls could not currently provide, together with a heightened focus on the standards agenda. The relative tolerance towards the emerging discourses of 'hyperfemininity' and 'girl power', which some girls discussed in interview, was a further challenge for them, as they did not currently know how to negotiate these discourses, remaining 'young' in disposition and appearance.

Therefore, whilst the good girl discourse remained powerful, achievement of it became somewhat illusive, as the girls struggled with organisation, independence and peer relationships at secondary school. This led to evidence of Foucauldian resistance, which was both explicit – for example, an observation of Lily giggling in class, when she did not understand; but also implicit – for example, Leah not having the skills to organise her homework routine effectively. There appeared to be, again, '...no single locus of great Refusal...' (1979, 95-96) of power; instead, resistance was an 'irreducible opposite' (Foucault 1979, 96) - 'mobile and transitory' (Foucault 1979, 96) - as the girls attempted to negotiate their new environment. The impact of this resistance, long-term, has yet to be revealed.

The negotiations of discourse experienced by the sub-sample of 10 girls were not limited to the school environment. There was also evidence, as discussed earlier, of a 'challenges at home' discourse which also needed to be navigated. Georgia, Nicole and Amber were the

only girls who explicitly discussed this discourse. However, it was frequently referred to in conversations with primary teachers (acknowledging that secondary teachers knew the girls less intimately, at this stage, and, therefore, focused on the girls' school-based academic and social profile). Indeed, at times, there was evidence of 'challenges at home' being used by some primary teachers as, at least, a partial explanation for the anticipated negative aspects which they thought would accompany some of the girls' transitions, for example: 'Holly is over-protected by her nan, as her mum isn't around. She still comes onto the playground in the morning'; '[Amber's] outside home life is not happy'; and Bethany was described as being 'encouraged' by her mother, '...but not supported [with academic work]'. This demonstrated the potential for the 'challenges at home' discourse to have Foucauldian power over the girls, and to 'other' their identities, acknowledging that where '...differences and fixed characteristics are assigned to 'other' groups of people they are being powerfully defined as different (and 'other') and this frequently involves seeing the 'other' as inferior in some way' (Walters 2012, 18).

However, there were also examples of implicit resistance to the negative power of the 'challenges at home' discourse. Whilst the teachers tended to view this discourse as an additional burden for the girls, Georgia focused on her love and compassion for a vulnerable family member, and emphasised her duty of care towards him. This emphasised the central role of the family in her life, which was also implicitly implied by others - a 'family first' discourse.

Some of the sub-sample also focused on the supportive or familial aspects of friends, for example: 'They are like family to me' (Bethany). Indeed, some literature has highlighted the importance of friendship for girls (e.g. George 2007), which was also evident in this study;

and others have stressed the importance for low-income girls, as ‘...confidantes and supportive alternatives to family...’ (Ridge 2005, 26). Therefore, a ‘friends as family’ discourse was also acknowledged as important for the 10 girls, arguably allowing them to resist difficult aspects of the ‘challenges at home’ discourse, but acknowledging that for some girls it was not secure enough to counteract the peer relationship difficulties and bullying which they were experiencing in Year 7.

Recognising and developing resilience

Therefore, this article has identified Foucauldian power and resistance associated with relevant discourses. Georgia, Nicole, Bethany and Amber balanced the benefits of the ‘good girl’ discourse’s power (e.g. teacher approval) in a new context, with a desire to resist, re-draft and explore other discourses. The ‘authenticity’ discourse appeared to be fading behind the influences of ‘hyper-femininity’ (Francis 2009), and the need to balance academic and social demands (Jackson 2006). Whilst, on the one hand, this could be viewed as ‘girl power’ - promoting resilience and innovation - the girls also need to be aware of how such attempts at self-regulation of discourse can simply replace one restrictive and limiting discourse with another. Therefore, the resistances were not seen as exterior to power (Foucault 1979), but were inextricably linked to it as an ‘irreducible opposite’ (Foucault 1979, 95), ‘furling across individuals, cutting them up and remolding them...’ (Foucault 1979, 96).

Such resistances were also evident with the emergence of the ‘friends as family’ discourse, which provided an opportunity to support them with the ‘challenges at home’ which many were experiencing. The resistances were also an implicit attempt to replicate the quasi-familial environment of the primary school, which they had left behind, combined with a

desire for greater adult support. This ‘plurality of resistances’ (Foucault 1979, 96) could also be interpreted as examples of resilience.

One needs to reflect upon the identification of examples of resistance and implicit/explicit resilience. Firstly, to consider how the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the term ‘resilience’ can be seen as moving ‘...fairly swiftly from thinking about the dynamics of systems to emphasising individual responsibility, adaptability and preparedness’ (Joseph 2013, 40). Whilst on one level this personal resilience is to be encouraged, it should not be at the expense of acknowledging a system’s place in contributing to the girls’ need to build resilience, or at the expense of considering how wider social conditions should be challenged.

Secondly, whilst the resistances demonstrate a Foucauldian ‘reaction’ (1979, 96) to the change in power/new interpretation of familiar discourses, some failed to reveal an explicit resolution. For example, Erin, Lily, Leah and Chloe’s ‘helping’ version of the ‘good girl’ discourse, combined with being ‘appropriately reticent, conscientious and demure in the classroom’ (Francis 2005, 15), faltered within an environment where the standards agenda discourse was prevalent, and independence, ‘ability’ and organisation were prized. Therefore, the next section intends to use the identified examples of resistance and resilience to reflect on how the girls could be supported more effectively at transition.

School

Transition programmes

Having identified the effectiveness of transition programmes in the literature (Bloyce and

Frederickson 2012) and how they are prioritised by secondary schools (Keay *et al* 2015), I was keen to explore whether the girls had engaged in similar activities, and how they could be developed further. This felt important for both groups of girls discussed in this article. Efforts were made by primary staff to raise individual girls' perceived vulnerability with secondary staff, with additional transition days/programmes in Year 6 for three of the sub-sample - Georgia, Chloe and Amber. Aspects of the transition programmes were explored in this study, which identified a focus on finding one's way around the specific secondary school, for example: '...they take us out, and show us where all the places are. If we are lost, we will know where we are' (Chloe). Whether this was representative of the programmes as a whole is hard to discern; however, the focus appeared to be practical strategies, rather than a fostering of emotional skills, such as resilience. There was one noticeable exception, discussed by Mia, who was in the broader sample. Mia had participated in a 'transition summer school', where wider skills appeared to have been developed:

'...they would help us, like, build confidence and make new friends with other people...because you have to, like, trust each other enough, and we went there and everyone like trusted each other and it was really fun'.

The inclusion of the concepts of 'trust' and 'confidence' also suggested a recognising and valuing of young people's identities, as recommended by others (Perry and Francis 2010). However, this programme was not experienced by many of the girls in the sub-sample, despite the individual schools' efforts to engage them, which highlights the potential difficulties in 'reaching' particular individuals.

The challenges of re-negotiating or repositioning discourse, also encourages reflection on the timing of transition programmes. As several of the negative transitional elements experienced by the girls were anticipated, and other changes - although not anticipated - were abrupt,

perhaps the summer term of Year 6 is not early enough to address, for example, peer relationships and academic independence in the depth required. Perhaps these skills need to be rehearsed and developed much earlier. It is also important to note that the primary teachers felt that they were custodians of considerable information about the girls, which they felt might influence their transitions. However, they were unsure whether to provide this information: sometimes this was based on their desire for the girls to make a fresh start; at other times, they discussed not having an opportunity to disclose such details. This, again, requires further reflection within the transition process.

Quasi-familial environment

Once the girls transferred, they were working with different adults and support networks. Indeed, in discussion with the girls, I became aware that I was the only adult link for them between primary and secondary school, once they were in Year 7. If the girls had transferred with familiar staff, would these adults have provided an opportunity to reinforce skills learnt during a primary transition programme? With regard to unexpected negotiation of discourses' power and resistance – for example, the challenges of negotiating authenticity and hyper-femininity; or how to navigate the 'good girl' discourse, within which the 'helping girl' is less valued - would a familiar adult have been able to pre-empt the challenges and guide the girls through them?

There are, undoubtedly, practical implications to familial adults transferring with Year 6 children. One also wonders whether it would simply reinforce an 'overreliance on support' (Bailey and Baines 2012, 61), but undermine the development of intrinsic resilience, particularly as the literature has raised concerns regarding TA support (Blatchford *et al*

2012). If we return to the girls' interviews, it is interesting that they were not particularly grieving for particular individuals; rather, they just simply required further support. This suggested that it was the closeness of the relationships which they desired, rather than the individuals – perhaps in reference to the quasi-familial environment which they had known previously.

This interpretation of the primary setting, which has been discussed in the data and in the broader literature, therefore, needs to be explored. The negative transitional elements experienced by some of the girls, and their negotiation of discourse to 'fit in' implies that such a nurturing environment had simply cosseted the girls, but, arguably, limited the development of their inner resilience. Whilst the secondary 'tutor group' structure appeared a sufficient familial environment for the majority of the sample, the abrupt removal of the quasi-familial primary environment - and this removal's subsequent impact on some of the sub-sample – does require reflection, as discussed elsewhere (O'Brien 2003). This reflection needs to explore whether primary schools should begin to withdraw some of their support earlier and replace it with 'scaffolded' opportunities to build explicit resilience; or whether the secondary schools should try to replicate this quasi-familial environment for some children.

Peers

The fact that a quasi-familial environment was removed so abruptly did, however, allow the sub-sample girls to reveal some implicit resilience through their efforts to replace this environment with a 'friends as family' discourse. Although it was not sufficient to prevent the negative transitional elements surrounding peer relationships and organisation, it did

reveal evidence of some implicit skills which could be utilised more effectively, to support the girls in other areas, and provided a potential starting point for the development of further resilience.

Conclusion

Therefore, my theorisation of the girls' navigation of discourse at secondary school has revealed a celebratory element, with examples of resistance to dominating, powerful discourses. Yet, it has also revealed examples where resistance to one discourse simply allows another discourse to dominate and become powerful; and where resistance simply represents a Foucauldian 'reaction' with no resolution.

To more effectively guide this group of girls, we should return to Foucault's concept of a 'multiplicity of points of resistance', resistance which both inextricably supports and challenges as '...adversary, target, support or handle in power relations' (1979, 95). Within this, we must utilise the girls' identified developing intrinsic strengths – particularly, their implicit/explicit resilience – and use these as both a starting point and a structure for supporting them through discourse negotiation at secondary transition and beyond.

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