

**Struggling for Success: An Ethnographic Exploration of the  
Construction of Young Femininities in a Selective, Single-Sex School**

UMI Number: U584106

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI U584106

Published by ProQuest LLC 2013. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

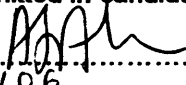


ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

## Declaration page

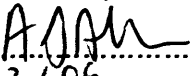
### DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed .....  ..... (candidate)  
Date ..... 18.12.06 .....

### STATEMENT 1

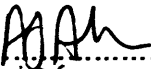
This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of ..... PhD ..... (insert MCh, MD, MPhil, PhD etc, as appropriate)

Signed .....  ..... (candidate)  
Date ..... 18.12.06 .....

### STATEMENT 2

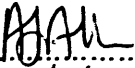
This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references.

Signed .....  ..... (candidate)  
Date ..... 18.12.06 .....

### STATEMENT 3

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed .....  ..... (candidate)  
Date ..... 18.12.06 .....

### STATEMENT 4 - BAR ON ACCESS APPROVED

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loans after expiry of a bar on access approved by the Graduate Development Committee.

Signed ..... (candidate)  
Date .....

## Summary

Recent research focusing on young femininities has successfully argued that the ‘post-feminist’ success story of girls ‘having it all’ and ‘in the conditions of their own making’ is substantially misleading (Epstein and Ringrose 2006, Harris 2004). Nevertheless, the popular conception of girls’ single-sex, private education as nothing less than a place of pleasure, privilege and perfection still persists. This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of the possibilities for identity construction for girls in this setting.

Undertaken across two school years (Years Six and Seven), in one single-sex, selective, private school, this thesis examines the ‘classed’, ‘gendered’, ‘sexualised’, ‘generational’ and ‘academic’ discourses and discursive practices that constituted these girls’ identities (as ‘upper-middle class’, ‘girls’, ‘pupils’ and ‘children’). An eclectic theoretical approach has been adopted for the purposes of this study; integrating feminist post-structural theory, Bourdieu’s notions of capital, habitus and field, and the concept of ‘social generationing’ developed by proponents of the ‘new’ sociology of childhood (Alanen 2001).

By exploring the significant and inter-related role that the body, academic achievement, sporting practices and age-based transitions played in the processes of identity constitution, the thesis will also explore the pleasures and pains articulated by these girls as they ‘grew-up’ and moved schools. In particular discourses of heterosexualised hyper-femininity featured strongly in the ways in which girls’ identities were constructed in this setting –with many girls suggesting that they (even more than their co-educational counterparts) had to present themselves as outwardly ‘heterosexual’ due to the frequent (homo)sexualisation of close same-sex relationships, positionings that were intensified within a single-sex environment.

Throughout the thesis the discourse of success and its relationship to femininity within the context of this elite single-sex setting is shown to be highly performative (Butler 1990), positioning girls in multiple, shifting and contradictory ways.

## **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisors for so patiently and graciously guiding me through the PhD process. Thank you for your time and effort in reading thesis drafts and numerous other abstracts and conference papers! Thank you also for your pastoral and practical guidance – for the encouragement to start the PhD in the first place and for your commitment to helping me finish.

Second, I would like to signal my appreciation to my family and friends for your patience, humour and (emotional and financial) support. Thank you to my parents for your continual encouragement and support. Thank you to my friends from Cardiff University – past and present (especially: Nicola, David, Jessica, Jo, Eleri and Catherine). A big thank you also goes to my friends in Exeter (Jon, Emma, Laura, Becky, Chloe and Genella). Apologies for all the weekends and birthday parties that I have cut short in order to get this thesis finished!

There are many other colleagues and friends that have helped me to develop my ideas throughout my PhD. Thank you to the members of the Children and Childhood research group and to the members of the Gender and Sexualities group. Thanks also to those colleagues in the department who have helped me in other, more practical ways and to those colleagues from other departments that I have met at conferences and seminar series (especially the Girls in Education 3-16 seminar group).

Finally, I would like to offer my particular thanks to all of the girls who gave up so much of their time and who put so much energy into participating in my project. Thanks to their parents and teachers for allowing me to do the research in the first place and to the ESRC for funding this project.

## Table of contents

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>Page 1</b>
<b>Table of Photographs</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
The significance of studying privately educated, upper-middle class girls The focus of my research – some research questions Some definitions, intentions and omissions An outline of the chapters	
<b>CHAPTER TWO: Conceptualising Identities – Theoretical frameworks</b>	<b>Page 17</b>
Introduction Fluid and multiple identities – Post-structural theory Feminist Post-structural theory and Foucault The formation of sexual and embodied identities Being, becoming or doing childhood – constructing identities as ‘children’ Habitus, Capital and Field – the formation of ‘classed’ identities Criticisms and possible limitations Conclusions	
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Research Setting and Strategies</b>	<b>Page 48</b>
Introduction ‘Welcome to the school’ – an introduction to the research setting Ethnography and epistemology Issues in researching children – participation Research strategies – participant observation Interviews Photography and photographic methods Data analysis Conclusions	
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: Friendships, Feuds and Fierce Competition: Young Girls’ Same-Sex Friendship and Identity Formations</b>	<b>Page 87</b>
Introduction The girly girls – ‘the most popular group in class’ Tomboys, rebels and weirdos – the ‘other’ girls	

Discussion  
Conclusions

**CHAPTER FIVE:**

**A Picture of Perfection? Young Femininities and the (Im)possibilities of Academic Achievement** **Page 113**

Introduction

The multiple versions of success available to girls in private schooling

Extraordinary achievement – ‘the confidants’

Good enough achievement – ‘the girly girl stress-heads’

Underachievement – ‘the misbehavers’

Discussion

Conclusions

**CHAPTER SIX:**

**Embodying Success: the (Im)possibilities of Active Girlhood** **Page 145**

Introduction

Sporting success?

‘It’s not my fault I can’t do it, I’m just no good at sport!’ – bodies that fail

The acceptability and respectability of achieving in sports

Discussion

Conclusions

**CHAPTER SEVEN:**

**Tales of Transition(s): ‘Growing Up’ and ‘Moving On’ to Senior School** **Page 172**

Introduction

The pressures of ‘growing up’ and ‘maturing’ in the senior school

Becoming respectable young women – constructing hyper-feminine identities

‘I’m not a girl, not yet a woman’ – the ‘tweenage’ years

Discussion

Conclusions

**CHAPTER EIGHT:**

**Conclusions** **Page 196**

Introduction

Hyper-femininity and the importance of being a lady

Hetero-femininity and the policing of gendered and sexualised behaviour

The importance of heterosexuality and the heterosexual imaginary

Class(y)ness and respectability

Class fractions and the messy nature of the (upper) middle class

Resistance and agency

Alternative femininities

The pain and shame involved in ‘growing up’ female

Discussion

Final points and future research

## **Appendices**

**Page 220**

**Appendix One - Timetable of Research**

**Appendix Two – Participant Details**

**Appendix Three – Interview Schedules**

**Appendix Four – Letters for Consent**

**Appendix Five – Outline of the Photography Club**

**Appendix Six – Outline of the Analysis Club**

## **References**

**Page 245**



## **Table of Photographs**

- Figure 2.1:** My sister's university ball
- Figure 2.2:** My bedroom
- Figure 2.3:** 'Girly girls love make-up'
- Figure 2.4:** My 'tomboy' years
- Figure 4.1:** Pink/blue photograph: 'Not all girls love pink, why make us stereotypes when we can be unique individuals'
- Figure 5.1:** 'Serious school work'
- Figure 6.1:** 'I am very sporty. I love sports but I think I am really good at tennis'
- Figure 6.2:** 'My gymnastics medals – I have won one every year'

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction to the Thesis**

This thesis reports on an ethnographic exploration of young, upper-middle class girls' experiences of gender identity construction. Undertaken across two school years, in one single-sex, selective, private school, this project examines the 'classed', 'gendered', 'sexualised', 'aged' and 'academic' discourses and discursive practices that constituted girls' identity formations (as 'upper middle-class', 'girls', 'pupils', and 'children') and sought to understand the multiple positionings that the girls held within these discourses.

### **The significance of studying privately educated, upper middle-class girls**

There has been very little research that has traditionally been concerned with the experiences of upper-middle class girls in private education (for notable exceptions see Walford 1993, Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall 2003, Delamont 1989, Evans, Davies and Wright 2004, Walkerdine, Melody and Lucey 2001 and Proweller 1998). It has been suggested that such research could be regarded as an 'indulgence' or even a 'distraction' when so many educational inequalities still persist (Power *et al* 2003). One may ask why these girls need to be studied at all if they appear to cause no immediate concerns for society and if their educational achievements seem to signify straightforward success. Yet there are a number of reasons why such girls' experiences might be a fruitful focus of study. As Power and Whitty (2002:596) suggest, the experiences of all middle class children have a 'shadowy, unsatisfactory presence' in the sociology of education literature; they 'hover in the background against which the perspectives and experiences of the working class have been contrasted'. These authors believe that it is important for these children's experiences to be 'fleshed out', for this will serve to illuminate the experiences of middle-class children and will add to our understanding of all of the class groups that exist in British society today. In addition, I would argue that the study of privately educated, upper-middle class girls potentially extends these understandings further; to account

for internal class divisions in what others have termed the 'messy' and 'fragmented' middle classes (Butler and Savage 1995:vii).

The educational and life experiences of middle and upper-middle class girls are also undergoing contemporary shifts. As a number of authors have suggested, society has been tremendously transformed in recent years; with globalization, deindustrialisation, deregulation, information technologies and a shift to a casual, flexible labour force all creating fundamental changes in employment practices and opportunities (Harris 2004a, Beck 1992, Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Coupled with these changes has been an increase in job insecurity and the need to gain ever more academic credentials in order to secure employment, as Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998:88) explain:

The outcome of education and training is uncertain, unemployment is a risk and the proliferation of routes and opportunities through education has resulted in a very complex and rather open-ended situation for young people.

Overwhelmingly, however, it is middle-class girls (and upper-middle class girls in particular) who are seen to benefit from these changes, as new opportunities for education and employment become available to them as a consequence of the restructuring of the labour market, feminist gains and a 'feminisation' of existing working practices (Harris 2004a, McRobbie 2000). These girls are often referred to as 'can do girls': girls with 'the world at their feet' because of self-driven ambition towards academic and occupational success (Harris 2004, Aapola *et al* 2005). Of course, it is necessary to recognise the negative aspects of these girls' experiences, especially considering the emotional costs 'success' has for these girls and the fact that women are moving into the professions at precisely the time when they are becoming devalued and high-flying men are going elsewhere (Walkerdine *et al* 2001). Yet it can be argued that, for these upper middle-class girls, the idea of having a successful, well paid and personally fulfilling career is now quite often a reality.

It has commonly been thought that private education, in particular, plays a key role in these girls' attainment of 'success', as an institution that is thought to be a major means of transferring economic social status from generation to generation (see Ball

2003 and Jackson and Bissett 2005). This, of course, has not always been the case. A number of authors suggest that the history of girls' private education is generally one of a struggle and straightforward opposition to women getting a 'good' education; characterised by poor resources and a basic curriculum concerning the 'accomplishments' (Streitmatter 1999, Coats 1994). As an extract from *The Ladies* magazine (30<sup>th</sup> November, 1872) demonstrates, it was not until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (with the development of schools by Miss Buss and Miss Beale and the establishment of the Girls Public Day School Trust by Maria Grey and Emily Sherriff) that provision was seen to dramatically improve for girls:

Those who are desirous of seeing the flimsy smattering of accomplishments, and the crude and parrot-like pretence of knowledge, which passes for female education, replaced by something better, will do well to inform themselves of a scheme I mention – a scheme which contemplates no disguised charity at the expense of a shareholder but a bona fide investment.

(Sondheimer and Bodington 2002, p3)

A great deal of diversity also continues to exist within the girls' private education system today: it is a system which accounts for schools with an emphasis on academic excellence and schools with an emphasis on developing individual talents and interests, as well as schools from the 'finishing' tradition and those from a background of overt education feminism (Walford 1993). In addition, as Power *et al* (2003) suggest, in recent years the public sector has been able to produce relatively 'safe' alternatives to private education for middle-class children; with some parts of the public sector effectively becoming colonized by middle-class families.

However, as standards of academic achievement shift upwards and advanced qualifications become more necessary to access to maintain positions of social status, it has been suggested that the attraction of academic selection has increased interest in the private school system for many middle-class parents (especially in terms of single-sex girls' schools, where it is thought that, pupils will not be subject to male distractions in an era of supposed male underachievement, Jackson and Bissett 2005). As Adonis and Pollard (1998:43-5) note, the private education system has changed

recently, becoming more academically selective and moving from a ‘disparate and vulnerable collection of institutions’ into a ‘fairly unified structure of...private meritocratic academies’. And so it appears that it is those private girls’ schools with an emphasis on academic excellence that appear to be thriving the most in today’s uncertain economic environment; promising hefty rewards of advanced qualifications and places in the elite universities as part of a financial investment for middle-class parents. As Power *et al* (2003) suggest it is these schools that are creating a ‘super class’ of pupils; pupils who have a significantly greater chance of attaining the ‘glittering prizes’ of success associated with elite universities and elite occupations.

### **The focus of my research – some research questions**

It is precisely because of these changes in the position of women in society, in the blurring of class boundaries and the restructuring of education (particularly private education) and employment practices, that my thesis seeks to explore the lived experiences of girls growing up ‘female’ in British society today. It examines the personal impact of class, gender and academic achievement on the development of girls’ identities as they enter their teenage years and in a world defined by so many conflicting parameters.

The main aim of my research can be summarised in the following research question:

- How do ‘high achieving’ girls manage and negotiate their gender identities as ‘girls’ with their academic identities as ‘pupils’ in the single-sex, selective, private school setting?

Some related questions that shaped and informed this research were:

- How do girls construct, manage and negotiate their gender identities as ‘girls’ in the single-sex school setting, in relation to masculinities but with the relative absence of men?
- How do discourses of age, class and sexuality combine in the construction of feminine identities?

- How are femininities embodied and experienced on a daily basis? What role does the body play in girls' identity formations?
- How are girls' experiences shaped and changed over time, in different physical and cultural spaces and during periods of transition?
- What does it mean to be a 'high' or a 'low' achiever in a selective, fee-paying school?

### **Some definitions, intentions and omissions**

It is important at this early stage to define the context in which my research took place. A wide variety of provision exists in the private education sector – for example: religious schools, preparatory schools, boarding and day schools. These schools have been referred to in a number of different ways: as private, independent or public schools, and the definitions of each of these terms are deeply contested and often have no legal definition (Walford 1993). In order to locate my study I have chosen the term 'private' to determine the character of the school; to describe its independent and fee-paying nature (in that it was not dependent upon the state for financial support) and to account for its 'elite' and 'privileged' character (small, high-status and academically selective, Boyd 1973). At this stage it is also necessary to note that my research took place within one school but in two distinct departments: the junior and the senior school. The first stage of my research involved working alongside a class of twenty-five girls (aged 10 and 11). The second stage of the research project followed these girls into the senior department of the school and involved research with three classes of girls aged 11 and 12 (seventy-five girls in total).

The private, single-sex school setting provided me with a unique opportunity to address questions of academic achievement in a high achieving environment, the construction of femininity in a single-sex environment and the relevance of class in an upper middle-class setting. A focus on the transition from primary to secondary schooling also provided the study with a longitudinal element and allowed an exploration of the ways in which identities are negotiated and managed over time. My research, of course, does have some necessary limitations. Firstly, it could be criticised for its lack of attention to wider issues concerning the single-sex, private

school. Although this setting is an important and unique part of my study, it is not the specific focus. Arguments about the relative merits of academic selection, and the advantages and disadvantages of single-sex schooling, inform and shape my study but are not specifically addressed in the body of my research. Instead, this thesis uses the single-sex, private school as an environment in which to study young girls' identity constructions; it is the girls' subjective and lived experiences of gender, class and academic achievement that are deemed important.

Secondly, my research focused on an all-white ethnic pupil sample. As Renold (1999) suggests, there is a place for the study of all-white children's cultures alongside the multi-racial ethnographies that already exist (Archer and Francis 2006, Connolly 1998, Youdell 2003, George 2004), especially as so many schools in the United Kingdom are composed of pupils that are predominantly 'white'. I am aware, however, that I have not problematised 'whiteness' in this study in the ways in which many authors have called for (see Phoenix 2001, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Weis 1990). Instead my study has specifically focused on the formation of classed, gendered and academic identities, aiming to add to a growing body of work that explores what it is like to 'live the specificities of these locations at a particular time and place' (Walkerline 2001); exploring class as an identity designation rather than as an economic relation to the means of production (Skeggs 1997), examining gender as a relational concept and as something we 'do' rather than a biological category we are born into, and exploring academic achievement as socially constructed and performative rather than as an innate level of intelligence.

Of course, many authors have observed that it is difficult to separate out different identity categories (race, class, gender, etc) in such a way as to study them separately. A number of theorists have even become wary of talking about the 'intersection' of these identities, as it appears to imply that they are fixed and homogeneous categories that can be added together in a simple manner (Francis 2000). As Cealey Harrison and Hood-Williams (1998) suggest, the notion of identity intersection is ultimately unhelpful because there are just too many possible combinations of identity and no justification to focus on any one particular category. In response to these arguments, I follow Archer *et al* (2001) in suggesting that identity categories cannot be separated out but do need to be treated as shifting and multiple; we need to understand social

divisions as combining to produce different identities and positions. Indeed, in many parts of the thesis I found it impossible to write about gender without simultaneously writing about class (and vice-versa). However, as these authors also indicate, sometimes it is necessary to concentrate on specific identity categories for further investigation and this is a decision that can not be made beforehand but must be based purely on the specifics of the data. This is the decision I have made about ethnicity within my own study. Based on the data that I collected I have decided to concentrate on the construction of gendered and classed identities, yet, where appropriate and in instances where these categories can not be separated out, ethnicity will be drawn upon.

In examination of these identity formations it is the children's own accounts of their subjective experiences that are of central importance to this study. Drawing on interviews, photographs and written contributions from the children, my study contributes to a growing body of ethnographic research that aims to bring children to the centre of the research process, viewing them as active social actors capable of managing and negotiating their own identities and of articulating their own experiences (Davies 1982, 1989, 1993, Renold 1999, 2005). This is not to suggest that adults made no contributions to my study at all, for many teachers were observed and some were interviewed during the course of my research. However, it is the children's accounts that my work has tried to foreground, with the data collated from teachers and parents used to explore intergenerational relations; to examine how the two subject positions 'adult' and 'child' interact, connect and inform one another in the process of their construction (Alanen 2001).

The next section will now move on to outline the chapters of this thesis in more detail.

## **An Outline of the Chapters**

### *Chapter Two: Conceptualising Identities – A Theoretical Framework*

This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks that enabled me to explore the ways in which young girls constructed their classed, gendered, sexual, learner and



generational identities. An eclectic theoretical approach has been adopted for the purposes of this study and the integration of all these approaches (feminist post-structural theory, Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field, as well as elements of 'generational theory' originating from the 'new' sociology of childhood) will be outlined in this chapter. The aim of this chapter is not to assemble a full exposition of these theories or to provide a 'smooth' account of the ways in which these theories might fit together seamlessly. Rather, the chapter seeks to provide a framework in which to think about the messy and complex nature of identity constitution. In doing so, the chapter addresses some of the key conceptual terms used throughout the thesis, such as: 'discourse', 'identity', 'subject position', 'performativity' and 'agency'.

### *Chapter Three: Research Settings and Strategies*

This chapter describes the conduct of the research, including details of the research setting, data collection methods, methodological framework and ethical implications of the study. The chapter begins with a detailed description of the school and class context in which my research took place. A discussion of my ethical and epistemological standpoint follows these initial introductions, followed closely by a discussion of the practical research strategies that were used to carry out this research.

I argue for the importance of an ethnographic approach in studying the local and situated character of young girls' lives. I explain how interviews, photographs and observations enabled particular understandings of identity construction, based on the girls' own experiences and accounts. The chapter explores some of the practical possibilities and limitations of involving children in the social research process taking into consideration wider methodological issues concerning participation, power, competence and collaboration.

The chapter also includes details of the multiple analytic strategies employed in the study. I describe my own reflexive and continuous strategy for coding and interrogating the data, and also explain how a group of girls participating in my study got involved in the analysis process through a lunchtime analysis club aimed at equipping them with the skills to interpret their own data. The final section in this

chapter addresses the techniques involved in representing and reconstructing social phenomena – concentrating on issues of authorial voice, collaborative authorship and multi-vocal texts.

### *The Substantive Chapters*

Rather than having one definitive literature review at the beginning of the thesis, each of the substantive data chapters begins with a specific literature review section, before discussing empirical data and analyses. While chapters have been thematically organised, there are many linkages and overlaps. It has been a difficult task to decide on the final chapter topics, and I recognise that the dissertation represents just one of the (multiple) ways in which my data could have been presented. It is my intention that the chapters provide insights in their own right, as well as contributing to the thesis as a whole. Topics are presented that were important to the girls themselves, but I have not attempted and do not claim to provide complete and coherent explanations for the girls' complex realities. I have also chosen to present the conclusion to the thesis as a substantive, empirically driven chapter, bringing the salient points from the thesis together, identifying the links and the connections as well as the spaces of ambivalence and contradiction.

### *Chapter four: Friendships, Feuds and Fierce Competition – Young Girls' Same-Sex Friendship and Identity Formations*

This chapter is the first of the substantive chapters and one that aims to outline the various ways in which girls managed and negotiated their identities as upper-middle class girls, pupils and children. Although mainly focusing on the topic of same-sex friendships this chapter has dual aims – to outline the girls' friendship groups (as a comprehensive introduction to the girls and as a basis for the following chapters) and to explore the ways in which these girls managed and negotiated these individual and collective identities for themselves. The chapter discusses the tomboy, girly girl, rebels and weirdos groups that the girls themselves identified in interviews, while also using them mainly as heuristic devices - with the recognition that they were not set or stable groups, but often subject to fluidity and change. The chapter aims to highlight the girls' enormous investments in these friendship practices (as a means of social

support and as a way of creating viable and desirable social identities for themselves) and the ways in which these groups were formed through classed, gendered and aged distinctions.

*Chapter Five: A Picture of Perfection? Young Femininities and the (Im)possibilities of academic achievement*

This chapter explores the girls' experiences of school life and identity formation, by concentrating on their educational achievements. The chapter begins by examining the 'outstanding' and 'exceptional' nature of success that the girls were thought to have achieved in this school, alongside the pleasures and privileges of being educated in this environment.

The chapter is then divided into sections based on the girls' friendship groups - in order to explore different groups of achievers in the class and the girls' differing relationships to success: the 'talented tomboys' (defined by their teachers as 'exceptional over-achievers' and by their peers as the most 'confident' girls in class), the 'good enough achievers' (a group of girly girls described by their teachers as high, but not 'natural' achievers and by their classmates as 'stress heads' – girls who worried a great deal about their achievements), and the 'underachieving rebels' (a group who were described by their teachers as not 'fulfilling their potential' and were identified by their classmates as 'misbehavers').

High achievement is explored in this chapter both in the narrow official sense (of achieving grades on tests) but also in terms of the girls' own feelings and experiences, and the ways in which they felt able to 'own' success for themselves. The chapter highlights the ways in which the girls in this school often struggled with success in school. Despite attending a school where success was openly celebrated and apparently available to everyone, many of the girls felt restricted to achieve in narrow ways that clashed with dominant discourses of femininity. Success is therefore also explored in this chapter as fragile and performative; as something that is not fixed or stable but as something that has to be constantly worked upon.

### *Chapter Six: Embodying Success – the (Im)possibilities of Active Girlhood*

This chapter also discusses the girls' experiences of success in this private primary school, focusing on the movement of bodies and the physical culture of the school - the embodied success of girls in sports and dance practices. The chapter begins by outlining the strong sporting ethos of the school and the multiple opportunities and resources available to the girls. The chapter then moves on to examine the problems that sports and dance held for these girls and the ways that these subjects were simultaneously experienced as pressurised and painful.

It is suggested that because sports and dance practices were so valued within the school, they became yet another way in which girls felt that they had achieved and performed success. It is also suggested that sport and dance were heavily circumscribed by dominant classed and gendered discourses of middle-class, feminine acceptability. Active girlhood, then, becomes described as a real, material possibility for these girls, as they had a number of resources available to them and were able to compete in a number of different sports in traditionally 'masculine' ways. However, a successful, physical identity is also questioned as a real impossibility for these girls as they struggled to negotiate femininity in a traditionally masculine subject and physical success in a school that predominantly valued academic success.

### *Chapter Seven: Tales of Transition(s) – 'Growing up' and 'Moving on' to Senior School*

This chapter bridges the gap between some of the literature on girls growing up and school transition; exploring both how the girls in my research experienced school transition and the effects that it had on their own identity formations. In particular, the chapter explores the notion of 'multiple transitions' - often used in youth research to explain how children do not grow up in a single, linear process but how they are subject to a 'plethora of transitional transitions'. The chapter suggests that for the girls in this study, school transition was a particularly important moment of identity work that took place across multiple sites.

The chapter examines the girls' own concerns about moving schools – the fact that they felt pressurised to 'grow up' and act like mature young adults and to develop as 'appropriately' feminine young women. The chapter also explores the dominant age-based and developmental discourses that pupils drew on in their constitution of these 'more mature' identities and the ways in which they were seen to inhabit an uneasy and turbulent space in middle-childhood as they 'grew up' and 'became' young women. It is suggested, however, that the girls' experiences of school transition can not solely be explained in these simple developmental and age-based terms. The girls were not involved in a simple progression to an 'ever closer copy of adulthood' but instead moved back and forth between these adult/child positionings as they constituted their various identities (Prout 2005). The girls' experiences of change are also explored, therefore, in relation to discourses of gender, class and sexuality.

### *Chapter Eight: Conclusions*

The final chapter engages with key themes that have emerged in the study, using a close reading of a data extract as a starting point. Attention is paid to issues of social class, heterosexuality and hyper-femininity – as enduring discourses in this school context and as major themes that have emerged in the thesis. The chapter also highlights the ways in which the girls' experiences were tinged with both pleasure and pain. The chapter concludes by considering how this study might inform future research and by noting the multitude of sites in which these girls' identities were constituted (Fine and Weis 2000).

## **Chapter Two**

### **Conceptualising identities –theoretical frameworks**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to outline and define some of the key conceptual terms used in the thesis and to set out the theoretical frameworks that have enabled me to explore the ways in which young girls construct their identities as ‘middle-class’ ‘girls’, ‘children’, and ‘embodied’ beings. An eclectic theoretical approach has been adopted for the purposes of this study, integrating feminist post-structural theory, Bourdieu’s notions of capital, habitus and field, and the concept of ‘social generationing’ developed by proponents of the ‘new’ sociology of childhood (Alanen 2001). My aim in this chapter is not to assemble an account that represents a full exposition of these theories, nor is it a ‘smooth’ account where all of the concepts are expected to fit together seamlessly. Instead this chapter will seek to utilise a range of theoretical frameworks in order to think about the messy and complex nature of identity construction. It is hoped that this work will provide a basis for the research presented in the following chapters, as a set of frameworks that will be developed and extended throughout the entire thesis.

#### *Methodological note*

The methodological techniques that I used for this research project are described in full in Chapter Three. During the study I asked some of the girls to take photographs and to create photographic diaries that they felt represented their own identities as girls. As part of this project, and as a way of introducing myself to the girls, I also created a photographic diary; something that I felt represented me as a person and as a girl/woman. I begin this chapter by sharing a few of the photographs that I brought together to form my photographic diary for this project. The aim of this is not to move the emphasis of the study from the girls’ ‘experiences’ to my own, but in some way to begin to relate theories of identity to everyday life. For as Haug (1987) maintains: theory is neither meaningful nor useful if it bears no relation to life as we experience it in the everyday world.



Fig 2.1 University Ball



Fig.2.2 My Bedroom

### *Humanist, unitary conceptions of identity*

As I look back on the photographs that I collated as part of my photographic diary I am surprised by the seemingly unitary picture of self that they portray; staring me in the face seems to be a picture of who I am and who I have always been. Undeniably, on first glance, I feel that these pictures represent a coherent and truly 'girly' identity. The first picture (shown above in figure 2.1) is a photograph of my sister (right) and my self taken at a university ball. This is what could be referred to as a 'polished' picture – one of those images that I may choose to display in a frame because it represents (to me) an ideal image of my self – in this case, hair styled, made-up and dressed in designer clothes. And although it is an image of 'who I want to be', it is also an image I can look at and feel that it represents 'who I really am' (albeit when I make an effort!); feminine (dressed in pink, diamante and heavily styled), heterosexual (hoping to appear attractive to the opposite sex), sociable (having a good time with family and friends) and educated (for although the photograph was not taken at my university it reflects my own educational background).

The second photograph (figure 2.2) reveals my bedroom – again on first glance (even if implicitly) appearing to bring all of those 'stable' elements of self together – the attraction to men (seen in the David Beckham calendar and photographs of my (ex)boyfriend), the importance of friendships (shown by the photographs and note cards), my interest in popular culture (demonstrated through the TV which is

dominant in the picture) and my fascination with clothes and handbags (glimpsed in the shopping bags and handbag cards that hang from the wall).

These ideas of self that I draw from looking at these photographs fit in with a modernist, (particularly liberal) humanist conception of identity; as a fixed, stable and unitary core of the self, identical through time, and an 'all inclusive sameness' with 'no seams of difference' (Hall and du Gay 1996). My photographs seem to portray an identity that is essential and unique to me, something that I chose to be; an essence that is reflected in the language that surrounds us (e.g. in the term 'girl'). Indeed, Bauman suggests that often photographs do lend themselves to this humanist understanding of identity and to ideas of a fixed, traceable and non-erasable self. St Pierre (2002:478) also comments upon the seductive nature of such a theory and reading of events. She explains why a humanist reading of identity remains as one of the most dominant ways in which we conceive of ourselves on a day-to-day basis:

Humanism is the air we breathe, the language we speak, the shape of the homes we live in, the relations we are able to have with others, the politics we practice, the map that locates us on earth, the futures we can imagine, the limits of our pleasures. Humanism is everywhere, overwhelmingly in its totality; and since it is so 'natural', it is difficult to watch it at work.

The girls who took part in my study also talked about their identities in similar humanist terms. For example, when talking about the nature of gender some of the girls referred to it as 'like vertebrates and invertebrates...like on a kind of graph', where, admittedly there were a range of identities that girls could embody (girly girl, tomboy, sporty girl, mosher, etc), but once girls had chosen the category they belonged to, they were fitted into these positions and remained there 'for the rest of their lives'. Some of their photographs (and talk about their photographs) also appeared to present an ostensibly chosen, unitary and coherent self, as is illustrated in the following photograph one girl took for her diary to represent her 'girlyness' and (amongst other things) her 'love of make-up'. On first glance the photograph does not seem to portray a strong image of 'girlyness'; indeed the stereo dominates the photograph and somewhat overshadows the make-up arranged around it. And yet, when discussed with me in interviews, the photograph was explained as a representation of an undeniably 'girly' identity.





Fig. 2.3 'Girly girls love make-up'

Davies (1991), in her study of children's interpretations of feminist stories, argued that children often find it difficult to view identity as anything other than fixed and non-contradictory. For example, she remarks upon an instance where she read the story 'The Paper Bag Princess' to the children (Munsch and Marchenko 1980). Although, as Davies suggests, this is not a story of a unitary being, but of a girl (Elizabeth) who changes positions throughout the book (from being an uncomplicated princess based in a romantic narrative at the beginning of the book to a free agent at the end of the book) many of the children found it hard to read the story in any other way than as a story of Elizabeth as a normal, unitary princess that just got things a bit wrong. Indeed, Davies comments that we all do this on an everyday basis; in order to act 'rationally' we will often ignore the contradictory nature of our individual identities, instead struggling with the diversity of our experiences to produce a story of ourselves that is unitary and consistent. If we do not do this for ourselves, she notes, others often demand that we do, or they do it for us.

#### *Some contradictions and complications...*

As the 'Paper Bag Princess' story illustrates and, of course, Davies' comments suggest, this is only one (though dominant) way of thinking about identity. It is however an overly simplistic conception of our experiences of self and one that can not account for the complexity and contradictory nature of everyday life. To illustrate this point, if we move back to thinking about my own diary photographs, I could ask how a less recent photograph of myself fits in with this coherent 'girly' identity I perceive myself as possessing:

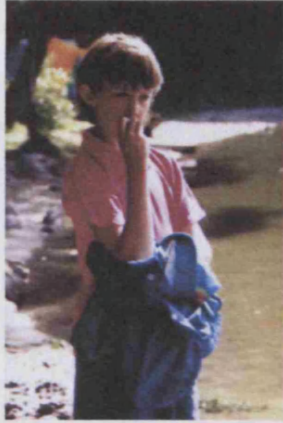


Fig. 2.4 My 'tomboy' years

I could ask how my former years as a self-confessed 'tomboy' (when I claimed that I didn't like girls and only wanted to play football or He-man with boys) fits in with my contemporary conceptualisation of my 'girly' self. Similarly a number of the girls in my study found it disconcerting and often questioned how it was possible that one of the girls in their class seemed to change her identity on a monthly basis – from 'girly girl' to 'mosher' and back again! The swift shift between subject positions made these girls uneasy. Some of the girls explained this complexity away by suggesting to me that she was really, *naturally* a girly girl but in some circumstances was prone to being led astray.

Indeed these stories can be interpreted so as to reinforce concepts of unitary identity. In her study of children's gender identity formations, Glenda Macnaughton (2000) illustrates this point by using a number of extracts from her own data to show how many experiences of the self can be read in these simple humanist terms. Following her example, if we look at the extracts that I have outlined above in this way and in terms of gender identity, then they do appear to be readily explained by sex-role socialisation theory. In my case, in particular, one reading of this 'change' in identity could be that I was simply in the process of learning to take up my correct role as a girl and was not (at the stage of the early photograph) fully socialised into being a proper girl. MacNaughton (2000) refers to these ideas as 'sponge' models of identity formation: where children build their gender identities through observing and absorbing the social messages given to them by adults. This, she claims, is a simplistic assumption that unproblematically assumes that children acquire a unified gender identity from their surroundings. She believes that these theories simply

cannot account for a number of questions, such as: how do children resist or reject these dominant messages? What do they do with contradictory social messages? And how do they make choices about these dominant understandings? Instead Macnaughton proposes that we need to view our identities differently and find new ways of theorising the self that can account for these complexities.

Of course, the short examples that I have used in this passage to contradict the notion of a unitary self do not do justice to the complexity of the negotiations of identity involved in the situations portrayed. Yet they do help us to question a simple humanistic model of gender and identity formation; the type of understanding that I drew from looking at my own photographic diary.

### **Fluid and multiple identities - post-structural theory**

The advent of post-structural theory has provided one way in which academics have been able to conceive of identity differently and account for the contradictions experienced in everyday life. Although, as Weedon (1997) points out, post-structuralism is an 'umbrella' term that accounts for a whole array of thinkers and theoretical positions, it does share certain fundamental assumptions about language as the place in which our sense of selves (our subjectivities) is constructed. This is an idea taken from structuralism (and Saussure in particular); an idea that explains how language does not simply reflect our individual natures or our social reality but constructs our identities and constitutes the social world, as St Pierre (2002:480) explains: '...language does not simply point to pre-existing things but helps to construct them and the world as we know it. We 'word' the world, it is not natural'. As Weedon (1997) indicates, however, post-structural theory moves beyond these basic structural principles to question whether social meaning is located in fixed signs or is in fact subject to a process of change. It was Derrida (1973,1976), in particular who questioned the 'logocentrism' in Saussure's (1974) work, and instead insisted on speaking of 'signifiers' in which meaning is never fixed but in a constant state of deferral. Following his lead we can understand identity as constituted in language (not existing before or reflected in language) and as not consisting of a fixed meaning or stable core, but as constantly being renegotiated and re-inscribed in and through language.

In this sense, post-structural theory has allowed us to theorise identity as multiple, fluid and shifting rather than as a fixed stable core. For some writers these ideas have been taken to signify the 'death of the subject': an idea that within post-structural theory nothing remains for us to be able to conceive of a person's individual identity. Certainly, it is important to make the distinction between post-structural and social constructionist theory; the latter still views the subject as a core that pre-exists but changes due to its shaping by language. Yet, as Davies (1991) claims, this is not to suggest that the subject entirely disappears in post-structural theory (especially because we need the concept to make sense of ourselves), just that the subject can no longer be seen as a rational, unitary self but as an 'effect' of subjectification. She quotes Derrida (cited in Kearney 1994:125) to illustrate this point:

I have never said that the subject should be dispensed with. Only that it should be deconstructed. To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, 'operations' or 'effects' (*effets*) of subjectivity. This is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it says it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic substance or identity, some pure cogito of self presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it.

As the quotation indicates, post-structural theory simply implies a different way of conceiving the subject. Moving back to the photographs that I used at the start of the chapter, we can reinterpret them - not by suggesting that I do not feel 'girly' or that this is not who I think I am - but by noticing the ways in which this sense of self is given meaning and is constituted and reconstituted in language, as an effect of language which is open to constant redefinition. As Scott (1998:35) comments, post-structural theory requires us to ask new analytical questions:

The questions that must be answered in such an analysis, then, are in what specific contexts, among which specific communities of people, and by what textual and social processes has meaning been acquired? More generally, the questions are: how do meanings change? How have some meanings emerged as normative and others have been eclipsed or disappeared? What do these processes reveal about how power is constituted and operates?

In addition a number of post-structural theorists have argued for a new theoretical language in which to express this thinking. For example, some authors claim that the term 'identity' no longer expresses what post-structural theory tries to convey

(Weedon 1997). Indeed, some prefer the use of ‘identifications’ in order to articulate the multiple and ongoing, processual nature of identity construction (Hall and du Gay 1996). Weedon (1997:32), among others, prefers the use of the term ‘subjectivity’ to refer to the ‘conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world’. This, she feels, crucially breaks with humanist conceptions of the individual and shows the subject as ‘precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak’. Often the term is also used to explore the feelings that are experienced or the personal investment which is made in certain positions of identity (Woodward 1987). Although these ideas are central to my understanding of the young girls’ identity constructions in this study I prefer to use, and will on the whole continue to use, the term ‘identities’ throughout the rest of the thesis. I wish to use the term because I feel it refers less to the unconscious and personal aspects of identity formation and more to the social nature of its construction, something that is particularly important to this study. In using this term I am putting it ‘under erasure’ –continuing to use it as a term but moving beyond and deconstructing its commonly assumed meaning. In using ‘identities’ I also wish to refer to the fluid and multiple nature of identity construction and not to signal ‘the stable core of self unfolding throughout history without change; the bit which remains always already the same’ (Hall and du Gay 1996:21).

### **Feminist post-structural theory and Foucault**

A number of authors have maintained that in their ‘purest’ forms feminist and post-structural theory cannot stand in conjunction with one another and are incompatible (see Francis 1999). In response to these arguments, however, St Pierre (2002) claims that although the two bodies of thought appear inimical, in recent years their combination has proved to be invigorating and fruitful. Similarly Weedon (1997:40) believes that certain forms of post-structural theory can be usefully used by feminists and a certain set of shared assumptions can be developed from within this framework. She defines feminist post-structuralism as:

...A mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change.

Weedon (1997:40) suggests that feminist post-structural theory pays attention to the 'production for women of subject positions and modes of femininity and their place in the overall network of social power relations'. In order to draw these important aims together Weedon proposes that many feminist post-structuralist theorists draw upon the work of Foucault and in particular his concept of 'discourse'. Discourses can be understood as ways of making sense of the world; as ways of working out what we regard to be 'true'. As Bhuman (1994:2) defines them, they can also be understood as 'socially organised frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done'. Discourses prescribe natural and normal ways of behaving and penalise those that are not inside them. In talking about science, Foucault (1988:107) illustrates this point:

It is not enough to say that science is a set of procedures by which propositions may be falsified, errors demonstrated, myths demystified, etc. Science also exercises power: it is literally, a power that forces you to say certain things, if you are not to be disqualified not only as being wrong, but, more seriously than that, as being a charlatan.

In his own work, Foucault examined a number of different discourses regarding mental illness, punishment and sexuality and looked at the ways in which these had been historically produced. Yet as these studies remind us, Foucault's conception of discourse was never purely linguistic since he believes that discourses 'organise a way of thinking and acting in the world' (St Pierre 2002); they contain a 'formative power' that can 'reach into the very grain of individual's lives' (Foucault 1988). Discourses do this by providing subjects with a range of 'subject positions' that denote who they can be, a spectrum of different modes of subjectivity. The range of subject positions available to individual subjects will depend on their institutional and social formation, but once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position (Davies 1991).

Foucault's concept of discourse offers us a unique and useful way of theorising the constitution of our identities in language. However, used on its own this concept appears overly deterministic. Indeed, a number of authors have criticised Foucault's concept of discourse for being overly dominant and lacking in flexibility (Best and Kellner 1991). It is Foucault's earlier work on these 'dividing practices' (as reflected in his work on discipline and punishment) that has come in for most (feminist)

criticism (McNay 1994). Yet, as Smart (2000) demonstrates, Foucault's work changed across the course of his career with his latter work placing more emphasis upon the 'techniques of the self' – looking at the means by which individuals can transform themselves. In particular, it is in Foucault's conceptualisation of power, used in conjunction with the notion of discourse, that we can account for the multiple and changing nature of subjectivity.

Foucault (1994) does, of course, teach that a constitutive power resides in discourse. However, he does not define this power as an entirely negative force. Instead Foucault speaks of power in terms of 'power relations': as a productive force that is transmitted through individuals, not possessed by them or emanating from one particular source. Although the following paragraph is relatively long it neatly captures all of the elements of power that Foucault (1994:292) tries to convey:

When I speak of the relations of power, I mean that in human relationships...power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other...these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all...thus mobile, reversible and unstable. It should also be noted that power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free...Even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when it can be truly claimed that one side has 'total power' over the other, a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out of the window, or of killing the other person. This means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance...there would be no power relations at all...of course states of domination do indeed exist. In a great many cases, power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom.

(Cited in St Pierre 2000:489-490)

Foucault claims that the formative power of discourse is transmitted through people and is not all powerful but subject to constant change and modification. It therefore follows that the process of subjectification is by no means a linear or simple process, one in which the subject is never fully positioned in one discourse due to the range of contradictory discourses that exist in the world, each in continual competition with one another for the 'allegiance of individual subjects' (Weedon 1997). One way in which we can understand this process is by looking at our own progression across the life course: as we move through life (and in turn different discursive fields) we are exposed to different discourses and different ways of thinking that may challenge and

replace our existing ideas of who we are and who we can be (this idea is illustrated in my changing photographs). Of course there will be some discourses that are more powerful or more convincing than others. However, as Foucault (1981:101) remarks, with power relations there is always the possibility of resistance:

We must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable... discourse can be both an instrument and effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it

Resistance, then, cannot be understood in terms of some great revolt, but as a change that can occur within our everyday concrete practices, as Sawicki (1991:27) explains: 'Freedom does not basically lie in discovering or being able to determine who we are, but in rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorised and classified'.

### *The formation of gendered identities*

Foucault's theoretical concepts have been essential tools for post-structural feminists to use in order to explore gender as not natural but discursively constituted in language. As Weedon (1997) suggests, it has enabled post-structural feminists to demonstrate how masculinity and femininity can be understood as key sites of discursive struggle - a struggle to fix the meaning of the signifiers 'male' and 'female' through subjects located in discourse. Although a great deal of influential work on the social nature of gender took place within second-wave feminism, Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) work in particular has played an important role in prising apart gender and biological sex. Butler's work departs from the usual assumptions that sex, gender and sexuality exist in a causal relation to one another; she rejects the idea that sexual orientation is pre-given and synonymous with biological sex. Instead she believes that sex is as culturally constructed as gender and that there can be no distinction between sex/gender at all: 'sex by definition will be shown to have been gender all along' (1990:8). Butler (1992:16) shows how categories such as 'woman' and 'man' can be opened up and explored in terms of their discursive construction:



If feminism presupposes that 'women' designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that can not be totalised or summarised by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignificability... to deconstruct the subject of feminism is not, then, to censure its usage, but, on the contrary, to release the term into a future of multiple significations... and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear.

Butler's work demonstrates the open-ended process of gender identity construction, not as something that we 'are' but as something that we 'do' (gender as a verb rather than a noun). In addition, her work illustrates the 'fuzzy' nature of identity boundaries, showing identity not to be homogeneous but entirely dependent on the 'other' (that which is different and is silenced in its formation).

In order to understand the constitution and negotiation of gender identities on an everyday basis, Butler also introduces the concept of performativity. As Butler (1990: 25, 33) explains it, 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender', but instead 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being'. Gender is not, she thinks, something that we are born with but a sequence of acts that 'congeal' and harden into something that gives the appearance of having been there all along. Gender is a performance that we carry out continuously in our everyday lives. It is not, however, a performance in the traditional sense of the word, for Butler remarks that we do not freely choose our performances and there is no 'real' subject that lies behind these performances ('no doer behind the deed') since no identity precedes the language that creates it (Butler 1990). We are the effects rather than the causes of these gendered discourses and performances (Silah 2002).

The concept of performativity also opens up the possibility of resistance in identity formation; as Butler (1997) points out, gendered performances can be undermined in their very repetition and reiteration. Talking specifically about 'hate speech' Butler (1997) proposes that language has the power to constitute subjects through a process of naming and interpellation but that this process carries vulnerability and the possibility of reappropriation and resignification. For example, Mills (2000) observes that although the term 'Queer' can be used with intent to injure, it can also be

reappropriated and revalued by homosexual subjects and can be returned to the speaker in a 'transmogrified form', no longer interpellating an abject other but indicating a positive identity that undercuts the power relations that serve to marginalise homosexuals. Youdell's (2004, 2005, 2006) work also offers examples of moments where 'resistance can be glimpsed'. In 'sex-gender-sexuality' (2005), for example, Youdell offers a close reading of an incident concerning a girl called Toni. Toni (a girl who has her hair cut into a short crop and wears oversized combats and doc marten boots) is asked by a teacher to collect some of the tools to be used in a resistant materials lesson. Youdell tells us that as Toni waits to collect a dust brush from one of the boys in her class she has sawdust flicked all over her. Another of the boys in her class tries to intervene in the task, suggesting that the act of flicking sawdust was not very nice, but the incident is dismissed by Toni for not being a problem. Youdell (2005:265) suggests that the scene is an illustration of the 'attempts made to constitute the female self outside of the heterosexual matrix'. She discusses Toni's clothes as potentially constitutive of a lesbian identity that breached the bounds of hetero-femininity and she concludes that Toni's dismissal of intervention is an 'attempt to resist the heterofemininity in whose terms she has been constituted and inscribe herself once again beyond the bounds of this'.

The opening up of the possibilities of gender does not, however, necessarily signal a position of indeterminate choice or a free-fall through the discourses available to us as subjects (Skeggs 1997). It also does not mean that all acts of resistance are necessarily intentional, or that they present a 'once and for all constituting moment' in which the subject is brought closure, for constitutions are always provisional and there is always the potential of misfire, backfire or unintelligibility (Butler 2004, Youdell 2005). Some discourses will also be more powerful than others and will more rigorously determine the subjectivity or subject positions that they offer up. A particularly useful tool through which to deal with this notion of possibility and limitation in combination is held in Davies' (1991) concept of the 'gender trap'. As Davies suggests it is difficult to resist being positioned in dominant male or female discourses; the idea of bi-polar maleness and femaleness is something that has material force in our lives. The evidence for this, she believes, is in the 'maintenance work' (or in Butler's terms the continual citation) that a person engages in to achieve and sustain their gender identity. The real 'trap' of these dominant gendered

discourses, however, is that outside of them it is difficult to imagine or to desire any other alternative.

Using the theoretical and conceptual tools detailed in these sections it is possible to re-interpret the photographs shown at the beginning of the chapter to begin to see the ways in which gender has 'congealed' on my body (as a 'natural' girly identity) through my positioning in discourse. It is important to recognise the passionate attachment and personal investment that I have made in this position, as it highlights not only the importance of 'desire' in discursive positioning but also illuminates the 'gender trap' that enables me to believe my position to be powerfully feminine and chosen through freewill whilst simultaneously reinforcing dominant gendered discourses. And just as these concepts have enabled a crucially different reading of my photographs, so they are essential to the understanding of the data that will follow this chapter. Indeed, my study will pay attention to the constructed nature of young girls' identities – treating 'femininity' and 'girlhood' not as social expressions of a natural and biologically derived identity but as discursively constituted categories. Particular attention will also be paid to the everyday reiteration and negotiation of these performatively produced identities and to the instances of resistance inherent in their performance.

The next section will develop two major concepts that have not yet been considered in detail but are crucial to such an understanding of identity formation – those of sexuality and the body.

### **The formation of 'sexual' and 'embodied' identities**

In the comments that I made at the beginning of the chapter, about the photographs that I collated for my photographic diary, (hetero)sexuality was mentioned as one example of a supposedly coherent gender identity. Indeed, a number of authors have suggested that sexuality remains a norm taken for granted in our society and in a great deal of sociological work. As Dyer (1993:133-4) explains, it is heterosexuality in particular that appears 'to be invisible to those who benefit from it. In part this is because of the remorseless construction of heterosexuality as natural. If things are natural they can not really be questioned or scrutinised and so they fade from view'. Sexuality is rarely viewed as something that is performatively constituted. Yet

Foucault wrote a great deal about the historical construction of sexuality - as a product of particular (medical and educational) discourses which are articulated around a cluster of power relations (Kehily 2004). Since his work a number of theorists have argued for the importance of viewing sexuality as discursively constructed and performed in multiple ways (Weeks 1986, Butler 1990, Hollway 1995, Wittig 1992). Following their example, my study also highlights the constructed and performative nature of sexuality.

While sexuality (and the formation of sexual identities) is a subject that will be addressed independently in this thesis it is important to bear in mind the inevitable intertwining of gender and sexuality in the production of identities. As Butler (1990) suggests, in her explanation of the heterosexual matrix, gender and sexuality are often formed in conjunction with one another. Drawing upon Rich's idea of 'compulsory heterosexuality' and Wittig's (1992) 'heterosexual contract' Butler explains (1990:151) that she uses the term 'heterosexual matrix' to:

...Designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised... a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.

Although Butler exposes the linear story of sexuality as an expression of a naturally sexed subject, as a fiction, she also uses the concept of the heterosexual matrix to explore the ways in which 'intelligible genders' are embedded in a structure of presupposed heterosexuality, so that 'doing gender' is seen as simultaneously 'doing heterosexuality'. Indeed, Ingraham's (1996) term 'heterogender' foregrounds this notion of the 'heterosexualisation of gender' (Renold 2005) and is an important concept to keep in mind when reading the data in the following chapters. It is not a term that I will use consistently throughout my thesis but by foregrounding it here I wish to draw attention to the fact that even in those instances when I am speaking of gender and do not appear to be explicitly referring to sexuality, I am aware of the impact that (hetero)sexuality has on the formation of gendered identities.

### *Embodied identity constructions*

My body was also an aspect that I mentioned but rather brushed aside in the introduction to my 'identity' (as expressed in my photographic diary) at the beginning of this chapter. As Turner (1985:1) suggests: 'There is an obvious and prominent fact about human beings...they have bodies and they are bodies'. Again, though, and in a similar manner to sexuality, the body has been somewhat neglected in sociological work. As a number of authors suggest, this is mainly due to the prominence of ideas founded in the enlightenment dualism that prioritises mind and reason over body, emotion and passion (Paechter 2006). Williams *et al* (1998) do propose that a 'secret history of the body' can be recovered from classical sociological texts through a critical re-reading of the literature (in much the same way that a secret reading of my body can be discovered by looking back at the photographs). However it is Foucault, they claim, who has consistently put the body at the centre of his analyses - in 'The Birth of the Clinic' looking at the ways in which medicine analysed, inscribed and read the body; in 'Discipline and Punish' by providing illustrations of the docile body; and in his studies of sexuality looking at the ways in which discourses of sexuality constitute the body. Indeed, Foucault (1979:172) himself suggests that his work can be seen as 'a history of bodies and the manner in which what is most material and most vital to them has been invested'.

For Foucault, discourses do not just constitute our behaviour, they also constitute us physically; they are inscribed on the body and enshrined in our mannerisms. Foucault does not view bodies as pre-socially different but as 'historically contingent, malleable products of shifting power/knowledge relations', constructed and re-constructed by a series of discursive practices (Williams *et al* 1998). Furthermore, in line with his theorisation of power relations Foucault does not simply suggest that the body is confined or constituted by a singular discourse without the possibility of resistance, for he suggests (1980:56) that once power is invested in bodies there:

...Inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power, of health against the economic system, of pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency...power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter attack in the same.

Foucault's treatment of bodies as discursively constructed has come in for some criticism. In particular he has been criticised for failing to account for the 'real' material body that we experience in everyday life. As Shilling (1993) argues, in parts of Foucault's work we can see an engagement with the 'real' body and the material effects of power; but in others, in view of the discursive body, it disappears as a material entity and becomes something that can be known only through discourse. Similarly, Turner (1985) suggests that Foucault expresses little interest in the materiality of the 'phenomenal body' as an 'active' and 'experiencing' entity. In answer to these criticisms I would follow Hall and du Gay (1996) in their view that while we can accept the 'constructivist' implications of Foucault's work we do not necessarily have to go as far as to suggest that no material body exists. Even Butler, who alongside Foucault argues for a body that has no meaning outside of discourse, basically accepts that there is a physical body that hurts if you kick it and bleeds if you prick it (Silah 2002). Moreover, it is in a combination of Foucault's notions of the discursively constructed body and Bourdieu's ideas of the 'embodied habitus' that an element of balance can be gained in this argument.

This is a topic that I will return to address later in this chapter, but for now I put forward two further caveats. Firstly, it is necessary to note that this research is based upon a study of 'female bodies'. Very little has been written in mainstream sociology about women's bodies and indeed Foucault has also been criticised for failing to account for gendered bodies in his analyses (McNay 1992). It has been left to feminists to account for the very different ways in which women experience their bodies in comparison to men (Bordo 1995). As Frost (2001) suggests, in a study of girls it is necessary to account for the different experiences girls have of their bodies and to remain aware of the fact that they live in specific bodies with very real, material constraints. Therefore it is not just any bodies that my study seeks to explore but the gendered bodies of young girls. Secondly, these girls are also children and this has consequences for the ways in which their bodies will be perceived in society. As James (2000) argues, children's bodies are constituted through discourses of normality, growth and change and any account of their bodies must appreciate the ways these temporal discourses are inscribed on the body and the ways in which children learn to negotiate these meanings in their everyday lives.

## **Being, becoming or doing childhood – constructing identities as ‘children’**

The study of childhood has a long history within sociology and has been theorised in a number of different ways. As Qvortrup (1994) suggests, traditionally (and popularly) childhood has been theorised as a state of ‘becoming’: as changeable, incomplete and as lacking the self control for independent thought and action. In contrast to this adulthood has been characterised as a state of ‘being’: as stable, complete, self possessed and a time of independent thought and action (Lee 2001). Childhood has, therefore, been defined as everything that adulthood is not: as simply a stage on the way to the complete and finalised product of adulthood. This idea of childhood (as a state of becoming), again like gender, can be glimpsed in sociological socialisation theories, where theorists such as Parsons (1956) have suggested that children must learn to internalise the culture of the society into which they are born so that they can decrease in ignorance and eventually become adults. Such ideas can also be seen to have derived from psychological developmental theories, where theorists like Piaget (1971) have characterised childhood as a series of developmental stages that need to be passed through in order to reach the desired result of adulthood.

In recent years, however, a number of childhood theorists have rejected these developmental ideas as over-simplistic and deterministic. Sociologists have criticised the ways in which these theories marginalise the experiences of growing up and centre on adulthood as the standard of rationality. Indeed, a ‘new sociology of childhood’ developed in the early 1990’s where theorists (such as James and Prout 1990) began to argue for childhood to be seen as a social phenomenon in its own right. Their view of childhood is as a distinct stage in the life course that is common to all children and characterised by basic physical and developmental patterns, but also something that is ‘interpreted, understood and socially institutionalised for children by adults across different cultures’ (James and James 2004:9). In line with this way of thinking these authors suggest that childhood should alternatively be seen as a state of ‘being’: ‘Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live’ (James and Prout 1997:8).

### *The 'new' sociology of childhood' – an outdated approach?*

As Prout (2005) comments, the advent of the 'new sociology of childhood' can be seen as a 'crystallising moment' in which the topic of childhood and a discussion of children's experiences began to be placed on the sociological agenda as a serious concern. Indeed, a great deal of fascinating and useful work has derived from such a theoretical approach. In particular it has enabled a number of new questions to be raised about the nature of childhood. It has also been the starting point for a growing and impressive body of empirical work focusing on children's everyday lives, experiences and ideas (Mayall 1994, James 1993, Buckingham 1996, Alderson 2000). However, some commentators have remarked that we have now reached a stage where the 'new' sociology of childhood has become rather middle-aged (Thorne 2000). As Prout (2005:62) points out the problem with such an approach is that it is outdated due to its origins within the frameworks of modernist thinking. He explains:

The sociology of childhood arrived, then, on the cusp of modernity when the social theory adequate to the transformations underway in modernity was in the process of being constituted... sociology's encounter with childhood is marked by late modernity – but primarily in an ironic sense: at the very time that sociological assumptions about modernity were being eroded they arrived, late, to childhood.

Prout proposes that the 'new' sociology of childhood had to develop within a modernist framework in order to be taken seriously as a discipline. This meant that it has been based on structural principles of 'social order' and in a series of dichotomies (e.g. agency/structure, being/becoming) that are unable to account for the diverse, heterogeneous nature of children's everyday experiences. Because of this, Prout feels that the notion of 'being' may no longer be useful in thinking about children and childhood, as it appears to rest on a modernist dichotomy that separates the adult and child and 'risks endorsing the myth of an autonomous independent person, as if it is possible to be human without a complex web of interdependencies'. As Russell and Tyler (2002:622) remark, the notion of 'being' also privileges childhood as 'the key marker of difference over and above other social identities' and 'tends to lose sight of the extent to which childhood... is an intersubjective experience that involves constant and complex renegotiation of a range of social and cultural identities'. The notion of



'being' no longer appears able to reflect the multitude of experiences open to children as they grow up.

Lee (2001) has also made the claim that late modernity has changed the experiences of both children and adults so that it is no longer adequate to speak of adults as 'beings' either. He argues that adults no longer face a certain future with a lifelong career or marriage. Instead he suggests that 'both adults and children can be seen in terms of 'becomings' without compromising the need to respect their status as beings or persons'; that 'both children and adults should be seen through a multiplicity of 'becomings' in which all are incomplete and dependent'. An alternative term is also put forward by Russell and Tyler (2002) who propose that we could refer to this as 'doing' childhood, a term that recognises the status of children as active social agents but emphasises the extent to which children are involved in the intersubjective process of becoming (not merely adults but a range of other subjective categories). This is a different way of seeing adults and children, not as distinct entities but as a multitude of relationships and possibilities for identity; a positive move away from developmental theories of 'natural', 'linear' progression to adulthood and maturity.

Prout (2005:61) observes that one way in which theorists have taken these ideas on board has been through generational relations theory which in his view 'seeks to establish the idea of generational order...[a] system of relationships in which positions of child and adult are produced'. He claims that generational relations theory shifts from seeing childhood as an essentialised category to one which focuses on a set of relations; relations within which childhood and adulthood are produced and looks at material and discursive resources open to them. Prout (2005) does not believe that generational theory is adequate on its own to account for the ways in which children and adult forge identities for themselves in late modern society. However, he does believe that it has updated the new sociology of childhood, and brought it out of modernist frameworks of thinking; and he has persuasively argued that growing up is a complex process in which children and adults forge their identities through a range of discursive possibilities and in a range of different relationships.

As the discussions preceding this section illustrate, gender theorists have used the term 'becoming' for some time now in order to explain the continual process of gender identity construction in discourse. In a similar manner, I believe that it is useful to view childhood as a process of becoming and as something that is embodied and discursively constituted in language. Therefore, when I refer to the girls in my research as 'children', I am not talking about a natural stage in the life course that children progress through on the way to adulthood; instead I am speaking of the discursive nature of childhood as something that is created and re-created in language and offers specific subject positions for individuals to take up as their own. In particular my study aims to look at the constructed nature of these 'childhood' identities (at notions of 'tweenage' and teenage girlhood) and the powerful role that these ideas of adulthood and childhood (the adult/child binary) have in young girl's lives. This has particularly important implications in terms of power relations, as we can no longer see children as entirely passive and subject to adult constraints but as agents capable of resistance.

In line with this approach I also believe that 'generational relations' is a useful concept in which to explore how particular versions of childhood are produced and made available to subjects; or, as Alanen (2001:12) prescribes in order to explore childhood as a:

Socially constructed system of relationships among social positions in which children and adults are the holders of specific social positions defined in relation to each other and constituting in turn, specific (and in this case generational) structures.

Yet for this concept of 'generationing' to be useful to a post-structural account it can not be accepted unproblematically. For this approach can at points seem to reinstate childhood as part of a binary and in terms of two oppositional positions, childhood and adulthood (Prout 2005). In addition, Prout believes that this approach to generation appears to employ a language of structure that loses the potential of heterogeneity and possible resistance to subject positions (of the different ways of doing identity). It is these ideas that need to be kept in mind if such an approach will work within a post-structural framework: generation needs to be regarded as a process rather than a fixed end product. It is only by regarding it in this way that we can

account for children's diverse experiences and speak of the intra (child-child) as well as inter-generational (child-adult) relations that help constitute certain subject positions.

Aside from this, the gendered nature of childhood is also a particularly important aspect to keep in view and a particularly key issue in my research. Indeed it could be suggested that gender has not been taken up as a topic of serious concern by many childhood theorists and that work on girlhood (in particular) has been largely left to feminists. My work recognises the importance of both gender and childhood in the study of identity construction, and seeks to contribute to a growing body of literature in studies of girlhood (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005, Aapola *et al* 2005, Harris 2004, Harris *et al* 2004, Bloustein 2003, Walkerdine *et al* 2001).

Before moving on to examine some of the criticisms and limitations that other authors have postulated with regards to the post-structural approach to gender, sexuality, embodiment and childhood, the next section will explore the theoretical frameworks employed in this study to explore the construction of classed identities.

### **Habitus, capital and field – the formation of 'classed' identities**

Bourdieu can be understood as having attempted to create a general 'theory of practice', a creation of a method that grasped many levels of practical life (Harker *et al* 1996). In particular, using economic metaphors he suggested a model of class that was based on symbolic struggles for 'capital' in social space. Social space can be defined as a series of fields or different arenas (that have some relationship to each other) in which people are positioned in their struggle for capital. Capital, as Bourdieu defined it, consists of a range of scarce goods at the centre of social relations which individuals struggle over for recognition and status. In an attempt to move away from 'crude economism' (but in order to account for the material aspects of social life) Bourdieu (1977:183) suggests that capital can be spoken of in terms of the symbolic:

Symbolic capital, a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical 'economic' capital, produces its proper effect in as much, and only in as much, as it conceals the fact that it originates in 'material' forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects.

Indeed, Bourdieu (1987) explains that four interrelated and transposable types of capital exist: economic capital – which includes income, wealth, financial inheritance and monetary assets; cultural capital – which can basically be understood as legitimate knowledge and behaviour and can include aspects like educational qualifications; social capital – which can be defined as resources gained from social relationships; and symbolic capital - which is the powerful form that all these different types of capital take once they have been recognised as legitimate. Acquisition of capital is the means by which individuals gain power, status and recognition in society. As Connolly (1998) suggests, it is possible to understand the attraction of the various forms of capital to individuals, and the reasons why they are a source of conflict between people due to their relation with dominant discourses in society. In essence, discourses define and develop different types of capital and give them their importance. As subjects strive for different types of capital they reinforce this importance and the dominance of certain types of discourse.

### *Habitus and social class*

As well as capital, Bourdieu also introduces the concept of habitus in order to explain how class (these symbolic struggles) is lived out on a daily basis. Bourdieu (1979:vii) explains that ‘the habitus is a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices’. Very simply, this concept can be understood as the ways in which we develop and internalise ways of approaching, thinking and acting on our social world (Connolly 1998). In terms of class, habitus can be seen as a predisposition towards a certain practice of social class, ‘a process of learning the classifications, codes and procedures which orchestrate these social exchanges’ (Wilkes 1990). For some this concept appears overly deterministic as it seems to imply a ‘crude reproductionism’ (the idea that people simply learn and internalise their class position in society). Yet as Reay (2004) suggests, habitus means much more than a simple internalisation of ideas and practices. She believes that it is Bourdieu’s concept of ‘field’ that gives habitus a more dynamic quality. Field can be understood as the different contexts or social arenas in which the struggle for capital takes place – for example, in the case of my study the school could be one field in which children struggle for acquisition of capitals. Bourdieu suggested that as we move across fields our habitus develops and changes as we encounter different ideas and develop different predispositions.

Furthermore, Bourdieu proposed that there is a dialectical relationship between habitus and field, so that a change in one can create a change in the other (Reay 2004). A person's habitus (or their internalised sense of their social position) does not therefore stay the same, but is in a constant process of becoming. It is:

A habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and its ambivalences, and therefore doomed to a kind of duplication, to a double perception of the self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities.  
(Bourdieu 1999:511)

A number of theorists remain sceptical as to the dynamism of habitus and many criticise the 'messiness' of this concept as something that, they feel, Bourdieu does not explicitly define (Jenkins 1992). However, Reay (1995) points out that it is the messiness of the concept that allows it to account for the complexities of social life and the different ways in which people experience social class in everyday life. In terms of my study, I feel that habitus is a particularly useful concept in which to explore the constitution of identities over time. My idea of habitus is perhaps an adaption rather than a straightforward adoption of Bourdieu's original concept, where I liken it to Davies' (1993) metaphor of the palimpsest (a piece of parchment that was written on and then only partially erased to make space for new writing so that previous writing continually collided with and shaped the next layer of writing). These concepts help me to understand the ways in which discourses are written and re-written on subjects in ways that overlap, so that they are replaced but continually collide with one another. They help me to understand the fluid and shifting nature of identity production but also the sense of persistence that a person may experience (see chapter five). Habitus is also a particularly useful concept in understanding the embodiment of identity, for Bourdieu (1990) insists that habitus is embodied: it is not just a mental attitude but expressed in the ways in which people walk, speak, and move.

Put simply, then, Bourdieu (1987) defines social class as a structure of relationships rather than a property, and as constituted by people existing in the same proximity in social spaces. A person's class position (or position in social space) depends on the global volume of capital they possess, the composition of that capital and the overall

weight of that capital according to their trajectory in social space. As Bourdieu explains it (1985:198):

Classes (are) sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances. However, this 'class on paper' has the theoretical existence which is that of theories... it is not really a class, an actual class, in the sense of a group, a group mobilised for struggle; at most it might be called a probable class, in as much as it is a set of agents which will present fewer hindrances to efforts at mobilisation than any other sets of agents.

Although Bourdieu (1984) spoke of three distinct classes (the bourgeois, the petit bourgeois and the working class) that at times appear to be very 'real', he believes that in reality there are no clear cut boundaries between classes. He likens class boundaries to those of a cloud or a forest, or more concisely to those of a flame 'whose edges are in constant movement around a line or a surface' (Bourdieu 1987). Bourdieu suggests that classes do not exist in a ready made reality but only in their struggle for capitals and in the frontiers continually produced and transformed through that struggle (Waquant 1991). His proposal is that class analysis should aim to capture the ambiguity and the fuzzy boundaries produced by these struggles rather than fixing class in place as something that can be measured (Skeggs 2004).

#### *The practical usefulness of Bourdieu's concepts*

Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field have been adopted by a number of theorists because of their ability to account for both material and cultural divisions and inequalities. As Walkerdine *et al* (2001) have noticed, his ideas are able to highlight the 'subjective micro-distinctions' through which social class is expressed and understood. Class becomes 'everything about a person' – the food they eat, the clothes they wear and even their mannerisms. This is an idea that is deemed particularly important in contemporary society, where class is apparently 'everywhere and nowhere', configured as personal characteristics rather than as real manifestations of class (as illustrated in the modern notion of 'chavs', Lawler 2005). In this sense, class can be understood as a set of 'fictional discourses' that are marked on bodies and minds; they inscribe and produce identities and are 'deeply lived' (Walkerdine *et al* 2001).

Bourdieu's concepts are also useful in that they account for class fractions and for social mobility. Bourdieu's accounts indicate that people can occupy similar social positions even with the possession of different types of capital. This is an idea that has particular relevance within my own study, for many of the girls talked about being in the same social class as their peers simply by the fact that they attended the same (elite) school. However, the girls could also make fine distinctions amongst themselves based on different types and compositions of (especially economic and cultural) capital: 'She is just posher than us...she has more money and she comes from a good family background'. Yet if Bourdieu does not believe that class exists in a ready-made reality it may be questioned why I am keen to hold on to the term (upper) 'middle-class' in my work. Following Gillies (2004) I believe that while approaching social class as if it existed in some kind of objective independent realm is problematic, it can work to bring a particular phenomenon into sight so that it can be better understood. Therefore, I will continue to use 'middle-class' as a term to refer to the girls in my study's similar social positions, but in doing so I hope to illustrate the complexity and contradictions (as well as the similarities) involved in their experiences.

### **Criticisms and possible limitations**

In one way or another all of the theoretical approaches mentioned in this chapter have had a profound impact upon sociology. Although these theories are not always used in conjunction with one another, they have been adopted and used together in a variety of ways by a growing body of theorists seeking to explore the complex nature of (gender, class, race and sexuality) identity formation. This has in fact resulted in an impressive collection of studies that have sought to explore children's identity formation in school, viewing schools not just as sites for the reproduction of identities but also for their production (Mac and Ghail 1994, Benjamin 2000, Swain 2004, Francis 1999, Skelton 1997, Renold 2005, Epstein and Johnson 1997, Archer 2005, Davies 1993, Walkerdine et al 2001, Kehily 2004, Reay 2001). However, such an approach is not without criticism. Indeed one of the main criticisms levelled against researchers who utilise these theories (particularly post-structural theorists) revolves around their conception of agency.

### *The possibility of agency in a post-structural approach*

The agency/structure debate (the debate over whether human action is structured or due to individual choice) has been one that has dominated sociological thinking for some time. It is a debate that can be seen to have particular relevance within the feminist post-structural framework of thinking, where agency has become a particularly problematic concept. Indeed, a number of authors have suggested that feminist post-structural theory leaves little room for the concept of agency (our own ability to make decisions and our capacity for willed voluntary action). As Francis (2001:68) understands it:

To poststructuralists we are simply vessels positioned and repositioned in relations of power through discourses: we do not actively choose which discourses we take up and use. The belief that we have our own coherent, meaning-making personalities is simply due to our positioning within discourses of liberal, humanist individualism.

For Francis (2001), the idea that we have no control over our lives or any sense of consistency in our identities is questionable since, she points out, few people actually experience themselves as non-coherent or lacking agency. This is certainly demonstrated in the ideas presented at the beginning of this chapter. However, for a number of other authors the problem with post-structural theory is that it does present a possibility of agency but one that appears to be incompatible with the discursively produced subject. Jones (1997), in particular, has criticised certain feminist post-structural theorists for using words such as 'positioning', 'choice' and 'agency' which as a result, she believes, incorrectly invoke notions of a pre-discursive humanist subject. These terms, she suggests, appear to suggest that individuals are free to 'take up' any discourse of their choice in order to create a sense of self; they imply a free-fall through discourse or a sense of 'shopping' for identity (Skeggs 1997). Davies (1997) acknowledges these criticisms as she too suggests that the language and metaphors we have available to us as theorists often lends itself to a humanist way of thinking. Certainly, within this chapter I am aware that some sentences I have written appear to offer up a sense of free choice and voluntary agency. In the last section, for example, this could be glimpsed in my discussion of children 'actively negotiating' their own identities.



Despite the misunderstandings caused by the 'conceptual traps' of language, however, Davies (1997:279) does not believe that the concept of agency is entirely incompatible with a feminist post-structural approach. Obviously we have to be careful with the language that we use to express this idea, but she suggests agency does exist in the sense that although 'we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses', choices do exist, even if they are to be understood as 'more akin to 'forced choices', since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the 'chosen' line of action the only possible action'. Butler (1990:145) describes the 'choices' we have to 'act' as subjects in a similar way: 'There is no self who maintains integrity prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only the taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there'.

For these authors, then, agency exists not in the sense that we pre-exist language or discourse, or in the sense that we are free to choose certain discourses that constitute our sense of selves. Instead agency exists within the discourses in which we are positioned; it is a form of resistance or subversive possibility that can occur through reiteration and in the clash between contradictory discourses. Of course, agency remains a much contested notion within this theoretical framework, with many authors continuing to be sceptical about agency existing only through discursive possibilities. Indeed, the concept does appear to be limiting; at times it does seem to signal that we are trapped within discourses with no possibility of altering them. However, many feminist post-structural theorists remain optimistic about the possibility of 'unfixing' identities and the local, subversive potential of agency (Silah 2002). Following Davies (1997: 272) I would also conclude that there is good reason to hold on to the concept of agency within post-structural theory; to reclaim it for use, mainly because the possibility of bringing about change is so essential to feminist work:

So yes, I want my cake and I want to eat it. And as a post-structuralist I do not find that problematic. Linear forms of logic are too constraining for those of us who wish to embrace the rich complexity of life lived through multiple and contradictory discourses.

### *The material/cultural divide*

A further criticism of the post-structural approach is that although it has opened up the possibility for the 'unfixing of identities' and has introduced us to different possible ways of being, it holds little possibility for theorising or understanding the material elements of social life. Materialism is a particular issue for social class theorists, especially as class has traditionally been measured in 'pure' forms and in relation to economic structure (Walkerdine *et al* 2001). As Archer *et al* (2001) propose many social class theorists have moved away from attempting to measure class and do now share a common (post-structural) understanding of class as a socially constructed, fluid and shifting phenomenon, or as Lawler (2005) suggests, as a 'dynamic process', not of 'empty signifiers waiting to be filled' but as 'something we are'. This approach has allowed theorists to account for 'degrees of difference' in people's experiences of class and also to explore the ways in which class is implicated in the formation of subjectivity. However, many of these theorists still face 'theoretical paralysis' in the face of materialism as they feel unable to account for the very real material inequalities that they see existing in society (Archer *et al* 2001).

For many this has meant that class has simply disappeared as a useful concept in post-structural analysis (Skeggs 1997). Another result of this has been that many theorists have sought a 'middle way' approach to this material/culture divide in order to locate shifting and multiple identities in relation to real, material inequalities (Archer *et al* 2001). Fraser's (1997) work on redistribution and recognition, which aims to explore the inevitable intertwining of these two mechanisms, is one way in which this has been attempted. Yet even Fraser's work has been criticised for reinforcing the opposition of culture and economy in a simplifying dualism (Young 1997).

In this chapter, I have argued that Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field can be seen as tools with which to transcend this material/culture divide. Of course, this is not a view shared by everyone. Indeed, several authors have suggested that Bourdieu's concepts are 'economically crude' and that his work appears to focus on the material aspects of class far more than the symbolic (see Skeggs 2004). In addition, a number of authors have suggested that Bourdieu's theoretical concepts are

inimical to a feminist post-structural approach. It is certainly the case that his conceptions of gender are far removed from a feminist post-structural framework of thinking (Skeggs 2004b) and that Butler (1999) has criticised of his work for determinism and for denying the possibility of radical change. And yet, as McNay (2004) demonstrates, theoretically Butler and Bourdieu are not as far removed from one another as they first seem to be. Furthermore, it appears that neither of these authors are necessarily divided over material and cultural matters and that both of them account for these factors in their work. Butler, for example, appears to argue for material redistribution as well as cultural recognition. Similarly, by his use of the symbolic Bourdieu negates material reductionism in his work. In fact, as Reay (2004) illustrates, if we think of Bourdieu's concepts more in terms of methods than as theoretical concepts then they become even less problematic. Bourdieu (1995) himself suggested:

The main thing is that they are not to be conceptualised so much as ideas, on that level, but as a method. The core of my work lies in the method as a way of thinking. To be more precise, my method is a manner of asking questions rather than just ideas. This is a critical point I think.

(Cited in Reay 2004)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has utilised a number of theoretical frameworks in order to conceptualise how it is that young girls construct their identities. A common strand in all of these theories is that they rely on the notion of 'doing': the idea that identity is not something that we choose but is something that is continuously and performatively constructed in language. In this way, gender and sexuality have been explored as identities that are not natural or biologically determined, but as identities that we 'do', class has been examined as an identity designation rather than an economic relation to the means of production, and childhood has been explored as a state of being and becoming – an identity that we must continuously perform rather than something that we can 'grow out' of. Yet this is really where the similarities between these theories end. Indeed, I repeat what was iterated at the beginning of the chapter. This chapter does not set out to present a 'seamless' theoretical account, but rather to put forward theoretical frameworks and ideas with which to work with in order to understand the

**data. It is their application to and development in empirical data that is important. In this chapter at least, the initial and primary application of some of these ideas to the photographs taken from my photographic diary has proved fruitful, enabling a different way of thinking about the complexities of identity. This application will be developed throughout the thesis in relation to the empirical data that were generated and analysed.**

**The next chapter outlines the context for this research and the methods used to explore these ideas in more detail.**

## Chapter Three

### Research Setting and Strategies

Her eyes shone as they always did when they saw Malory Towers again for the first time. The car swept up to the front door. It always seemed like the entrance to a castle, to Darrell. The big drive was now crowded with cars, and girls of all ages were rushing about, carrying bags and lacrosse sticks... 'Golly it's grand to be back! Hallo, Belinda! I say, Irene have you got your health certificate? Hallo, Jean. Heard about Sally... Darrell darted here and there among her friends happy and excited. Her Father undid the trunks, and the school porter carried them in... 'Come on' said Alicia. 'Let's go and unpack our night cases. I've heaps to tell you Darrell!'

*Third Year at Malory Towers, Enid*

Blyton (1989:1,4)

#### Introduction

Enid Blyton's<sup>1</sup> description immediately conjures up a familiar world: the immediately recognizable, hackneyed realm of British private-school fiction, the staple of novels and films, most recently exploited by J K Rowling<sup>2</sup> in her Harry Potter series. It is as "hyper-real" as Baudrillard's Disneyland. As Walford (1993) suggests, in the introduction to his book on public schooling, the line between 'fact' and 'fiction' in people's understandings of public schooling has become increasingly blurred. While fictional accounts of private schools, often based in the 1920's, 30's and 40's, have rarely been accurate reflections of private schooling, they have become familiar and guiding narratives. And so it is important here to outline the school setting in which my research took place; to separate the so called 'facts' from 'fiction', and to enable a better understanding of my research by putting the girls' experiences into context.

This is not a simple enterprise. For one thing, the 'facts' of the school setting and the 'fiction' of Blyton's account are not easily distinguished: both are ultimately individual interpretations of phenomena and cannot be held to reveal the 'true' nature

---

<sup>1</sup> Enid Blyton is a well-known British author of children's books. Between the period of 1946 and 1951 Blyton wrote a series of books based on Malory towers, a private educational institution for girls.

<sup>2</sup> JK Rowling is also a well-known British author of children's fiction. Her books (published over the last decade) centre on the character of Harry Potter - a young boy who attends Hogwarts (a private school for witches and wizards).

of private schooling (Sikes 2005). And private schools themselves have often drawn on these fictive accounts, for marketing purposes, to promote a distinctive, privileged school ethos. However, this chapter will begin by sketching out my interpretations of this context. This account will primarily be concerned with examining the school's physical location, size and ethos, for more descriptive accounts of the school can be found in the substantive chapters of the thesis. The chapter will then move on to note some of the epistemological and methodological concerns of the project - for the research methods used in the project also need to be located in a theoretical background to establish how and why they have been used. Finally, the chapter will discuss the research methods that were used to conduct research in this setting: the practical strategies that were used to explore the girls' experiences.

### **An introduction to the research setting**

In the leafy suburbs, on the edge of a major conurbation in the South of Britain stands the school in which my research was based; a school that will, for the purposes of this study, be referred to as Taylor's Girls' School<sup>3</sup>. A series of large, old, interconnecting buildings surrounded by playing fields, it was established by a charitable trust over one hundred years ago. Currently a single-sex establishment, divided into two departments – a junior and a senior school – the school comprises nearly 800 girls. The school's junior department caters for girls aged between five and eleven; starting with reception and ending at Year Six. The school's senior department caters for girls from age eleven through to eighteen. Girls commonly enter the school in reception, in Year Seven (at the start of the senior school) or in Year Twelve (at the start of the sixth form college), though this varies according to the number of places available at any one time. The school is academically selective and so at all of these points of entrance girls have to take an entrance examination. The exact nature of the test, however, depends on the age of entry to the school. Once accepted to join the school, the girls' parents must pay a yearly fee although a small number of scholarships and bursaries are made available to girls. These are also dependent on academic selection and results gained in the entrance exams. The school is incredibly proud of its long history as a provider of girls' education and this is reflected in the school ethos. An

---

<sup>3</sup> The names given for the school, the teachers and the pupils are all pseudonyms.

attitude of 'girls can do anything' is promoted by the school; notice boards are filled with pictures of female musicians, sports stars and writers. The school also emphasises the importance of individual and independent learning – stressing the importance of producing 'whole' and 'well balanced' individuals (School Prospectus 2004). Because of these aims a special importance is also given to extra-curricular activities and 'real-life' learning. Girls are expected to participate in a number of lunchtime and out of school clubs in order to develop a 'mixed range of skills' and to 'broaden their outlook'.

### *An introduction to the girls*

My research in Taylor's Girls' School took place mainly with one class of twenty-five, Year Six girls. When I entered the school to begin my research the girls were in their last term of junior schooling and were aged between ten and eleven. All of the girls in the class described themselves as 'British' in origin, and only two of the girls distinguished themselves as 'not white'. The majority of the girls' parents could be described as professional workers (including a number of surgeons, dentists and university professors), whilst a small number of parents could more appropriately be described as working in managerial roles. A number of the girls told me that their fathers were the primary earners in their household; this gendered division was reflected in a number of the girls' photographic diaries where fathers were relatively under represented due to their 'absence' from the house. All of the girls described themselves as 'definitely middle-class', but whilst there was a tendency for the girls to agree that they were 'privileged' and 'quite well off', there was a definite reluctance to being described as 'upper class'. All but two of the girls had joined the school at the same time (in reception at age five) and had been classmates for nearly six years by the time of research. During their time in the school the girls were looked after by a different form teacher every year. The teacher of the Year Six class at the time of study (Mrs Dearing) had been teaching at the school for a number of years and seemed a well-liked and respected figure (by both the girls and their parents). As the girls told me, 'she is strict but caring' and 'interested in everything we do'.

My research did not end in Year Six. It was followed up with a further two terms spent with the girls in Year Seven at the start of the senior school. At this point the

girls had been split across three different classes and had been joined by a mix of new pupils, some coming from the surrounding state schools and others from local private schools. The 'new' girls that joined the school in year seven could be described as having come from a variety of backgrounds. To a certain extent, as the 'old' girls told me, they could be described as having come from 'less well-off' homes than the girls who had been in the school since the junior department (a number of the newcomers having entered the school on scholarships). However, the majority of these 'new' girls still described themselves as 'middle-class'. Indeed many of them had come from homes where education had been a priority (to some extent reflected in the 'push' many of them had been given by their parents to be privately educated) and from backgrounds where their parents could also be described as working in the professions.

#### *Arranging and maintaining access to the school*

Initial access to Taylor's was gained through Mrs Fairbank, the head teacher of the senior school. A letter explaining my research priorities was sent for her to read and in order to gain approval (see appendices). Shortly after the letter had been sent I was contacted by Mrs Fairbank who told me that the school was interested in my research and that if I should want to proceed then it would be advisable to meet with Mrs Deakin, the head teacher from the school's junior department. Due to a heavy workload and the impending Christmas season, Mrs Deakin arranged to meet me in the following January to discuss my research plans. Because of the time difference between the initial point of contact with the school and the meeting with Mrs Deakin, I was able to spend a great deal of time deliberating upon the methods that I would use as part of my research. By the time the meeting arrived I was able to outline in some detail (with some of the resources already made and able to be shown to Mrs Deakin) my plans for the use of photographs, interviews and observations with the girls. Some details of my plans for research were modified, to fit in with existing school practices and term times (for example, half terms were noted so that interviews could be scheduled so as not to clash with holidays). However, on the whole Mrs Deakin seemed happy with the designs, suggesting that they would be appreciated by the girls because they reflected their immediate interests. After the meeting there was a short time before I was due to begin my research at the school; during this time I



was initially introduced to the class teacher (Mrs Dearing); and I kept in touch with Mrs Deakin to keep her informed of my plans and to remind her of my arrival.

Gaining access through the head teachers (acting as gate keepers to the school) did appear to be the easiest way of entering the school. Yet negotiations of access did not stop here; they had to be negotiated with a number of other participants after this point too (Burgess 1984, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). A prominent concern was to ask the teachers if they minded my presence in the school. This was a fairly easy process in the junior department as my time was mainly spent in one class with one teacher who I had met before the beginning of the study. Negotiating access to observe in classes in the senior school, however, turned out to be a thoroughly different and much harder experience. A meeting was set up before my work in the senior department began. This was a nerve-racking incredibly formal affair – which involved me giving a speech from a lectern on the stage in the Great Hall to a visiting educational professor and the entire senior school staff! Admittedly this was not the type of meeting that I had expected and did not allow for any informality or the chance to discuss my ideas. The fact that I froze on the stage – unable to explain my research without shaking, also did nothing to help matters! Indeed, a number of problems concerning access in the senior school did seem to result from this original failure to explain my research plans in a consistent manner. No clear timetable was given to me by the school on my first day and so, not really knowing what to do, I simply followed children that I already knew from class to class. Upon arrival at these classes teachers were often unable to remember who I was and I had to continually reintroduce myself and ask for permission to the join their lessons.

On the whole teachers were very obliging, especially given the initial confusion. But it was not only their consent that I sought to gain, for I felt it was particularly important to gain informed consent from the girls participating in my study too. Initially, letters were sent to the girls' parents (before the study commenced) explaining the purpose of my research and asking for their consent too (see appendices). The letters contained permission slips for the parents to send back to the school. The replies were received by the school before my study began and all of the parents agreed to the research. On my very first day in the field I was also allowed a slot at the beginning of the day to introduce myself to the girls in my own terms and

to explain how I would like to research their 'daily lives in school'. After this, the girls were given time to ask me questions, although many of them preferred to ask me about the research in their own time, in a more personal and private manner. A laminated card reminding the children of the purposes of my research was also given to the girls for them to refer to at a later date, should they so wish. And all of these processes were repeated before my research began in the senior school.

Although the practice of gaining informed consent from children has been recommended in recent years, some theorists have questioned the way in which informed consent appears to rely on a modernist conception of a unified, rational and consenting subject (Miller and Birch 2002). Certainly, in my study, I had to think seriously about whether the girls were actually given the freedom to consent on their own terms or whether they were coerced into it as 'just another school project' by parents and teachers. Thought was also given to the amount of information that I was able to give the children before the study began. Because of the flexible and exploratory nature of my study I was left questioning exactly what I was asking the children to consent to. Following the advice of Alldred and Gillies (2002), however, it was decided that since informed consent appears to be the best practice available to researchers, it should be sought from the children but not just at the beginning of the project. Attempts were continually made to inform the children of any changes in my research and to ask for their renewed consent; as an ongoing discussion across the research (Benhabib 1992).

### *Leaving the Field*

The process of leaving the school was also a complex procedure that had to be negotiated with a number of different people. Because my field work took place in three distinct phases, I left the school on two occasions for long periods of time before I finally ended my work in the school. To avoid confusion and to signal the end of each stage of research, I made sure that each member of staff and each child in the class were aware of my departure and that I had thanked them fully for their time and work. Often I would follow this by leaving small presents for the staff and the pupils. A great deal has been written about the 'compensation' that participants receive at the end of research projects (see Pink 2001, Alderson 2005). Following Pink (2001) I also

feel that small presents are not adequate compensation for the hard work and effort that is put into research. And yet, the giving of gifts in this school context was an extremely important activity. Although children give gifts to their teachers at the end of term in most schools, in this school the act of gift-giving was immensely significant and almost obligatory. At the end of each term the parents of all the children in each class in the school would gather together and buy a big gift for each teacher (including mini breaks, spa days and food hampers). In addition to this each child would also bring in their own small gift to school on the final day of term - often flowers, toiletries or food items. In line with these practices, then, I felt that it was only appropriate for me to signal the end of each research phase by following this gift-giving tradition. Instead of viewing this as an act of compensation for the research, it was alternatively seen as one of many 'flows of exchanges' between the girls and myself (which also included practices such as: printing off photographs for the girls' family albums and inviting a professional photographer to work alongside the girls) and as a formal way of signalling the end of the research.

After leaving the school I followed this process by sending a letter to the head-teacher, thanking her for granting me time and access to the school. At times the head teacher would reply to my letters, asking me to keep in touch and to keep her informed of how the research was developing. After the first phase of research I made sure that I met with her formally to give her a report of my research in the junior school and to inform her of my plans for the research in the senior school. After the second phase of research, the head teacher, herself, asked me to present the school and the governing body with a written report of the research. It was decided that this would be a document produced by the children involved in the photography club, to inform people of their activities during this time. This was an extremely useful activity as it provided me with the opportunity to visit the school on several occasions (for short periods of time) in between formal research visits. This meant that not only was I able to keep in touch with the girls to remind them of my next phase of research, but also that I could keep in touch with what was happening in their lives. Indeed, each visit generated its own unique set of field notes - detailing recent school events, chats that I had with the girls and also any action that occurred as we worked together on the photography club album.

When I came to leave the school for the final time it was decided by both the pupils and the staff that this should be marked more formally in terms of a small group meeting. This was an extremely useful opportunity for me to thank everyone involved in the project and to say goodbye officially. Initially it was very hard to arrange a time when this meeting should take place, especially because I could always think of more reasons to visit the school and more data that I needed to collect. However, as the Easter holidays (a natural break in the term) drew closer and I began to feel that the majority of my research had been completed in the school (that I had reached a certain point of saturation), a date was drawn up and the meeting took place as a way of marking to others and also to myself that the field work had ended and that the formal analysis and write up would begin. As I left the school for the last time I promised the head teacher that I would keep in touch and that I would inform her of any significant developments. Yet to give myself a real break from the field it was agreed that the next formal written report would follow the completion of the thesis.

A detailed timetable of my research has been included in the appendices. Before moving on to examine the practical aspects of this design in more detail the next section will begin with a note on epistemology and methodology – specifically focusing on ethnography and seeking to locate it within feminist post-structural theory.

### **Ethnography and epistemology**

Although ethnography is a diverse practice with a number of possible definitions, it has widely been described as an approach to research that is based on ‘direct observations’ with the researcher becoming ‘immersed in the field situation’ (Spindler 1982:15). As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:1) have described it, ethnography can be seen as a term primarily referring to:

... a particular method or set of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.

Commonly accepted as the method (or mix of methods) that takes us closer to the meanings and experiences of social actors in everyday life, ethnography has been an approach adopted by a number of qualitative researchers (Lincoln and Denzin 2005). According to Gordon *et al* (2001), ethnography has a long and varied history within educational research, with many British studies tending to originate from a sociological background. This research, they suggest, has taken place predominantly with children aged 7-16 in mainstream schooling with work now being carried out increasingly in different locations and with younger children. James (2001) also notes how ethnography has played a major role in research with children, both in and out of the school setting. She suggests that ethnography can be credited as the main method that has enabled children to be recognised as people to study in their own right – as credible research participants. Ethnography has been a method that many feminists have favoured too. As Skeggs (2001) observes, feminism and ethnography have a lot in common: including an interest in experience, participants, definitions, meanings, subjectivity and context. As a method seen to focus on the ‘quality of people’s experiences’ and their shared meanings of social life, ethnography has been used by a number of feminist scholars to ‘give voice’ to women’s lives. My research approach can also be described as having a feminist ethnographic focus. I spent a year observing, talking to and asking questions of girls in order to explore their experiences of identity construction in a single-sex private school. This approach enabled a prolonged study of subjectivity, with an attention to the contexts in which activities took place and a concern for the day-to-day practices of girls, as moments where identities are discursively (re)constituted.

A strong body of feminist ethnographic work already exists within education (see for example: Clarricoates 1980, Llewelyn 1980, Francis 1999, Skelton 1999, Davies 2003, Reay 1999, Hey 1997, Youdell 1999, Renold 2005, McLeod 2002), with most studies seeking to observe the construction of gender and power relations in school and to place girls and women at the centre of their research (Gordon *et al* 2001). Yet despite the popularity of ethnography within both feminism and education, it is important to recognise that there is nothing about ethnography as a practice that makes it inherently compatible with these approaches. Indeed, it has been argued for some time now that there is no one feminist theory, nor one feminist methodological practice (Stanley and Wise 1993).

As Dickens (1983:1) points out:

Demands that feminists produce a unique methodology act to circumscribe the impact of feminism... we feel it is time to abandon what amounts to a defensive strategy. It has to be recognised that feminist research is not a specific, narrow, methodology but one that is informed at every stage by an acknowledged political commitment.

In a similar vein, Gordon *et al* (2001) have demonstrated how varied the use of ethnography has been within educational research, with scholars from a range of theoretical backgrounds ( including cultural, post-structural, material and critical theorists) adopting it as an approach for research.

It is possible that ethnography will become even less compatible with feminism when it is combined with post-structural theory. A number of authors have commented on the problems that post-structural theories pose for ethnography in its study of 'experience' and quest to gain a 'true' understanding of the social world. The idea that ethnography can represent the world in unproblematic ways and can capture the meanings on which people act has been rejected by a number of post-structural theorists (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Instead they have claimed that there is 'no reality that can be known outside of the discursive representation of it', and that meanings are not the properties of individual but 'reflect the constitution of subjectivities through language' (Skeggs 2001:430, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:5). Of course, it is not only ethnographic studies that have been critiqued by post-structural theorists for their representation of the social world. Alldred and Gillies (2002) suggest that a major part of empirical research is problematic from a post-structural viewpoint, predicated as it is on modernist principles of embracing notions of progress and enlightenment, truth and reality, and on notions of the Cartesian rational subject. Some authors have come to conclude that ethnography, if not the method most compatible with post-structural theory, is at least a less problematic approach (Alvesson 2002). In fact, a growing body of literature has emerged over the last decade to explore the practices and processes involved in conducting ethnography in accordance with these theoretical sensibilities (St Pierre *et al* 2000, Alvesson 2002, Stronach and Maclure 1997, Travers 2001). As St Pierre (2000:1) suggests, we are now:

Working in the 'twilight of foundationalism', after the crises of representation and legitimation and through and out of a restless 'post' period that troubles all those things we assumed were solid, substantial, and whole – knowledge, truth, reality, reason, science, progress, the subject and so forth.

For many researchers, she remarks, this is now a case of 'working the ruins' of ethnography; not unquestioningly accepting it as a method but working with a 'question of belief' to explore how it can be re-worked in light of these different philosophical principles. As Britzman (2000) points out this will mean re-examining our understandings of ethnography so that the 'real' that ethnography aims to explore is taken as an effect of discourses, and so that ethnography itself can be expected to summon only partial truths and fictions. If this is the case, then Britzman (2000) believes that ethnography can offer us a more complicated version of how life is lived out.

It is recognised that epistemology (the theory of how knowledge is produced) cannot be easily separated from the practical techniques of research. Indeed, epistemological arguments will inform and interlink with all of my discussions about research techniques, later on in the chapter. However, I feel it is important first to foreground exactly how feminist post-structural theory has affected my approach to ethnography. The next sections will seek to explore what a feminist post-structural, educational ethnography might look like.

#### *A note on experience*

The importance of experience to feminist ethnography can not be underestimated. Many authors have come to understand ethnography as the practice of approaching and understanding other people's experiences. Similarly from a feminist perspective Skeggs (1997:25) highlights the importance of experience by remarking that:

It was in an attempt to challenge descriptions and classifications and the universalist assumptions that were made from descriptors of male experience (disguised as objective knowledge) that the concept of experience itself gained validity for feminists.

Furthermore, Skeggs (1997:25) suggests that feminist standpoint epistemology is premised on the understanding that women's experience can carry a 'special knowledge to challenge oppression'. And yet experience becomes a difficult issue from a post-structural perspective; the common idea of experience as a form of authentic knowledge emanating from a unified, 'true' subject (woman) is challenged. Although, many authors agree with Skeggs (1997) in her view that experience is a concept that feminists should not discard (especially due to its important and formative nature in feminist history), it is, they believe, a notion that has to be refigured (Britzman 2000). Experience has to be alternatively understood as having no inherent meaning but of being constituted and given meaning through discourse (Weedon 1997); understood not in the sense of individuals having or owning experiences, but as individuals constituted as experiencing subjects through discourse (Davies *et al* 2001). As de Lauretis (1984:159) explains:

For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction – which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values or material causes, but by one's subjective engagement in the practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world.

In this sense, then, my research can be recognised, not as an attempt to understand the 'authentic' nature of girlhood, as a fact that can be discovered simply by asking questions of experience, but as an attempt to explore the discursively created experiences of young girls and as a way of understanding how they come to occupy the category 'girl' (Skeggs 1997). Identity, therefore, is not to be taken to be an essential object of study, 'standing still and ready for its close up' (Gamson 2000:357) but; following Visweswaran (1994), it can be explored in terms of its discursive formations; as multiple and fragile and as emerging from a series of performances and positionings.

### *A note on the self*

The concept of the researcher's self is also complicated by post-structural theory. Both feminists and post-structural theorists have questioned the authoritative style that a number of (conventionally male) ethnographic texts have been written in (Denzin



and Lincoln 2005). The 'invisible' presence of the author in many ethnographic texts has been challenged as a technique used for promoting the ideal of an objective researcher that can discover and report on a 'true' social world in a relatively unproblematic manner (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). More recently theorists have proposed a number of alternative ways in which authors can construct their texts in order to represent the researcher selves differently. Reflexivity, in particular, has been highlighted as an important tool to enable researchers to reflect on the ways in which they are implicated in research. In some cases this has led to a particular kind of 'self reflection' in the text, where participants' stories are told through the researcher's own identity and experience. However, this notion of reflexivity is still relatively problematic, for not only does it rely on a particular concept of self (one that is produced through a specific historical telling that relies on fixing the selves of others in order to produce movement for oneself) but also because it often relies on a singular researcher identity that does not account for movement, place, space, or bodies and yet 'nonetheless authorises itself to speak' (Skeggs 2002). Such accounts have been criticised both for their narcissistic and seductive tendencies; as forms of rhetoric that persuade the reader of the authority of the work through confessions of the self and through the immediacy of being in the situation (Atkinson 1992).

Yet as both Skeggs (2002) and Adkins (2002) suggest, it is not the idea of reflexivity that is necessarily the problem in these practices; more often it is the notion of self. Both these authors suggest an alternative form of reflexivity; used as a means to reflect on the power and practices of research and as an attempt to be responsible, accountable and aware of one's own positioning and partiality. Skeggs (2002:369) elucidates this point by suggesting that

This means we have to acknowledge that as researchers we do inhabit positions of power, but these may shift and they are rarely easily known... What we need to do is return to reflexivity as practice and process, as a matter of resources and positioning; not a property of the self.

I too have attempted to engage reflexively in my work in these ways. In the following discussions, of the practical techniques used in the course of this research, I have attempted to account for my own part in the project, to be sensitive to the ways in

which the research has been carried out and to explore the part that power relations have played in this process. Yet it has been a hard task to attempt without writing my different research 'selves' into the text. Indeed, it is not only in this chapter that I appear, as accounts of my selves have already appeared - woven into the narratives of the previous theory chapter. And yet, whilst I recognise that these different selves have been written into these accounts, it is important to acknowledge that they are not meant as an uncritical celebration of the researcher selves at the expense of others, for this is first and foremost an exploration of young girls' experiences. Nor are they meant to be understood as fully self-conscious accounts of the part my static, unified self played in the research process. Instead they have been used as a way of accounting for aspects of the research experience and as a way of making these processes apparent. It is, as Gillies and Alldred (2002:162) note, hard to transcend our investments in the modernist subject; but an attempt must at least be made to conduct research in an ethical way that allows for the recognition of more diverse ways of being.

#### *A note on ethics*

If ethics can be understood as the 'right way to treat each other as human beings in research', then it becomes increasingly hard to distinguish the philosophy of ethics from the local practice of ethics (Murphy and Dingwall 2001). Indeed, only a short note on ethics will be included here at this stage in the chapter, as fuller discussions of ethical practice will be developed in the sections that follow. There is, however, a need to acknowledge the ways in which ethics are related to epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and the possibilities of knowledge. For a long time now, feminists have argued for a different type of ethical practice in research. Presumed to have originated in Gilligan's (1983) work, feminists have argued for the practice of an 'ethics of care', based on principles of responsibility, reciprocity, honesty, accountability and equality (Edwards and Mauthner 2002). Although these notions of care have been criticised for their biological essentialism (the idea that women are naturally more caring and therefore more capable of carrying out this practice), it is possible to see the tremendous influence these ideas have had on the local practice of ethics (Skeggs 2001).

A number of post-modern theorists have also more recently criticised certain ethical practices for their modernist approach to ethical issues, based on abstract and transferable principles (Edwards and Mauthner 2002). This too has resulted in a number of theorists becoming more interested in methodologies that emphasise the local and contingent nature of research; an interest in ethics that are worked out in the context of research, not applied in mechanical ways through guidelines and by researchers who feel they are able to stand outside of the context of research and above relationships of power. As Prout and Christensen (2002) indicate, a local practice of ethics may be even more important in research with children, where it is not helpful to presume children's competencies in advance, but where instead there is a need to develop practices suited to their specific needs in the research context. A responsibility to professional organisations (like the British Educational Research Association) and to my funding body (the Economic and Social Research Council), meant that formal ethical guidelines were adhered to in my research (BERA 2004, ESRC 2006). However, in line with feminist post-structural sensibilities, ethics were also worked out on a local and contingent basis, involving discussions with the girls who participated in my study (Miller and Bell 2002). Indeed, as Prout and Christensen (2002) demonstrate, it is a combination of reflexive practice and collective dialogue that is needed to meet the varied circumstances of research whilst also providing an anchor for ethical practice.

The next sections of this chapter will move on to discuss some of the major issues in my research design, specifically focusing on the issues faced when researching children.

### **Issues in researching children- participation**

A major aim of my study was for it to be participatory; to involve the girls in the project and to enable a degree of choice and flexibility in the research design. This choice was informed by feminist principles of honesty and reciprocity in research and in line with post-structural ideas to undertake joint explorations of the pluralities of the social world (Tyler 1986). This decision was also made in line with arguments from the 'new' sociology of childhood. As Prout (2003:11) suggests, there has been an accelerating movement towards ideas about children's participation and voice in

recent years, one that has become enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child. Indeed, a number of innovative, child-participatory projects have enabled and enlisted the help of children in social research in recent years (Punch 2003, Clarke and Moss 2001, Kellett 2004, Davies 2003). In line with these studies my project also sought to involve the girls in the research, enabling them to choose some of the methods used in the research and to be involved in analytical decisions and representation of the work.

Despite the relative control that the girls had over various aspects of the research project, it must be acknowledged that a great deal of the research had to be planned (for practical reasons) by me before the girls were involved. As some researchers have remarked, this type of adult directed research can be seen as ‘participation by proxy’ or ‘tokenism’; as research masquerading under an attempt to recognise children’s voices but at the same time denying them the chance to fully participate (Pole *et al* 1999). However, as Hart’s (1999) ‘ladder of participation’ demonstrates, there are many ways in which children can participate in social research. In any case, not all children may be able or wish to participate fully in research projects and in these cases researchers must avoid imposing their own ideals on to their participants (Birch and Miller 2002). This was certainly the case in my research for many of the girls were often ‘too busy’ to participate. Participation depended on a number of factors (e.g. homework and lunchtime clubs) and often participation rates varied across the studies depending on the girls’ other commitments. Time for participation was particularly pushed when the girls reached the senior school, where many of them had to make a number of sacrifices just to attend the interviews. Robinson and Kellett (2004) suggest this to be the case for a number of projects: that in reality participation and choice rarely exist in absolute freedom but involves varying degrees of compromise. As Sinclair (2004) points out, levels of participation need to be worked out locally to suit the individual research context. In my case, this meant a degree of structure rather than complete free choice, but the freedom and flexibility to influence the project.

### *A multi-method approach*

Although ethnography has generally always involved using multiple methods, more recently a number of studies involving children have also adopted this approach. In

particular, researchers have suggested that one of the best ways to involve children in research is to employ a range of 'child-friendly' or 'task-centred' methods, including photography, sentence completion exercises, creative writing, drawing and story telling techniques (Thomas-Slater 1995, Derbyshire *et al* 2005). It is debatable as to whether all children will find such techniques 'fun' and 'empowering' and whether, for example, all children prefer drawing to talking. Similarly it is dangerous to separate children as the 'other' in research; suggesting they have different competencies to adults (Grover 2004). Yet as Mason (2006) suggests, multiple methods can be used in research to enable a more complicated understanding of events and to allow us to 'think outside of the box'; to push our research questions further. Mason's reasoning that multiple methods allow a more complex view of a multi-dimensional social life is certainly one of the reasons why I have adopted a multi-method approach to research. As she suggests (2006:14) this is not a 'sloppy' approach to research:

In proposing a palette of methods, I am not making an argument for eclecticism or for non-strategic proliferation of techniques, as though more is always better, or variety is inherently a good thing. On the contrary, in this model, the logic for choosing which methods to select from the palette should always continue to be governed by the questions that drive the research.

Following Mason, I believe that it is also important to stress that this is not an approach that seeks to 'integrate' methods but more of an attempt to 'mesh' them together. This is accepting that the views these methods offer will not necessarily be consistent or coherent with one another but will produce a more complex picture of a typically 'messy' and multidimensional social world.

### *A longitudinal focus*

Time is also recognised as an important concept in ethnography (Wollcott 1995). In recent years there has been a concern over a rise in, what has been referred to as, 'blitzkreig' approaches to ethnography (Rist 1980, Jeffrey and Troman 2004) which has led a number of scholars to suggest that a period of a year to two years is the ideal completion time for a project. Aside from the time taken to conduct an ethnography, a number of researchers have also become interested in time as part of the object of study. Time has been pointed out as particularly important in the study of children; in

exploring children's experiences of 'growing up' and their notions of the past, present and future (Neale and Flowerdew 2003). Indeed, time in both of these senses (as the length of research and as an object of study) was important to my research. Most obviously, time was studied as a factor in the girls' transitions to secondary school where it was deemed important to understand their experiences of this event. Time, however, was also important over the course of the research in more subtle ways. As Mcleod (2000:49) has suggested, research with a longitudinal focus can aid a different and more complex understanding of identity formation:

...it can illuminate, confirm or unsettle initial and tentative interpretations, alert us to recurring motifs and tropes in participants' narratives as well as to shifts and changes, suggest continuities or disruptions in emotional investments in desires and dispositions, and provide a strong sense of how particular ideas are taking shape or developing. This allows identity to be analysed as a process and not simply as a repository for one off opinions and quotation.

In her own study of gender identity formation, Mcleod felt that a longitudinal focus allowed her to more adequately explore Bourdieu's concept of habitus as an idea of the 'past in the present'. In a similar manner Skeggs (1997) has also argued that her longitudinal research allowed her to explore, develop and test different theoretical concepts over time. In fact she remarks upon the fact that the theory of respectability (a major concept in her study) was only developed towards the end of the research. As Holland and Thomson (2003) remind us there is a need to be careful in research with a longitudinal focus not to impose a linear sense of time onto our analyses or our participants. And as they suggest, a longer time of study is not necessarily meant to produce a more informed or coherent understanding. Instead it will often complicate the picture, 'cutting through simple stories of class and gender' (Mcleod 2000:202).

### **Research strategies – participant observation**

Participant observation is commonly understood to be the main method used in ethnography. Indeed, participant observation was used a good deal by the early researchers in the Chicago School of Sociology (the centre where ethnography is thought to have developed from within sociology). Robert Parks (one of the founding members of the school) is reported to have said that he wanted researchers to go out into the world and participate in research that meant getting 'the seats of their pants

dirty' (Deegan 2001). As Becker (1958:652) proposed, participant observation can be defined as the process in which the researcher goes out and:

... gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organisation he studies. He [sic] watches the people he [sic] is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He [sic] enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he [sic] has observed.'

Participant observation was a method upon which I drew heavily in my own research. During the first phase of my project I spent over ten weeks in class with the girls, observing them in the classroom and outside at break times, often joining in with lessons and participating in a residential school trip. The second phase of research, which took place in the senior school, also involved observation of lessons, break times and extra-curricular activities for eight weeks.

#### *Participant observer role(s)*

It has conventionally been suggested, in line with Gold (1958), that there are four roles that researchers may take up as participants in research (participant as observer, full participant, observer as participant and full observer). It is similarly proposed that a degree of 'impression management' needs to be maintained by researchers in order to fit into certain social settings – involving dressing correctly, speaking correctly and taking up pre-prepared roles within institutions (Lofland and Lofland 1995, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). In my research I tried to take up an active participant role in the classroom which often involved chatting and working alongside the girls but on occasions also meant donning the appropriate clothing and getting 'my hands dirty' (for example, learning to play lacrosse!). Whilst in the school I also tried hard to manage the impression that I gave to the teachers and children, often being very aware of the way in which I spoke (actively trying to cast off my strong regional accent!) and attempting to dress in 'smart but trendy' clothes to fit in with the school dress code whilst not dissociating myself from the girls (Delamont 1989). However, it was often difficult to maintain a set role in research, especially as my role in the school seemed to change dramatically across the course of the project. For example, whilst active participation was encouraged in the junior school it became increasingly

harder to participate in senior school life due to the relatively quiet and static nature of the lessons.

During my research it also became apparent that the children and teachers would often perceive me as inhabiting very different roles from the ones that I had chosen. As Youdell (2005) suggests, given the 'visual economies of prevailing discourses', the way we look will always mean that we will be positioned in research in certain ways by subjects. Unaware of the ways in which the girls had positioned me in my research until my identities were drawn into interview discussions, I found that I was regarded as specifically gendered ('a real girly girl'), undeniably heterosexual and most definitely 'clever' (due to the qualifications I was studying for). Of course, the girls did not always agree on my role as an 'academic' researcher (it varied between helper, analyst, psychologist and trainee teacher). And so, as Youdell remarks, we need to be aware of our multiple selves in research; as not fixed in set roles but as performatively constituted across the course of research. This means that we will not always be fully aware of the ways in which we are recognised in research (who knows how else the girls viewed me!). Yet it means that as researchers we are not constrained by certain roles or positions. Indeed, in my research, conversations about the presumed nature of my identity often opened up great debates which held the potential to 'subjectivate' me and the research participants in different and less static ways (Youdell 2005).

### *Relationships and rapport*

Defined as 'the response to the researcher's capacity for interpersonal dexterity' or 'the cause and consequence of warm, mutual interactions in research' (Hey 2000), rapport is also regarded as an important quality to be established in the research relationship and as an essential way in which researchers can gain access to observe various aspects of social life (Burgess 1984). In my research it was deemed particularly important to establish and maintain 'friendly' relationships with the girls in order for them to accept me into their classroom to observe their experiences. Due to the length and nature of my research, this meant that often these relationships developed and formed the basis of friendships. As the research progressed so did my relationships with the girls: I was given more and more access to observe their private lives outside of the school and it became quite hard for me to leave the field.



Yet, as a process of gaining trust and building confidence and (sometimes) friendships in research, rapport has been questioned by researchers for its artificial nature, as bounded to certain times and official research commitments (Miller and Birch 2002, Coffey 1999). Of course this was true in my work, as all of my relationships in the school were based on the grounds of my research; there was no other reason for my attending the school. It was also the case that although I could develop relationships with the girls, these were by no means neutral or free from relations of power. For example, there was no way in which I could transcend certain adult roles in research or become a young girl in any way. Although the girls quite commonly positioned me in different ways with regard to my age, (sometimes asking for 'adult' help or permission in class and at other times asking what I wanted to do when I grew up!) I became increasingly aware that there was no way for me to transcend certain 'adult' characteristics. As O'Kane (2000:136-7) maintains:

Ultimately the biggest challenge for researchers working with children are the disparities in power and status between adults and children...researchers face great challenges in finding ways to break down the power imbalance between adults and children, and in creating space which enables children to speak up and be heard.

Relationships in school are perhaps even more demanding as they involve balancing relationships with both children and teachers (Russell 2005). However, as Hey (2000) advises, it is quite problematic to view rapport just as a way of establishing equal relationships with research participants. It is, Hey suggests, useful to share aspects of experiences with research participants, but it is important to recognise that the working out of these points of connection is never innocent and always performative. Instead of trying to forge relationships on the grounds of equality and shared connections, Hey (2000:163) maintains that researchers need to view rapport differently, as 'a process always on the edge of destabilising', as 'never fully achieved or stable', as 'partial recognitions' and 'processes of connection, disconnection, break and rupture':

...rapport as a momentarily achieved (fragile) form of intersubjective synergy that is produced with and against the force of binary norms that marshal us into our respective places. Rapport can be thought of as a form of interpersonal hegemony. This is a position which disputes that empathy/rapport constructs the cancellation of all differences.

Indeed, research never involves monolithic power relations anyway, for Christensen (2004:174-5) proposes:

The issue of power is complex and cannot be addressed through only viewing power as a matter of social position – such as ‘adult power’ over children or vice versa. In the process of research, power moves between different actors and different social positions, it is produced and negotiated in the social interactions of child to adult, child to child and adult to adult in the local settings of research.

It was certainly the case that many of the girls participating in my study were relatively powerful. Often able to deploy an enormous amount of cultural capital, the girls were able to negotiate their own roles and relationships in my research. This is not to suggest that as a researcher I was able to sit back and let the girls find their own spaces for participation or power, for as Mayall (2004) suggests I was continuously reflecting on generational issues; trying hard not to fulfil ‘traditional’, ‘authoritarian’, ‘adult’ roles and seeking to create spaces for ‘continuous flows of exchanges’ rather than exploitative relationships (Pink 2001).

#### *Directing the researcher’s ‘gaze’ and writing field notes*

On a more practical note, one of the key problems identified in observational research is in knowing what to observe in the first place. Although Gordon *et al* (2005) contend that observation is not a neutral practice (based as it is on powerful acts of interpretation of what is useful or important to study) they do believe that researchers must go through a process in the research where they learn to direct their gaze. In order to focus my own initial observations and in order to make the ‘familiar strange’ (Delamont and Atkinson 1995) a few practical tips were followed. These included: noting the classroom layout, seating arrangements, names, daily activities and timetables (Delamont 1999). My initial gaze was also focused by my research questions; specifically looking at issues of gender, class and achievement. As time wore on my gaze became increasingly focused due to events that had previously happened in the field and through interview discussions or analytic ideas noted down during periods of absence from the school. Another way in which my observations became more focused was through Gordon *et al*’s (2005) advice to concentrate on times of silence and non-activity as well as noise and action. As these authors suggest,

after the initial impact of audible and visible action is absorbed by the researcher it is important to 'sensitise' one's gaze to focus on non-events and silence, for this broadens the observational field and makes bodies and spaces more visible.

Attention was also paid to the ways in which my field notes were constructed, for this too involves individual interpretations and the making of specific decisions (Atkinson 1992). Field notes can be understood as a form of representation: not a mirror to the world, but a way of reducing observed events into written accounts (Emerson *et al* 2001). They were used in my study to make the field more 'manageable and memorable' (Atkinson 1992). Mainly taken at the end of each school day, my field notes consisted of a number of different elements. Often my field notes, like my observations, began with a fairly open structure, noting anything and everything that seemed to be of concern. To begin with this meant that many of my field notes were written in chronological order (to pattern and account for daily activities) and particularly striking events were picked out and recorded in more detail (Wolfinger 2002). However, as the research progressed and my 'gaze' became more focused, so did my field notes. Notes on events and non-events began to be recorded, as were notes on the researcher's selves, methods and theory, though often these were differentiated from one another in the course of the writing. During the course of the research I tried hard not to rely too heavily on memory, sometimes making jottings during the day to assist my write-up at night. However, at some points (especially during busy times) 'head notes' had to be relied upon in order to account for events or discussions (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Similarly, an effort was made to make detailed notes at the end of each school day, though sometimes 'sketch notes' had to be relied on until enough time was available for them to be written up fully. The notes that are used in the following chapters do differ somewhat from my original jottings as these needed some rewriting from their original form as 'streams of consciousness', 'thought rushes' and flows of memories'. In their final form these notes have been substantially sorted and reordered into readable accounts in an attempt to provide clarity, anonymity and relevance (Lofland and Lofland 1995).

## **Interviews**

Sometimes referred to as the 'gold standard' in research (Silverman 2000), interviews have been used by a number of qualitative researchers. Defined as 'conversations with

a research purpose', they have often been used for their flexible, fluid and conversational approach (Mason 2002). Interviews have also formed the basis of a lot of ethnographic work, used in studies where 'researchers have established respectful, on going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds' (Sherman Heyl 2001:369). Apart from these similarities, however, it must be recognised that there is no such thing as 'the interview', only a family of interview based methods driven by different theoretical purposes (Arksey and Knight 1999).

### *Focused group interviews*

The interview method used in my study was the focused group interview. Focus groups and group interviews have been used a great deal in social research, especially in research that has taken place with children (Morgan *et al* 2002). Although the two approaches share many characteristics, and the terms are often used interchangeably, it is helpful to distinguish the two. Focus groups were developed in market research as a method to explore group reactions to phenomena (Bloor *et al* 2001). In their adoption for social research they have been adapted and used to concentrate on the shared meanings that are produced in group situations (Morgan 1998). In contrast, group interviews are seen to be less structured than focus groups; as Lewis (1992) describes them, they are more of a 'conversational encounter with a research purpose'. Group interviews have also been used by researchers as ways of interviewing many individuals at once but with a focus on the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee rather than on interaction with the group (O'Reilly 2005). To strike a balance between these two approaches I chose to describe the interview method used in my research as 'focused group interviews'. These interviews represent a fairly flexible approach to group interviewing, allowing conversation to be shaped and developed by the participants own interests and with an interest in what individuals say as well as group reactions. As Kitzinger (1994:159) suggests, they enabled me to 'examine people's different perspectives as they operated within a social network' and to explore how accounts were 'constructed, expressed, censured, opposed and changed through social interaction'.

### *A post-structural influence*

Traditionally group interviews, like individual interviews, have been viewed as 'pipelines to people's interiors' (Alvesson 2001), as simple forms of data gathering in which participants speak directly to the researcher, who is able to capture self-evident truths or precise data that can be categorised and reported on (McLeod 2003, Fontana 2003). Yet as McLeod (2003) maintains, working from a post-structural framework we are no longer able to enter interviews as unmediated confessions; instead we need to acknowledge the interview as a construction (as the interviewer and interviewee working together collaboratively to accomplish the interview) and as partial truth with power relations present. Similarly, a number of authors have proposed that interviews need to be recognised as events where researchers can explore the multiple subject positions people speak from as the effects of discursive practices, not as events where unitary subjects reveal their own individual experiences (Mason 2002, Alldred and Gillies 2002). This has meant a change in the ways in which questions are asked in interviews. In my research this meant, not asking about the so-called 'truths of girlhood', but asking about the ways in which girlhood (as a category formed of multiple subject positions) was lived out by girls on a daily basis.

My interviews were also used as a way of exploring, what Bronwyn Davies has referred to as, 'discursive positioning'. This can be understood as a way of exploring the subject positions people speak from and negotiate in the course of conversation. Davies and Harre (1992) propose that as people speak they assign parts to themselves and others taking part in the conversation; they make available subject positions in which other speakers are positioned by. This, they point out, is not necessarily a straightforward process because people do not speak from one single, non-contradictory subject position throughout the course of a conversation, and listeners do not always take up the positions made available to them. It is also, therefore, not an easy process for researchers to explore either. However, these authors contend that positioning is a real conversational phenomenon that allows researchers to explore (at least) some of the fragmented discourses that constitute research participants and to think about the different selves presented to them in interviews. In my research, positioning became extremely apparent when the girls began to talk about themselves as 'girls' in the interviews - as they negotiated their own views on girlhood with

others and attempted to balance the contradictory views of their different selves. In this sense, interview talk can be regarded in the same way as observations, as both are representations of certain phenomena and interview talk can be seen as performative (constitutive of identities), not simply a reflection of a ready made reality (Coffey and Atkinson 2003).

### *Practical organisation*

Interviews took place across all three phases of my research project, as 'getting to know you' interviews in the first phase and as follow-up interviews in the second and third phases. All of the interviews were voluntary and took place with groups of around four to six girls, following Bloor *et al's* (2001) advice that this encourages better group relations and allows enough time for each member of the group to talk. Groups were often chosen on the basis of existing friendships because it was felt that this enabled a 'freer conversation' where participants felt at ease to talk amongst their peers (Hill 1997, Kitzinger 1994), though at points in the research friendship groups were sometimes mixed. Although care was taken to make sure girls from different friendship groups were not uncomfortable with others in the group, it was recognised that these mixed interviews sometimes worked better to provoke group debate. The interviews took place in venues of the girls' choice; most often these were venues outside of the classroom such as cloakrooms, locker rooms and stairwells. Although these locations were often noisy, and at points meant we were moved on, they were thought to promote less formal conversations (Green and Hart 1999). I tried to take a back seat in the interviews, taking up a role as a conversation 'starter' and 'steerer'. Taking on a semi-structured format, I used a guide to lead my questioning and probing of the girls, though on the whole I tried hard to listen to what the girls had to say, letting them steer the conversation towards topics of their own choice. As my research progressed, the questions on my interview guides changed. This was due to some questions having been answered in more informal ethnographic conversations and because of new questions emerging during observations. It was also due to the limited time available for interviewing in the school. Although group interviews were a very practical way of interviewing a number of children in a small amount of time, the interviews often went over their allocated time slots and were difficult to fit in

around lesson times. Indeed, in the end a number of the interviews had to be conducted during the girls' lunch and break times.

With the girls' permission all of the interviews were tape recorded. This not only allowed me to have a permanent record to take away from the interviews, but also allowed for greater concentration in the interviews. The girls were encouraged to experiment with the tape recorder before the interviews took place, which meant that not only were they more comfortable with the recording but that their names and personal information were also taken before the interviews began. Many of the girls also took time at the end of the interviews to listen to the recordings - they were keen to hear their own voices and recall what had been said. The interviews were then transcribed using a set of standard transcription conventions. Although transcription, as a process of typing up interview accounts, has often been regarded as a fairly straightforward process, this was not the view taken in my research. Transcription was not understood as a simple mechanical procedure but as an inevitable act of interpretation involving certain theoretical assumptions to be made about the data. They were seen as artefacts produced by me, rather than 'pearls containing wisdom allowing insight into the essential truths of others' (Alldred and Gillies 2002). For example, it was recognised that even during the process of punctuating interview accounts I fixed them with certain meanings, often flattening out the emotions and humour presented in the original speech. Following Alldred and Gillies (2002) advice, then, great care was taken during the transcription process not to iron out contradictions and ambiguity or to smooth out messy speech; to resist the temptation to create more manageable, linear subjects.

### **Photography and photographic methods**

Many sociologists have argued that the visual image is essential to the construction of social life (Fyfe and Law 1988). Photographic methods seem to have a strong connection with sociological research, for many writers have commented on the fact that photographs were commonly used in the *American Journal of Sociology* before 1915 (Chaplin 1994, Banks 2001). In the 1970's, in particular, a number of feminist researchers used domestic photographs in order to explore women's experiences outside of dominant aesthetic discourses (Edge and Bayliss 2004). Since this time, a

number of researchers have also become interested in photographic methods as a means of studying identity formation. As Holliday (2000:513) indicates, the display of identities is primarily visual: 'Most of us display our identities in visual ways through different arrangements of cultural products such as clothes and interior décor and the kinds of books, records and CD's we choose to put on display for others'. This is not a new sociological idea; Emmison *et al* (2000) relate how many theorists (such as Goffman and Simmel) have highlighted the importance of visual display in everyday social life. However, it is perhaps an area where visual research methods have altered or enhanced our understanding.

### *The photographic diary and the lunchtime photography club*

The photographic/visual diary has been a method well utilised in identity research. Young *et al* (2002) asked Brazilian street children to create a photographic diary that portrayed their everyday life. Similarly Chappell (1984) asked the girls that participated in her study to produce photographic diaries that would 'tell stories about their relationships and the people that mattered to them'. Photographic diaries have often been used to access the 'private' lives of participants and the visual aspects of everyday lives. They have taken a range of formats: posed or impromptu, structured or free-flow, large or small scale and personal or abstract. The photographic diary method was also implemented in my own study in order to explore the girls' personal worlds and their visual displays of identity. The girls were each given disposable cameras and were asked to create photographic diaries that portrayed, for them, 'what it is like to be a girl'. The girls were each given diary books for the photographs to be displayed in and were encouraged to represent them in any format that they wanted to (Holland and Thompson 2005). The diaries were subsequently analysed by a method of 'photographic elicitation'. Conventionally this method has meant that researchers insert photographs into interviews as a way of sharpening interviewees' memories and reducing misunderstandings in the research process. However, this process assumes that photographs can hold 'objective social facts'. I did not use photographs to evoke responses or as tools with which to gain knowledge. Instead, photographs were used in interviews to ask the children why they were relevant to their own experiences. This process, therefore, may be more adequately described as a form of 'photographic feedback', a method that 'can allow a discussion of images in ways that may create a



bridge between different experiences of reality; they are a reference point to represent aspects of someone's reality' (Pink 2001:71).

Due to time limitations in school it was decided that it would be best practically to implement the photographic diary as a lunchtime club. This was a technique also adopted by Chappell (1984) who used small study groups to enable young girls to 'tell their own lives through the photos they might take of themselves and the stories that could be told of these'. In a similar manner, I used six one-hour sessions over a school term to explore aspects of photography with eight girls. After consulting the girls' form teacher, it was decided that (as with other school clubs) the girls would be chosen to participate in the club on a 'first come, first served' basis. Letters detailing the nature of the club and consent forms were sent out to all of the girls' parents and the girls themselves were told that it would be those girls who handed their forms back in first on Monday morning who would be chosen to participate in the club. As Monday morning arrived there was a queue of twelve girls lined up at the teacher's desk with signed consent forms in their hands. Upon realising the length of the queue several of the girls bowed out graciously, asking me if they could still be involved in the club at a more minor level. This was agreed and a couple of the girls were given photographic diaries to complete at home in their own time. It was also agreed that a reserve list would be drawn up so that when any of the photography club members were away, these 'extra' girls would be chosen to take their place. Later that day the form teacher did tell me that she did slightly regret the method of choice we had agreed on, especially because one girl had been found crying in the toilets at break-time, saying that she was upset because she was 'ninth in the queue' and that it was not her fault because her 'Mum had been stuck in a traffic jam that morning' (see Allan 2004 for more details). However, upon reflection the teacher also told me that she felt it had been 'right to stick to the usual methods of choice' and that it had worked out well because 'at least there were a range of girls from the class involved in the club'. Indeed, as one of the girls told me herself: 'it is weird...I don't know how it happened but everyone in the club has a friend and there are girls from all of the different groups in the class!'

To begin the club all of the girls were each given a photography pack, including their own disposable camera, a folder of activities, a note book and a photo diary. The

workshops were not based on how to use a camera. Rather, they were used to get the girls to look at photographs critically and to work out how a photograph is put together. Several of the sessions involved the girls looking at the work of female photographers Cindy Sherman and Sally Mann to see if they could work out their own stories to explicate the photographs. As the sessions progressed the girls were then set tasks to design their own photographs that may portray 'what it is like to be a girl'. The club ended with a one-day photography workshop where the girls worked alongside a professional photographer to produce their own portrait prints that expressed their personal interpretations of 'being a girl'. The workshop was the time when the girls were enabled to become more 'hands on'; they exhausted the photographer as they told him how they would like to pose, which lighting effects to use, which angle to take the photograph from and as they eventually took control of the camera themselves.

### *The benefits of using photographic methods*

The use of photographic methods in my study of identity construction was both exciting and methodologically rich. Not only did it allow me to get to know a small group of girls more intimately but it allowed access to their personal worlds and experiences. Reay (1995) points to the importance of this in educational research as she maintains that personal histories and non-school lives help shape the dispositions that are observable in class. Using the method in the lunchtime club also allowed the girls to participate freely in their use of the methods, to choose what they wanted to photograph and how they would present it. Indeed, photography has quite a history in participatory research (see Wang and Burris 1994, 1997), more recently being used in education as a form of 'photovoice' (Meyer *et al* 2004, Meyer and Kroeger 2005, Beck 2005, Whitfield 2005, Mitchell *et al* 2004); to entrust 'cameras into the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders and potential catalysts for social action and change, in their own communities' (Wang 1999).

Importantly, the method also encouraged the girls to explore further their sense of selves. Holliday (2005:516) says that, visual methods are a particularly post-modern medium which can be used to 'capture the ways in which different subjects may be

situated in specific configurations of discourse whilst making those discourse open for examination as they recur in different images’.

This is a point that is also echoed by Lister (1997), whose view is that, though we need to be careful not to view digital photography as a practice entirely set apart from traditional film based photography, it can be seen as a medium that particularly draws on post-structural theories of language and meaning; on the polysemic nature of signs and their capacity to mean more than one thing. Digital photography in privileging ‘fragmentation, indeterminacy and heterogeneity’ is able to emphasise the processes and performances involved in identity formation. Although the girls in my research mainly used disposable cameras, the photography workshop at the end of the project allowed them a space to work with digital cameras and editing facilities in order to alter and enhance their images digitally should they so wish. This was a process similar to that used by Bloustein (2003) in her research into young girls’ identity constructions, where she asked them to make video diaries and then allowed them to edit their final attempts. As Bloustein (2003:64) recounts, data from these sessions can be incredibly illuminating: ‘the exercise proved even more liberating... ‘new selves’ could clearly be created in the final video product. Old ‘selves’ could be revisited, and scrutinised for their ‘authenticity’ at representing the real me or the ‘me as I am now’. The camera allowed the girls a unique opportunity to ‘play’ with their identities, to use mimicry and to explore the different ways in which they wanted to express themselves (Fasoli 2003). Both bodies and objects came to the forefront, as particular foci which remained relatively unexplored in other methods; this allowed me to explore postures and poses, clothing and visual display, language and various forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, Belk 1995, Plummer 2001, Noyes 2004). Furthermore, it was not just the content of the photographs that became objects of study. The framing and presentation of photographs also became of interest to my research, for as both Spence’s (1979) and Mann’s (1992) work on family photographs have shown, both the context in which photographs are displayed, and the techniques used in order to ‘frame’ these photographs in the first place, are essential to the meanings found in the photographs’ content (Edge and Bayliss 2004).

And yet, although a number of benefits have been noted in this section, it can not be denied that there can be problems in using such an approach. Indeed, there were many ethical problems involving photographs that arose in my research; a more detailed

discussion of these have been outlined elsewhere (see Allan 2004). However, the next section will discuss some of these problems, focusing particularly on the issue of representation.

### **Data analysis**

The process of data analysis was ongoing throughout my research - with initial analyses being noted in the form of hunches and ideas in field notes and with later ideas and theories being developed during the final write up of the thesis. This cyclical process of analysis was reinforced by the longitudinal approach to the research, with various time periods out of the field allowing for more continuous reflection. The formal process of analysis, however, began with coding the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Although coding practices take many different forms and strategies, it is generally agreed that coding is the process of 'identifying key themes and patterns in the data' and that 'codes represent the decisive link between the original 'raw' data...and the researcher's theoretical concepts' (Seidal and Kelle 1995:52). In my research coding began at the level of the initial 'gaze' (in deciding what to record in my field notes) but was developed throughout my research by the reading and re-reading of data, looking for key themes in order to sort the data into different categories.

Once my field notes had been typed up, the interviews transcribed and the photographs stored electronically (originally in a temporal sequence), then initial categories were decided upon and codes were drawn up so that the data extracts could then be sorted into individual files (using the 'cut and paste' function of a computer word processing program). This meant that not only did I have the original data files to continue to read through, but also that I had files containing all of the data (field notes, transcripts and photographs) relating to specific codes stored in one place. The data extracts contained in these categories were then printed off and read and re-read in order for them to be further (physically) sorted (through highlighting and manual cutting and pasting) into more refined categories.

This process of sorting the data was, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) declare it should be, a creative process, involving thinking with the data and thinking about it in

different ways. It was a process of data simplification – a way of managing and organising the data into more manageable chunks. But most importantly it was also a process of data complication, where data was extended as well as cut. During the process questions were continually asked of the data (what am I/am I not including? Why?), codes were consistently re-worked and reformed and, as Stronach and Maclure (1997) have advised, attention was also paid to the ambivalence, contradictions and differences in the data as well as to similarities and linkages. Reading also played a large role in this practice, for not only were books (including research and children's literature) read during the course of the field work, they were also read after the initial coding of the data, to generate new ideas and to explore metaphors and analogies.

Although the majority of analytical thinking was done through the coding and categorising of the data, this process did not represent the end of the analytical process. Instead, the processes involved in coding the data were steps that I took on the way to building up bigger ideas and theories. Going 'beyond the data' to develop new ideas was deemed a particularly important part of the research project and one that could not be divorced from the analytic process (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, Silverman 1993). Of course, the activity of developing theories and ideas was not just one that I engaged in at the end of my research, for these thoughts occupied each stage of my research. For example, they were formed as memoranda while I wrote my field notes and transcribed my interviews. They were also formed as initial hunches as I talked with the girls about their ideas relating to the research. However, a great deal of this thinking was also done as I tried to write up my research and represent it in text. It was during this time that the real creative and intellectual work of the analysis was done - as my ideas were linked to the ideas of others and new theories were tested, developed and revised.

### *Using computers to analyse qualitative data*

In recent years a number of computer packages (CAQDAS) have been introduced to aid the analysis of qualitative data (including NUD\*IST, NVIVO, Ethnograph and AtIsTi). As Weitzman and Miles (1995) point out, although these packages can not do the actual thinking involved in analysis for the researcher, they can help to build codes

and categories and to aid the process of theory-building. More recently many of these packages have extended their tools so that they can do much more than simply store and retrieve data. AtlasTI, in particular, has been an extremely useful tool for researchers to use in the analysis of multiple data, as it allows for text, photographs and videos to be stored separately or together, for flexible links to be created between the files and for analytic memos to be attached to them (Lewins and Silver 2006). Although I recognise the usefulness of these packages in not only storing but also helping to analyse multiple sources of data, I followed Stanley and Temple's (1996) advice to use simple computer packages to their full extent before adopting more specialised tools, and did not adopt them or use them in my project.

Indeed, I found that the word processing package on my computer was ample for the tasks that I wanted to complete. Not only did it allow me to store the data in multiple combinations (in its original and coded forms and in a combination of photographs, transcript and field note extracts) but it also allowed me to attach memos to specific files, to do word searches and to be flexible in my thinking about and coding of the data. Because all of the photographs could be stored electronically (either digitally downloaded or scanned in) and could be managed in the same way as the text, it was not deemed necessary to invest in more specialised packages (see Fielding and Lee 1991). In addition, because the girls' subjective views and feelings about their photographs (discussed in the photographic feedback interviews) were deemed to be more important than the content of the photographs themselves, it was felt that it was enough for them just to be stored and sorted through a word processing package, for this in itself allowed me to explore the relationships between the visual and the verbal and to contextualise one with the other. Perhaps the most major reason for not investing in a computer package, however, was because it was felt that it would be disadvantageous in the process of familiarising myself with the data. By going back to the data in its original form every time I wished to explore a new topic or theme, it allowed me to familiarise myself with the data again and to re-think some of my original codes and concepts.

### *Participatory data analysis*

Very few child-participatory projects have involved children in the data analysis and interpretation process. Barker and Weller (2003:220) elucidate this point:

The process of analysing data and disseminating information is mostly undertaken by adult researchers, who select voices to include in the analysis and dissemination of the research. Rarely are children involved. Researchers unavoidably draw upon their 'adult knowledge' and adult preconceptions.

There are exceptions to this norm, examples include Thomas and O'Kane's (1998) work with children in social care, Alderson's work (1999) with children in creating and editing a book about their school and Howarth's (2003) work with young children on public play facilities. Although, in my study, a great deal of the data analysis was completed by me, it was deemed necessary for the girls to be involved in this process. In order to fulfil these aims, a number of the girls were asked to participate in a lunchtime club during the final stages of the research (see Allan 2005). The club was designed, planned and facilitated by me and involved two groups of five girls meeting with me once a week across the course of a school term. The girls in these groups were asked to participate in the club for a number of reasons. First, because they were girls that I had developed the strongest relationships with across my research (on the whole girls who had been involved in the project from the beginning) and were therefore also the girls that were most likely to be prepared to give up their lunchtimes to be involved in the project. Second, because they were girls who had expressed an interest in this process all along and who had been involved in planning this phase of the research. Finally, because I was already aware (from previous interviews) that these were girls who worked well together and who represented a range of different groups in the school (both tomboys and girly girls).

To begin the club the girls were each given packs to take home with them containing extracts of interview transcripts (taken from the interviews that they had previously been involved in), photographs, pens, pencils and a book of club activities. In the first sessions of the club the girls were taught some basic coding skills and looked through the data for emergent themes and ideas. To do this I gave the girls some examples from previous transcripts to show how I had come to my decisions about the data and how I had categorised them. The girls were, in fact, quite used to this sort of exercise,

perhaps not in terms of analysing transcripts, but they told me that they were ‘made to do’ similar exercises in English. The fact that these skills fitted in with the girls’ existing school practices was important for the project as it tapped into their own unique competencies and interests (Holland and Thomson 2005). As the coding sessions progressed I presented some of my own initial themes and ideas that I had drawn from the data to the groups. This was more than respondent validation (although I was interested in whether my ideas actually fitted with the girls’ experiences) for it was also a way of complicating the data and enabling them to think about it in different ways.

During these later sessions I also introduced items from popular culture to the girls such as video clips and extracts or images from books that they had mentioned in previous interviews. These were not used because of their applicability to children for there is ‘nothing intrinsic to young people’ that means cultural texts should be used in research (Weis and Dimitriadis 2001). Instead they were chosen for their ability to promote discussion and develop new ideas. In subsequent sessions academic literature was also introduced to the girls as part of their analytic reflection to allow them to probe further, to connect their experiences to those other authors have written about and to develop ‘sensitising concepts’ grounded in the data (Blumer 1954). The literature presented to the girls came from a variety of sources (including journal articles, edited collections on girls’ experiences and gender theory texts) and was selected by me before the club began. The literature extracts were either direct quotes or extracts of interviews and were all displayed by Power point when it was deemed relevant for them to be introduced into discussions. The introduction of this literature was not meant to stifle the girls’ ideas or to limit what they could say. Indeed, it was introduced only after the girls felt they had exhausted their own ideas, as a way of developing their own perspectives.

### *Writing and representation*

As Coffey and Atkinson (1996:108) maintain: ‘Analysis is not simply a matter of classifying, categorising, coding or collating data. It is not simply a question of identifying forms of speech or regulatories of action. Most fundamentally, analysis is about the representation and reconstruction of social phenomena’. Indeed, in my own



project it was considered particularly important that the children write down some of their own analytical themes and ideas. Across the course of the club the girls were asked to write short extracts for me on analytical themes of their choice. No instructions were given as to how this task should be completed, except that it should be about something that they felt was important to them, and was something that could be used in the final thesis. The girls were extremely competent writers and a number of evenings and weekends were sacrificed by them to create a varying range of written pieces. A number of authors have referred to this type of practice as 'collaborative authorship'. Child researchers, in particular have commended this practice as a way of allowing children's voices to be heard alongside the researcher's voice in the text; as a form of 'multivocality'. And while I continue to question whether there can ever be 'authentic' voices that can be 'extracted' from children and used in written texts (Mauthner and Doucet 1998), it was a major aim of the study to allow the girls to collaborate in the final thesis; to include their work as stand-alone pieces in order to interrupt my own authorial voice.

Yet although the girls did competently collaborate in writing up their analytical ideas it was still not possible for them to fully collaborate in the entire authorship of my thesis. Of course it must be recognised that my doctoral thesis is only one medium in which the data from my research will be represented. Indeed, there are multiple ways in which it will eventually be presented: as reports for other children in the school, reports for the head teacher and in letters for their parents. A book aiming to represent the work of the photography club has already been created (and solely authored) by the girls for teachers and other pupils in the school. However, this does not discount the fact that the final thesis has been authored by me. After all, the girls were able to write up only small extracts for my research given the time restrictions and their own busy schedules. Similarly, the girls were often able to reflect only on their own ideas and experiences, and at some points in the thesis I needed to go beyond these descriptions to theorise their accounts and to locate them in wider theoretical debates. As Mayall (1994:11) contends:

However much one may involve children in considering data the presentation of it is likely to require analyses and interpretations, at least for some purposes, which do demand different knowledge than that generally available

to children, in order to explicate children's social status and structural positioning.

The final representation of the data, therefore, has been undertaken by me but with a commitment to the girls participating in my study. In terms of photographs this has meant deciding on whether they should be presented in the final thesis. Indeed, ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity as well as ownership of the data, although not inherent to photographic methods, do come to the forefront when visual data is being presented as part of social research (Harper 2005, Gross and Ruby 1988). My final decision about the representation of these photographs was not to include photographs of the children themselves in my thesis. Instead, the photographs have been described in text and woven into the written analysis. This decision was made mainly due to considerations of the girls' rights to confidentiality and anonymity but also because I felt unable to ask the children for their full and final consent to use the photographs in this way, owing to the fact that they may well change their minds in the future.

In terms of writing this has meant leaving some of the girls' written extracts from the analysis club to 'stand alone' and 'speak for themselves' in the following chapters. It has also meant paying close attention to the techniques used to author the chapters and to the interpretations made in this production. One way in which this commitment was honoured was by consulting the girls in my research about my analytical ideas. This is not to suggest, however, that everything I have written in the thesis has been agreed upon by the girls, for in my study I have proposed a number of different ideas (for example, about heterosexuality) that were not explicitly mentioned by the girls. As Skeggs (1997) suggests, there is sometimes a need to retain our own interpretations of data. For although we need to be accountable and responsible in our representations (for often they do have a real impact on social life) we also need to look for the fullest possible explanations for events. This must be done responsibly; by recognising how as researchers we are implicated in our own interpretations. Responsible representations can also be maintained through a careful use of rhetoric. It is hoped that the rhetorical devices used in the next few chapters will allow for multiple readings of the data, or at least for further possible interpretations. In particular, it is hoped that in my attempts to present the ambiguities, discrepancies and contradictions in the girls' experiences, my interpretations will allow for a continual exploration of the margins of identity, a reading of the 'inbetweenness' where subjects are never

complete, fully resolved selves (Stronach and Maclure 1997). Indeed, if it is accepted that analyses are always interpretations rather than mirrors to the social world, then space is always needed in texts to allow for further readings. After all, say Coffey and Atkinson (1996), analysis is never complete and ideas are never exhausted, only ever abandoned at a certain stage.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to sketch out what a feminist post-structural ethnography may look like and to examine how multiple qualitative methods (including photographs, interviews and observations) may be 'meshed' together in order to explore the experiences of young girls in private, primary education. This is a decidedly qualitative approach to research, primarily concerned with exploring identity as multiple, fragile and emerging from a series of performances and positionings, not as an essential object of study that can be simply discovered through asking simple questions. This is also an approach that is predominantly concerned with child participation and the rights of children to be involved in research projects that focus on them. Indeed, the girls' own accounts (generated from the methods detailed in this chapter) will structure the remainder of the thesis, with their ideas from the analysis group forming the themes of the following substantive chapters. It is to these girls' accounts (or at least my representation of them) that I now turn.

## Chapter Four

### **Friendships, feuds and fierce competition: young girl's same-sex friendship and identity formations**

I think friends are really important and what your friends do has an impact on what you do. For example, if all your friends take packed lunches to school, then you might feel obliged to do the same. Sometimes this does not matter. I personally don't think that you have to be the same as everyone else. If you want to wear something, for example, that your friend isn't wearing then you should have the confidence to wear whatever you want to. This is only my opinion however, but I do know lots of people who do not want to be different.

Kathryn (Analysis extract March 2005)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to explore the friendship and identity formations of the girls in my research. As the above extract suggests, close friendships were very important to these girls, both as a means of social support and in order to construct a socially acceptable identity for themselves. The group interviews that took place with the girls across the research were overflowing with friendship references. Girls constantly asked me if they could come and talk to me about their various friendship formations, so much so that the interviews were gradually renamed by the girls as 'those friendship talks'. The countless references to friendship made by the girls are perhaps not surprising as many researchers have pointed out the important part that friendship plays for young people in 'modern' society (see Hey 2002, McLeod 2002). Aapola *et al* (2005), in particular, discuss the paradoxical representations of friendship that young girls are faced with today. On the one hand they suggest that there is a circulating discourse of 'girlhood in crisis' that presents friendships as overbearing and out of control. And on the other hand they believe that there is a celebration of friendships in contemporary society; a proliferation of images promoting friendship for its empowering virtues. Either way it appears that there is an increased interest in young girls' social relationships in modern society, as Rose (1999:91) suggests:

Our cultural habitat has become saturated with narratives of relationships from the most intense to the most trivial, with lovers, with workmates, with friends. Through the intense focus on biographies, personalities and minutiae of the

lives of the famous and not so famous, in the press, on the television and in the cinema, a new culture of the self has taken shape.

In her review of academic friendship literature Hey (1997) claims that young girls' relationships have been subject to a number of 'theoretical inflexibilities'. Radical feminists and social psychologists alike, she maintains, have not taken into account the multiple sources of power present in these girls' lives (see Stanworth 1981). Symbolic interactionists have traditionally failed to read them in terms of their gendered, raced and classed dimensions (e.g. Furlong 1976, Pollard 1984) and subcultural theorists seem to have 'underrepresented' and 'eliminated' girls from research altogether (e.g. Willis 1977). In short, Hey (1997:6) states that 'girls' same-sex relationships have been variously overlooked, over-romanticised, over-politicised and oversimplified' in academic research.

Further to this Hey (1997) suggests a need for a new 'language for reading girls' groups' and in fact her own study can be seen as the beginning of this attempt to more adequately analyse girls' friendships. As Aapola *et al* (2005) propose, Hey's (1997) work has offered sociologists a more complex understanding of friendship; one where friendships can be understood as part of a 'web of social practices' that mediate identity construction. In her own words, Hey (1997:28-30) suggests that the concept of 'positionality' (as a concept of 'place and power' as well as a 'discursive economy in which subjects can and do try to position and out-position each other through access to differential resources of social, economic and cultural power') can help us to understand the ways in which the 'social is indexed' through friendship and how identities are 'practised, appropriated, resisted and negotiated' in and through them.

Since Hey's (1997) study there has been a growing body of work concerning friendship and identity formation (see for example, Kehily *et al* 2002, George 2004). Adding to this collection, a number of authors have attempted to explore the historical, cultural and geographical environments of young girls' friendships (Morris-Roberts 2002). In particular, authors have tried to explore how the supposed conditions of 'individualisation' in 'modern' society have changed the nature of female friendships (see Aapola *et al* 2005). Indeed there have been increasing suggestions from theorists that the 'individual has triumphed' (Bauman 1996) and that the 'ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current

in modern society' (Beck 2001:165). And although a number of these theories have been rejected for failing to account for the complexities and contradictions of young girls' lives and for remaining on a purely theoretical level (Hey 2002, Morris-Roberts 2002), they have been taken up and discussed by academics concerned with female friendship. Many authors suggest that there is now a need to look at the effect of individualising discourses on young girls' lives (Hey 2002, Mcleod 2002, Aapola *et al* 2005). As Hey (2002) suggests, there is a need to read 'individualisation' through the social and to look simultaneously at the individual and social selves created through friendship.

### *Aims of the chapter*

This chapter has dual aims: to outline the girls' friendship groups in my research (as a comprehensive introduction to the girls and as a basis for the following chapters) and to explore the ways in which the girls managed and negotiated a range of collective and individual identities for themselves within these groups. From my first days in the field I became aware of the very different friendship groups that existed within the class. The girls confirmed these observations as they told me that they had been members of distinct friendship groups for as long as they could remember: the 'tomboys', 'girly girls', 'rebels' and 'weirdos'. In interviews the girls further divided these groups into two distinct categories: those that were girly (the 'girlies') and those that were not (the 'others'). Using these categories as a basis, this chapter has been divided into two sections to explore the groups' identities in more depth.

The chapter aims to highlight the enormous amount of time and energy the girls invested in maintaining collective identities for themselves and their friends through the use of complex inclusion and exclusion strategies. It will be suggested that these groups were predominantly based on classed, gendered and generational distinctions. Popularity, in this school, will be explored as a particularly classed and gendered phenomenon; girls who were popular appeared to deploy far greater cultural, economic and embodied capital than their peers and were predominantly positioned as hyper-feminine. For these girls popularity was equated with respectability. As Skeggs (1997) suggests, respectability is a central mechanism through which the concept of class has emerged; a means of marking 'Englishness', morality and a certain form of

individuality (as marked out against the working class masses). Historically, she suggests, respectability has always been used as a primary means for women's class categorisation. Although Skeggs (1997) does not believe that respectability is a dominant concern for those positioned in the middle-classes, this chapter will suggest that it was a prominent concern for these girls and a dominant way in which their different friendship groups were defined.

Although the girly girl and the 'other' girl categories were defined and described to me by the girls as categories that existed in reality, it is important to recognise that they did not necessarily exist in a pure form in the classroom. Indeed the girls often struggled in interviews to divide everyone in the class in such a strict manner (and their attempts could well be seen in the light of the way in which I questioned them to talk about these formations); girls could not simply be put into one category as either girly or 'other'. In this chapter the categories have also been used as a heuristic device in which to explore the girls' friendship group practices and perceived identities; as a type of conceptual map enabling us to make sense of the various subject positions available to the girls in this school (Mac an Ghail 1994). Yet it is necessary to regard these groups more as 'ideal types' than as existing in a pure form in reality. As Mac an Ghail (1988) suggests the empirical world is far more complex than ideal types can ever portray.

Indeed the chapter hopes to convey some of this messy reality by exploring the fluctuation and movement that was apparent in these groups, by examining the experiences of girls that seemed to straddle the different groups and those who appeared to shift subject positions and friendship groups. Furthermore the chapter will also explore the pushes and pulls of discourses of individualisation experienced by the girls: their need to simultaneously be a member of a friendship group and to form distinct authentic and individual identities for themselves (to negotiate both compulsory sociality and compulsory individuality). The next section will begin by discussing the girly girl group.

### **The girly girls – ‘the most popular group in class’**

The ‘girly girls’ were one of the first friendship groups revealed to me in my research. Indeed these girls were very well known within the school (by other pupils and teachers) and had a long history of being friends with one another. In many cases the girls’ collective history spanned back further than they could remember. Many of these girls’ parents were friends and so the families would often ‘holiday’ together as a group. Some of the girls’ sisters or brothers were also friends and had attended the same school for a number of years. Other girls’ parents knew each other from their various occupational backgrounds and some of the girls had even been born in the same hospitals. This small social network was something that became of interest to me very early on in my research, as this extract from my field notes illustrates:

Some of the girls do seem to move in small circles continually bumping into the same friends from other (private and selective) schools and nurseries that they have attended. Many of them seem to have had the same friends since they were born! It seems a very privileged (and extremely wealthy) network to be brought up in.

(Field notes, July 2004)

These girls were also well known within the school because they were regarded by other pupils to be the most popular group of girls in their class. Because of their highly visible status within the school these girls were often commented on by the other girls in their class. The group had even managed to earn themselves a nickname as the ‘yellow gang’; a label which was thought to encapsulate all of the group’s characteristics:

Gayle: They are really popular... we call them the yellow gang because they always do well in everything and they are in the yellow house, the house that wins every competition.

Isla: Oh we call the girly girls the yellow club because they are so sporty. They are the popular, cool girls that really love themselves. They are also the ones that dance all the time. They all go to the Delia Charlesworth’s school of dance.

(Year Six interviews, July 2004)

As these extracts demonstrate the girls were seen to be popular for a number of reasons. Similar to the ‘All Star’ girls in Hey’s (1997) study, these girls’ ‘hallmarks’ were ‘sophistication’ and ‘poise predicated on affluence expressed through leisure,



aspiration and consumption' (Hey 1997:105). In school these girls were regarded as sports stars; they were the girls that were picked to represent the school in every match (see Chapter Six for a fuller discussion of the important status of sports in school). They were also among the highest academic achievers in the class (see Chapter Five). Out of school these girls led a privileged social life too as they held a number of expensive parties (involving hiring leisure clubs, attending restaurants and cinema previews and drinking 'mocktails' in the back of limos!). The girls were also members of an elite and extremely expensive dance school that performed in a number of national events and competitions. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms it appears that these were girls with 'taste'; they held all the 'correct' economic, social, cultural and embodied capital.

But it was not just their hobbies, interests and wealthy backgrounds that appeared to give the girls high status within the school; as a group of 'girly girls' these girls were positioned within dominant discourses of hyper-femininity that also appeared to give them symbolic capital. As some of the girls explained, 'girly' could be described as:

- Jennifer: Pink, fluffy, hair, makeup, boys, straightners, hairspray...um and hairdressing, playing with hair...cheerleading!
- Violet: Girly fluffy and you dress up like Ebony does all the time. I know a good girly cheer...
- AA: Go on then.
- Violet: Oh my God I just got a manicure. The boy is there I need to do my hair, 2,4,6,8 he is waiting at the gate, 3,4,5 I hope I look alright!
- (Year Six interviews, June 2004)

As both the talk leading up to the rhyme and the rhyme itself illustrate, the girls felt that a great deal of their identity as girly girls depended on their appearance; dressing up and making an effort. Indeed, the girls in this group were regarded as some of the most attractive girls in the class, a 'fact' that seemed to add to their capital as popular girls in an elite friendship group.

The girly rhyme the girls sang for me also nicely illustrates the part that boys (and the male gaze) played in the construction of these hyper-feminine identities, for their relationships with boys also seemed to add to their elite status within the school. Although these girls were subject to the same pressures of balancing their sexual identities as the other girls in their class (as sexual but not too sexual) they did gain a

great deal of power from their romantic relationships with boys. This was especially the case as the girls reached the senior school, where in one instance it appeared that one of the 'new' girls, Frankie, had been accepted into the group for just this reason: because she was popular with a number of the boys in the private school nearby. Frankie was able to maintain a dominant position within this group for a number of reasons – she was clever, attractive and very talented at a number of sports (she told me that she had been skiing before she could walk and was now a champion skier for her country). However, by having a relationship with a boy from the local private school Frankie was fulfilling a dream that many of the girls hoped for themselves. By keeping it secret, or (perhaps more correctly), by pretending to keep it secret and sharing her relationship details with only a few of the girls Frankie was able to position herself confidently as a heterosexually desirable member of the girly girl group.

One thing that was not mentioned in the interview extract above, however, but was mentioned on a number of other occasions, was the fact that above all else the girly girls wanted to be seen as 'nice' girls. Part of this need to be nice was a need to be seen as a good friend – as trustworthy, loyal, reliable and dedicated. The girls talked in great detail about what it meant to be 'true' friends and in fact their favourite book seemed to be 'Best Friends' by Jacqueline Wilson<sup>1</sup>, a book that saw 'true' friendship conquering all challenges – overcoming challenges of femininity, relationships with adults and vast geographical distances. To maintain niceness within the group the girls created a number of moral and ethical guidelines to control and surveil their friendships (Hey 1997). The girls in some cases would test one another on their skills to be good friends; like a form of 'niceness litmus testing' (Bloustein 2003:25). It is interesting to note, how strong an emphasis the school placed on girls being good friends. It seemed to be a dominant discourse in this context, one that was rehearsed in the school prospectus and in the school's mission statement placed on the walls in all of the classrooms. It was a discourse that these girls seemed to rehearse and repeat in interviews with me; in what seemed to be an 'act of ventriloquism' (Hey 1997) the

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline Wilson is a well-known British author of contemporary and topical children's fiction. Several of her books are now popular television programmes and stage productions. The girls in Taylor's School had seen many of these productions and had also been to meet her in person.

girls would time and time again reiterate what a 'friendly' school they inhabited where all of the girls were 'nice'.

Overall, the identity that this girly girl group appeared to be striving to create could most adequately be described as that of a 'lady'. In Poovey's (1984) terms this identity combines all of the elements that were mentioned by the girls – niceness, compliance, passivity and attractiveness. The lady identity appears to be defined both by appearance and conduct. Interestingly being a lady was also a dominant aim within the school; as one teacher told me, the aim was not just to educate the girls academically but also to 'bring them up as ladies'. This aim is perhaps not surprising, for as Poovey (1984) suggests, the lady is a particularly middle-class identity, a concept that has come to stand for all things that are respectably feminine. And so it appeared that by drawing on both dominant class and gendered discourses and by striving to position themselves as ladies these girls were able to maintain a privileged and elite position as the most popular friendship group in the class.

*'I want to be in their group...that's all I really want!': Girly girl 'wannabes'*

Being a member of the girly girl friendship group did indeed seem to be a privilege. This could clearly be seen by the number of girls that desired to be part of the group – those girls that other authors have referred to as the 'girly girl wannabes' (Renold 2005). There were a couple of girls, in particular, in this class who wanted to be a member of this group more than anyone else. These girls were often identified by their classmates as 'loners'. In conversations with me both of these girls admitted that they did not belong to a close group of friends and that what they desired more than anything was to be a popular girly girl. In interviews the girls talked to me in great depth about popularity. One way in which they would do this was to talk about a series of books they were reading. These books were based around one main character who, I am told, was a 'complete nerd'. The books follow this character across junior school and into senior school where the girl eventually transforms herself and becomes a member of the popular gang in her class. Often when the girls told me about these books they would compare their own experiences to those of the main character in the book. It could be suggested that they were using these books as a

fantasy space in which to try out different identities for themselves (Walkerdine 1997).

But it was not just through 'fantasy spaces' that these girls tried to access the popular girly girl identity, for there were a number of strategies that they adopted in 'real' life to fulfil these aims too. One of the ways in which this was done was by wearing similar clothes to the girly girls. Indeed pink was an important colour for these 'wannabe' girls; it was the way in which they could display girly femininity on their bodies. On non-school uniform days these girls would come to school dressed head-to-toe in pink. Interestingly none of the girly girls themselves dressed in pink – perhaps because they did not need to mark their identities out so clearly. But whatever the reason, on these occasions, rather than positioning the 'wannabe' girls as members of the girly girl group, their dress seemed to reinforce their status as outsiders.

On one occasion I made the mistake of positioning one of these girls in a similar way myself. It was the end of term and I wanted to give each of the girls a present for having me in the school. After discussing the presents with a few of the girls I decided to give them each a bath bomb from Lush (a bathing product from a popular cosmetics store). I gave most of the girls the same bath bomb but under strict instructions from the girls I made sure to give the girly girls pink bath bombs and the tomboys blue bath bombs. Not really knowing at this point what to give some of the girls I gave them yellow bath bombs. But this was a big mistake. One of the girls came to me at break time crying, asking why I had not given her a pink bath bomb like the other girly girls. I tried to explain that it did not matter, and that I had not done it on purpose, but it did matter to this girl – for it signalled that I did not position her as a girly girl and it symbolically excluded her from that group.

Another strategy these girls used to try and become members of the girly girl group was to claim similar interests, hobbies and taste in music to these girls (Ali 2002). In conversations the girls would often tell me that they, like the girly girls who were renowned for their dancing, also liked to dance. They also told me that they owned some of the same equipment as these girls (stereos, televisions and computers) and that they lived in similar houses to them. Eventually across the course of the research



I found out that some of these stories were not entirely true, as this extract from my field notes demonstrates:

One of the girls told me today that she lives in a large house with acres of space in the garden and an outside swimming pool. I feel bad but I am not sure how much of this story to believe as I am told by the class teacher and some of the other girls that this simply isn't the truth. In fact the class teacher told me that she is from a relatively poor background compared to the rest of her classmates. I get the feeling that I am being told these things by this girl as a way of impressing me and as a way of 'keeping up with the Joneses'.

(Field note extract May 2004)

In Skeggs' (2004) terms it could be suggested that this girl was trying extremely hard to 'pass' as a popular girly girl through the use of a number of different strategies; she could be seen to invest in her home and her body as a form of cultural capital and as a way of 'passing' her identity. But as Skeggs (1997) suggests, this is not an easy strategy to pull off, firstly because it requires a 'disavowal of self' and a recognition of one's own inferiority (Butler 1993) and secondly because it requires recognition from others. It is not as simple, Skeggs (1997) believes, as taking a subject position off a 'discursive shelf' at will; the girly girl wannabes could not become girly girls just because they wanted to. Indeed in order to become girly girls these girls had to have their identities recognised as girly and their capital legitimised.

*Friendship work: building and maintaining collective friendship groups through 'projects' of inclusion and exclusion*

Of course being recognised as a popular girly girl was no easy task, primarily because it was not in the girls' interests to let everyone be a member of their friendship group. In order to maintain their high status these girls needed to draw a line between their group (who were seen to be 'naturally' popular and girly) and others who were simply 'trying' to be girly – those girly girl wannabes. Indeed, the girly girl friendship group could often be observed performing a great deal of 'friendship work', using complex strategies of inclusion and exclusion to maintain their group's collective identity (Aapola *et al* 2005). For example, the group interviews were often used by the girls to negotiate and renegotiate their group identity in this way:

AA: How would you best describe your friendship group to me?

Violet: Best best close friends

Gene: Rude! We are not that close!  
Libby: No Gene but we are best friends.  
Gene: We have girly chats, we are the girly girls.  
Violet: I am not really girly girl, only a bit because I like to go out in the rain and play rugby and stuff!  
Gene: Oh yeah I like to go out in the rain too and I am not like 'oh I am going to paint my nails today' but we are girly girls really.  
Libby: Yeah we are girly really.

(Year Seven interviews, January 2005)

In this extract the girls' talk can be thought of as a 'lived moment of interaction' where the girls struggled to negotiate their friendship networks in talk. The girls' talk in this instance is analogous to some of the incidences noted in Kehily *et al's* (2002) study of young girl's friendship groups. In their study, Kehily *et al* (2002) found that some of the girls had formed a small friendship group called the 'diary group'. In a similar manner to the girls in my interview extract, the girls in this study used the diary group as a space to try out and produce different identities for themselves. They also used it collectively to negotiate and confirm their identity as a group, in their case principally using the talks as a space to confirm a particular version of normative femininity. In both of these cases talk was a particularly important tool utilised by the girls to maintain collective group identities; it was a way of 'doing friendship' (Davies 2004).

And it was not just by talking about current events and activities that the girly girls in my study made sense of and confirmed their friendship groups, for it was also negotiated in the ways in which they talked about the past. Re-telling or re-creating events was a way in which girls could strengthen their group identities by creating a collective history for themselves (a form of collective remembering), as this next extract demonstrates:

Libby: We really are the crazy girls.  
Violet: Like at break time and lunchtime we are like crazy, we run around like mad things!  
Libby: Remember that Thursday... we just went ballistic, seriously! Like we were dragging Becky all over the floor and we flopped on top of Daisy and everything and we were like crazy!  
Violet: Oh yeah I remember, like falling all over the place and everything it was so funny!  
Libby: Our group is the best!

(Year Seven interviews, January 2005)

In this instance, the girls were trying to reinforce a group identity of being fun-loving, care-free, crazy girls. By retelling an event where all the girls were present and participating in a 'fun' activity, the girls could literally position themselves in this way; the story worked as a form of collaborative negotiation, depending on 'mutually inclusive verbal practices' to position people in a particular way and as a member of a specific group (Nilan 1991:8). As Hey (1997) suggests, this 'memory work' also works to confirm people's status within a group of friends as membership within groups depends on being included in the story as it is recounted. In some cases the stories that were retold by the girls were not entirely 'real' accounts of events that went on in their friendship groups. Often the girls told edited versions of these stories so that they eliminated the contradictory or 'bad' bits of their friendships; to give a smooth and coherent narrative that proved what they wanted to claim at a particular time (Cullen 2005). The stories worked as a powerful device to create boundaries between those involved in the group and those who were excluded.

It was not just within interviews and other forms of talk that the girls could be seen to be working on their collective identities. The photographs taken as part of the lunchtime photography club were also used by the girls to encourage group bonding and identity. As Cullen (2005) suggests, snapshots can be used simultaneously to include and exclude people from a group. They can also function to communicate the norms and values of particular groups, to allow the performance of certain identities. Similarly, though, it was not just in formal research activities that this friendship work took place, for my field notes were overflowing with incidents that involved these inclusive and exclusive strategies. For example, the girls' use of gifts was a particularly interesting way in which girls sought to include or exclude friends from their groups (see Cullen 2006). On one occasion one of the girly girls, Ebony, gave me a present that she had bought for me over the holidays. The present was a 'groovy chick'<sup>2</sup> cheque book that could be used to make promises to friends (see figure 4.1).

---

<sup>2</sup> Groovy chick is a 'trendy' female character designed by Santoro graphics that features on many popular children's products such as bedding, stationery and items of furniture.



Fig: 4.1. 'Groovy Chick' cheque

I was very privileged to receive the present as only a few of the girly girls in the class exchanged these cheques amongst one another. It could perhaps be seen as a sign of my acceptance into their friendship group. However, the cheque book was also fascinating because it seemed to form a kind of social contract between the girls; it was used as a way to secure friendships with one another (Hey 1997). Another particularly memorable incident involving friendship work occurred when some of the girly girls were creating a memory book for the teacher to keep after they had left the school. The aim of this book was to remind the teacher of every girl in the class. To fulfil this aim the girls had created a page in the book for every girl and on it they had written words that they felt described that girl. And so, not only did the book position every girl in the class as a particular type of girl belonging to a particular type of friendship group, but it also reinforced the powerful collective identity of the girly girls as they created the book, because only they, a select few, were allowed to work on the project. It was only when Sarah came to me crying, telling me that she had been 'tippexed' out of the book (and therefore also erased from the friendship group), that I realised the real power that this project held for the girls.

Indeed, friends were needed by these girls in order to legitimate their identity; as a reflection of a self confirmed as 'normal', as 'a face that smiles back as our friend/our self' (Hey 1997:136). The girls invested heavily in intimacy as a way of confirming their own and their group identities, for the 'getting of a self also required a getting of a friend' (Hey 1997). As Hey (2006) suggests, in such a volatile and fragile social world it is hardly surprising that young girls feel an increasing need for intimacy - it is at these times that relationships (especially friendships) bear the full weight of 'ontological security'. The changes in contemporary society have been described by Hey (2006:9) as having produced a re-emphasis on sociality that 'no amount of neo-liberalism is ever likely to overwrite'; as making sociality compulsory yet 'sexy'.



*(Dis)identification and 'othering' others*

Perhaps one of the most significant ways in which the girly girls maintained a powerful collective identity for their group, however, was through a process of (dis)identification (Skeggs 1997). The girls appeared to construct their collective identities in opposition to other groups. They constructed their identities dialogically; classifying themselves through the classification of others. As this next extract shows:

Ebony: They are not girly girls, Gayle's group are moshers that wear baggy tops and all those hats and combats.

Genella: I could not wear that!

AA: Is it just what you wear or behaviour as well?

Genella: Behaviour too cos they are moody and immature. We would much rather talk than play games and stuff. We are like gossiping and we are always giggling and stuff.

Poppy: In free time we would rather go in town shopping but Gayle's gang just go to town and hang round and stuff.

In this episode the girls tried to position themselves firmly as fun loving, mature girly girls by 'othering' the mosher group and in turn distancing themselves from 'moody' and 'immature' behaviour. Indeed age, as illustrated in this instance, was a dominant way in which the girly girls constructed their identity in opposition to the others in their class. By acting in a mature and sensible manner at school these girls had gained a great deal of adult support and approval (from their parents and their class teacher). This gave them the power to take on 'adult' roles for themselves and to maintain distinctions between themselves and less powerful children. By pushing supposedly negative behaviour onto another group they were able to establish exactly who they were as a group as opposed to who they were not. This allowed the group to create (even if only momentarily) a strong coherent identity for themselves, to 'close up difference and otherness in favour of a unitary, wholesome and identical self' (de Castro 2004:473).

In other incidences the girls were only able to describe their friendship groups by talking about what they 'were not' rather than what they thought they 'were':

Libby: Well there is this group... Lucy and Isla and that well we compete with them and things. They are completely different to us.

Gene: They really love animals and things.

Violet: They are obsessed on one thing and don't know how to be good friends.

Libby: They are tomboys too...real tomboys.

(Year seven interviews, January 2005)

The extract illustrates the enormous incentive that practices of 'othering' held for these girls. As Hey (1997:75) suggests, how else can girls present themselves as normal and okay? To claim to be loyal and trustworthy and a good friend would go against the very nature of the identity that they were trying to claim for themselves. It was only by 'othering' these qualities and by (dis)identifying with another group that the girls could attempt to represent themselves in a favourable manner.

### **Tomboys, Rebels and Weirdos – the 'other' girls**

However, it was not simply the case that all of the girls wished to become popular girly girls. Even the girls identified as 'loners' and 'wannabes' claimed that popularity had its problems. In fact, a number of girls felt that they had actively chosen to construct their group identities in opposition to the girly girl group and similarly used practices of (dis)identification. For the girls in the weirdo group (those 'immature girls' who liked to 'play with unicorny weird things') this was not necessarily a choice that they felt they had made but rather an identity that they had been positioned in by others. Many of the weirdos (like the wannabes) did actually claim to be girly but their lack of capital, in particular their supposed lack of maturity (age-based capital), did not allow them to be recognised in this manner. The 'rebels' gang were also positioned as 'different' by their classmates, as 'moshers' and 'goths'. Although the girls did not claim these identities for themselves they did tell me that they wanted to be different and were aware that their difference could be read in this way, as Eva explained:

We are darker than the others... I mean we are not angels of death or anything... but we do dress different like in baggy jeans and boots and I go round with bracelets with spikes on and net tights... it is the way we behave as well like we scream and we are cheeky... we can be very cheeky!

(Year six interviews, June 2004)

The tomboys in particular were a group that vehemently denied being 'girly' in any way. These girls positively (dis)identified with the girly girl group and aimed to construct an alternative identity as being 'like boys' doing 'the things that boys do'.

They felt that they had an affinity with boys and they expressed this in a number of ways. One way in which they did this was through what they wore; they made distinctions between the 'girly' pink clothes that the girly girls wore and the 'boyish' androgynous clothes that they chose to wear (mainly fleeces, combats and sweatshirts). The girls also distinguished the 'scary, horror' books that they chose to read and the 'girly, romantic trash' that other girls in their class read. Both of these distinctions (the clothes and the books) were clearly represented in a photograph that the girls took as part of the photographic workshop, where they dressed up in their chosen androgynous attire, sat themselves on seats holding copies of horror novels while asking the girly girls (dressed in pink) to sit amongst them holding copies of romantic comedies. The photograph displayed below represents the girls' first attempts to create this scene as they practiced with props before actually posing for the photograph:



*Fig: 4.2. Pink/blue photograph: 'Not all girls love pink, why make us stereotypes when we can be unique individuals'*

Another way in which the tomboys (dis)identified with the girly girls and established themselves as 'like boys' was by claiming that they preferred to have friends who were boys rather than friends who were girls. When asked who their best friends were the girls told me that obviously they were friends with girls in school because they had no other choice, but given the chance they would always play with boys.

Similarly the girls claimed to like playing 'boy's games' - in particular play fighting. The girls referred to this activity as 'mirror fighting' and explained it as a game that involved one girl acting out a fight scene whilst another mirrored her actions. What was particularly interesting about these games was the fact that the girls described them as 'macho' and 'tough' when actually they rarely involved any touching at all. In fact it was a relatively gentle game they had learnt in their ballet lessons. It was also interesting to find out that none of these girls (apart from one who claimed to be friends with her male cousin) had any male friends at all. Perhaps what this highlights

is the lack of discursive resources these girls had to do any identity other than 'girl'. These examples also appear to illustrate the confining nature of feminine discourses, for the girls found it extremely hard to be powerful girls and instead aligned themselves with boys who they felt could be far more powerful and had far more opportunities than themselves. It could be that rather than 'transgressing' gender boundaries these girls were actually endorsing existing gender hierarchies by devaluing femininity and confirming male superiority (Reay 2001).

Yet it was not just through claiming to be 'like boys' that these girls made distinctions between themselves and the girly girl friendship group. One of the major criticisms the tomboys and a number of the 'other' girls expressed about the girly girls was that they were 'clones' who 'just followed the crowd'. Alternatively, the 'other' girls distinguished themselves as 'unique individuals' with 'minds of their own', as the following extract demonstrates:

Lucy: When you are a tomboy it is like you are trying to... well it is a bit like being a rebel really because you are trying to be an anarchist or whatever because you want to be unique. For some girls it is just like I don't want to wear dresses and for some people it is more I do not want to fit into a girly category.

(Analysis extract, March 2005)

The 'other' girls in my study were in fact very similar to the 'alternative girls' in Morris-Roberts (2004) study. Like the alternative girls, the girls in my study seemed to make sense of their identities through practices of 'distinctive individuality' (Muggleton 2000); they were 'distancing themselves from others who were involved in collective practices of sameness' (Morris-Roberts 2002:18). In order to distinguish themselves from the 'girly masses' the tomboys, rebels and weirdos claimed to be unique and so simultaneously distanced themselves from people in their own friendship group. Like the alternative girls, the girls in my study often did this by claiming that their group was diverse and held no one unique style. They also did it by claiming to accommodate diversity; by claiming to be the only group that did not mind what 'type' of girl they 'hung around' with (Morris-Roberts 2004). Indeed these groups did seem to be fairly accommodating to the other girls in the class. Although the girls acknowledged distinctions between their various friendship groups they would often play together on the field. For example, the tomboys would often involve

the rebels in their play fighting games and would sometimes take a 'weirdo' under their wing when her other friends were away.

What is particularly interesting to note, however, is where these girls did draw their boundaries of acceptance. In one instance, across the transition from primary to secondary school, one of the girls Poppy was seen to cross from the 'rebel girl' friendship group to the 'girly girl' group and to transform her identity completely in the process. After the school holidays I was very surprised to see that the rebel girls were no longer friends with her, especially as I knew they had made plans to spend time together across the summer break. The girls were very secretive about the 'split' to begin with but eventually told me that Poppy had done a 'really awful thing', she had 'gone and become a girly girl'. It is hard to portray the real angst and upset that this 'move' caused the girls. It was the cause of a number of fights across the rest of the term involving the rebels phoning Poppy on several occasions to 'tell her what they thought of her', and the cause of a fight where (quite symbolically) the rebels tore Poppy out a group photo that they had taken in the photography workshop. Poppy was seen as a betrayer of the rebel girls' alternative identity. She had crossed the boundaries and become a member of the 'girly masses' and for them this was unacceptable. Remarkably Poppy was not entirely accepted by the girly girls either. Poppy tried hard to fit into their group but was often seen as a 'copy cat' rather than a 'real' member of the group. In this sense Poppy seemed to become a 'nobody' in her class (although she herself did not see it this way) because she had no real friendship group that identified with her; she had nobody to legitimate her identity.

*'The plastics' – 'false' and 'authentic' friendship and identity formations*

However, the tomboys and the 'other' girls in my research were not just claiming to have 'unique' and 'individual' identities; they were also claiming to articulate 'real' and 'authentic' identities as opposed to the girly girls, who (they felt) were simply putting on a front. Karla neatly summarised this in one interview when I asked her:

AA: What makes someone popular?

Karla: Well sometimes it is because they sacrifice themselves just to get friends, But it's also because they think they are so much better than you...the best. They are so horrible to you just because of sport or something and you just feel really put down when you are next to them

in class. What makes it worse is that they actually act as if they know they are better than you, they do not try and soften it down, they want you to know. They pass you really hard on purpose and say geek to make you feel crap. They put their shiny plastic shoes on to all their friends, they have the friends that they want to be friends with and the others just don't matter.

(Year Seven Interviews, January 2005)

Interestingly Karla uses the word 'plastic' to describe what she thinks is the false nature of these girls' friendships and their identities. One of the major 'fronts' that Karla recognises the girly girls to be putting on is their apparent niceness. As she explains, this was rarely her experience of these girls: 'they are so horrible' and 'they make you feel like crap'. Indeed, aside from Karla a number of the girls in the class talked about the girly girls as 'mean' and compared them to a group of girls in the recent film '*Mean Girls*'.

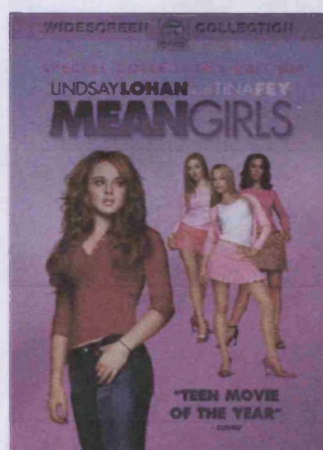


Fig: 4.3. Mean Girls the movie

The group to whom these girls compared their classmates was nicknamed 'the plastics' – a group of girly girls who acted nicely but were actually out for all they could get. Although Karla used the term plastic in her interview I do not believe she was making a reference to the film at this point. However, the comparisons that other girls made between these two supposedly 'plastic' groups were fascinating. For example, one girl told me that like the girls in the movie, each of the popular girls in her class had 'their own unique specialities in meanness'. Another comparison that was made, was between the girls in the movie making a 'burn book' (a type of 'slam book' that Brown 2003 describes as a notebook where girls record their cruel opinions of other girls) and some of the girly girls in their class creating websites and using instant messenger systems for similar purposes. Although I was often only told about

the existence of these websites and messages, there was an occasion where one of the girls invited me to view one of the websites for myself. I was quite literally shocked at the content of the site that I viewed. I believe that it could quite justifiably be described as derogatory and demeaning. I was relieved that the school found out about it and dealt with it themselves, saving me from a potentially huge ethical minefield.

### *Mean Girls?*

There may well have been connections between these girls' lives and the *Mean Girls* movie but that does not necessarily mean that their circumstances can be read in entirely the same manner. It was not simply the case that all of the girly girls in my study were 'mean' nor was it only they who could be regarded as mean, for the 'other' girls could also be observed being 'unkind' to each other. The 'other' girls were, as they claimed, 'more open about their bitchiness'. Yet there were times when their so called teasing was also taken seriously; occasions when it was deemed by adults that their behaviour was unacceptably cruel.

Indeed, both the *Mean Girls* movie and the incidents in my study need to be seen as part of a much wider discourse in society. As Gonick (2004) suggests, a discourse of panic has emerged in contemporary society concerning the aggressive nature of young girls' friendships (see Brown 2003, Bjorkvist *et al* 1992, Crick and Grotpeter 1996). This has been caused, she believes, by a heightened anxiety over social change, where the stress that this causes has been displaced on to young people as a way of coping with future uncertainty. The *Mean Girls* movie can be seen as part of such a discourse, that on the one hand appears to celebrate the supposed power girls have in relationships with one another (a type of post-feminist discourse), but on the other hand creates a cause for concern by highlighting the aggressive nature of these relationships. Either way, as Gonick (2004:397) maintains, these discourses do not account for the complexity in young people's lives:

The effect is that not only are the differences between girls and the particular circumstances of their lives glossed over, but girl's layered and complex expressions of identity, power and resistance are collapsed into certain ubiquitous meanings of girlhood with an ever expanding reach. Once these meanings enter our 'common sense' lexicon their pervasiveness results in a

narrowing vision and imagination for the multitude of ways in which girl's expressions might be read and engaged.

For the girls in my study, meanness was certainly regarded as an inherently feminine characteristic, one that was particularly identifiable in hyper-feminine girls. As one girl told me:

Georgia: It is a girl thing, a real girly girl thing. Girls appear to be kinder than boys but we are a lot more evil inside! Boys are more evil on the outside. We keep all our thoughts inside but boys are not afraid to show it. I mean I won't mention any names or anything but for example I spoke to one real girly girl and she was on about how irritating she finds this other girl and then that girl rang me and she told me how much she hated the other girl! They both thought that the other girl liked them when really they could not stand each other!  
(Year Seven interviews, January 2005)

However, 'meanness' was also regulated by definite classed distinctions. This is a point Ringrose (2006) makes when she suggests that the rising concern over girls' inherent meanness constitutes a new way to pathologise girlhood but with different effects for different girls. The real mean girl figure, as Hey (2006) similarly suggests, is reserved for the working class girl; a figure that represents everything that the middle-class despise and defend against. Indeed, in this school the girls were rarely ever 'truly' identified as mean girls yet the discourse appeared to reinforce a certain white, middle-class, respectable feminine identity that had to be carefully safeguarded and protected by the girls within the school.

As Gonick (2004) proposes, the 'mean girls' discourse also appears to rest on developmental notions; ideas that maintain that meanness is just a phase that children pass through, a 'gradual progression from hormone laden emotion to a unified, self reflective person with a coherent identity'. The *Mean Girls* movie also promotes these age-based developmental notions, for it ends by recounting that over the summer holidays the girls grew up, got boyfriends and were finally able to leave their meanness behind them. As the film implies, only then could 'girl world finally be at peace'. The girls in my study certainly explained their behaviour in these ways, as they told me that they thought it was just a 'stage' that they were going through that was affected by their hormones. They also told me that they had a lot to gain by keeping their meanness a secret. The teachers, they told me, expected them to act in a



'sensible', 'mature' manner like 'little grown ups', all behaviour that did not involve 'girl-fighting'.

As in Hey's (1997) study, the girls in my research would often use notes to pass judgements on one another without teachers noticing. One of the girls, Gayle, actually told me that she ran a 'note passing' business. In exchange for sweets or other favours Gayle would deliver the girls' notes to one another so that they would not know where they had come from. The girls also used websites, instant messenger services and mobile phones to communicate with each other in similar ways (through spaces that were simultaneously public and private) (Mitchell *et al* 2005, Valentine 2002). It must be noted that these forms of communication were used not only to vent anger, but were also used to solidify and strengthen friendships. Yet whatever the reasons for using these forms of communication, the girls clearly did so in a private manner, away from adults so that they could create respectable identities for themselves as children (as youth that were maturing in an age-appropriate manner) and as respectable upper middle-class girls.

#### **Discussion:**

In conclusion it is helpful to reflect upon the way in which all of the girls' friendship groups, and indeed their collective group identities, were constituted through a number of overlapping and competing discourses. The girls themselves distinguished their groups mainly in terms of different gender identities, claiming to be girly or 'other', hyper-feminine or 'alternative'. The girly girl group, in particular, appeared to deploy a great deal of gender-based capital through their positioning in hyper-feminine discourses; their popularity was equated with a certain 'ladylike' identity that was firmly based on appearance (predominantly heterosexual attraction) and behaviour (passive niceness). What the girls did not mention quite so explicitly, however, was the fact that this 'lady' identity was also a particularly middle-class identity. Indeed, the girls' friendships relied heavily on class distinctions. As Johnson and Lawler (2004:7.2) observe, even the most seemingly personal relationship choices are determined by class habitus (by sharing a similar position in social space):

... Why two people are compatible is not, contrary to commonsense notions, altogether mysterious... compatibility is conceptualised and 'made' through a process in which individuals situate themselves, and others, in relation to an economy of symbolic goods. That is not to say that people only love those who occupy the same positions in social space, nor that they could love anyone who occupies such a position... However, social space impinges upon, organises, and to some degree dictates, how and whom we love.

In both Johnson and Lawler's (2004) study and my own, relationships were where 'class was done'. In my study this was often done through intra-class distinctions made between the girls in their peer group depending upon each girl's volume and deployment of various forms of capital. However, as the 'mean girls' incident illustrates, the girls' identities as 'respectable ladies' were also heavily dependent upon working-class others from outside of the school. Their identity 'work' here could be described as a form of 'class in the head'; as not existing in any real sense of a relationship between the girls and others, but based on an imaginary relationship with 'abject' others who were forced to take the burden of all the things these girls despised.

The girls' relationships and identities were also made and maintained through age-based distinctions. The girly girls were keen to distinguish themselves as 'mature' girls who sat around and chatted politely, as opposed to their 'immature' classmates who 'still played games and ran around screaming like idiots'. However, the girls' relationships were not formed in isolation amongst their peers. In fact these girls spent a great deal of time in adult-controlled spaces and so formed their identities in terms of adult-child relationships too. It was particularly important to understand adult involvement in the girly girl friendship group in order to understand how they maintained their popularity. For it was largely through parental approval and adult sanctioning that they maintained this dominant position in the class.

This chapter appears to outline two fairly different groups: one seemingly powerful girly girl group and another supposedly powerless and marginal group. However the groups were not so simply formed and the power invested in their relationships was far more complex than is immediately apparent. The girly girls were relatively powerful due to their acquisition of cultural, economic and embodied capital and their positioning in dominant feminine discourses. The groups' combined capital meant

---

that these girls were often more able to experiment with their identities than their classmates. It was remarkable how a number of the girly girls tried and tested aspects of tomboyism but were not punished for their transgressions like other girls in the class were (although it could be suggested that these girls were only temporarily adopting these identities not trying to permanently pass as tomboys as some girls were – the difference between ‘being’ and ‘doing’ other, Renold 2005).

Yet the girly girls were not always as powerful as they wished to portray themselves to be. The ways in which these girls worked to keep the ‘wannabes’ and ‘other’ girls outside of their group highlights the fragility of their power - a network of power that could misfire, backfire or fail to be recognised at any time. The girly girls’ power as ‘mature’ girls could also be questioned. Although the ‘little adult’ identity was a position that they were encouraged to take up within the school and thus gained them status with their peer group, the very term ‘little adult’ illustrates how the girls were unable fully to take up ‘adult’ positions of power. The girls may have been able to deploy power by acting in this way and by (dis)identifying with the more ‘childlike’ girls but in the end these girls were subject to the same adult regimes of control and discipline as every other child in their class.

It cannot simply be suggested that the tomboys and the ‘other’ girls were entirely powerless groups. There were times when these girls were able to manoeuvre themselves discursively into more powerful positions. There were also times when these girls quite literally turned the tables of power - like the incident in Brown’s (2003) study where the alternative girls turn the hose on the girly girl group, there were occasions in my study where these momentary acts of resistance could also be glimpsed. Furthermore, a number of these girls apparently believed that they had actively chosen to be different from the girly girls; they felt that they had chosen to occupy these marginal positions themselves. As hooks (1991) suggests, marginality is not always an undesirable position to occupy:

*Marginality is much more than a state of deprivation... it is also a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance... I was not speaking of marginality one wishes to lose... but rather a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.*

What the girls' talk particularly demonstrates is the fluidity and fragility of all of these identities and the constant negotiation needed to validate and maintain them as 'authentic'. From the interview extracts used in this chapter it becomes apparent that just as the girls' collective identities were secured in talk, so they were also undone through it. This next extract demonstrates the point:

- Abi: I do not think that I am a girly girl...I am more of a sporty girl.  
Kathryn: There is not much difference in them though.  
Abi: The difference is that sporty girls do not wear pink.  
Gene: But you have pink tracksuits.  
Kathryn: And Georgia always wears pink, every time I go round her house she is always wearing pink.  
Gene: I think they can be both, because I think I can be quite sporty and I also like to dress up.  
Abi: Mind you Leila is sporty and she is a tomboy!  
Gene: Oh what!

(Year Six interviews May 2004)

This was also the case in the photographs that the girls took to represent their friendship groups in the photographic workshop. If we move back to reconsider the pink/blue photograph that the tomboys took, we can see how it simultaneously establishes them as a close group of 'authentic' tomboys and yet how it seemingly undermines their identity as not 'natural' but as 'other' to the girly girl norm. Talking about a similar photograph taken in her own research, Youdell (2004) suggests that it is possible to read such images as moments of inscription of a feminine-hetero/unfeminine (masculine) homo binary, where the bodies of the female, (un)feminine/impossibly) masculine girls are rendered starkly visible (and in this case distinctly 'other') against the female-hetero-feminine norm.

What these examples also illustrate is the fact that all of the identities named and claimed by these girls were ideal types. They were standards used by the girls to measure themselves against others. They were abstractions however; not realities, but stereotypes (de Castro 2004). In my study none of the girls claimed truly to fulfil these categories and none of them declared that they ever really wanted to. As the interview extract above demonstrates, the girls often tried to 'talk themselves out' of categories, claiming that they were different and could not be stereotyped. The girly girls, for example, stated that being too girly was undesirable as it restricted the physical activity that they could participate in. Similarly the tomboys claimed that

being 'too tomboy' was restricting because it meant that they could not always wear what they wanted to. One girl in particular, Lucy, told me about an incident where she had been seen by the other girls in her class wearing a dress. Because this was not her usual attire and because she was understood to be a tomboy the other girls in Lucy's class had returned to school and taunted her in hurtful ways. 'Why do we have to be labelled?' Lucy asked me in response. 'Why can we not be seen as individuals? Why are we always put into boxes and made to stay there?' These questions sum up the dilemmas that all of the girls faced in my study: the need to close up difference and otherness in order to maintain strong collective identities; yet the simultaneous need to claim fluidity and freedom in their own identity constructions to allow, not only for difference, but also for forms of resistance (de Castro 2004).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to illustrate both the stark boundaries created by the girls in their identity and friendship formations, and the fluidity and constant negotiation involved in these practices. It has been suggested that the girls in this school felt both a distinct need to find friends who were similar to themselves (as a way of legitimating their own identities), and also a great need to create their own authentic identities (as a way of claiming independence and individuality for themselves). These themes (concerning the pushes and pulls of individuality and sociality) will be drawn out and developed in the next chapter as I turn to examine the girls' experiences of schoolwork and the supposedly 'individual' world of academic achievement.

## Chapter Five

### A picture of perfection? Young femininities and the (im)possibilities of academic achievement

#### Introduction: a picture of success?

Today was the day when all of the school photographs were to be taken. There was a restless atmosphere as I entered the classroom this morning with many girls moving to and fro, borrowing hair bands and brushes and swapping jumpers with friends. The morning progressed swiftly and it was soon 'our' turn to be photographed. The girls assembled on the steps to the entrance with the tall, stone archway and tower of the main school building set as a backdrop. Dressed immaculately in their uniforms and with their hair neatly tied back the girls were gradually ordered and seated in rows according to their height. The teacher and I were ushered to the back of the scene where we stood either side of the girls. After a few last minute changes the photographs were taken. Due to the changing weather the images were taken quickly, between gusts of wind, and before the group quickly dispersed back into the warmth of the school.

(Field note extract June 2004)

The school class photograph is nothing new. In fact it has a long history in education; conjuring up powerful images of what it is like to be a pupil in school (Holland 1998). Like many others taken before it, the photograph that I wrote about in my field notes followed a specific genre that aimed to represent children as educational success stories. Taken from a distance the image allows viewers to position themselves as proud parents looking down upon their children's current educational achievements. The image also allows the viewer to look to the future, as the children are represented as 'becomings' full of impending promise. The school photograph taken during my study may portray this image of success even more distinctly, for as Holland (1998) suggests it is private schools in particular that rely on visual and ritual display as a base for their prestige and exclusivity. The ornamental stone archway and tower looming in the background of the photograph are visual representations of power and privilege. The immaculate and decorative uniforms that the children wear add to this vision as these 'signs of wealth come to stand for cleverness, exclusivity and excellence'; these 'exotic signifiers' link back to the past (as 'iconography of traditional schooling') but also signal towards the 'future oriented world of competition' where these children are positioned to succeed (Holland 1998:87).

But is this an unequivocal picture of success? As the field notes illustrate, this is a highly stylised photograph, one that has been purposefully arranged to conjure up these images of exclusivity and excellence. Not even the immediate circumstances of the scene (the changeable weather) have been allowed to interfere with this representation. The school photograph is only a snapshot of these children's lives; a single moment captured in time that can not account for the multiple and complex experiences or identities that the children negotiate in their time at school as upper-middle-class, girls and pupils.

The story of middle-class, female educational achievement has been portrayed in very similar ways to the image that is conjured up in this photograph: as a celebration story with no cause for concern. As Francis (1998) suggests, girls have been performing increasingly well in education since the early 1990s. The current image of girls' success seems very far removed from the 'grim picture of rampant inequality' in the 1970s and 1980s where it was reported that girls were frequently achieving low results in education (Francis 2000). As Reay (2001) remarks, it now seems to be the case that femininity is coterminous with high achievement in school. Indeed, there is a great deal to celebrate in these girls' outstanding achievements; there is a need to highlight the educational gains made by girls which have been hard fought for by feminists (Lucey 2001).

Yet just as the school photograph could not represent the complexities of young girls' educational experiences, neither does the 'celebration story' that is represented in popular educational discourse. Lucey (2001:177) elucidates this point:

There is no doubt that viewed from a distance the overall educational achievements of all girls as compared to boys would seem to have improved significantly over the last twenty or so years. But as with any distant object, moving closer reveals details which appear insignificant or are invisible to the distant view, the micro gaze. What appear to be tiny specks on an otherwise smooth surface turn out to be towering mountains of hierarchy; hair line cracks become huge fissures of difference. So it is with gender, social class and educational achievement.

It appears that in an unrelenting policy drive to 'excellence in standards' in recent years (DfEE 1997, 2003, 2005) 'embedded in a culture of performance testing and

tables', that academic achievement has been considered only in its narrowest sense and as an unproblematic picture of success (Renold and Allan 2006).

In recent years a number of academic studies have endeavoured to explore this topic in more depth; to explore the complex interweaving of gendered, raced and classed discourses with educational achievement (Francis 2000, Reay 1999, Connolly 1998, Renold 2005, Younger and Warrington 1999, Skelton 1997, Archer 2002, Epstein *et al* 1997, Mac an Ghaill 1994, Benjamin 1999, Lucey and Reay 2002, Youdell 2005). Yet even within the academic literature it appears that middle-class girls' achievements have been relatively overlooked, as Delamont (1989:61) proposes: 'the lives of middle-class girls at home and school are probably the least researched topic in the whole of the sociology of education'. More recently Power *et al* (1998:330) have suggested that even when middle-class success has been researched it has been treated somewhat unproblematically:

It has sometimes appeared within the sociology of education that for academically able and aspiring pupils, stereotypically from middle-class homes, academic progress is painless and a successful path through higher education into a prestigious occupation is assured.

There are, however, a handful of studies from over the years that have endeavoured to explore young middle-class girls' educational achievements and experiences (Delamont 1989, Roker 1993, Walford 1993). And a number of studies have added to this work more recently, trying to readdress this issue and to look at the distinct ways in which class, race and gender complicate this supposedly straightforward success story (Proweller 1999, Power *et al* 1999, Evans *et al* 2004). Archer (2005) for example, has been able to highlight a number of different relationships that girls have with educational success. By exploring these relationships her work illustrates the complex, fragile and problematic nature of success. Walkerdine *et al's* (2001) study has also highlighted the problematic nature of academic success for middle-class girls. Their study suggests that in recent years girls have been able to enter the 'male world' of rationality and as such have been achieving increasingly well within educational establishments. However, these authors believe that this transition has not been easy and still comes at a price to young girls. Renold and Allan's (2004) study also found that many of the 'high-achieving' primary school girls that they interviewed were struggling in their relationships with academic success. Although there were a few



girls who could clearly be identified as ‘confident’ achievers, there were many more that consistently downplayed, denied and even hid their academic success.

### *Aims of the Chapter*

All of the girls in my study could, in a formal sense (based on examination marks), be described as high-achievers. In the class where I was based as a researcher, nineteen of the pupils achieved the highest levels possible in their Standard Assessment Tests (SAT’s), with the remaining five pupils attaining only slightly lower levels which were still significantly above the national average. The school, itself celebrated the girls’ achievements in official documents and felt able to describe its pupils as ‘motivated’, ‘confident’, ‘independent’ and ‘intuitive’. A recent Ofsted<sup>1</sup> report also proclaimed that these were girls with a ‘unique interest in work’ and with a ‘keen spirit to learn’. By concentrating on the high educational achievements of the girls in my study, this chapter seeks to explore the girls’ identities as young, middle-class, high-achieving school girls. In this chapter, high achievement (or success as I will refer to it) will be explored both in the narrow, ‘official’ sense of the term (as the grades that the girls achieved in their various examinations), but importantly it will also be explored in terms of the girls’ own experiences; in terms of their feelings and the ways in which they felt able to ‘own’ success for themselves.

The chapter will begin by examining the outstanding and exceptional achievements of the girls in my research and will highlight some of the ‘pleasures’ of being educated in the private, single-sex, selective school. The first section will also explore the distinct and highly individual ways in which these girls felt they were able to create ‘successful’ identities for themselves. The second section of the chapter will be divided into sub-sections based on the girls’ friendship groups - in order to explore the girls differing relationships to success and the different groups of achievers in the class: the ‘talented tomboys’ (defined by their teachers as ‘exceptional over-achievers’ and by their peers as the most ‘confident’ girls in class), the ‘good enough achievers’ (a group of girly girls described by their teachers as high, but not ‘natural’ achievers and by their classmates as ‘stress heads’ – girls who worried a great deal

---

<sup>1</sup> Ofsted is the official body for governing schools - a group who use inspection evidence to advise the public on the effectiveness of educational provision.

about their achievements), and the ‘underachieving rebels’ (a group who were described by their teachers as not ‘fulfilling their potential’ and were identified by their classmates as ‘misbehavers’). It is worth reiterating here that these categories are not exhaustive and that they too are ‘ideal types’. Although the girls are portrayed in this chapter as inhabiting similar academic identities to their friends, this was not always the case. There were, of course, variations within each of the friendship groups and many of the girls shifted between different subject positions.

It will be suggested that the girls often struggled with success in this school, for despite attending a school where success was openly celebrated and apparently ‘open to all’ and despite their ‘actual’ achievements in tests, many of the girls felt restricted to perform success in narrow and competitive ways that clashed with dominant discourses of femininity. This chapter, therefore, will also explore the fragile and performative nature of success, as a process that is not fixed or stable but as something that has to be constantly worked upon. It is hoped that by examining the multiple relationships that girls held with success, that this chapter will begin to explore some of the ‘hair line cracks’ that appear in an otherwise ‘smooth’ picture (Lucey 2001).

### **The multiple versions of success available to girls in private schooling**

The official success discourse of the school in which my research took place seemed to highlight the multiple ways in which girls could succeed and gain status within the school. Notice boards publicly celebrated a range of success stories in the school, with the achievements of girls who had become television presenters or had joined pop bands presented alongside those who had achieved more academically. The school magazine also showcased a number of girls’ work and praised them individually for their various talents: physical, social, theatrical and artistic as well as academic. The school prided itself on its lack of academic banding and it stressed that success was ‘open to everyone’; all the girls had to do was ‘try their best’. As one girl told me:

The teachers always say that it is not how many merits you have but that you have to try your best all the time. If you try your best all of the time then they say that you will be successful, even if you are only getting five out of ten.  
(Helena - Year Seven Interviews, March 2005)

From my own observations I also noted how many teachers spent time stressing effort over actual achievement. Many teachers began their lessons, where they were testing the girls, by reassuring them that the tests were ‘not significant’ and by telling them that it was only necessary for them to ‘try their best’. On report cards grades were given for effort as well as attainment, as one teacher told me: ‘we take these very seriously... we try to impress the importance of these on the girls as just as important, if not more so, than attainment’.

One of the major stated aims of the school was to produce girls who were ‘all round achievers’. Meadmore *et al* (2004) believe that this is a common aim for private schools in today’s competitive educational market, as they suggest that private schools have needed to reinvent themselves and embrace marketisation strategies to develop themselves as ‘optimistic assets’ and to develop a type of ‘value-addedness’ that can be bought only through private education. There is a wealth of academic literature that seems to suggest that this is indeed how middle-class parents view schools; as institutions that can develop their children’s potential to succeed in a risky world of employment (Vincent 2001, Ball 2003, Ball and Vincent 2005, Reay 1998, David 1993). Ball (2003) refers to these parents as ‘risk managers’ – as people who learn to deal with the uncertainty of the education market by trying to secure the best assets and the best company for their children, using whatever social and economic capital they have available to them.

Indeed, by talking to the girls’ parents and teachers, it certainly seemed to be the case that both groups were committed to developing the girls as fully rounded ‘projects’ of success. Their combined strategies seemed to link in neatly with neo-liberal discourses of the flexible, late-modern subject that is ‘self-driven’ and ‘self-made’ (McRobbie 2000). The girls were expected to seize all of the opportunities that were made available to them and to create a kind of DIY project of the self (Harris 2004). Yet it was not only the girl’s parents and teachers that seemed to invest in these individualised notions, for the girls themselves also seemed to be involved in a project of ‘reinventing the self’, as this next extract illustrates:

AA: So what does being a success mean to you?

Libby: Sports and music are really important to me.

Violet: The thing is you have to be an all rounder so you can be the best and be ready for university. You have to be good at music, sports and the academic. I think all of us here have that covered...like Georgia is good at sport, she plays the piano and she is an academic and I like to swim, I play the flute and I am kind of an academic.

(Year Seven Interviews, March 2005)

Aside from the interviews, I was able to observe for myself what seemed to be the girls working on their 'projects of self', grasping every opportunity made available to them. The class adventure trip away was a prime example of this. It had been chosen by the school to develop a number of the girls' different skills: educationally (for example, the trip was designed to develop the girl's geographic/orienteering skills), socially (as team workers), and physically (in outdoor activities). However, the trip was also used by the girls themselves to develop skills in ways that the school had not anticipated. On the first day of the trip, for example, I walked through one of the bedrooms that the girls were staying in and it was suspiciously tidy and quiet – all the girls were stretched out on their beds immersed in their books. At first I put their behaviour down to the fact that they must be compensating for some type of misbehaviour but I was stunned to find out that the girls were actually using this as an opportunity to prove themselves to be responsible pupils.

For these girls it seemed as though every activity was viewed as an opportunity to be used in creating a successful self. Their activities inside and outside of school formed a kind of tick list of things that they had to achieve; a way of accruing success and (surplus) capital for themselves. The girls could in fact be described in Harris' (2004:8) terms as 'can do' girls: girls with the 'world at their feet', girls who were identifiable by their 'commitment to exceptional careers and career planning', their 'capacity to reinvent themselves' and to succeed. In Skeggs' (2004) terms these girls could also be described as 'cosmopolitans'. As Skeggs suggests, the cosmopolitan is likely to be someone who possesses the ability and resources to participate in the global, capitalist economy and has the 'potential to better express or embody genuine universalism'. She uses a quote from Hannerz (1996:103) to elucidate this notion:

A more genuine cosmopolitan is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.

To become acquainted with more cultures is to turn into an aficionado, to view them as artworks. At the same time, however, cosmopolitan can be a matter of competence. And competence of both a generalised and a more specialised kind. There is the aspect of a state of readiness, a persona; ability to make one's way into other cultures, through listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting.

Indeed, many of the girls in my study could be seen to be investing in these identities as they engaged in a whole range of different activities. In school, this could be glimpsed through the girls' ethical discussions in lessons, where they were asked to take on the role of 'other', as Brazilians living in the rainforest, to decide whether they would sell the landscape that they inhabited in order to survive. Many of the girls were applauded by their teacher for speaking eloquently about the troubles that these 'others' may experience and for being able to 'take their viewpoint and step into their shoes'. In their family lives the girls were also expected to participate in and appreciate a range of (foreign) cultures as they travelled abroad to visit a number of exotic destinations. The girls themselves also talked about the need to become experts in popular as well as high culture; they needed to be aware of a whole different manner of media (from art works to television shows) in order to compete with their peers at school. As Petersen (1993:169) suggests:

Elite taste is no longer defined as an expressed appreciation of the high art forms (and a moral disdain or bemused tolerance for all other aesthetic expressions). Now it is being redefined as an appreciation of every distinctive form along with an appreciation of the high arts.

Fitting in neatly with Beck's (1992) and Giddens' (1991) notions of the 'reflexive self', the girls appeared to portray themselves as being involved in an incredibly 'individual and voluntarist project of self invention' (Skeggs 2004:52). The girl's narratives seemed to suggest that this was a project that they found relatively easy; as simply a matter of making the right choices.

### *Academic success in private schooling*

Yet the educational achievements of the girls in this school were not quite such a simple picture of success. Firstly it could not be claimed that everyone found this way of achieving success pleasurable or easy. Many of the girls found the school's emphasis on effort confusing; often meaning that they did not know what was

expected of them. The girls also felt that the school's 'official' success discourse was not the only discourse to exist in the school. Despite acknowledging and recognising the multiple opportunities and choices available to them in school, the girls still felt limited in their achievements. It appeared to the girls that although the school stressed collaboration and effort, the reality was that the school expected competition and individual achievement. In interviews some of the girls talked about the real impossibility of achieving in school and gaining success through effort alone. As Helena remarked: 'It would be hard to feel successful if you were trying hard and still getting low marks...I don't think even the teachers would really believe that you were trying your best'. Similarly some of the other girls questioned their teacher's 'real' attitudes towards their work:

The teachers always try and make out like...well like last year the teachers told us that the SAT's were not important but you could tell that they wanted you to do well and that really it was important. They just say 'oh it's not important' and when they say that it sounds really important and everything and makes you really worried! Like for the SAT's they said it wasn't important but if it really wasn't important then why did they make us take extra revision papers?

(Kathryn – Year Seven Interviews, January 2005)

Of course the ways in which the teachers downplayed the importance of tests is understandable, as one teacher told me: they were doing it 'in the best interests of the girls' so as 'not to worry them'. But as the extract above demonstrates, the downplaying of the importance of tests did not always work and in some cases seemed to increase rather than decrease anxiety amongst girls.

Just as the girls felt that high-achievement rather than effort was 'really' expected of them by the school, so they felt that these achievements had to be gained academically. It is interesting to note how many of the photographs that the girls took as part of their diaries represented the serious nature of their schoolwork. Taken in a kind of documentary style, many of these pictures were photographed from a height, looking down upon the girls working hard at their desk. The images tending to invite the viewer to take the place of the 'all seeing' teacher in the classroom; observing, monitoring and regulating the girl's work (Holland 1998). Whether this was the intended outcome of the photographs I am not sure. But I am told by the girls that what the photographs do show is the serious and academic nature of the work that

took place in their classes. Interestingly, none of their photographs represented the multiple opportunities or activities that the school stressed were available to them. As the photograph pictured below demonstrates, the images were static and deskbound - in direct contrast to the school's 'lively' prospectus photographs.



Figure: 5.1. 'Serious schoolwork'

The girls also told me that academic success was often only recognised when it had been tested and measured in a quantifiable manner. Indeed, the girls were subject to a number of tests and examinations. In an average school week the girls could expect at least one test for each academic subject, and across the term three further major exams. The girls took these tests very seriously and in some cases it seemed that they had begun to define themselves in terms of their grades; these 'fixed' measures had come to determine who they could be as successful learners, as this next extract demonstrates:

- AA: So what would success in your school work mean to you then?  
Kathryn: I see it through my test results and for me that means full marks only.  
Abi: Well for you maybe but for me nineteen out of twenty would be good or maybe nineteen and a half but thirteen would definitely be a failure!  
Kathryn: Thirteen I would really not be happy with.  
Abi: I wouldn't be happy with fourteen either.  
Kathryn: Fourteen is okay but twelve or thirteen I would be devastated with!  
(Year Seven Interviews, January 2005)

Reay and William (1999) found similar results in their own study of children's academic achievement. Quoting Broadfoot (1996:68) they propose that children learn to judge themselves by test scores because they are forms of panoptic surveillance that teach children to act 'as if some external eye was constantly monitoring their performance'. The interview extracts shown above certainly emphasise the

'normalising' and 'regulatory' effect that the assessments had on the girls in my own study. The girls seemed to have internalised the grades that they had received from tests, using them to refer to and assess their own and each others performances. Like the children in Reay and William's (1999) study, the girls in my research were also using the test scores as a means of more openly competing with one another. As one girl told me: 'yes we do all want to get good grades, so yes we are competitive...not always openly, sometimes it is like in mega secret ways...but we are definitely very competitive'. The competitiveness of academic achievement also made a number of the girls in my study more visible in the classroom and, as they told me, made them worry more about their achievements. The next extract demonstrates the girls' experiences of stress:

AA: So how important is it to do well at school?

Eden: I am just one of these people that really wants to be good at stuff like reports. It really matters to me so I try hard all the time. I try too much and it gets me really tired and sometimes even ill. Like in year six I was trying so hard that I just got ill.

Helena: Yeah I got this thing last year cos I was trying really really hard but I couldn't sleep at night or anything and I ended up getting tonsillitis.

AA: So are there pressures on you?

Helena: Yeah pressures in everything that you do...pressure to do well.

Eden: Like practice hard and revise and that sort of thing.

Helena: You feel like the pressure from blue slips is sometimes a life or death situation!

Eden: Yeah you have to revise this or you will die...

Helena: I was actually stuck on a question yesterday, it was what makes you happy...I don't think I actually know what makes me happy these days!

(Year Seven Interviews, March 2005)

Of course it is important to recognise that this was just one example of the girls' unhappiness in school. At the time when this interview took place it was still very early in their first term in senior school and they were feeling much more unsettled than at other points in the research. The girls did tell me, however, that a dominant reason for feeling stressed about work was because they felt trapped between two competing and conflicting notions of success. Two dominant discourses of success existed in the school: success that could be achieved by effort and in multiple ways; and success as strongly linked to a standards based agenda that could be achieved only academically. For both the pupils and the teachers there were times when these discourses would combine and overlap with one another. But predominantly the girls



felt that the narrow, traditional discourse of academic success was most dominant in their lives.

Having outlined the conflicting discourses of success that existed in the school and some of the pains and pleasures that accompanied them, the chapter will now move on to explore case studies of the girls' friendship groups and in turn their varying relationships to success – to begin to examine the ways in which different classed and gendered discourses complicate this picture.

### **Extraordinary achievement – the 'confidents'**

The 'tomboy' friendship group (also known to their classmates as the 'confidents') were singled out by students and teachers alike as the highest achievers in class. The tomboys' peers talked about them as 'really confident girls' who 'just always know what they are doing' and who always 'get the best marks in class'. Teachers talked about their achievements as 'extraordinary'; as above and beyond the (already high) standards that they expected of all the girls. During my time in class I was told by a number of teachers to look out for these girls, to watch out for their 'natural flair' and 'innate ability' to succeed in 'anything academic'. During class discussions these girls were often pointed out to me by teachers for having given the most 'thought provoking', 'original' and 'insightful' answers. Many of these girls had also been singled out for being particularly talented in certain subject areas and some of them had been encouraged to pursue these talents in extra groups, workshops or national competitions. Interestingly the tomboys appeared to work in a very 'individual' manner in class. Often, they told me that they preferred to work alone and that they did not feel that they needed help from their friends. The tomboys also appeared to be extremely competitive - a behaviour which particularly shocked the other girls in their class, as this next extract demonstrates:

Mrs Whitley (the classroom assistant) comes to the class half way through the lesson to take the girls out for their end of year six reading tests to test their various reading ages. Kathryn (one of the girly girls) is taken for her test first. She returns to the class later looking very nervous and she proceeds to tell her friends that the test is very hard and that she will need to give them some help, she tells them: 'the third one is infatuation, it's a hard one so I thought I would help you on that one'. Next Isla (one of the tomboys) is called out for her test.

Unlike Kathryn, she returns to the classroom with a huge smile on her face. Some of the girls call out and ask her how she did. She replies that she is happy with her efforts and that she thinks she did very well. The girls seem horrified that she openly admitted her success, Ingrid turns to me and says: 'Can you believe she just said that?!'

(Field note extract, June 2004)

The tomboys' behaviour as proud, competitive and publicly confident achievers could be regarded as 'masculine'; it could be suggested that these girls were citing traditionally 'male' discourses and inhabiting 'male' subject positions in order to achieve successfully in the classroom. In recent years, this type of 'masculinised' and 'individualised' success has been widely celebrated in popular discourse; as a concrete example of 'masculinised' new women 'at ease with male attributes' and 'enjoying the buzz that comes with ambition, drive and success' (Wilkinson 1999:37). As Ringrose (2006:23) proposes, girls' 'newly' found confident educational success is regarded as 'the surest inculcation of a brave new "post-feminist" world, where issues of gender inequality are positioned as no longer posing a problem, and where success is held up as there for the taking'. Of course, it is important to recognise and celebrate these girls' exceptional achievements, especially as girls have traditionally been overlooked and regarded to be 'lacking the necessary masculine learner subjectivity as well as the necessary male defined knowledge' (Foster 2001:209). It is also important that we recognise the 'different' ways in which these girls are achieving at school, the ways in which they were pushing the boundaries of normative feminine achievement and pupil behaviour. As Francis (1999) exhorts, we need to accept that girls are able to draw on 'masculine' discourses in their identity construction or else we run the risk of confining them to gendered behaviour that is strictly biologically based.

However, we do also need to ask how transgressive this behaviour actually is. Talking about a similarly confident, competitive, and individualised achiever (Nyla) in a previous study, Renold and Allan (2004) suggest that 'masculinised' learner identities are ambivalent positions for girls to inhabit and can be both repressive and productive. This also seemed to be the case for the tomboys in my study, for, like Nyla, they did not always find high-achievement an easy position to inhabit. The other girls in the class were very critical of their 'aggressive' behaviour and would often tease them about it. Like Nyla, the tomboy's 'masculine' behaviour was continually re-worked

by the other girls in the class through conventional notions of how girls should behave in class. In one incident, for example, some of the girly girls managed to have one of the tomboys knocked out of the school netball team for her overly competitive behaviour. Though I am still left wondering about the highly gendered nature of this game, in this instance it did seem that the tomboy's behaviour was shown up by the girly girl group as 'unladylike' and unacceptable. The girly girl's actions not only limited this girl from playing on the team again (effectively cancelling out this behaviour altogether) but it also acted to reinstate their own (hyper-feminine) collaborative behaviour as the norm.

The tomboys were often not worried about being treated differently or being called 'manly geeks' (which is what they were most commonly called by the other girls in their class). Like the square girls in Renold's (2001) research, the tomboys had a strong friendship group to support their identities as high-achievers. As upper-middle class girls based in an academically successful school, the girls' identities as high-achievers were also 'promoted, protected and celebrated' by the school's official pedagogic discourses and by their own family backgrounds (Renold 2001). The tomboys had a number of different strategies that they used to discursively manoeuvre themselves into more powerful positions. Humour was a particularly powerful way in which the girls would deflect any critical attention that they received from their classmates. For example, the tomboys would often joke amongst themselves about the 'fact' that they were geeks (calling each other 'geek', 'teacher's pet' and 'boffin') and would joke about being different from others (claiming that they were 'mad', 'eccentric' and 'odd' because of their tendency to enjoy academic work).

In MacInne and Couch's (2004:442) terms, these girls could be seen to be 'performing powerfully in the space of shame'; a space which provided the girls with the potential to do things differently, to 'argue back' and to 'exude non-dominant expressions' whilst paradoxically being more of what rendered them other and marginal. As these authors suggest, their shame was a particular response to domination, 'a kind of complicity' that allowed for 'negotiation between dominant power operations and the performance and presentation of self'. In a similar way, the tomboys also negotiated their positioning as 'manly' and 'aggressive' achievers. As the girls themselves told me, these names did not worry them for they wanted to be

'boy-like' anyway; they were not scared of entering a traditionally masculine domain (confident achievement) because it could be accommodated into their identities as tomboys.

However, the tomboys were not always able to 'brush off' the criticisms that they received from the other girls, nor were they always able to manoeuvre themselves into more powerful positions. There were incidents when the tomboys came to me feeling extremely upset after being criticised by other girls in the class. One day Isla told me that she was fed up of being 'geeky'; why was it that she was always called un-cool by the other girls? She read some of the same books as them (in this case a book about 'dragonology', which when Isla read it was deemed to be 'sad' and 'boyey' but when one of the other girls read it was admired for its intricate artwork and 'pretty pictures') yet they always ignored her when she talked about them.

What all these incidents show, therefore, is the plethora of contradictions that these girls faced in an educational context where both masculinity and femininity were demanded of girls; where masculine competition was the only way to succeed in an atmosphere of testing and standards, but femininity was still demanded of them to become successful girls. What these incidents also demonstrate is that femininity still sits uneasily with academic achievement regardless of the actual grades that pupils are achieving; that to be clever and feminine still involves a paradox of contradictory gendered subject positions (Walkerdine 1990). The tomboys, although constantly struggling, were able to strike some kind of balance in their achievements but only by 'dumping' dominant feminine behaviours (Renold and Allan 2006). Other girls handled this balance differently, as we will see in the next section as we discuss the case study of the girly girl, 'good enough' achievers.

### **'Good enough' achievement: the girly girl 'stress-heads'**

Like the tomboys many of the girly girl friendship group were also considered to be some of the highest achievers in class. Although teachers often ranked them as the second highest achieving group in the class, on the surface it did appear that these girls had it all; they were identified by classmates as 'popular', 'pretty' and 'clever'. These girls could also be recognised as 'ideal' (feminine) pupils: they were 'sensible

and selfless', they always collaborated as a group to help one another and they always tried extremely hard to please their teachers (Francis 2000). In class these girls were almost always observed trying hard with their work, they often stayed in at lunch and break times to continue their efforts. Every member of their group was expected to put a great deal of effort into their work; especially when they were working on collaborative projects. When a member of the group was seen not to be pulling their weight it almost always ended in confrontation, as I found out for myself when I was asked to help the girls in a French group exercise. On this occasion I was asked to step in and help the girls act out a scene because a member of their group was away. Having almost no formal training in French there was no doubt that I struggled with the exercise. In my embarrassment I tried to laugh off my ability and instead of acting seriously I tried to create a caricature of a French person, adopting a (very strange!) French accent. The girls were horrified at my apparent misbehaviour and lack of effort, they told me in no uncertain terms that they were shocked that I had not taken the exercise seriously and had let the group down.

Most of the time, however, the girls worked well together as a group. They were often observed adopting 'caretaker' roles to support one another (Francis 2000, Francis and Skelton 2002). For example, I witnessed a scene in one lesson where Violet (one of the girly girls) had forgotten her compass. Knowing that Violet would get into an awful lot of trouble with the teacher for this, one of her friends, Nicole, got down on to the floor and crawled under several desks to the front of the room where Violet was sitting to give her a compass. It was an extremely nerve-racking moment as none of the girls were officially allowed to leave their seats once the lesson had begun. Nicole knew that if she was caught, she would be the one in detention. Later, when I asked her why she had taken such a risk, she told me, 'It's just what friends do'. In other lessons where the girls were allowed to get up and move about they would often go to their friends for help. In one of the interviews the girls told me with great glee that they had a 'secret work weapon'; each member of their group had a subject 'speciality' and could help anyone else out in the group who was found to be struggling. This meant that none of them ever had to fail a class task.

*Femininity and academic success: 'talented tomboys' or 'plodding princesses'?*

Despite their success in school the girls struggled on a daily basis to have their achievements recognised by their teachers. On my first day in the school I was told to watch this group because of the ways in which they worked. In direct contrast to the tomboys I was told that these girls were only able to achieve through 'sheer perseverance', 'hard work' and 'attention to detail'. The teachers told me that they were not 'natural achievers' like the tomboys; instead they listened carefully to what the teachers said in every lesson and applied it to their work. Most of their work was done by detailed questioning of teachers and by constantly checking that they were performing in the right way. The teacher's opinions were also backed up by other pupils in the class. Though their classmates did not talk about them in quite the same way they did describe them as 'stress heads'; as girls who always 'worried about how well they were doing in class' and who 'cried if anything went wrong'.

It appeared that these two groups of girls were viewed by their teachers in very different ways: the tomboys as a group of competitive but naturally intelligent achievers and the girly girls as a group of collaborative achievers who were only able to succeed through hard work and determination. The debate over those children who are regarded to be 'hard workers' and those who are seen as 'naturally intelligent' is well rehearsed within the sociology of education. As Francis and Skelton (2002) suggest, this is usually a distinction made between girls (as 'conformist plodders') and boys (as 'naturally talented' achievers). Despite being in a single-sex school the same distinction seemed to apply in my research. Indeed, it appeared that only the girls who claimed to be tomboys, that took up traditionally 'masculine' subject positions (as rational, individual competitors) were able to be identified as 'naturally intelligent'. In contrast the girly girls were seen as conformist plodders; girls who were less intelligent because they made their work more visible. In a similar manner to the girls in Walkerdine *et al's* (2001) study, the girly girls in my research found that their achievements were downgraded by teachers because they were not seen to have been produced in the right way.

By taking into consideration the pressure that schools and teachers are under to produce 'outstanding' (quantifiable) results, it is not surprising to find teachers

applauding such individualised and competitive learning. Indeed, as Kenway (1997:35) suggests:

Teachers invariably walk a tightrope between encouraging students to succeed in conventional terms and encouraging them to succeed differently – always with the knowledge that difference seldom wins out over dominance.

Yet the girls did struggle with these contradictions on a daily basis, as Abigail's case study illustrates. Abigail was one girl in particular who struggled with competition and collaboration. On the one hand Abigail told me that she desperately wanted to be the highest achiever in her class. This was a dream that she shared with her parents who, she told me, expected her to be the best in everything that she did. On the other hand, however, Abigail also placed a high value on friendship, which was another arena in which she wanted to succeed: 'Friends are really important...I know I said it was important to do well at school but I don't just base that on my reports and grades and things...I also base it on how many friends I have got'. On a daily basis Abigail did seem to be able to balance these two ambitions. She had developed strategies to succeed in both tasks. For example, she told me that sometimes she would do extra work at home that her friends didn't know about, so that she could work at the same rate as them in class. In the photography club Abigail also took me aside one day to ask me if it was okay for her to complete her diary when she was alone rather than in the club where she could spend time with her friends. However, Abigail did find juggling these two ambitions increasingly stressful. Many of Abigail's classmates commented on her being frequently stressed and upset. Her teachers also commented on her behaviour telling me that she was a 'right little worrier'; that she was 'quite the perfectionist' and that she was 'very highly strung'.

In Julie Mcleod's (2002) terms, it appears that Abigail was caught in a connection/autonomy conflict; where her sense of obligation for others complicated her desires to succeed at school. Indeed, there were times when Abigail felt that she had to choose specifically between achieving highly at school and being a good friend. Towards the end of term, for example, the class were set a final project that would be marked and sent to the senior school. This was a group project and for once the girls were allowed to choose the people with whom they wanted to work. Initially Abigail was very excited about the project as it was something in which she really felt

she could achieve highly. It was also something that she felt she could enjoy because she would get to sit and work with her closest friends. But as the weeks wore on and Abigail's friends found out that she was doing extra work at home for the project Abigail became more and more unhappy, as this extract from my field notes shows:

Abigail ends today in a flood of tears because she thinks that Violet and Jenny are giving her evil looks from the other side of the room. Not knowing much about the situation the music teacher asks me to take Abigail out of the room and comfort her. Outside the classroom and sobbing heavily Abigail tells me that she had fallen out with Jenny and Violet over the biscuit project. She tells me that they had been sending 'hate messages' about her and that she had read one of them. Sure enough, I recall that earlier in the day when I had been sat next to Violet at break she had handed Jenny a note saying that she thought Abigail was a bitch for keeping her work from them. Following the note the girls proceeded to tell me that they thought Abigail was bossy and selfish and that they would have to check all her folders while she was away to make sure she wasn't doing any other work behind their back.

(Field note extract, July 2004)

For Abigail, the consequences of succeeding academically but failing to be a 'good friend' were harsh. Because Abigail's competitive behaviour did not fit the ideals of feminine friendship she was excluded from her friendship group. And yet the consequences for not achieving at school were also harsh; she would be regarded as a failure (a position that was simply not acceptable within the school). Given the amount of pressure on these girls to achieve (often in contradictory ways), one can understand their positions as conformist plodders (and as people who tried to balance both the feminine and the academic - to achieve individually and to collaborate with their friends). Success for these girls was never certain, especially as their success was often not recognised by teachers to be the 'right kind'. Success was not an authentic location that any of these girls could ever fully and finally inhabit, instead it had to be vigilantly guarded and constantly (re)performed (Archer 2005). The need to succeed in school seemed to form a straitjacket for the girls, where they felt able to achieve only in conventional ways because they were afraid of making mistakes. Indeed, because failure was simply not a possibility for these girls and because it was an identity that had to be constantly 'othered', many of the girls found that the certainty of achieving through 'conformity' was much better than the uncertainty of not being able to achieve at all, especially if this behaviour was supported by their friends.



Having discussed the two high-achieving friendship groups that existed in the class, the next section will move on to discuss the experiences of those girls regarded to be ‘underachievers’.

### **Underachievement – ‘the misbehavers’**

In the school in which my research was based I was extremely surprised to find a number of girls who were identified as low-achievers. Less surprising, however, was the fact that these girls were still achieving quite highly on tests (significantly above national averages) and that they were not described as ‘failures’ but were instead regarded to be ‘underachievers’ – girls who were simply not fulfilling their (high) potential (Smith 2003, Myhill *et al* 2004). Many of these ‘underachieving’ girls were also ‘new girls’ – girls who had only joined the school in the senior intake at age eleven. Although the ‘new girls’ were a large and heterogeneous group, not all of whom were in this ‘underachieving’ group, many of them were from state schools where they were used to different standards of achievement and had been taught in very different ways. The teachers described these girls as ‘struggling’ due to their ‘lack of knowledge’ and previously ‘inferior’ training. The girls themselves also described their struggle to ‘keep up at school’, as this next interview extract demonstrates:

AA: So are you happy with the work you have done at school so far?

Elissa: I don’t know...I am not sure.

Millie: I think I did better in my old school...it was just easier.

Elissa: I think it is harder here because like in my old school I was popular and really smart but here I don’t seem very smart.

Millie: I think I am able to mess around less here...I have to be serious now.

(Year Seven interviews, January 2005)

Many of the ‘new’ girls found it hard to fit into their ‘new’ senior school – they often felt ‘lost’ in such a privileged and high-achieving environment. These girls can be compared to a group of working-class students in Reay’s (2001) study, a group who found it impossible to fit into educational institutions and who described themselves as losing a sense of who they ‘really were’ as they were forced to perform ‘new’, ‘acceptable’ middle-class personas. Although almost all of the ‘new’ girls in my study could be described as middle-class, they too felt ‘lost’ in school due to a lack of relevant cultural and economic capital. As one girl told me:

The junior girls have just been brought up well while they were young and they have been to private schools which means you are taught better because you pay for the privilege. You can tell they are different because they are just so confident. They have been trained well. I mean my Mum met Abigail in town and she just came up and introduced herself. My Mum says she could tell that she was really confident and that she would get everything she wanted in life. Not like me I am not confident. I have not been trained in the same way to do well at school.

(Millie – Year Seven Interviews, January 2005)

Although the previous sections have shown the complexities all girls faced in their struggles to succeed in school, this extract shows just how privileged many of the girls actually were. Indeed, although the girly girls often struggled to have their achievements recognised by their teachers and were often not as confident as the tomboys, they were still confident girls. Like the middle-class girls in Reay's (1997) study, the girly girls could often be observed telling the teachers what they thought, how lessons should be planned, what topics they should cover next and how their work should be presented; they were often able to position themselves as equal to or as 'knowing better' than their teachers because of the tremendous amount of capital they were able to deploy. What the 'new' girls' talk illustrates, then, is the fact that the 'junior school' girls' confidence was not a personal matter, but a structural matter (Archer 2005). Their confidence was class based; not a matter of personal choice or good luck, but a consequence of their privileged family backgrounds and experiences in private education. What this also illustrates, therefore, is the complex way in which class intersects with gender and complicates this picture of success further.

The 'new' girls, however, were not entirely 'fazed' by their introduction to the upper-middle class, high-achieving environment of Taylor's or by the confidence of the 'junior school' girls. In many ways the 'new' girls challenged the existing culture of the school by introducing a range of 'new' discourses. One way in which they did this was by challenging the 'junior school' girls' identities as 'posh girls'; by labelling them as 'posh and pretentious', 'up-tight' and 'eccentric old fools'. As some of the girls told me in interviews:

Iyana: Some people are so posh in this school and they judge you on your work saying you are not good enough. Like they ask you how you pronounce scones and stuff! I just say shut your face!

Isla: Yeah we say Scones anyway we are not posh!

AA: What does posh mean then?

Iyana: Well it can be if you are a hard worker but it could also mean that you have lots of money. Not all people with money are posh but if they brag about it they definitely are!

(Analysis groups, February 2005)

The term 'posh' was used by the girls to mean a number of different things though it was most often used to describe girls who were wealthy, spoke in a certain upper-class accent and tried too hard at school. By critiquing the 'junior school' girls for being 'posh', the 'new' girls in my study were critiquing their pretension, investing in humour to devalue those that devalued them.

As Skeggs (2004) suggests, this anti-pretentiousness is never just a form of surveillance of the middle-class by the working-class (or in this case, of the upper-middle class by the lower middle-class); it also operates as a form of surveillance within the middle-class itself. Certainly, the 'junior school' girls in my study were acutely aware of the possibilities of being branded 'posh' and the problems that this could cause for them among their peers - many of them went out of their way to avoid this positioning. I was told by one girl, for example, that Abigail had substantially changed her behaviour in class after the move to senior school. She had become friends with a few of the 'new' girls who had laughed at her 'constant stressing' about work and her 'obsession with money'. I was told that Abigail had soon learnt to behave differently with these new friends: 'she now pretends to be cool, she hides her work more than ever and she says that she doesn't care about school'. The power that the 'new' girls deployed in challenging their classmates must not be underestimated. However, as both Skeggs (2004) and Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) suggest, we must recognise that anti-pretentiousness also operates as a mechanism to keep the lower classes in place. For while the 'new' girls successfully challenged their classmates and devalued their position as high-achieving, upper-middle class pupils, they also made barriers to their own success, making it virtually impossible for any of them to be able to be recognised as high-achievers and to move into these positions of status within the school.

### *The 'rebel gang'*

However, it was not only the 'new' girls who were aware of the differences that 'class' made to the success girls were able to achieve and 'own' in school. Eva was one of the 'old' junior school girls who, long before the 'new' girls ever joined the school, would sit and talk to me about how she hated being part of such a 'posh' school with 'pretentious idiots' for classmates. Eva rarely publicly challenged her classmates instead she often expressed her anger by drawing derogatory pictures of them and by making gestures behind their back. In one lesson, for example, I observed Eva continuously waving her hand around in the air behind Kathryn's back. When I asked her what she was doing, Eva told me that she was making the gesture that the Queen makes when greeting her lowly citizens, as this is how she felt Kathryn behaved with her. On other occasions Eva would simply sit and complain to me about school and about the work that she was subjected to, calling it 'slave labour' and 'child abuse'. In a similar manner, Eva's best friend Gayle also rebelled in class, and often in much more publicly challenging ways than Eva. In fact, Gayle had been pointed out to me by many of her teachers, one telling me that she was the cause of 'ninety-nine percent of trouble in the class'. Like Eva, Gayle told me that she despised school and the 'woosy' way in which her classmates did what they were told. Gayle told me that she had made it her mission to make people laugh, to misbehave and have fun rather than get bothered by her schoolwork. Although her classmates found her lack of attention in class frustrating, they did often laugh at her 'pranks'. There were occasions when I too found it hard to resist laughing at her tricks and when I struggled to keep my composure as she made rude gestures behind her teacher's back.

Rebellious behaviour like Gayle's and Eva's is not uncommon in schools. Humour is a strategy that has often been used by pupils to avoid school work. As Woods (1990:185) explains, humorous practices have often been regarded as 'natural products and responses to the exigencies of the institution, such as boredom, ritual routine, regulation and oppressive authority'. Indeed, there are a number of reasons why Eva and Gayle may have behaved in this way. A common explanation given would be that they were acting to protect their sense of self-worth: that given the pressure on them to succeed in school they were pretending not to care so that if they failed they could not be blamed (Jackson 2004). This may well have been the case for

Gayle, who told me in one interview that 'she often didn't try' so it did not really matter if she succeeded or not. However, it was not quite this simple, as both of the girls were 'officially' high-achievers and both (despite their complaints) professed that they did ultimately want to succeed at school.

The main thing that the girls stressed to me in interviews was that they wanted to be 'different' from their classmates. One way in which they distinguished themselves was as 'common girls'; they did not want to be seen as 'posh' or 'pretentious'. It is debateable as to whether this was really a choice that the girls made, especially as they told me that they felt that they were always 'lacking' the correct 'classiness' in school. Gayle, for example, talked about lacking the 'right know-how' (the correct cultural capital) to compete with her peers. She told me that she had the money (economic capital) to succeed in school (and indeed she was often the centre of attention in the summer term when her 'famous' pool party invites were being handed out) but that she still stood out because: 'Well I just didn't know the things the other girls did when I came to this school, I was different and some of them would call me dumb'.

Eva, on the other hand, told me that she felt she had the correct 'knowledge' (cultural capital) to succeed at school (she told me that her dad had been a professor and that he had impressed on her that education was the most important factor in her life) but she felt that she lacked the money (economic capital), as she claimed to come from a relatively poor family where her Mum struggled to cover her school fees. Like the 'new' girls, these girls often felt 'lost' and struggled to fit into the upper-middle class, high-achieving environment of Taylor's. Unlike the 'new' girls, however, these girls had been at the school for some time now and so the only way in which they felt they could distinguish themselves from their classmates was by behaving like rebels. Indeed, the girls felt a tremendous amount of shame about attending a private school which turned out to be a dominant reason that they often downgraded their achievements to me in interviews. Because, as they told me, they felt their successes had not been achieved in the right way and would have been substantially different had they been achieved in a state school.

Eva and Gayle also wanted to be 'different girls' – they wished to distinguish themselves from the 'passive' and 'girly' behaviour of most of their classmates. The 'rebel girl' identity (and humour in particular) appeared to provide a space that allowed them to perform this difference. As Renold (2001) remarks, humour has often been a strategy adopted by 'laddish' boys who wish to disguise their willingness to learn. It is only recently that this 'laddish' attitude to schoolwork has been recognised as a behaviour that girls invest in too (Jackson 2005). Through their misbehaviour and use of humour Eva and Gayle can also be seen to be taking up these subject positions for themselves. The only problem with this identity, however, was that it contradicted the girls' desires to be recognised as achievers in school. Gayle, in particular, often pushed her 'laddish' behaviour to the limit and risked exclusion as well as being ostracised by other pupils. Her behaviour as a 'lad' was often criticised by her classmates as 'stepping over the line' and 'getting them all into trouble'. However, there were times when Gayle would 'behave' in class - she told me at one stage that it helped her if she acted 'girly'. For example, she told me that her class teacher had taken to calling her 'her fairy grandchild' as a way of embarrassing her and making her behave; although Gayle absolutely detested this 'girly' positioning, she knew that if she played along with it she would have an 'easier life'. In contrast Eva avoided the openly challenging behaviour that Gayle invested in. By resisting 'quietly' she was able to manage carefully a high-achieving identity for herself as well as retain her 'difference' as a rebel.

The girls' struggle to be different 'middle-class' 'girls' and to simultaneously achieve at school is best summed up in a photograph that they took as part of the photography workshop. This was a picture that saw Gayle being wheeled across the classroom on the teacher's chair as she posed in the image of superman. The photograph was quite aptly labelled 'rebel supergirl' and seemed to combine all of the different elements of the identities that they struggled to balance. The picture symbolised, for the girls, the ways in which they were expected to behave at school, as 'super girls' who could do anything, achieve anything and behave perfectly all the time. Yet the picture was also a humorous 'take' on this identity as it clearly showed them rebelling from these norms and hinted at other possible ways of being. The fact that both of these identities were combined in the photograph, however, shows the struggles that they faced in

being 'different' – the powerful discourses to which they were subject and the dominant ways in which they had to behave if they wanted to succeed.

Of course, all of these perceived hardships must be kept in context, for ultimately these were privileged girls who were still achieving very well at school. The girls identified to me as 'underachievers' were still performing well on tests at school and had the desire to succeed. Because of their privileged positions it would appear that even Eva and Gayle were able to play with their inscriptions as 'laddish underachievers' and manoeuvre themselves into more powerful positions. As Skeggs (2004) suggests, inscription (the marking of different characteristics on the body and the process of making the subject through regimes, classification schema and control of the body) is a mobile resource for some subjects whilst it is fixed for others and read as limitation. For Gayle and Eva their positioning as 'lower class', 'unfeminine', 'underachieving' girls was often a problem for them in school. Like other girls, Eva and Gayle were subject to dominant classed and gendered discourses that marked their behaviour out as 'wrong' and 'different'. Yet because of their already privileged positions and the various amounts of capital that they were able to deploy they were able to use their 'rebellion' as a resource; they were able to play with their inscriptions and to balance their identities as 'different' achievers at school. Unlike other (working-class) girls who have no choice but to be fixed into these positions, these girls were ultimately able to be identified as high-achievers in their own right.

### *Future Success*

Success in terms of career and financial rewards was not too far off in the distant future for these girls either. Some of the girls told me that they had already started their own businesses; some of them were making more money than others, but all seemed to be successful ventures. In interviews the girls also talked about their dreams for the future. They told me that they wanted to travel to Australia, swim with dolphins, buy 'funky flats in Mayfair', become Blue Peter presenters or be rich and 'live the good life'. And not infrequently it seemed that many of these girls would be able to fulfil these dreams, as this next extract demonstrates:

- Violet: Kitty and I have this thing with Henrietta where we say that we are um going to do Lacrosse in America when we are older.
- Libby: Yeah then I might go to Hollywood and do a singing gig too.
- Gene: Mrs Atwood says that there is a real chance that we could get famous and that if we do we have to remember her and give her half the money... she says remember me when you all get famous.
- AA: How realistic do you think your dreams are? Do you definitely think you will be able to achieve everything that you want to?
- Libby: Oh I know I can do the Lacrosse thing...
- AA: What about university?
- Libby: Oooh I want to go to Harvard. My cousins live in America and they have all gone to Harvard.

Perhaps for these girls more than others, the rewards of working hard could be celebrated more readily, because even if they were not felt now, their realisation did not appear to be too far away in the distant future.

Yet as Thomson *et al* (2002, 2004) suggest, all ‘imagined’ futures are based on the social locations and everyday practices that are available to people in the present. Indeed, the girls in my study were not just making simple choices about what they wanted to do next, for they were also creating successful futures for themselves based on the resources and experiences that were already available to them. Although at first glance the girls did appear to be successfully making themselves in the conditions of their own choosing as ‘self-made’ ‘cosmopolitans’, they were in fact doing so in discursively constrained ways, as a consequence of their classed and gendered positionings.

As Skeggs (2004) suggests, far from being natural or fixed the ‘cosmopolitan’ is very much a classed and gendered identity; it is a privileged position that is limited to the middle-classes because of the time, money and knowledge needed to access it. Drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), Skeggs (2004) suggests that the cosmopolitan identity is often misrecognised – thought of as natural and legitimate and ascribed rather than achieved. Yet as Skeggs (2004) maintains, these identities always require a great deal of work, for ‘the middle-classes do not exist in a ready made reality’; instead they are always ‘constructed through material and symbolic struggles’. The cosmopolitan identity is also highly gendered; it is a particularly post-feminist identity based on the idea that gender equality has been achieved and that girls can achieve anything as ‘flexible subjects’ of the future (Harris 2004). As



McRobbie (2002) suggests, girls can achieve in these ways (as flexible subjects) but often only in narrow gendered terms and by investing heavily in post-feminist masquerade.

It is interesting to note the ways in which the girls in my study referred to themselves as 'cosmopolitans' or 'cosmo girls'. Seemingly unaware of the academic debates surrounding this topic the girls talked about being 'cosmo girls' with reference to the magazines that they read (*Cosmo Girl*) and in some cases to a 'trendy' alcoholic cocktail that their Mums drank. Their idea of a 'cosmopolitan' was of a hyper-feminine girly-girl (of a life filled with make-up, sleepovers and boyfriends) who had a substantial amount of money to invest in a demanding consumer lifestyle. These narrow notions of 'cosmo living' were reflected in their hopes for the future, where they claimed to want to have it all: to be rich, bright and beautiful. Their narratives about the future reflected the narrow ways in which their success could be achieved; along predominantly hetero-normative pathways leading to marriage and family life (where having a career was a possibility but only as an addition, not as an alternative to family life).

### **Discussion:**

Indeed, this chapter has suggested that the post-feminist success story, of girls being able to have it all in conditions of their own choosing, is substantially misleading and needs to be carefully re-examined (Ringrose 2006). In terms of academic success there is a need to look at the different discourses of success available to girls in school; the multiplicity of discourses which fuse together notions of effort, ability, attainment, discipline and conduct in complex ways and in order to determine the possible identities open to these girls as good/bad students and achievers (Youdell 2006). In my study, success was predominantly experienced by the girls in narrow, individualised and competitive ways and as achievable only through academic achievement, despite claims by the school that it was open to everyone through effort. The conflict between the school's official and unofficial discourses of success left girls confused about how they should actually achieve at school. The emphasis on effort meant that success was often experienced by the girls as boundless, as something that could always be improved upon because they could always try harder.

---

Achievement was described by some of the girls as an 'X factor' – a mysterious and unknown quality that people either did or did not possess and a quality that no one really knew how to access.

However, these discourses of success were also infused by discourses of class and gender; the girls' 'biographical' identities also interacted with their identities as students/learners (Youdell 2006). Indeed, in many cases the girls' positioning as high-achievers appeared to contradict their identities as girls. It appeared that those girls who cited 'masculine' discourses of individual and competitive achievement could be 'ideal achievers', but not 'ideal pupils' or 'ideal girls', and that those girls who cited hyper-feminine discourses of collaborative behaviour could be 'ideal pupils' and 'ideal girls' but not 'ideal achievers'. As Youdell (2006) suggests, the discursive practices that constitute identities can also be traps; there are inevitably costs and losses involved in every performance. Social class was also found to complicate these positions further, meaning that many of the 'lower middle-class' or 'common' girls in my study struggled to access any of these ideals. Although these girls were never described as failures, they often experienced their achievements in this way, for as Lucey *et al* (2002) maintain, failure was demanded of them. Inevitably, someone in the school had to fail for others to be able to succeed.

Of course the girls were not idle in their 'identity work', for they were able to deploy discursive agency and to (re)perform and (re)constitute their discursive positionings. A number of strategies were used by the girls in order to 'balance' their identities as girls and as high-achievers. Humour, in particular, has been mentioned in this chapter as an important tool that the girls used to manoeuvre themselves into more powerful positions; as a tool used to revalue otherwise devalued identities. The girls were also able to cite a number of different discourses in the constitution of their identities as middle-class, high-achieving girls. Interestingly, there were a number of girls in my study who cited traditionally 'masculine' discourses in their struggles to succeed at school. Perhaps as Walkerdine *et al* (2001) suggest, this was an option that was made more readily available to the girls in a single-sex environment. Indeed, as McLeod (2002) argues, a number of 'newer' discourses have emerged in society today; femininity is being de-traditionalised and there are more options open to girls in their 'identity work'. And yet, at the same time, she suggests, femininity is being

rearticulated in ways that make contradictory demands of girls: to be both social and autonomous (and individual and collaborative learners).

Finally, we may well ask why it is that so many of these girls continued to try hard at school if there were so many problems for them. As Walkerdine *et al* (2001:186) suggest, one answer may be that a:

...Huge investment in success covers over the terror of its opposite. That what is defended against is the fear of falling off the edge of rationality and into the darkness of those held to be in the pit of unreason, the dark force of the masses...After all, if the working-class is rapidly splintering and changing, with part of it becoming the non-working underclass, with the middle-class containing complex defences against falling off the edge, these young women's impossible rebellion must carry all those defences – they can not be allowed to be seen to fail. It does seem as if their only course is to become both very clever and very beautiful.

As these authors propose, middle-class girls are made to follow a very narrow path to success - a path which has been determined over history, a kind of 'conveyor belt' from which girls are not allowed to depart at any cost. This 'pathway' has also been described by other authors as an 'educational habitus'; as certain personal dispositions that middle-class students inhabit (such as aspiration, self concept and a positive perception of schooling) and that help them to progress in their education at school (Nash 2002, Connolly 2005).

I too would like to hold onto the notion of 'educational habitus' as a way of explaining the girls' experiences of success in my research. First, it enables a simultaneous understanding of the girls' similar social positionings and also their very different experiences of academic achievement. As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, the habitus is both a group and an individual phenomenon. Indeed, for the girls in my study, there were definite ways in which their experiences of social life were similar to those of their classmates (due to their group habitus – their similar positioning and trajectory through social space). However, there were also a number of ways in which the girls' experiences differed from one another (especially their experiences of academic achievement) and this can be explained by their individual habitus (due to the different volumes of capital each girl was able to deploy and the very different trajectories that they made through social space to reach these similar social

positions). Secondly, the concept of 'educational habitus' also allows us to examine why success was so hard for the girls in my study to access and experience as their own; and to understand the discursive barriers that continued to prevent them from feeling successful from a very young age .

Indeed, the concept of habitus enables us to understand that the girls' identities as achievers changed across time, that they shifted and developed through their interaction in different fields (the best example of this change probably being illustrated through the 'new' girls' experiences of private education). However, it also helps us to understand that their identities involved a certain degree of fixity, as deep-rooted identities that contained some elements of continuity. As Bourdieu (1987) suggests, the habitus does not remain the same throughout history: it is a habitus 'divided against itself' that changes due to its interaction with different fields. And yet it is also a habitus that contains elements of fixity for although, over time, discourses continue to overwrite one another, they continually collide with one another and shape the possibilities of what one can be.

It is only through this concept of 'educational habitus' that we can begin to explore some of the reasons why these high-achieving girls felt so uneasy with academic success despite their achievements; to explore why they felt that they could 'never really be successful'. In the words of one of the girls:

It's like...well...you feel you have always been defined in this way as a low achiever. Well...I mean...I suppose not always because I did do well in school when I was young...I was teacher's pet in Year Two! But since then I have really struggled to succeed in school. I can never get any better however hard I try...I think I can never be a good student. It really makes me worry sometimes. Sometimes I think: what can I do? What can I be if I do not achieve? I am just stuck!

(Ingrid – Year Six interviews, June 2004)

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter has focused on the heavy demands made by the teachers, parents and peers of these girls to achieve academic success in 'conditions of their own making'. The chapter has also shown, however, how inevitably fragile and performative

---

academic success is, and how utterly dependent it is upon classed and gendered distinctions; meaning that even in this school people had to 'fail' in order for others to achieve. The next chapter will continue with this theme of success, turning to examine the girls' experiences of 'embodied' rather than 'intellectual' success.

## Chapter Six

### Embodying success: the (im)possibilities of active girlhood

The young girl learns actively to hamper her movements. She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous to her. Thus she develops a bodily timidity, which increases with age. In assuming herself a girl she takes herself up as fragile.

Young (1980:153)

Sport is *so* important to me...it is like my whole life! I do every sport, I don't mind what it is, I just love to do physical things...every night when I get home it is just sport, sport, sport, sport, sport!

(Abigail - Year Six interviews, June 2004)

#### Introduction

A long and publicly celebrated history of male sporting achievement exists in contemporary society - reflected, for example, in the historical accounts of the early (male-only) Olympics but also in the intense media coverage that surrounds male football matches today. Similarly, within sociology there exists a long history of male sporting achievement, as Hargreaves (2005:5) suggests: 'most histories and sociologies of sports, as well as popular books on sport, are written by men about male sports'. Again this is not just something that has only happened historically, but also something that continues to exist today, with, for example, a number of articles focusing on the importance of sport (and in particular football) for masculine identity formation (see for example, Skelton 2000). There has been much less written about women's involvement in sport, and perhaps even less written about girls' involvement in physical activities. Where accounts of girls do exist they have tended to focus on their involvement in dance practices rather than in other more mainstream sporting activities, and even then dance has been a topic subject to academic ridicule - regarded as not worthy of serious sociological thought (McRobbie 1991).

It is only since the 1960's (and due to the impact of feminism in this era) that girls' sporting activities have been shown some serious interest within sociological literature. Most of this work has been completed by feminists who have done an important job in highlighting the historical involvement of women and girls in sport.

Contrary to popular conception, these studies have shown sport to be an activity that women have been a part of for some time now and in a variety of ways (Cahn 1994, Jones 2000, Hargreaves 1994). Yet as Scraton and Flintoff (2002) suggest, unfortunately even some of this work can be criticised for being essentialist and harmful, because it has tended to focus on trying to prove that sports do not masculinise female participants, and as such has perpetuated a number of unhelpful stereotypes. In addition, as Hargreaves (2000) suggests, this work has sometimes assumed that the women involved in sport form a homogeneous group sharing similar cultural backgrounds, which in itself has led to a different kind of exclusion from sport for many females.

More recently, however, a number of authors have begun to re-focus their attention on the involvement of girls and women in sport (Hargreaves 2000, Wright and Dewar 1996, Wheaton and Tomlinson 1997). Scraton (1992, 2004), for example, although having focused on young girls' sporting activities for some time now, has recently turned her attention to consider the issue of young girls' after-school sporting activities. In a similar manner, both Hunt (2004) and Garrett (2004) have focused on young girls' sporting achievements, however their work has been concerned with more formal, school-based achievement. In all of these accounts, the body and identity formation have been taken up as significant topics of concern, reflecting the central position that the body and identity formation have taken in other areas of sociological interest due to the impact of feminism, Foucauldian thought and post-structural theory.

### *Aims of the chapter*

This chapter aims to bring 'physically active' and 'sporting' bodies to the forefront of my own research; to describe and differentiate the bodies that were discovered in the course of my research and to explore what these bodies permitted and limited in terms of the identities that the girls were able to perform (Paechter 2006b). Of course, the body can not simply be separated out in this chapter, away from the analyses presented in the other chapters, for the body appears in all of this work. In the first chapter, for example, the girls' bodies were discussed in terms of the different bodily practices that they invested in and the discourses that they cited and inscribed in the

constitution of their identities. This is a theme that will be returned to in the next chapter, where the girls' investments in traditionally 'feminine' bodily practices (such as make-overs and pampering) will be explored alongside their changing experiences of the body as they 'grew up' and moved schools. The last chapter also examined the relatively docile and disciplined bodily practices that the girls engaged in within the formal school; their 'deskbound' experiences of academic achievement. Together all of these chapters seek to focus on the 'schooled body', a subject that is often thought to be overlooked due to the concern that education pays to the 'mind' rather than the 'body' (Paechter 2006b).

This chapter, however, will focus on the movement of bodies and the physical culture of the school. In particular the chapter will focus on the sport and dance practices that these girls were involved in. Of course, there were many ways in which the girls were active in school beyond these 'official' subjects – in drama, in the playground and in extra-curricular clubs. However, sport and dance were activities that appeared to be particularly synonymous with the school's aims for physical education - based on discourses of health, fitness and physical training. They were also often the only activities that were deemed 'acceptable' by the school as 'respectable' ways of achieving 'all-round' success, and physical as well as cultural capital. On the surface it may appear that these two subjects are substantially different. Sport (although including a wide variety of activities) has often been described as an aggressive and competitive activity that is technical and regimented (Bramham 2003). Dance, on the other hand, has been described as an expressive art form that is exploratory in nature and allows for free bodily movement (Novack 1993). And, although the chapter will examine the girls' different experiences of these activities, especially in terms of 'feminine acceptability' in the school, both sport and dance will be examined together in this chapter because of the special status that they had in the school, as prestigious physical activities that were demanded of the girls.

The chapter begins by describing the multiple physical activities and resources available to the girls in this school; it will examine the strong 'sporting' ethos of the school and its emphasis on sporting success. The chapter will then move on to examine the problems that sport and dance held for the girls and the ways in which they were experienced. It will be suggested that, because sport and dance were so



highly valued within the school (by the teachers in the formal school, but especially by pupils in the informal culture of the school), the girls felt that this was yet another way in which they had to prove themselves; yet another activity in which they had to achieve in. The chapter will also examine the ways in which this situation was further complicated by a mind/body split of importance in school subjects. It will explore the ways in which the girls felt that physical activity was demanded of them by their parents, teachers and peers, but simultaneously devalued and treated as insignificant because of the higher value placed on academic achievement. It will be suggested that even when sports and dance were valued by the school, only certain activities were deemed to be acceptable for the girls to participate in. In this school, sport and dance were heavily circumscribed by dominant classed and gendered discourses of middle-class, feminine acceptability. Active girlhood, then, will be described as a real, material possibility for these girls, as they had a number of resources available to them and were able to compete in a number of different sports. However, a successful, active physical identity will also be examined as a real impossibility for these girls as they struggled to negotiate femininity in a traditionally masculine subject (and within a traditionally feminine, yet undervalued subject), and to negotiate physical success in a school that predominantly valued academic success.

### **Sporting success?**

The quotation used at the beginning of this chapter is illustrative of the findings of a number of academic studies that have sought to explore girls' experiences of physical education. Within sports sociology a number of authors have commented on the heavy restrictions that women face in their involvement in sport. Within educational research, authors have also suggested that girls often struggle to get involved in school-based physical activity and that even when they do they are likely to suffer from a negative body image (Scraton 2001, Wright 1996, Garrett 2004, Evans and Penney 2002). Despite the fact that many of these studies are relatively new and perhaps more optimistic than previous studies, (noting some of the positive changes that may have occurred) judgement is still reserved about the possibilities that exist for girls in physical education today. Hargreaves (2004), for example, believes that even though there is a need to celebrate the gains made by women in sport (and girls in physical education) we still need to place these positive images alongside broader

struggles for social justice. Similarly, Scraton (2001) suggests that we need to be aware of the 'real void' that still exists between the theorising (that occurs in sports sociology) and the real world (of physical activity) that most of us inhabit.

The girls' experiences of physical education in my study did appear, however, to substantially differ from these 'negative' reports. As the quotation from Abigail (at the beginning of this chapter) demonstrates, physical activity was celebrated in this school as a considerable success story of multiple physical achievements. Although competitive sport has often been marked out as a traditionally masculine activity (as a hallmark of male hegemonic power and a principal activity used in the constitution of acceptable masculine identities, Bramham 2003) it was an unusually important activity in this single-sex girls' school.

From very early on in my study I was struck by the prestigious status that subjects like sport and dance had within the school and by the girls' eagerness to participate in these formally organised physical activities. At the end of the study, as I asked the girls about the importance of sport and dance in their lives and I commented on the number of times they had been mentioned across the research, the girls joked with me, one saying: 'Wow Alex! It must have been really hard for you to work out that sport is so important to us...I mean we only mention it every other sentence!' Indeed the girls' 'love of sport' was a common theme to crop up in interviews. It was also a topic that the girls persistently tried to capture in their photographic diaries, where even in these photographic stills the girls tried to represent themselves as 'on the go', active' and adventurous' (see figures 6.1 and 6.2). The following photographs represent a few of the ways in which the girls tried to capture their 'sporty personalities'.

Unfortunately, because they do not portray the girls actively participating in sport, they fail to represent the physically demanding and active 'bodily' nature of these activities. However, they do represent the girls' passionate investments in physical activities and their pride at having achieved in them:



Figure: 6.1. *'I am very sporty. I love all have sports but I think I am really good at tennis'*



Figure: 6.2. *'My gymnastic medals – I won one every year!'*

In school time the girls were offered a range of sporting activities to participate in (including football, tennis, rugby, aerobics, gymnastics, dance and swimming). After school many of them were also involved in extra-curricular sports clubs (often national and international sporting squads as well). The school certainly prided itself on the resources that it had made available to the girls and on the girls' 'outstanding achievements'. The following extract is just one example of an official occasion where the girls were recognised for their talents in sport:

Mrs Butler (the junior school PE teacher) came in this afternoon to tell the girls that they are all invited to a rounders match at the end of the week to celebrate their sporting achievements in the junior school. She tells them that this will be followed by a small party where she will be their host and will provide them with refreshments as a form of thanking them for their efforts. She then goes on to tell the girls that they will all be receiving certificates in an end of term assembly for their participation in extra-curricular clubs. Abigail in particular is at pains to make sure she reminds Mrs Butler just how many clubs she has been a part of. Half in jest, she turns to me and says: that should mean I get more than a hundred certificates!

(Field note extract July 2004)

Like the boys in a number of other academic studies (Renold 2001, Bramham 2003, Connolly 1998), the girls in this school were marked out as 'exceptional' achievers in sport; their achievements were heralded as 'extraordinary', not only because the girls regularly exceeded normal 'feminine' expectations but also because they were often seen to be achieving 'as well as' or 'even better than most boys'. All in all it appeared that these girls were gaining a tremendous amount of social, cultural and physical capital from their investments in physical activities. By participating in sport and dance they received official recognition from their parents, teachers and a host of

professional organisations. However, importantly they also gained respect, admiration and popularity from their peers. Sport, the girls told me was the only 'really fun' lesson that they could participate in within the school. It was the only subject regarded by the girls as a 'popular' subject; a subject where the girls felt they could achieve highly without fear of being positioned as 'uncool' or 'geeky'.

*Pressure to perform: achieving embodied ideals*

Even though physical education was often marked out as a 'fun' lesson by the girls, and physical activities were regarded to be enjoyable leisure pursuits, the pressures the girls felt to participate in these activities, at times, seemed to undercut these pleasures. It has often been argued that sport is a subject where bodies come to the forefront as the 'central instrument for expression of skill'; a lesson where bodies are evaluated and subjected to the gaze of others in their performances (Garrett 2004). In my study it was certainly the case that the girls felt pressured to perform in sports and to achieve certain bodily ideals, as my field notes illustrate:

After break today I was left thinking about the importance that sport holds for these girls. This is not just something that is reflected in the clubs and matches that they participate in but also in their leisure activities. Today's lunchtime volleyball match particularly illustrated this for me. It was a particularly exhausting activity as I was asked to be the girls' referee. Not only did the girls get very angry with each other when certain rules were broken but they also got 'mad' with me when I was not seen to be upholding the rules properly. At one point one of the girls was asked to leave the match because she was told by her team mates that her skills were simply not good enough! Not only did this activity seem very exclusive but it also seemed to be taken incredibly seriously, especially for a lunchtime 'mess-about'!

(Field note extract, July 2004)

For some girls it was not enough just to take part in sport for the 'fun' of participating, there was also a need to compete to win. Amanda, for example, was one girl in my study who was an extremely talented tennis player. Despite claiming to enjoy tennis she also spoke about the immense pressure she felt to keep her achievements up. In interviews Amanda told me about the three hour training sessions that she attended after school, the weekends she devoted to training and the holidays she spent in 'top-class' training camps. By senior school the pressure of balancing sport with her

academic achievements was beginning to show, as this interview extract demonstrates:

AA: What do you think is the hardest thing about being at school?

Amanda: Homework...it is hard to get it all done...it takes up all my time...like I have to do it when I get back from tennis. Like tonight I have got tennis 5.30 to 8 and then I have to go back to my house, cos it's not really anywhere near. Then I have got to get all my homework done cos I can't do it in the car when it is moving. It gets on my nerves cos I finish my work at about midnight and don't get to bed until after that time...it is hard...I would prefer to have more free time.

(Year Seven interviews, January 2005)

Similarly, Abigail was an extremely skilful dancer. She was a keen member of the Delia Charlesworth school of dance (which I am told is an 'exclusive and talented', but 'extremely expensive' dance club) and had performed in and won a number of different international competitions. Again, although Abigail talked about the tremendous pleasure that she gained from dancing (of dancing alongside friends, escaping school work and developing a skill) she also talked about the pressures of having to achieve:

Well I help the little ones and I have five hours myself on Fridays and it is eleven to five most Saturdays too! On a Sunday I sometimes do three hours and I don't really have a chance to do homework and have friends round or chill or anything. On Wednesdays it is really horrible because it finishes so late and to be honest by the time you have finished your homework it is about ten.

(Analysis groups, March 2005)

But for Abigail it was not just the dance practice that 'stressed her out', it was also the performances:

Sometimes I get a bit stressed with dance shows, like in one of them that we did last year there were ten of my family in the second row and they just kept on staring at me and I couldn't concentrate on what I was doing cos they kept looking at me and putting their thumbs up or down depending on how I was doing. I just couldn't help but look at them...I mean I did do the dance but it made me stressed and really put me off.

(Analysis groups, March 2005)

Indeed, a number of authors have commented on the importance of performance in dance (see Roman *et al* 1988). Gvion (2005) in particular suggests that dance is

primarily a bodily performance; a bodily practice that depends on public consumption and audience appreciation for its rewards. For Abigail, as for many of the women in Gvion's (2005) study, dance was a way to prove bodily skill and to gain acceptance and reassurance in bodily terms. Yet it was also a practice that constantly demanded more from her; perfection was a moving target that meant she was constantly under pressure to prove and improve her self.

Jon Evans and his colleagues (2004, 2005), in their work exploring young girl's experiences of anorexia, have also recognised the importance of performance in bodily practices and the immense pressures that girls face to achieve in school in embodied terms. Though talking mainly in terms of physical appearance rather than physical activity, these authors suggest that a strict performative and managerialist culture exists in schools today; that both students and teachers are continuously judged in schools for their effectiveness. People are defined, they claim, by 'states of performance and perfection which can never be reached, by the illusion, which always recedes, of an end in change'. People, they also suggest, are valued only on the surface and only for their visible and demonstrable achievements. In this culture, then, the body becomes another form of value in school; another way of achieving performances to meet the criteria of excellence demanded of them. In my research, like in Evans *et al's* (2004) study, a strict performance culture could be understood to exist in the school. This was not based purely on academic achievement (although as the last chapter has demonstrated this was certainly a strong focus) for it was also based on embodied achievement. To succeed in school as 'all-round achievers' the girls had to succeed in both academic and embodied terms. Sport presented yet another opportunity for the girls to achieve; a way of achieving physical capital as well as the cultural capital gained from formal academic achievements.

### **'It's not my fault I can't do it, I'm just no good at sport!': bodies that fail**

Because of the pressures to succeed in sport and dance, many of the girls were extremely anxious about potentially failing this subject. Ella, for example, was one girl who talked about the problem of not being particularly gifted in dance and the pressures of keeping up with her peers:

- AA: What do you especially like about dancing?  
Ella: It is definitely not so good if you are pathetic. You have to be good at it.  
Gene: You don't have to be really good but you have to try your best.  
Ella: But it can be quite hard sometimes to always be trying to do your best and then have someone shout at you to tell you to try harder.  
Abi: Yeah but you have to try and be good or there is no point. Like there are these three girls at dance club and I don't know why they bother coming because they stand at the back in their tarty clothes and chat instead of doing any dancing.  
Ella: I do quite enjoy the dancing and it keeps you fit but I would probably enjoy it even more if I was any good at it.

In both school and leisure time Ella found it hard to enjoy dance because she felt that she did not measure up to her peers. In this interview Ella was trying hard to negotiate a space for herself amongst her friends as a 'less-skilled' dancer; as someone who achieved 'less well' than her peers. Yet she struggled to negotiate this position for herself, for as she tried to claim this identity her friends took the possibility away from her, claiming that it is only 'other' ('tarty') girls (from outside of the school) who fail and that she must still try and prove herself. The extract, therefore, demonstrates the girls' tremendous fear of failure and the fact that it could rarely ever be claimed as an intelligible identity within the school. In this instance, although Ella does not claim to be a failure she is reprimanded by her friends for even entertaining the thought as a possibility and for claiming that she is slightly less successful than them. Physical failure (like academic failure) was an impossible position for the girls in this school; an identity that could not be inhabited by these girls but only by lazy, underachieving others.

Ingrid was another girl who also spoke about the pressures of being watched in sport and of the body being found to be lacking. Ingrid told me in several discussions that sport was the most important thing in her life; that it was what she wanted to be 'known for'. It was also, however, a subject that she struggled to be recognised in. In one particular lesson I observed for myself just how distressing this 'lack of success' was for her. The lesson was supposed to be a time set aside for 'creativity', a time when the girls were encouraged to explore and realise their bodies' 'flexible potential'. Despite this emphasis, however, the lesson soon turned into a competition amongst the girls as to who could do the most sophisticated moves and as to who could get the most teacher attention. Ingrid practiced her moves patiently as she

---

waited for the teacher to come and observe her efforts and when the teacher did eventually reach Ingrid she praised her for her enthusiastic attempt at a cartwheel, but suggested that her legs were slightly out of sync and that she should try and align her body more accurately. Although this was a relatively small (and seemingly constructive) criticism, it was a devastating blow for Ingrid, who found it too much to be found lacking in front of her peers. For the rest of the lesson I sat with Ingrid as she cried to me, explaining her own feelings about the event and angrily accusing her teachers of never recognising her 'real' potential.

Ingrid was, however, fairly talented at most sports and many of her peers experienced their bodies as 'failing' far more than her. Some of the girls, for example, struggled hard in their lessons to become confident swimmers. Most of the class were extremely talented swimmers because of their involvement in water sports from an early age. Some girls, however, had to be given extra training in lessons and had been placed in a lower group away from their peers until they had 'caught up'. These girls were often extremely embarrassed to be seen as 'different' and at points their embarrassment would result in their parents coming into school to meet the teachers, demanding that they had to be taken out of the bottom group so that they were not treated differently from their classmates. In a school where sport was taken so seriously by the girls and where subjectivities were clearly constructed around being 'sporty' or 'not sporty', these girls experienced their bodies as inadequate, failing and humiliating (Garrett 2004). Their failure was perhaps inevitable; as was the case in academic achievement, someone had to achieve lower results in order for others to succeed. Yet even in this situation failure was not accepted by the girls or by their parents, who went to great lengths to protect them from this potentially injurious identity.

### *Fat free PE*

And yet, even these girls were not regarded by their peers as complete 'failures' in sport. Often their 'avoidance' strategies worked and they appeared to be able to 'pass' themselves off as relatively successful achievers. Some of the girls did not get their parents involved in their struggles and had their own (conscious or unconscious) strategies to deal with these difficult situations. In fact some of these girls were remarkably thin and so although they were not able to be recognised as successful



swimmers they were still able to be recognised as 'sporty' because (they told me) of their 'healthy' looking physiques. In a similar way to the girls in Renold's (2005) study, many of the girls in my study were able to gain a tremendous amount of physical capital due to their small bodily weight; they appeared to be able to use the discourse of 'not being thin enough' in playful and pleasurable ways, knowing that they were 'really skinny' and being able to mark themselves out from their 'fatter' peers.

Indeed, it was the girls who appeared to inhabit a larger bodily size that often found it much harder to avoid the feeling of bodily inadequacy or humiliation. A number of authors have written about the 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin 1983) and the 'cult of thinness' (Garrett 2004) that is so apparent and yet so normalised in western society. In this school thinness was also upheld as a bodily ideal and girls spent a great deal of time monitoring themselves and each other to see how their bodies fitted with these ideal norms (Renold 2005). Although 'fat' bodies were deemed generally unacceptable in any area of schooling, the girls particularly talked about the need for a slim physique in sport. Students who were able to take up positions as slim and fit individuals accrued a tremendous amount of capital in the school and were often those recognised by PE teachers as 'good pupils' (Hunter 2005). Being thin was not something that was explicitly promoted by the school. A number of the teachers were aware of the teasing that girls endured because of their weight and worked hard to counter the negative messages that they felt these girls received from their peers.

However, as the work of Evans *et al* (2004) suggests, often these ideals were far more subtly embedded in the school culture. Indeed in recent years, these authors believe, there has been a shift in thinking in physical education, resulting in a move away from concerns in repairing the physical body to notions of 'healthism'. As discourses of children's health have become a cause for national concern ( in terms of obesity and non-activity, reflected in National Health reports - e.g. Brown *et al* 2006, and popular reality television programmes<sup>1</sup>) physical education has become reoriented as a project

---

<sup>1</sup> Examples of these popular television programmes include: 'Unfit Kids' (a television programme hosted by Ian Wright aiming to reduce the body weight of eight children through an after-school sports club) and certain episodes of 'You are what you eat' (a television programme hosted by Gillian McKeith, a nutritionist who aims to get families to reduce their body weights by eating healthier).

of health promotion and prevention, with the aim of making people more active, fit and thin. As Macdonald *et al* (2005) suggest, even very young children are now expected to partake in projects of bodily maintenance; health has become the responsibility of the individual.

In my research I was certainly able to witness lessons where the girls were being taught to take responsibility for their own health. Although bodily size was never explicitly discussed in these classes, the girls did talk to me in interviews about the ways in which they would actively take responsibility for their own weight. The girls' participation in the cancer charity event, the 'race for life'<sup>2</sup>, is a particularly good example of the personal investments that the girls made in their bodily maintenance. As King (1993) has suggested, the race for life can be viewed as a classic example of governmentality; of people taking their health and charity into their own hands without active coercion. In preparation for the race, King (1993) suggests, not only do participants take responsibility for themselves as 'civically active citizens' in raising money for charity, but they also commit themselves to 'biological self betterment' as they take responsibility for their own health in training to run. During the photographic workshop that ran as a part of my research, I also noticed how the girls took responsibility for their own bodies in their pictures - disregarding any shots that they felt made them look 'too fat' and stating that they would 'go on diets immediately' to rectify the problem.

In one interview the girls also told me about Elsie, a girl in their class who they had decided was overweight and unhealthy. Although Elsie had promised the girls that she would go on a diet and partake in more exercise, the girls told me that she never fulfilled her promises. They had decided, therefore, to take matters into their own hands. From the beginning of the week the girls had put Elsie on a strict diet of apples, oranges and water and they were making her do three laps of the field everyday. Every morning Elsie was made to report to the girls for her exercise plan, if she could not do it for herself they told me, they would have to take responsibility for her. What Elsie's case study demonstrates is the ways in which these discourses of

---

These issues are also reflected in the recent programmes by Jamie Oliver (a famous chef) which aim to make school dinners healthier for children.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Race for life' is a woman-only, five kilometre race, held yearly in different venues across the nation to raise money for the cancer charity 'Cancer Research UK'.

health and fitness were taken up by the girls' own peer group and reinforced at the micro-level of the school. It shows the intense surveillance that the girls were subject to in their daily bodily practices and in their maintenance of slim and 'healthy' physiques. The girls in this school invested heavily in these discourses and in practices of bodily transformation; their bodies were to be viewed as projects of self-improvement that needed constant work in order for them to succeed (physically) in the future.

Of course, not all of the girls in my study who were somewhat larger than their classmates experienced their bodies as failure. Gayle, for example, was one girl who, like some of the girls in Hunter's (2005) study, was able to 'slip between good and bad positions' with regards her weight and depending on her 'engagement in various discursive spaces'. In one conversation that I witnessed between Gayle and her friend Ingrid, Gayle was told that she was 'fat, lazy and stupid'. In response to these insults Gayle told her friend: 'Ha ha, you are wrong! I am not fat I am just lumpy! I am not lazy either... just because I don't do sports at school doesn't mean I don't do them at home. I'm a member of the national sailing squad for goodness sake!'

Gayle's talk in this instance illustrates the alternative discourses that some girls were able to draw on to counter being positioned as fat or lazy (Renold 2005). Momentarily Gayle was able to open a space for her to be bodily 'otherwise' – as an achieving student with a less than perfect body. Yet it was Gayle's skill in sport that allowed her to position herself in this way; that effectively allowed her 'fat' to be overlooked. And even as Gayle positioned herself as 'otherwise' she appeared to reinforce the very discourses that she disrupted, for as she talked she reinforced the slender body as a project that can not be abandoned and has to be worked on, even if in alternative ways. As she continued to participate in sport she was complicit in reproducing these discourses. In Hunter's (2005) words: by 'misrecognising' that sport was good for her health and therefore worthy of participation, Gayle justified its dominance in school culture. Even as a student who was unable to take up a legitimate subject position as 'properly sporty' she was complicit in reproducing these discourses albeit, as Hunter (2005) suggests, as a target of symbolic violence.

It is hard to overestimate the feeling of failure that some girls experienced in bodily terms because of their size. Elsie and Gayle did not really speak to me openly about their feelings. Instead these girls often used humour as a device to deflect criticism. Just as some of the girls used humour to re-value their success in academic terms, so these girls used humour to re-value and reposition the ways in which their bodies could be seen. Elsie, in particular, joked with her classmates that it was not her fault that she was bad at sport, it was just the way that she was born: 'Flamingos cannot fly and Elsie's cannot run...it's a natural fact!' There were some girls in the class, however, who did talk to me openly about their experiences of 'being fat'. A couple of the girls in the class, for example, told me that they felt abandoned and isolated because of their weight – they were convinced that their bodily weight was the source of their unpopularity. In PE lessons these girls would sometimes use, what other authors have referred to as, 'passive avoidance strategies'; by avoiding participation in PE they were effectively able to avoid discursive constitution as failures (Garrett 2004). These girls would also talk to me on a regular basis about the ways in which they tried to control their eating habits. I have numerous field note entries remarking upon conversations with them where they discussed the fat content of various items with me and where they told me that they were 'not going to eat today' because they had to lose weight. There was one particular occasion, however, that highlighted for me the intense shame that some of these girls experienced because of their size:

I am sat on a table eating my lunch today chatting to some of the girls when suddenly Abigail and Jennifer rush over to tell me that I will have to come quickly because one of their classmates (Maria) is 'kicking off' at the other girls on their table. I look around for the class teacher to see if she can sort out the problem but as she is nowhere to be seen I decide to go and sit with the girls myself to see what is happening. When I go to the table all of the girls have left and I am not able to find Maria until considerably later on in the lunch hour. When I do find her she is alone crying and she tells me an incredibly different story from her classmates. She tells me that she did not like what was on offer for lunch so she had asked the cook to make her a sandwich instead. When she had returned to the table with her lunch the other girls had started to pick on her, telling her that there were people starving in the world so how could she possibly stuff her face with so much bread. Feeling so bad about these comments she had left the table and gone without her lunch.

(Field note extract, July 2004)

Whatever the 'truth' of this incident (if indeed there is one to be found) this story illustrates the distinct sense of shame (the distinct feelings of personal inadequacy or

insufficiency, Frost 2001) that was brought on some girls for not embodying specific slender bodily norms. Maria was not in fact what most people would regard as fat - she was larger than her classmates but taller rather than fatter. Yet her larger build was interpreted by her classmates as 'fat' and this was regarded to be an outward sign of her own bodily neglect. Maria, like some of the other 'larger' girls in her class, was seen by her classmates to have actively chosen her large bodily size and so the girls felt that this decision merited her isolation. The eating practices that Maria developed can, therefore, be seen as a way of her attempting to reassert some control over her body; an attempt to achieve something with her body and a way of proving to others that she was not morally deficient (Evans *et al* 2004). Although Maria was not confirmed to me as an anorexic at the time of my study, I believe that the following quote from the work of Evans *et al* (2004) reflect her experiences. As these authors suggest:

The anorexic avoids the shameful world of eating, while simultaneously achieving personal power and a sense of moral superiority through the emaciated body. Their attempt at disembodiment through negation becomes the symbol of their moral empowerment.

As Evans *et al* (2004) propose, 'fat' is not a feeling or even a disease (in this case it was hard to see that any fat even existed!) but is a social construct: a dominant classed and gendered discourse that states that those found to be 'fat' are also to be found 'wanting'. Maria could in fact be described as traditionally feminine and attractive, with blue eyes and long blonde hair neatly tied back into plaits. Yet Maria was constantly denied a 'girly girl' subject position by the other girls in her class. They told me that she could never be girly because she was 'too fat to wear girly clothes properly'. Found to be fat, Maria was also found to be lacking femininity and class. Fat was a moral issue (of excess, waste and laziness) for these girls and as Skeggs (2004) suggests morality is always linked to gender and class; excess has always been linked to the 'immoral' working-class and discipline and restraint has been reserved for the 'morally superior' middle-class.

#### **The acceptability and respectability of achieving in sport:**

Although (as the last sections have shown) the girls were clearly expected to succeed in sport and dance at school and to achieve certain 'healthy' bodily ideals, it could not

be suggested that this was the primary aim of the school. In fact, what made achieving in physical activity far more complicated for the girls was the fact that they felt sport was not entirely valued by the school. Sport and dance were both subjects that the girls could not take at examination level. Although the teachers claimed that there were 'good reasons for this', because they did not want to 'take the fun out of the subjects' the girls clearly felt differently, as this next extract demonstrates:

Genella: Our school is considered academic and musical rather than sporty.

Poppy: It is funny because if you look at all the girls in this school then you will see that they are all good at sport.

Genella: Yeah and I asked my Mum why we do not have sports scholarships at school and she said it was because the school wants us to be academic and not sporty...but other private schools do them...it is not fair! Compared to other schools are facilities are not that good either. Compared to them we can never be the best, we are not allowed.

The girls talked in a way that suggested that there was a mind/body split over the importance of subjects in school; where academic subjects of the 'mind' took precedence over those of the 'body' (Flintoff and Scraton 2001). This was an idea that was also expressed in the school's end of year annual report, where the school claimed to have taken a greater interest in physical education more recently, in addition to their focus on academic studies. Phrased in this way, PE seemed to be a subject that was added onto the school's curriculum; a subject that was not taken as seriously as other academic subjects but was regarded as yet another 'value-added' benefit that this private school could offer its students in a time where all schools were being forced to compete for their place in the education market (Meadmore *et al* 2002).

The girls also told me that even when sport was 'taken seriously' by the school, only certain sports were recognised and valued. The girls told me that often the sports that were valued by the school were those that concentrated on technical training (the control of the body through the mind) rather than those that were practiced for sheer physical pleasure. The girls felt unable to participate in just any physical activity that they fancied; instead, they told me that their activities had to be officially recognised by the school in order to be rewarded.

*Elite and exclusive – classed and gendered sporting activities*

At first glance the girls' conversations about the sports that were 'acceptable' in their school did not appear to mention either class or gender, as this next extract demonstrates:

Abi: I really love football and rugby....did you watch the match last night? I have all the pictures of sexy footballers in my locker and I try to see all of the matches on TV. I just wish I was allowed to go and see the matches really being played.

Gene: Yeah I wish we could learn more about football at school. I mean we are allowed to play it at school in year nine but I think that is only because someone has offered to come into the school to teach us.

Abi: Yeah we don't get much teaching in school...it is so unfair...and there is no football club.

(Analysis groups, March 2005)

Yet there were far more to these conversations than first seemed apparent and as they progressed the girls talked to me more and more about their suspicions that these sports 'choices' were inherently classed and gendered. As one girl told me: 'I just sometimes wonder whether they think some sports aren't classy enough for us to do... in our school it is almost like the teachers try and think of the weirdest sports possible just so that we do different things from other schools'. The girls' talk appeared to reflect Bourdieu's (1989: 214) notions of the distinct class based nature of sport, for as he suggested:

To understand the class distinction of various sports, one would have to take account of the reputation which in, terms of their specific schemes of perception and appreciation, the different classes have of the costs (economic, cultural and 'physical') and benefits attached to the different sports – immediate or deferred 'physical' benefits (health, beauty, strength, whether visible through body-building or invisible through 'keep-fit' exercises), economic and social benefits linked to the distributional or positional value of each sports considered...

In other interviews the girls talked more explicitly about the distinct class-based nature of sports in school; they spoke of having to have the 'correct equipment' to participate in sports at school (of having the correct economic capital to invest in these activities). They also spoke to me about having to have prior knowledge of these activities; of having the correct cultural capital in order to succeed (even if this just meant knowing which way up to hold a lacrosse stick!)

One particularly striking example occurred on the class adventure holiday away. This was a trip that was advertised to the girls (by their teachers) as a leisure holiday; as a reward for their hard work across the year. Although I was left with no doubt that many of the girls did tremendously enjoy themselves on the trip, I was also left with the feeling that there was more to this holiday than relaxation. I began to feel that the choices made about the activities that the girls would participate in on the trip were not incidental. The activities that were chosen for the girls were all 'extreme sports' (canoeing, abseiling, pot-holing, rock climbing and caving) - activities that appeared to demand certain performances of the girls (on the whole persistence and endurance in the face of adversity). It appeared that these performance-based tasks had been chosen for the girls, not just for fun, but because they specifically fitted the girls' existing experiences; they had symbolic significance for these middle-class girls as activities that demanded time, devotion, money and 'flexibility in the face of adversity' (Kay and Laberge 2002, Wilson 2002).

However, out of all the sports that the girls could participate in within the school, the girls told me that ballet was the activity that they felt was most valued and accepted.

As Ella told me in one interview:

Ballet is really popular in this school...almost everyone does it...most people have to do it. I think the younger ones think that it is all pretty and pink and they can be like Angelina Ballerina<sup>3</sup> or something. Like wearing their hair tied back in buns and wearing pink tutus and stuff...like now in the senior school we would not be seen dead in tutu and tights. But they think it is pretty and elegant and I think they think if you do ballet then you can be a proper girl.  
(Year Seven interviews, March 2005)

Although the girls were interested in a variety of different dance genres, ballet, they told me, was the only genre to be officially taught within the school. The girls thought that this was because it was a 'serious' dance form that involved 'brain work as well as leg work'. The girls' ideas here reflect the thoughts of a number of sociological dance theorists, for as Novack (1993) has suggested, ballet has commonly been regarded as a serious, white, upper middle-class art form; as a respectable hobby for girls to be involved in due to the immense technical training and knowledge needed to

---

<sup>3</sup> Angelina Ballerina is a popular children's cartoon (portrayed in books and in films) based around the character of Angelina, a mouse who has a keen interest in ballerina.



be involved in it. Ella's comments on ballet being for 'proper little girls' also reflect these ideas of middle-class respectability, her talk about the elegance of bodies seeming to echo Sherlock's (1989) suggestions that the 'elegant' balletic body is a symbol of a certain classed way of life and that ballet practices form in class specific ways like 'habit' on the surface of the body.

And yet, like these authors Ella does not only speak of the classed nature of dance, for she predominantly concentrates on it in gendered terms. Ella speaks specifically of a young girly femininity that is expected of girls in dance; of a 'graceful' and 'elegant' body, of pink tutus and tights and hair neatly tied back in buns. Even though Ella and many of the other girls in my study were aware of certain changes that had occurred in ballet in recent years (of alternative ballet companies like the self-confessed 'camp' Le Ballet Trockadero de Monte Carlo, and of male ballet dancers like Wayne Sleep who had appeared in a recent popular reality television show) the girls still insisted that ballet was inherently girly. Like Novack (1993) the girls believed that romantic images of the highly feminine slender and graceful ballet dancer still persisted in ballet, embedded as they were in the narratives, techniques and choreography of the dance. In their school, the girls felt that ballet was valued because it was a predominantly hyper-feminine body practice. As the girls told me in one interview:

Gene: Ballet is about being graceful and elegant with your body...that is why we do it. It is about stretching and posture...it is about getting your body shape right out of dance as well as in it. Like some of the older girls that I know who do ballet, wear high heels when they are not dancing so that they can look graceful all the time.

Abi: Ballet is really girly girly.

Gene: Well it is...but can it really be...I mean Isla did ballet...she got all her certificates and she is not girly.

Ella: I am sorry but I can not imagine Isla doing ballet...she just can't...I don't believe it! Ballet is not for tomboys!

(Year Seven interviews, March 2005)

It is interesting to note, how in this conversation, the introduction of Isla's larger, muscly body<sup>4</sup> momentarily interrupts these discourses and appears to clear a space for bodies that are not so acceptably feminine. And yet, within one sentence this possibility is closed down and deemed impossible, reinforcing the elite and exclusive

---

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Isla was also one of the only girls in the class to identify as 'mixed-race' or 'non-white', although the girls did not mention this in this instance it may well have been an influencing factor in their decisions about Isla's suitability to ballet.

nature of ballet as something that can only be performed by a slender few and demonstrating the impossibility that some girls experienced in embodying acceptable femininity even when they achieved in these traditionally feminine practices.

This extract demonstrates the distinct ways in which classed and gendered discourses were inscribed on these girls' balletic bodies. The girls' postures and movements (in and out of their dance lessons) can be read as a form of elegant femininity; the words 'graceful' and 'elegant' simultaneously reflecting the classed and gendered elements of these bodily practices. It was not simply the case that by participating in ballet these girls were passively enacting gendered discourses, for their talk shows the awareness of their existence. And yet as the girls practiced ballet in school they were performing and constituting these identities for themselves. The school's preference for ballet can, then, be seen as more than a simple appreciation of an expressive art form, for it was a distinctly classed and gendered embodied activity that fitted in well with the middle-class, hyper-feminine culture of the school. The girls' investments in ballet were not straightforward either, for it was not an activity that the girls were strictly forced into by the school, nor was it a hobby that they adopted entirely by free choice. Yet the rewards of being involved in such a prestigious practice (and of being seen to embody such a highly feminine identity) were extremely advantageous.

*Beauty or a beast – maintaining femininity in sport:*

Not all of the sporting activities that the girls took part in the school were considered, by the girls, to be as heavily circumscribed by gender as ballet. Other sports such as rounders and basketball were welcomed by the girls as activities that gave them the chance to be 'less girly' and 'more active'. Indeed, compared to ballet many of the girls felt that these sports allowed them a chance to be 'otherwise'; to be 'more like boys' and to 'do the things that boys are allowed to do but girls usually are not'. The tomboys were one group who particularly marked themselves out in this way. Like Kelly *et al's* (2005) skater girls, these girls saw themselves as engaged in an alternative girlhood that was in strict contrast to emphasised femininity. Of course, as Hall (1996) suggests, the term tomboy has always been used to refer to high levels of physical energy expenditure and vigorous outdoor play. A number of other girls in my study also wished to mark themselves out as 'sporty girls' rather than 'girly girls'.

This enabled them, they felt, to maintain a distinction between those girls in their class who were weak (as Ingrid told me: 'you know, the ones who cry when they break a nail') and themselves as active, adventurous and ambitious girls who were always on the go. For these girls in particular, sport appeared to offer them a way to embody a more powerful feminine identity; these girls appeared to invest in sport as a form of 'tomboyism', which allowed them to 'mobilise the tomboy subject position and to participate in associated behaviours as and when it suited them' (Renold 2005).

And yet even within these so-called 'less stereotypically gendered' sports, the girls still appeared to face heavy restraints. For whilst the girls talked about the multiple physical pleasures they experienced in sport they also spoke about the necessity of embodying a hyper-feminine, 'hetero-sexy' look as they participated. As Abigail told me:

Oh yeah you still have to look good when you play sports, some people say you don't but you do really have to make an effort...even if just secretly. I still always try to look a bit girly by wearing my purple joggers and matching top.  
(Year Seven interviews, March 2005)

Indeed, in PE lessons the girls could often be observed pulling up their jogging bottoms to make them look more like 'Kylie Minogue's cropped trousers' or pulling their t-shirts back into knots to make them 'more clingy'. In interviews the girls also talked to me about the impossibility of combining a feminine look with a muscly body:

Abi: You know Kelly Holmes<sup>5</sup> I would have thought she would just wear tracksuits, tracksuits and more tracksuits. In the paper though the other day I saw her wearing a black mini-skirt with these massive blue furry tights and a top up to here and she had loads of make-up on and a tiny handbag! I was just like uuurgghh!

Gene: Yeah I saw Kelly Holmes in Hello magazine and she had this nice black dress on but then on her legs you could just see big muscles that made her just look awful! I love sport but I do not want to get big muscles or man shoulders!

Abi: Yeah you look at her ankles and think she has got nice legs, very girly!

Ella: Ha ha you fancy her!

---

<sup>5</sup> Dame Kelly Holmes was a double-gold Olympic medallist in the summer of 2004. At the time of my research she was in the media a great deal talking about her sporting successes and introducing her autobiography. The girls were also aware of press rumours that Kelly Holmes was dating another female athlete and to a certain extent this knowledge is reflected in their talk.

Abi: No I am not being gay or anything now but if you have a nice miniskirt or a nice top on then you can not have big muscles... girls should just not be like that!

As Hargreaves (2001) has suggested, the muscly body has often been linked to the stereotype of the mannish lesbian athlete – a stereotype that has haunted sport for some time now and has effectively worked to maintain heterosexual femininity by acting as a warning for those who do not perform a traditionally feminine look. The girls in my research also feared being identified in this way, for as they told me, in a single-sex school it is particularly imperative to be seen as heterosexual. In order to avoid a potentially injurious lesbian identity the girls felt compelled to present themselves as overtly heterosexual. Their talk in this extract can be viewed as evidence of the hetero-normative scripts that they used to effectively silence homosexuality and foreclose any possibility of lesbian subjectivities. What this extract illustrates, therefore, is the impossible contradictions that many girls faced in embodying active femininity in a traditionally ‘masculine’ subject. However, it also illustrates the powerful ways in which heterosexuality infused gender in these physical activities to produce a kind of heterosexual sporting contract that seemed to determine how the girls could present themselves. In this school, success in sport could be achieved only by performing an acceptable feminine identity. Femininity, however, could be achieved only through heterosexuality and even then success was never fully guaranteed, for there was always the potential of misfire, backfire or subversion.

## **Discussion**

It is important to recognise the tremendous pleasures that many of the girls in my study experienced from their participation in sport and dance. As Wright and Dewar (1997) suggest it is important to recognise the kinaesthetic and sensual pleasures that can be gained from involvement in ‘vigorous exertion’. Similarly it is necessary to account for the power and strength that some of the girls experienced from pushing their bodies to the limits (Wheaton and Tomlinson 1998). As Garrett (2004: 223) suggests:

A sense of physicality can be empowering for young women... in finding pleasure in and control over their body they can embody an understanding of

themselves that supports ongoing engagement in physical activity and is resistant to dominant discourses.

Indeed, in contrast to a number of studies that have suggested that girls do not want to (or are unable to) be physically active, the girls in my study were active and ambitious. The school offered these girls a varied range of physical activities and a range of material resources for them to use in order to succeed 'physically'. A number of girls in my study claimed that sport actually gave them a chance to be 'otherwise'; to be 'active' and 'adventurous' rather than 'weak' and 'passive'. Girlhood was certainly not 'bad' for these girls' health, as it has been suggested that it is for others.

Because sport was made so readily available to these girls and because it was such a prestigious subject (mainly with the girls themselves rather than in the official school) the pleasures of these activities were often undercut by the incredible pressure the girls faced in order to succeed in them. As a dominant part of the school's (informal) culture, success in sport was demanded of the girls in order for them to become all-round achievers; to gain physical as well as the necessary cultural capital. The pressures of having to achieve in these ways – of having to take responsibility for their own health, weight and fitness – were often painful for the girls, especially when their bodies were experienced as awkward, humiliating and potentially failing. The fact that their peers intensely scrutinised these decisions and their bodies in terms of health (and therefore also in terms of moral value) was an added source of stress. For on the one hand this intense surveillance seemed to lend social support to the girls, but on the other it appeared to increase the pressure that these girls experienced in their pursuit of an 'ideal' feminine physique.

What complicated this situation further was the fact that physical education was not felt by the girls to be taken entirely seriously within the school - it was a subject of the body rather than of the mind and so the girls felt that it was treated as insignificant in comparison to the more 'serious' and 'rewarding' academic subjects. Furthermore, even when sport and dance were valued by the school the girls told me that only certain subjects were deemed acceptable for them to participate in. These subjects were often sports that had been chosen for the girls (consciously or unconsciously) because they fitted the school's upper middle-class and dominantly feminine culture. Indeed, despite the girls' tremendous ('exceptional' and 'extra-ordinary')

achievements in a range of sports the girls felt limited to participate in a small range of sports that were deemed to be acceptably feminine.

A number of the girls in my study did actively complain about the limited and gendered nature of the sports that were made available to them in school; some of them quite eloquently argued the case that it was 'sexist' and 'outdated'. On one occasion (on the school trip), for example, the girls were told by their instructors that 'they would not be walking up the biggest hill today because, as girls, they would need to take a slightly less demanding route'. Many of the girls were outraged by the overtly sexist nature of this comment and complained to their instructors suggesting that they should at least be given the chance to try the larger hill - one girl exclaiming: 'oh my goodness! Don't you read the papers! Don't you know that girls can do anything that boys can these days and even better!'

Despite their comments, quite surprisingly, when asked in interviews a number of the girls in my study did claim to fundamentally believe that girls were not 'naturally' as physically active as boys. As one girl suggested:

It is true though that men are more naturally muscly and more naturally better at playing sports than women. If you had the best man tennis player in the world playing the best woman tennis player then he would definitely win. I mean we never play sport against boys and I don't think we would ever win! You just have to admit that men are more naturally better at sports than women. Some women are good but on average men are better.

(Ella, Year Seven interviews, March 2005)

Although this was not an opinion that was held by all of the girls in my study and it was not a remark that went unnoticed in the interview, it was certainly the case that many of the girls felt that their experiences of sport were different to those of boys. Indeed, many of the girls in my study compared their experiences in sport to those of girls in popular films, such as *'Wimbledon'* and *'Bend it Like Beckham'*. Both of these films represent girls taking the centre stage as sporting heroes and as successful athletes. Yet as the girls in my study told me, even these successful girls could not perform as well as men in sporting competitions and when they did they were often made to reject or devalue sport in favour of a heterosexual, loving relationship. Although 'love' was not a factor that many of the girls in my research were wrestling with at the time of study, they did feel that their experiences of sport were similar to

these girls; that they struggled to be recognised in sport and that even when they were recognised it was only as secondary to men and if they were also able to perform a successful hetero-feminine identity.

Finally, it is important to consider how age mattered to these girls in their experiences of physical activity. Although this is a topic that has not been discussed explicitly in this chapter, as it has done in others, it can be glimpsed in this chapter through the discussions about the different sporting practices that the girls did (or did not) get involved in (for example, in the ways that many girls dismissed ballet as an activity to be involved in later on in the school because of its associations with a young girly femininity). It can also be glimpsed through the girls' discussions about investing in their bodies for the future. Just as the last chapter showed how many of the girls in my study felt compelled to invest in academic work for their intellectual success in the future, so this chapter shows how the girls felt the need to invest in physical activities for their success as 'healthy' adults in the future. Although the girls did gain some value from their experiences in the present (for example, in terms of sociality and physicality) the girls' gains from these experiences were rarely instantaneous. Instead the girls treated their bodies as 'plastic' projects for the future; as projects that could constantly be invested and reinvested in and continually transformed in the hope of future physical perfection (Bordo 2005).

And yet despite the girls' achievements and investments in their bodies, there is a need to question just how physically successful these girls could be in the future. For just as sport was not taken seriously as a school subject, so it was often not seen as a serious career option for the girls, mainly because of the small chance of success and because of the fear of failure being so high. Despite Walkerdine's (1997) claim that sport is an area in which all middle-class girls can achieve and is not a fantasy escape scenario as it is for so many working-class girls, it would seem that for the girls in my study it was just that – a fantasy – an activity that they could never ever really achieve in unless it was in addition to their academic success.

Indeed, if young middle-class girls' experiences of academic success can be compared to a conveyor belt (as Walkerdine *et al* 2001 suggest) then perhaps their experiences of physical success can be compared to the act of walking a tightrope. For the girls in

my study, in particular, all of the material resources were there for their disposal – there was a real material possibility of their achieving physical success. And yet the girls experienced these possibilities in extremely narrow and limited ways. The activities formed a kind of tightrope for the girls, where sport and dance had to be carefully managed and negotiated with age, class and gender. The fear of falling from the tightrope was high for these girls as was the fear of failure; to fail to balance these extremes was unimaginable and could lead to their positioning as unrespectable, unfeminine and non-heterosexual – each being a potentially injurious identity, and at the very worst unintelligible.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to bring the physically active body to the forefront of my research and to explore the physical culture of the school in which my research was based. In particular, the chapter has focused on the distinctly classed and gendered nature of these sports and dance practices and the ways in which they presented the girls with possibilities and limitations for engaging in an active girlhood. Just as the previous chapter suggested, success was a predominant concern for these girls as they struggled to achieve physically as well as intellectually. The next chapter will explore some of these themes further: looking at the girls' investments in traditionally 'feminine' bodily practices and focusing on the 'schooled body', as well as exploring what success meant to the girls as they 'grew up'. In particular this chapter will focus on the issues of age and generation as it seeks to examine the girls' experiences of the transition to senior school.



## Chapter Seven

### Tales of transition(s): 'growing up' and 'moving on' to senior school

You know what? We are at a funny age right now... we really are between being a girl and being a woman... You know like the Britney Spear's song – 'I'm not a girl, not yet a woman. All I need is time, a moment that is mine, while I'm in between. I'm not a girl'.

(Isla, Year Six interviews July 2004)

#### Introduction

Transition is a complex and confusing term comprising a multitude of definitions. In school-based educational research the term has traditionally been utilised in a bureaucratic sense - used literally to trace pupils across a change in schools and to focus on school organisation, curriculum development and academic achievement at this time (Nisbet and Entwistle 1969, Finger and Silverman 1966, Youngman *et al* 1986, Cotterell 1979, Brown and Armstrong 1982, Measor and Woods 1984). More recent research, however, has moved beyond this singular definition of transition, to speak of the multiple transitions that pupils make as they 'grow up' and change schools (see for example, George and Pratt 2002, Pollard 1985). Emerging at a time characterised by a growing interest in subjectivities and identity construction, these newer studies seek to explore how pupils constitute their identities across this period and as they move through the education system.

A more recent 'gender aware vantage point' has also made it possible to explore the ways in which girls and boys negotiate these experiences differently (Ruddock *et al* 2003). In particular, a growing interest in what it means to 'grow up girl' in late modern society has led to a new body of work specifically concerning the transitions that girls make in the course of their educational careers (Harris 2004, Aapola *et al* 2005, Harris *et al* 2004, Driscoll 2002). For example, *Growing up Girl* by Valerie Walkerdine *et al* (2001) – while not specifically focused on school transition – is one of the first studies to explore the changing experiences of girls as they move through the British educational system. Similar longitudinal research has also been completed by Jackson and Warin (2000) Lucey and Reay (2000) and O'Brien (2003). In addition, the work of Pugsley *et al* (1996) and Simpson (2002) (though focusing on

both boys and girls) brings an embodied perspective to this topic, as these authors consider how the bodily identifications of pupils change as they move from one school to another.

### *Aims of the chapter*

This chapter seeks to explore young girls' experiences of the transition from junior to senior school. Although this chapter initially focuses on transition in the traditional sense – as an organised period of change occurring within the formal school – the focus of the chapter is much wider. Indeed it will be suggested that transition was not a simple, singular or linear process for these girls but a particularly classed, gendered and sexualised experience, involving multiple transitions and occurring across multiple sites. As a moment of 'intense change', 'uncertainty' and 'unknown experiences', transition will also be explored in this chapter as a 'critical moment' of identity work; as a specific point in time that had important consequences for pupils' lives and identities (Thomson *et al* 2003, Jackson and Warin 2000).

The chapter will begin by exploring some of the dominant concerns that the girls in my research expressed about 'growing up' and 'moving on' – looking at the ways in which they felt the need (after the move to senior school) to mature academically and to become 'respectable', hyper-feminine women. The chapter will examine the dominant age-based and developmental discourses that these girls drew on in their constitution of these 'more mature' identities and the ways in which they were seen to inhabit an uneasy and turbulent space in middle-childhood as they grew up and became young women. It will be suggested, however, that the girls' experiences of school transition can not solely be explained in these simple developmental and age-based terms, for the girls in my study were not involved in a simple progression to an 'ever closer copy of adulthood' but instead moved back and forth between these adult/child positionings as they constituted their various identities (Prout 2005).

The girls' experiences of change were also infused by discourses of gender, class and sexuality, meaning that in this school context certain developmental discourses were heralded above others. The chapter will suggest that although a heterosexual identity was demanded of the girls it was simultaneously expected to be denied and delayed in

favour of academic maturity and in the pursuit of a successful academic career. This chapter, therefore, will explore the huge contradictions that these girls faced as they moved schools – the simultaneous demands to be heterosexual but not sexy (or sexually active), and to be mature and independent ‘flexible’ subjects of the future, whilst still predominantly dependant upon adult support.

### **The pressures of ‘growing up’ and ‘maturing’ in the senior school**

Many of the girls in my research felt that the move to senior school heralded a move to academic maturity; it was expected and understood by the girls to be a time when their workloads and responsibilities would increase. Despite the fact that a number of the girls talked about the incredible pressure to succeed academically in the junior school, many of them feared that it was only going to get harder for them after the move to senior school. Indeed, after the move some of the girls told me they were now facing tremendously high teacher expectations, that it was no longer acceptable to simply complete ‘neat and colourful work’, that they ‘now had real targets to achieve’ and that they had to ‘try really hard to get the marks’.

Although the girls identified as the highest achievers reported that this pressure was even stronger for them, many of the girls felt that messing around in class was no longer an option for anyone; they all had to concentrate if they wanted to succeed. Abigail, for example, told me that she had quickly learnt to behave differently from the way she had in the junior school. She recalled an incident from her first week in the senior school where she had tried to help her form teacher by cleaning the classroom - moving chairs into position and removing litter from the floor. Abigail had often assumed the role of ‘class cleaner’ in the junior school and this had earned her great favour with the class teacher. However, Abigail was shocked that she did not receive the same praise in the senior school and she told me: ‘I mean the teacher did not even give me a merit...It just goes to show that it doesn’t work here...in junior school they just wanted us to be good little girls but even that isn’t good enough here’.

Growing up and maturing was therefore an experience that the girls faced with some trepidation. Before the move to senior school a number of the girls talked to me with apprehension about the tasks that they knew they would have to take up (such as

packing their own bags, remembering the necessary equipment and making their own way to school – all of which were activities that their parents had completed for them previously). Like the children in a number of other academic studies, the girls in my research had also been subject to a range of ‘horror’ stories about what to expect in senior school (Measor and Woods 1984, Delamont *et al* 1989). Often these stories reflected the girls’ fears about having to grow up quickly and take responsibility for their actions, as the following story demonstrates:

I was told that if anybody was ever late for school then they would have to face a very angry teacher who would then get their ponytails and put their head in the sink. Then the teacher would put on the tap with the plug in and leave the child for the period of time that they should have been in school. Apparently everyone finds it very funny when they have wet hair for the rest of the day.

(Amanda, Field note extract July 2004)

As Delamont *et al* (1989) note, these stories often act as a warning for pupils - teaching them the accepted ways to behave in senior school. In this case, the stories also appeared to be a space used by the girls to express their worries: they acted on ‘an emotional level as a ‘space’ in which to place deep, although free-floating anxieties about vulnerability’ (Lucey and Reay 2000:198).

Yet the girls’ fears were not just anticipatory, for they were also very real worries that continued to trouble them during their time in the senior school. At the start of my research in the senior school I was surprised by the number of girls who came to me on a regular basis asking for help. Often the girls would talk to me about their experiences, telling me that what they really feared about senior school was doing the wrong thing or being told off. Many of the girls told me that they felt that their new-found responsibilities were too much to bear, that they were scared because they had suddenly been stranded without adult support and were expected to ‘go it alone’, as this next extract demonstrates:

AA: So how do you feel senior school is going?

Eden: It is okay I suppose. Well, it was horrible the other day, we had geography for the first time and I cried because I forgot all my books. Mrs Dean got really cross with me. At that time I felt really horrible...I never mean to do wrong I always try and stay on the good side of people but I find it hard to remember everything here! To be honest, sometimes I would rather be back in junior school. It was so kind and

friendly there I never got shouted at like I did the other day. Junior school was like being at home...and I love my house... my puppy Sonny is always there waiting for me. I wish I could be a dog...they have a simple and enjoyable life...they don't have to go to senior school!

For this girl, in particular, the move to senior school meant a move away from the 'simple things in life' and from the familiar, familial and friendly atmosphere of the junior school. The transition also signified a move away from the 'fun' and 'childish' experiences of the junior school. Senior school was a place, she felt, where her childhood identity would inevitably diminish.

However, for some girls the move to senior school was seen as a positive change; for some the move was infused with 'fearful excitement' and was tinged with 'pleasurable anticipation' (Lucey and Reay 2000:328). The girls explained their excitement in terms of a range of 'new-found' freedoms that they would be able to experience in the senior school and as a result of being able to inhabit 'more adult' positions. The freedoms that the girls spoke of varied widely but included having the right to choose from a range of school dinners, being able to go anywhere they wanted to at lunch or at break, and moving between lessons without supervision. In particular, space was an incredibly important 'new' right for these girls because they now had access to spaces where they would not be constantly watched and where they felt they had the chance to 'be themselves' (Lucey and Reay 2000).

Indeed, as the girls in this school increased in age and were seen (by their teachers) to mature, they were given a number of 'new' rights and responsibilities, including the role of head girl or classroom monitor, the right to make decisions about the daily life of the school and even the right to choose which teachers should be employed by the school (some girls were chosen to interview new teachers for the school alongside the head teacher and the governing body). Upon entering the senior school the girls were seen to have matured and were thought to need the freedom to learn to become responsible adults. This was an idea that was expressed in the school motto – where it was stated that every girl should aim to become an 'independent individual' – able to look after herself and capable of behaving in a 'mature and responsible' manner.

The emphasis that the school placed on academic maturity is not entirely surprising, for as Driscoll (2002) elucidates these developmental discourses have long been associated with notions of ‘growing up’ and adolescence –heralding a move from dependence to independence, immaturity to maturity, and ignorance to knowledge. In fact, Measor and Woods (1984) suggest that these ideas have long been used as an organisational principle for schools too; that for some time now children have been divided into different age groups depending on these principles of child development. By encouraging the girls to ‘grow up’ and mature, this school was thus also drawing on these dominant developmental discourses of age-based maturity and competence and was producing and reproducing them as normative.

### **Becoming respectable young women – constructing acceptable hyper-feminine identities**

For the girls in my research project, academic maturity was not the only characteristic that they felt was expected of them as they changed schools, for they also felt that they had to ‘grow up’ and ‘mature’ as ‘feminine’ ‘young women’. In interviews the girls talked openly about the possible identities available to them as ‘girls’ in the senior school and many of them felt that there was an increasing pressure to be hyper-feminine. This is illustrated in the following extracts taken from the girls’ Year Seven interviews, where I asked them:

AA: Do you think that happens when you grow up... I mean have things changed for you since being in senior school?

Eden: Yeah like in junior school there were more kinds of people but in senior school there are just moshers and girly girls.

Abi: Yeah and even then there are always more girly girls than moshers.

Kathryn: As you become older I think you become more girly

Abi: Yeah like everyone in the sixth form has like high heels and does their hair and...

Kathryn: I don’t know why people become more girly, maybe they just have to...but definitely the older girls in this school act more girly.

Of course this is not to imply that the girls’ experiences of junior school were not also gendered, but merely that they felt that the pressure to behave in a hyper-feminine manner had increased with age. Nor is there any suggestion that the girls in my research are the only girls who have ever experienced these feelings, for a number of

studies have shown this to be a common experience for many girls of this age (Renold 2005b, Reay and Lucey 2000). However, the girls in my study felt that this was a particularly dominant discourse in the school that they inhabited because of its single-sex nature; they felt that there was a dominant emphasis on femininity in the senior school, meaning that they (more than girls in mixed-sex schools) had to behave in a more stereotypically feminine manner. As one girl told me:

Well, there is just more of an emphasis on being a girl in this school...they [the teachers] just expect you to be proper girls...to sit right and do the things that girls do...they say that as we grow up we have to learn to become proper young women. I mean even my friends outside of school think that I am all girly and wear pink all the time just because I go to a girl's school.

(Ingrid, Field note Extract February 2005)

Indeed, for some of the girls the pressure to embody a hyper-feminine identity was experienced as especially intense and demanding. The tomboys, in particular, told me that they felt that as they had 'grown up' and moved schools they were subject to very different demands. Many of these girls talked about the extreme stereotypes that they felt they faced in the senior school as 'older' girls. Some of them, for example, talked to me about the pressures that they faced from their peers to embody a hyper-feminine look:

Isla: For most girls our age the important things are hair and make-up.

Eden: There is definitely pressure to look a certain way...some people are like patrolling and are like leaders of groups and everybody sucks up to them and everyone wears what they wear.

Helena: Yeah like follow the leader or like clones...they should do a star wars film about it – attack of the girly girl clones!

Other girls also talked to me about the pressures that they felt they faced from their teachers. Lucy, for example, told me of one instance where she was outraged by her teacher's use of 'girly stereotypes'. This was an occasion where Lucy and the girls in her class were asked to make a poster that would 'tell others about who they were'. In 'true tomboy style', Lucy told me that she had chosen dark colours to illustrate her work and navy blue backing paper to represent her 'different identity as a tomboy'. After completing her poster and taking it to her teacher, Lucy told me that she had been furious that it had been rejected for display in the classroom. She told me that the teacher had told her that it was too dull and dismal and needed brightening up.

Perhaps, the teacher suggested, she could go back and mount it on pink paper to brighten it up and at the same time emphasise her 'real' identity as a girl?

Although I witnessed some of these events for myself, I was still surprised that the girls in my study felt quite so strongly about the pressures of hyper-femininity, especially because so many of them (roughly about half) had in fact claimed in interviews with me to be tomboys. Yet despite this fact (and, to be fair, the girls claimed that the numbers were unrealistic anyway—given that they felt most of the girls were just pretending to be tomboys) many of the girls did experience this pressure as incredibly real. In fact judging by the sheer number of girls in my study who claimed to be tomboys, it would seem that there was a real need for these girls to find ways to be 'otherwise' – to find spaces in which to perform their identities as 'different', away from the pressures of hyper-femininity. And, as the girls increased with age, so these pressures appeared to be felt even more strongly. As Renold (2005b:15) suggests:

The queer possibilities of the 'tomboy' subject position are temporally bound. Its legitimate (i.e. socially valued) status hinges upon its location within middle childhood, where institutional and ideological discourses of presumed sexual innocence can be drawn upon to undermine and subvert wider cultural discourses of 'compulsory heterosexuality' and pressures to project heterosexualised femininities. Such subversive possibilities are perhaps less available with the union (rather than the collision) of 'age grade' (e.g. sexualised adolescence) and 'age class' (e.g. secondary schooling) in which active (hetero) sexualities are expected if not promoted and sexualised adolescence and gender non-conformity conflate to produce potentially ambivalent or non-heterosexualities.

Indeed, many of the girls in my study felt that as they 'grew older' it was no longer acceptable for them to identify as tomboys – they were increasingly being encouraged to leave these 'childish' identities behind them. As some of the girls told me:

Lucy: Now we have come to senior school everyone is so like 'oh yeah girls have to be girly and pink' and I just think why do we have to fit into that and be like girls?

Cathren: Yeah and bribing is bad, cos some tomboys get bribed by the teacher to turn into girly girls.



- Eden: Well I don't think that is the case... but I don't like the idea of growing up and being girly, I just like the idea of being a child.
- Lucy: Yeah just kind of running around free and being who you are and not who you are supposed to be.

*Fluffy, pink princesses – the pleasures of embodying a hyper-feminine identity*

There were, however, a number of girls in my study who were immensely proud of their investments in hyper-femininity and who seemed to gain a tremendous amount of pleasure from these girly identities. This was certainly the case for a number of the girls who, whilst still in the junior school, seemed to invest heavily in young girly femininities. As my field notes demonstrate:

Abigail, Jenny and Jasmine are all sat around a table discussing the clothes that they have bought for their teddy bears to wear from a shop that makes outfits for them in the high street. Abigail discusses the ballerina outfit that her Mum bought her teddy at the weekend, talking about its intricate detail and its sequinned wand. Mid conversation Jenny leans over to Jasmine and grabs her hand and begins to squeal. She asks Jasmine where she got her 'beautiful manicure' from and Jasmine replies that her Dad took her to Miss Manicure at the weekend for a birthday treat. I ask the girls if they go there often to which they reply by telling me that they sometimes go there but mainly for people's parties or on special occasions. The girls continue talking about the treatments that they like to receive at the salon and end their conversation by agreeing that 'sometimes it really is great to be a girl!'

(Field note extract, July 2004)

A number of the girls in my study also used their photographs from the photography club to communicate the pleasure that they experienced from embodying these young 'girly' identities. Sarah was one girl who tried particularly hard to represent herself as young, girly and feminine in her photographs. Her photographic diary was full of images picturing vast amounts of make-up, accessories and clothes. Similarly the photographs that Sarah constructed during the photographic workshop were used to represent her 'true girly' self. In one particular photograph, Sarah dressed her self up in a mini-skirt and cropped top and lay on the floor with a handbag in one hand. Behind her on the floor she placed all manner of 'girly products' – make-up items, pink clothing, more handbags, creams and lotions. When asked to create a statement to explain this photograph Sarah chose the following words:

All girls have to look their best if they want to impress. People such as tomboys never dress up as people like me. Pink skirts, high heels, lipstick,

make-up. That is what I wear. Look your best, girls! I look like a princess. I am a princess. Glamour, glory, that's my thing!

As the statement demonstrates, Sarah invested heavily in a feminine 'girly princess' identity that was 'glamorous, pink and fluffy' (Holland 2004, Brownmillar 1984). Despite the fact that this identity has often been seen to represent docility, conformity and passivity (especially in traditional fairy stories), Sarah's talk here seems to suggest that this identity conferred a tremendous amount of power on her. Indeed, by using the word 'glory' Sarah appears to draw on post-feminist discourses of 'girl power' to explain her experience of girly femininity as pleasurable and rewarding. Similarly by using the word 'glamour' Sarah evokes a number of other powerful ideas. The term possibly referring to magical imagery - as Holland (2004) suggests to the 'supposed influence of a charm on the eyes; making them see things as fairer than they are... fascination, enchantment, witchery' and therefore to the 'magical pleasures' that could be gained from such an identity. But also perhaps relating to those notions of effort and self production that Driscoll (2002) believes were omnipresent in the Hollywood films of the 1930s and 40s, therefore also indicating the necessary (but pleasurable) work that was needed to maintain such an identity.

Powerful and pleasurable as these identities were, as the girls changed schools so they told me that their identities had changed. Many of the girls wanted to stress to me that they no longer invested in young 'girly' feminine identities, for there were new and exciting pleasures that they could experience as they grew up and became 'proper women'. Sarah, for example, told me that since she had moved to senior school she preferred to be referred to as a 'girly girl' rather than a 'girly girly'. Although there appeared to be very little difference in these two names (only one letter having been removed) the change was incredibly significant for Sarah. As Kramerae and Triechler (1985) suggest, the term 'girly' has always connoted childishness, immaturity, dependency and conformity. Sarah's move away from the term, therefore, can be seen as a move to a more sophisticated and womanly identity.

In interviews Sarah also talked to me about the different activities that she now invested in as a 'girly girl' in senior school. She told me that she was no longer interested in sleepovers and 'playing about with make-up' for she now had the freedom to go out at night to discos, to go shopping on her own and to go to beauty

salons for treatments. These were all activities that the girls felt that they were limited from participating in during their time in the junior school. However, with the move to the senior school the girls told me that many of these restrictions had been lifted and that they were now trusted to take more responsibility for themselves. As such, these activities had become increasingly popular; the girls now found it incredibly pleasurable to be able to 'show off' their 'new' feminine identities in public spaces. The school disco, for example, was talked about by the girls with great excitement because it was an event that would allow them to stay out late and to spend their time with boys from the neighbouring school. The girls talked to me for hours before the big event, telling me how they would act, what they would wear and even how they would smell! The disco appeared to be a space of multiple pleasures; enjoyed for the social experience of getting together and investing in traditionally feminine beauty practices before the event, and also for the pleasures of being seen and recognised as heterosexually desirable and acceptably feminine at the event itself (Best 2004).

Just as the girls' experiences of academic maturity drew on age-based discourses of adolescence, so did their experiences of growing up 'acceptably' feminine. Indeed, a number of the girls explained their experiences as a 'normal' and 'natural' progression to adulthood, due to the fact that their hormones were 'kicking in'. Instead of linking the experience of 'growing up' to notions of maturity, in this instance the girls appeared to draw on alternative developmental discourses, explaining their experiences as predominantly related to biological and physiological change. Again, as Frost (2001) remarks, this is not surprising for it has commonly been expected that girls will behave in these ways as they approach their teenage years. Girls more than boys, she argues, have always been expected to grow up and become their bodies, experiencing them as different and changing with the passing of time.

### **'I'm not a girl not yet a woman' – the 'tweenage' years**

What complicated these matters, however, was the fact that many of the girls did not actually feel that they had reached adolescence yet. Although the girls recognised that some of them had started to mature and that some of their bodies had started to change, they were reluctant to suggest that they had reached this stage yet and that the

transition to adulthood was such a simple one. As the quotation used at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates, the girls felt that they were at an 'in between' stage in their lives – stuck between childhood and adulthood but also between childhood and adolescence. Some of the girls, for example, talked about not wanting to wear certain items of clothing yet; they criticised other girls who wore thongs or bras suggesting that it was 'disgusting' for girls of their age to wear these things 'before their time'. The girls also scrutinised their photographs from the photography club in these ways; checking to make sure that each girl represented herself in an age-appropriate manner. Indeed, after the move to senior school a number of the photographs were reconsidered and subsequently rejected by the girls for being overtly sexual. Some of the photographs were rejected by the girls for 'having too much leg on show', whilst others were abandoned for their display of inappropriate, 'sexy' or 'tarty' clothing. It appeared to be the case that certain items of clothing or body parts that had previously been seen as innocent were now being reconsidered by the girls and seen as increasingly sexualised (Aapola *et al* 2005). The girls' increasing age appeared to herald a change in the ways in which their bodies were viewed; as increasingly sexual but still in need of constant protection.

Similarly, some of the girls told me that they were not yet ready for relationships with boys - that dating was a practice that was only acceptable for their teenage sisters to engage in:

Helena: I don't think it is worth having a boyfriend right now because you have to go through being dumped and things. It is something that you can do when you are older. You just shouldn't have to do those things at twelve!

Eden: It just doesn't interest me in the slightest!

Helena: I think it is really disgusting actually! I don't think you should be doing that sort of thing at eleven and twelve. Just think what you could get up to....uurrghh...I really don't want to know!

The girls' talk in this instance also demonstrates the ways in which these girls felt caught 'in-between'. By talking about dating and sexual relations, these girls showed their awareness of such topics and therefore position themselves in a traditionally 'adult' position as sexually knowledgeable. However, by referring to sexual relations implicitly rather than explicitly and by expressing their disgust about the topic, the

girls simultaneously distance themselves from it and position themselves safely in the bounds of childhood – as innocent and asexual becomings. Sexuality (and in particular pleasurable sexual experience) was explained by the girls as something that had to be delayed for later on in life; an experience that could become practicable and pleasurable only with age (Fine 1988).

The girls' teachers and parents often described the girls in these ways too – as inhabiting an 'awkward' and 'vulnerable' space in middle-childhood. Despite the fact that they felt that the girls would inevitably 'grow up' during the move to senior school and as such could be granted more freedom, they also felt that the girls were still in desperate need of protection. This often meant that although certain rights were made available to the girls they were still heavily monitored and never given absolutely freely. For example, even though the girls were given spaces to inhabit as 'their own' in the senior school they were still often carefully watched over by adults. On one occasion, for example, one of the girls in my study came to me crying, telling me that she was furious because she had been banned from using the locker rooms because she had been caught eating in them. 'Who were they', she asked me, 'to tell her what she could do in there?' 'They gave us that space', she told me, 'so why should they be allowed in there to know what I was eating!' In this particular instance the girls felt that their rights had been breached and that a space that they had formerly felt was 'their own' had actually been revealed to be a place that their teachers owned; a place made for them as children rather than a place that they could own for themselves (Rasmussen 2004).

In fact, the only time when the girls in this school actually felt that they had been given the absolute freedom to do exactly what they wanted was on a day that they referred to as 'mess up day'. This was a day when the girls who were about to move to the senior school were given a chance to 'leave their mark' on their existing school and to express some of their new-found freedoms as 'grown-ups'. The girls in my study used this day as a chance to play a number of tricks on their teachers, for example, pretending to slice off their fingers in the paper trimmer and placing cling-film on the seats of the toilets. And yet, although the girls were delighted with their tricks and told me that they felt 'really free to do what they liked' they were certainly not given the chance to run riot in the school. Indeed, the very fact that the girls were

given an official time and space in which to behave in these ways, demonstrates the control that the girls' teachers still had over this apparent freedom. Furthermore, if the girls' behaviour on this occasion is compared to that of some of the older girls in the school on their mess up day before their move to sixth form (behaviour that included stunts like ordering numerous pizzas and taxi cabs for the headmistress and securing a banner to the local bridge saying 'toot if you have had a Taylor's girl') then it appears that they were still fairly limited in their actions. As pupils who were still very much seen by their parents and their teachers as children, the girls were limited in the subject positions that they could inhabit as 'independent' 'grown ups'. Although they were expected to grow up and behave differently after the move to senior school there were still strict limitations to their behaviour based on dominant developmental discourses.

This was not only the case with these (supposedly) 'smaller freedoms', for the girls also felt that academic maturity was governed in this way. Ella, for example, told me that even though she felt that she was allowed to make serious decisions about her life and her expected career path, her teachers would still interfere in her decisions and tell her if they thought she was making the wrong choice. Ella felt that this had made her relatively dependent on the school and she told me:

I mean we do get a lot of chances to decide what is best for ourselves in school but the teachers will still often tell us what to do. It is then that I think I just don't understand what we are supposed to do in the future. If they make all our decisions for us now, how are we ever supposed to learn what to do?

(Year Seven Interview, March 2005)

It appeared that even though this was a school that promised to give the girls a great deal of freedom to progress on their own independently, many of the girls still felt that because of their age and because of the strong pastoral nature of the school they were often left with little choice but to follow the advice of the school and those adults who 'knew better'.

Yet even if the girls' academic maturity was sometimes denied it was certainly a behaviour that was encouraged and expected by the school particularly because it was seen as so necessary for academic success. The same could not be said, however,

about sexual maturity, a discourse that was constantly silenced in the school and a behaviour that was presumed to be 'too much for girls of this age'. Although the girls were expected to grow up to become 'respectable' feminine young women, this was within strict limits and was certainly not to be associated with any form of sexual identity or activity. The girls were expected to have some 'romantic' interest in boys. Indeed, on some occasions romantic (heterosexual) relationships were clearly encouraged by the girls' teachers who, although teaching them that strong feelings of love should be reserved for later on in life (when they would inevitably get married), told them that it was normal and natural for them to feel 'love' for other boys their age and that they should enjoy these childhood 'crushes'. The teachers' ideas of these relationships, however, remained firmly within age-appropriate discourses of romance; based on strong notions of fun and heterosexual friendship rather than sexual activity. As young girls the teachers still felt that they needed protecting from sexuality and they continued to monitor their behaviour. Some of the girls told me, for example, that the teachers constantly checked their uniforms for sexual excess (for being 'skimpy' or 'overly tarty'), as Jasmine commented:

I mean the teachers have told me that I can not wear my PE skirt home...it is stupid I think but they say that it is because the builders outside of the school may want to look at my beautiful legs! They also say that there are perverts around waiting for young girls in short skirts.

(Field note extract, March 2005)

The girls also told me that the books that they read were strictly checked for their sexual content. Indeed, in one class I observed an occasion where a number of the girls had their reading books taken away from them because they were deemed to be 'too sexually graphic'. Not surprisingly magazines were also taken from the girls for similar reasons. Like the teachers in Kehily's (2004) study, the teachers in my research often regarded the girls' magazines to be overtly sexual and therefore intellectually impoverished and unworthy of critical attention. The teachers were worried that these reading materials promoted sexuality in a 'frivolous manner' and in ways that unnecessarily distracted girls from the things that 'really mattered...like school work'. Furthermore, dance was a hobby that was carefully monitored by the girls' teachers and parents. Although it was an extremely popular subject in the school and one that many girls excelled in (as the last chapter demonstrated), it was also

deemed to be a particularly ‘risky’ subject— a subject that flirted with sexual boundaries because of the ‘compromising moves’ and ‘erotic costumes’ that were sometimes involved. Some of the girls, for example, told me that they had actually been pulled out of a Grease tribute dance because it had been deemed to be ‘immoral’ by their parents. Although the girls were unsure what immoral meant they were certainly not unsure of the reasons why they had been restricted from participating in the dance: ‘It’s because it’s all about sex’, they told me, ‘and they don’t want us doing that’.

There was one incident that occurred during my time in the school that highlighted the ways in which these discourses of sexuality were silenced in the school; where I noticed how sexual development was expected to be denied and delayed. This incident occurred on an occasion where the girls were asked by their English teacher to act out scenes from their favourite books. One of the groups in the class had chosen a book called ‘Always and Forever’.

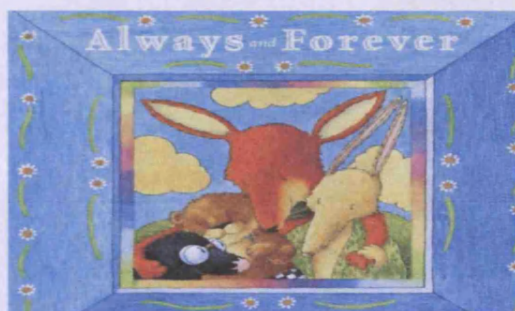


Figure 7.1 - *Always and Forever*

This was a story about a ‘family’ of animals who had lost their friend to death but had managed to discover that the ‘secret’ of friendship was that it lasted well beyond this point and was eternal and enduring. The first scene that the girls acted out from the book predominantly relied upon the text and portrayed a scene of close friendship - involving a dance where the girls held hands and danced around an imaginary garden together (incredibly similar to the childhood game of ‘ring a ring o’ roses’). The girls were congratulated by the teachers on this performance and were praised for having ‘truly captured the essence of the book’ and the ‘ideals of friendship and romance’.

It was only when the girls performed their second scene, however, that the teachers became anxious and alarmed. This was a scene that the girls had made up for



themselves, portraying what they felt would happen next. The girls had decided that the logical conclusion to the book would be that these animals would fall in love and have babies together. They had interpreted the relationships between these (seemingly gender ambiguous) animals as heterosexual 'loving' relationships and to the teacher's horror they had decided to perform a scene depicting the animals having sex with one another, followed by another scene of dramatic and graphic childbirth. It was at this point that the teacher immediately ended the girls' play, suggesting that it was 'entirely inappropriate' and 'almost beyond belief'.

*'Presumed innocence'<sup>1</sup>*

What this incident demonstrates is the fact that these children were clearly subject to dominant hetero-normative discourses of age-based sexual development. Indeed, as Renold (2005) points out, age and generation are central to the ways in which childhood is constructed and understood: 'by virtue of their age children are variously positioned within the category child and designated a particular temporal space within which their lives are regulated and interpreted'. This is also true, Renold (2005) believes, of sexual development, which can be understood as a process of sexual generationing: where children are expected to develop sexually in strict age-related stages and where any deviation from these norms is punished or pathologised.

In my research this certainly seemed to be the case, for as this instance demonstrates, it was deemed entirely acceptable (and even desirable) for the girls to experiment with issues of (heterosexual) love and romance when they were firmly based in the realms of childhood, relating to fun and friendship rather than anything 'more serious'. However, as soon as the girls deviated from these norms they were stopped in their tracks, punished for their transgressions and denied the more 'adult' position of being sexually knowledgeable. As Epstein (1993) observes, because of the supposedly unnatural association of sexuality and childhood, it is often the case that children are only seen to be able to 'play' with their 'emergent sexuality' as sexual becomings rather than sexual beings. It is only when this behaviour begins to look less like play that there is a cause for concern because it is then that children appear to have blurred

---

<sup>1</sup> See Renold (2005)

the boundaries and crossed the lines between childhood and adulthood. Of course, this incident could itself be classified as 'play', suggesting that, in this case, even fiction had its boundaries.

What this incident also shows, however, is that the girls' transitions to the senior school were not just determined by discourses of age but also by dominant classed, gendered, sexualised discourses of acceptable development. As young children these girls had to carefully balance their identities within the norms of childhood. As Mayall (1994) suggests, for most children in the Western world this means carefully negotiating the dominant discourses of innocence, protection and exclusion. However, as 'girls' and 'young women' they also had to deal with contradictory discourses of hetero-femininity, carefully balancing their identities to present themselves as acceptably heterosexual and desirable but not sexually precocious (Willett 2005). Like many others before them, the girls in my study appeared to be subject to highly restrictive heterosexual discourses and to the slag/drag phenomenon that Lees (1993) believes strongly links girls' gender identities to their sexual reputations. As members of the middle-class, it was also particularly important for these girls to be positioned as (hetero)sexually respectable. The girls themselves told me that they did not want to be positioned as 'tarty' as this could also mean that they would be identified as 'common'. Talking about clothes, for example, the girls told me:

Millie: I think a bit of tart is alright...I mean you want to look good.

Joanne: Yes you want to look good but no tart is never alright!

Caroline: Yeah I mean Claire from my junior school...no offence to her but she was really tarty! She had these huge hoop earrings and you could literally put your arms through them!

Joanne: Yeah you are a tart if you wear those earrings and short skirts and stuff. It looks really common...my Mum says it looks like you have not been properly looked after! It is really townie!

(Year Seven interviews, January 2005)

Sexy and tarty were positions that none of these girls wanted to inhabit as they were presumed to indicate a particularly shameful type of working class femininity. The word 'townie' was used by the girls to distance themselves not only from what they regarded to be mainstream, 'common' behaviour but also from this supposedly working-class, sexually promiscuous behaviour. Interestingly the girls quite literally used the fictional character, Vicky Pollard, (a particularly 'townie' and 'tarty'

character from the popular British comedy television series 'Little Britain' who is portrayed in the series as having multiple sexual encounters and a number of babies by different fathers) to distance themselves from this behaviour. Although Vicky was a figure much loved by the girls, she remained the butt of all their jokes - a constant and fearful reminder for them of what sexually promiscuous girls may become. Indeed, as Walkerdine (1999) shows, the erotic and sexually precocious little girl has always been an identity that has been projected onto the working class - one that middle-class children are protected from at all costs. In this school this was certainly the case: sexuality was equated with shame and failure and it had to be delayed (if not completely denied) in pursuit of academic success. Pregnancy was avoided by these girls at all costs for to them it symbolised death: if not an end to their respectability, then certainly an end to their academic career (Epstein *et al* 2003).

Yet despite the dominance of these discourses it would be hard to conclude that the girls accepted them without demur, or that alternative discourses were not available in the constitution of their identities. Indeed, the very fact that the girls acted out the scenes of graphic sexual intercourse during their play is evidence of these other possible ways of being. Their behaviour, though only momentary, shook up these discourses - positioning the girls as sexually knowledgeable rather than sexually innocent. Of course, in this particular incident one could question whether the girls intentionally or deliberately tried to resist these discourses. The girls did not mention anything to me prior to the event about wanting to deliberately embarrass their teachers by bringing this subject up in their play - neither did they mention anything to me after the event. In fact many of the girls seemed tremendously embarrassed by the event and few of them seemed likely to talk about sex in school again! In this instance it appears that the girls' acts of resistance were unintentional; the incident exemplifying the ways in which previously unspoken discourses and non-ordinary meanings can enter into everyday action and disrupt historically sedimented discourses (Butler 2005, Youdell 2006).

At other points in my research, however, some of the girls did appear to be actively aware of their resistance of these dominant discourses and were able to constitute powerful identities for themselves as sexually knowledgeable and sexually desirable young women. Genella and Elsie, for example, were girls who were particularly

skilled at resisting criticism for being overly flirty and tarty. These were girls who were able to reinscribe these negative positionings and take pleasure from their positions as girls who 'knew the most about sex in the class'. As sexually knowledgeable children, these girls used their position in the class to win popularity with others, sharing their much-sought-after information and expertise with their peers. As Epstein and Johnson (1997) conclude, it is not necessarily the case that all children are sexually innocent or even that they wish to be – instead, more often than not it is adults who wish this state upon children.

In terms of academic maturity it was also the case that a number of the girls in the class appeared to be able to draw on different discourses and to position themselves outside of dominant discourses of development. As Gayle's case study (discussed in Chapter Four) demonstrates, it was not necessarily the case that all of the girls fitted in with the school's dominant ideal of maturity. Gayle was a girl who was constantly criticised by peers and teachers alike for being 'childish' and for having to 'act the class clown'. In junior school her class teacher constantly warned her that she would not fit into the senior school if she did not 'buck her ideas up'. But Gayle told me that she was proud of her reputation as a 'childish' and 'immature' 'little girl' because she believed that it simply meant that she knew how to have more fun than the other girls in her class. In senior school she felt that this positioning had brought her even more popularity as she provided comic relief for her friends in an otherwise 'boring' classroom. In one interview Gayle even criticised her friends for their maturity, calling them boring and old before their time 'like sixty-year-old grannies without the grey hair!' Her talk illustrating the tensions that there were for these girls within the dominant discourses of growing up; that although it was deemed normal and natural for the girls to behave in a mature manner as they reached senior school, this was not the only way they could behave.

Gayle's example also illustrates the fact that the girls' identities as 'children' did not simply disappear as they moved to senior school, but that they became progressively conditioned by new definitions of adulthood. Her case calls into question these taken-for-granted developmental discourses and shows that there is more fluidity in the construction of these identities. Indeed, none of the girls were involved in a simple progression to an 'ever closer copy of adulthood'; instead they moved back and forth

between various adult/child positions as they constituted their identities in the senior school (Prout 2005). This was a process of reversals as well as progressions, where some of the girls (like Gayle) felt that they wished to remain in the 'safer' spaces of childhood and where some felt literally 'trapped' into these positions if they wanted to be recognised as 'respectable' young girls. The transition to senior school was a process of multiple positionings, involving sometimes daily and hourly negotiations by the girls. In just one lesson the girls could be positioned as immature or mature, as old enough to do something or not yet old enough, depending on their behaviour. Of course, all of the girls were subject to the dominant discourses of normal development; they all took up the different subject positions made available for them within these discourses. Even Gayle would sometimes submit to norms of natural development when necessary: at times she had to act maturely and achieve in the classroom if only to please her parents. Similarly, all of the girls relied upon others for their recognition in these positions; as Aapola (1997) suggests, they were not always able to choose the subject position of an adult for themselves but predominantly relied upon adults for their acceptance in these positions. Yet the girls did move unpredictably between these positions - always dependent upon their location in gendered and classed discourses - but were continually shaking up these discourses and actively negotiating alternative spaces for themselves.

## **Discussion**

For the girls in this school, transition was predominantly seen as a move to maturity and respectable womanhood – both an academic and a gendered transition but a normal and natural progression towards adulthood. After the summer holidays it was presumed (by both the girls and their teachers) that the girls would somehow magically and mysteriously 'grow up' and could be given the freedom to take responsibility for themselves. For the girls in my study the move to senior school had indeed meant a sharp increase in freedom – giving them the rights to make an enormous amount of important decisions. Traditionally this has not often been the case for girls as they grow up, for as Aapola (1997) remarks, girls have traditionally been expected to take on increased responsibilities rather than increased rights.

Yet this was certainly not the case for the girls in my research, who arguably enjoyed many more freedoms than their female counterparts. These were girls who (owing to their class positions as cosmopolitan, 'new' flexible subjects of the future) were often economically independent (some involved in running their own businesses and some working for others) and who had been expected to make their own decisions about their lives from a very early age. As Lucey and Reay (2000) suggest, it is incredibly important that we recognise the pleasures that girls like these experience as they grow up and move schools, particularly because they have traditionally been ignored in academic research.

What complicated these freedoms and pleasures, however, was the fact that the girls felt that they had not actually reached adolescence yet. Although the girls did not often use the term 'tween' for themselves, they did appear to describe themselves in this way – as 'tweenagers' stuck in between both childhood and adulthood, and childhood and adolescence. As individuals who were still predominantly seen as children, the girls were not easily able to move into more 'adult' positions of independence, maturity and freedom or to experience the rights that they felt should have been made available to them. In their position as 'tweenagers' the girls faced heavy contradictions – expected to be mature but not totally independent and heterosexual, and romantically interested in boys but not sexy or sexually active. Sexuality, in particular, was something that had to be denied and delayed until much later on in life if the girls wanted to succeed academically. As Walkerdine *et al* (2001:178) suggest this has often been the case:

The entry of middle class girls into masculine norms of rational academic excellence comes at a price. It is not achieved easily and indeed is produced out of the suppression of aspects of femininity and sexuality. In that sense, in our view the discourses of 'girl power' which stress the possibility of having it all and being what you want, provide an ideal that is almost impossible to live up to, and through which young women read their own failure as personal pathology.

And yet, despite the dominance of these discourses, the chapter has shown that not all of the girls in my study passively and automatically rejected sexuality in favour of academic success. A number of the girls were shown to have resisted these dominant discourses, shaking them up as they behaved differently from the ways that were

expected of them. For some girls this only involved momentary (and even unintentional) acts of resistance, as the girls' performance of sex in their 'always and forever' play demonstrated. But for other girls this resistance was (apparently) intentional and lasted much longer. As the case studies of Genella and Elsie demonstrate, some of the girls were able to re-inscribe these potentially negative and injurious subject positions and to position themselves powerfully as sexually knowledgeable young adults. It was certainly not the case that all of the girls in my research were sexually innocent or that all of them wanted to be, for despite the restrictions they faced on a daily basis (the potential 'slag and drag' positioning) many of them enjoyed engaging with issues of sexuality. 'Angus, Thongs and Full Frontal Snogging' (a book by Louise Cattrell), for example, was one of the most popular books in the school library. Despite the fact that several teachers had tried to ban it owing to its 'graphic sexual content', the girls still insisted on hiring it out - gaining pleasure from the ways it increased and 'connected' their knowledge of sexuality (Thomson *et al* 1999). As Renold (2005) suggests, it is important that we recognise the girls' pleasure in these practices and the ways in which they are sexual beings in the present as well as sexual becomings in the future.

Claudia Mitchell and her colleagues (2005) would seem to agree with these conclusions, for as they document, the tween identity has recently been able to offer girls a tremendous number of new freedoms and ways to express themselves as they grow up. However, Mitchell *et al* (2005) also believe that the tween identity is one that is historically quite old and one that is subject to many of the older classed and gendered discourses of sexuality being too much too soon for young girls. Despite the apparent 'newness' of this identity, Mitchell (2005) asserts that the tween identity is one that can be traced throughout history, an identity that has always been expected of middle-class girls at a certain age - a stage where they have been expected to come out into public society to demonstrate themselves as respectable, heterosexual subjects.

For the girls in my study this certainly appeared to be the case, for despite their freedoms, the 'tween' age-stage for them was still very much a time structured by dominant discourses of gender, class and sexuality. In their school and at their age, the heterosexual was certainly imaginary, both in the sense that Ingraham (1996) uses

the term (as a dominant ideal in the school but one that was obscured from view and presented as normal and natural) but also in a fantasmatic sense (remaining as a dream and a fantasy for these girls to fulfil in the future, a promise of a huge white wedding if only they could delay their sexual development in the present).

As the tomboys stories demonstrate, the girls did in fact feel that they were given very little space to be different and to deviate from these norms. In Lesko's (2001:132) terms, it appeared that the girls' guardians knew what their futures should entail; that they knew the end of the story and that:

... Since the end of the story matters so much and adults know what the correct and happy ending is (increasing maturity and responsibility, school achievement, full-time employment, marriage and children, property ownership, in that order), only deviations or pitfalls along the prescribed plot merit attention.

The girls had to be guarded and protected against all odds, so that, like the 'princesses' in their fairy stories, they could be guaranteed their very own 'happy ever after'. The End.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter has sought to highlight the multiple ways in which young girls experience the transition to senior school; the plethora of classed, gendered, academic and sexualised transitions that they encountered. The chapter has examined some of the unique rights and responsibilities that these girls had access to as they 'grew up' and moved schools. However, it has also explored the ways in which these rights and responsibilities remained bound within dominant discourses of 'tweenage-hood'. The next and final chapter seeks to draw all of these conclusions together, alongside the conclusions drawn from the previous substantive chapters, in order to draw a final conclusion to the thesis.



## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusions**

I was walking back to the classroom towards the end of the lunch break today when I saw a young girl (from the Year Three class) jump off the end of the main stairwell banisters and run through a set of double doors in front of her. Thinking nothing more of the incident I walked towards the staircase myself and greeted several of the girls from the year six class (all of whom were involved in my research). As I passed the girls some of them turned to greet me but the majority remained silent, watching in (apparent) amazement as the young girl disappeared through the double doors and into the main hallway of the school. As I put my hand out to support myself up the stairs several of the girls rushed to move my hand away, quite literally pushing me to the other side of the stairwell. 'Didn't you just see that?', one of the girls asked me, 'it was awful... that girl just pulled up her skirt so we could see her knickers and everything, and then she slid down the banisters and ran off leaving who knows what behind her!'

(Field note extract, July 2004)

#### **Introduction – The 'banister incident'**

The banister incident was a moment that took place towards the end of my field work in the junior school. Although, as the field notes suggest, I was not completely aware of the significance of the event at the time, later on in my analyses it became somewhat of a 'defining moment' for me in my research - a moment that enabled me to think about the ways in which various aspects of the thesis come together. Indeed, on the surface the incident appears to be quite straightforward: a simple example of an occasion where one young girl breaks certain school rules by sliding down the banisters and is consequently reprimanded (although not face-to-face) by her peers for her 'rebellion'. Yet when we scratch beneath the surface, it appears that there is much more to this event than first meets the eye.

At once this scene can be understood as a moment of resistance and as a time of great pleasure and freedom. The girl playing on the banister momentarily appears able to abandon concerns of respectability (e.g. of sufficiently covering her underwear, or of adhering to school rules) and simply enjoys the sensation of engaging in spontaneous physical activity. And yet, as we learn from the comments of the girls watching the event, the scene can also be understood as a moment of restraint and restricted

possibilities. For as the girls watch the scene unravel before them so they express their disgust at the younger girl's behaviour, at once distancing themselves from the event and therefore marking it out as 'wrong' (Probyn 1994) and at the same time reinscribing their own (relatively passive and 'ladylike') behaviour as the desirable feminine norm. From the conversations that I had with the girls in the minutes following the incident it became apparent to me that they had rejected the girl's behaviour because it appeared to transgress a number of dominant classed, aged and gendered norms in the school— not only had the girl played on the banisters in a way generally reserved for the home and in a manner that to them signalled immaturity, but she had played in a way that had revealed her underwear; in a way that could be regarded as unfeminine, sexually excessive and working-class. The incident, therefore, demonstrates the dominance of certain classed, gendered and aged discourses that make certain (predominantly 'ladylike') identities intelligible/desirable and others unintelligible/undesirable in this context, and the moments of possible resistance and the spaces that appear in these discourses for girls to do their identities differently.

It is because this incident so neatly captures all of these identity processes in a simple, and yet irreducible manner that I have chosen this field note extract to begin this final chapter. Of course, in itself this incident can not summarise or explain my entire thesis. However, it does provide a starting point from which to explore some of the salient points in this study and as such it will be used in this chapter as a catalyst and as point of departure, for exploring some of the dominant themes of the thesis as a whole and as a means of drawing them together. The chapter starts by examining the girls' concerns about 'being a lady' and of embodying certain hyper-feminine identities in this school context. The following sections expand upon this theme, suggesting that the 'lady' identity was not just a gendered identity, but also one that was constituted by classed, sexualised and generational discourses. These sections will explore both the importance of class(y)ness and respectability for these girls and the dominance of heterosexuality in this single-sex school. The chapter will then move on to explore the place of micro-resistant practices in these identity constructions and the girls' painful and pleasurable experiences of them, before finally concluding by pointing towards some possibilities for future research.

It is important to remember that this chapter will not represent a straightforward summary or a simple conclusion to the questions posed at the beginning of the thesis, for as Gonick (2005:161) suggests it is almost impossible to produce a singular conclusion from a discussion in which 'the limits to understanding have been central to the analysis as the claims to knowledge'. The very study of identity (when recognised as fluid and multiple in nature) forecloses traditional narrative convention; not resting on singular stories with simple endings, but on contradictions, differences and on a series of openings to other possibilities (Stronach and Maclure 1999). It is also useful to note that this chapter does not offer any simple explanations of the ways in which this work relates to wider policy implications. Instead, this chapter aims to draw together those conclusions that until this point have not yet been linked, both as a way of pulling together some of the pieces of data and re-examining the discourses and discursive spaces that constituted these girls' experiences and as a way of identifying possible links and connections as well as ambivalence and contradiction. In doing so it is hoped that the arguments presented can be generalised, not in the traditional sense of the word - as results that are representative of a wider population- but in the sense that some of the theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter may have relevance beyond the local context of the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

### **Hyper-femininity and the importance of being a 'lady'**

One of the most striking comments that I felt the girls watching the banister incident made in the minutes following the event, was that the younger girl's behaviour in this episode was 'not very ladylike'. The comment appeared to sum up everything that they felt was wrong with her behaviour; that it transgressed a number of dominant classed, gendered and sexualised norms within the school. Indeed, the dominance of the 'lady' identity in this school setting is a major point that has been highlighted throughout the thesis. Chapter Four began by demonstrating how almost all of the girls that I spoke to in my research felt that the only way to behave acceptably in school was to 'act like a lady' and how a number of their teachers claimed that it was in fact a dominant aim of the school to produce girls who could clearly be considered to be ladies. Chapter Four also considered the girls' own ideas of what being a lady actually entailed: their claims that being a lady was about embodying both a particularly hyper-feminine look ('pink', 'fluffy' and well 'made-up') and a specific

type of hyper-feminine behaviour ('nice', 'compliant' and relatively passive). The group of girls who were felt to inhabit this identity most closely were described in this chapter, as those girls who were peer and self-identified 'girly girls'. It was this group of girls who (despite not being very well liked by their peers!) were regarded as the most popular group of girls in the class. Like Hey's (1997) 'All Star Girls' these were girls who were considered to 'have it all'; they were pretty, rich, popular and clever and their positioning within dominant discourses of hyper-femininity appeared to lend them a great deal of symbolic capital within the school.

Hyper-femininity can best be understood as a particularly exaggerated or emphasised performance of femininity (Paechter 2006b). As Butler (2004) suggests, hyper-femininity represents an ideal form of femininity and one that many women cannot perform on an everyday basis. In this school context, hyper-femininity (as a dominant way of performing the lady identity) was certainly held up as 'ideal'; as a positioning that many girls struggled to negotiate for themselves. The example of the wannabe girly girls in chapter four clearly illustrates the ways in which a number of girls struggled to be recognised - by wearing typically 'girly girl' (pink) clothes (which ironically the girly girls themselves did not wear), by participating in 'girly' pastimes (such as nail-painting, gossiping and sleepovers) and on some occasions by engaging themselves in 'girly girl' fiction as a way of fantasising about 'passing' as a member of this group (Skeggs 1997).

As an 'ideal', hyper-femininity (or 'being a lady') was also a positioning that many girls struggled against. Indeed, despite the fact that many of the girls wished to define others in these static and essentialist ways (by tying them down to one specific identity) a large number of them did not want to be limited in these ways themselves (de Castro 2004). Instead the girls often felt that they could be identified in a multitude of ways. For example, one girl told me: 'I am a girly girl but I can also be a bit naughty and mischievous, sometimes I would say I am a little bit tomboy'. As the comments from the girls in Chapter Five demonstrate, there were times when being positioned as a girly girl or a lady proved to be somewhat of an 'identity trap' (Youdell 2003), for many of the girls who were identified in this way were also largely identified by their teachers as 'conformist plodders' (Francis and Skelton 2002). As supposedly hyper-feminine young ladies, the girly girls were regarded to be

ideal pupils; they were caretakers for others in their class and they collaborated well with their peers. However, these girls were rarely identified as ideal achievers. Seen by their teachers to 'try too hard' or to 'not be naturally intelligent' enough, these girls sometimes felt that they were trapped in undesirable positions as 'failed' learners.

In Chapter Seven it was suggested that the girls felt that as they 'grew up' the demands of embodying a hyper-feminine identity substantially increased. As the girls moved from the junior school to senior school so they told me that they were expected 'more than ever to grow up' and become 'proper feminine young ladies'. The tomboys in particular felt that they struggled the most with these demands, telling me that there was 'only room for girly girls in senior school'. As Renold (2006) suggests from her own work with tomboys, the practice of queering girl or doing girl differently is almost certainly temporally and spatially based – a practice that is confined to the primary school where adults presume that children are sexually innocent. It was only as these girls moved to secondary school that their innocence came under threat of erasure and their identities appeared to diminish with the supposed ever-closer step to adolescence and adulthood (Renold 2006).

### **Heterofemininity and the policing of gendered and sexualised behaviour**

The girls' talk about 'being a lady' also prompts us to think about the distinct ways in which discourses of gender and sexuality suffuse one another in the constitution of subjects (as Sedgwick 1990 suggests the 'indissoluble knot' of gender and sexuality). Ingraham's concept of heterogender (or more specifically: heterofemininity) has been used in the thesis as a way of exploring this process; to highlight the ways in which 'doing girl' also meant 'doing heterosexuality'. Heterofemininity and the sexualisation of girlhood was a major theme explored in Chapter Seven, where it was suggested that the girls' teachers went to great lengths (censoring reading books, confiscating magazines and controlling aspects of dress) to protect them from (what they saw to be) their emergent sexualities. As Chapter Seven proposed, this did not mean that the girls were actively discouraged from thinking about romantic relationships. In fact it was argued in this chapter that many of the girls' teachers encouraged them to engage in heterosexual romantic relationships (even if this was solely through use of their imaginations in class discussions). However, it was also

suggested that these relationships were recognised by the girls' teachers only when they remained firmly within age-appropriate discourses of fun and friendship rather than in sexual activity (Epstein and Johnson 1997). Renold's (2005) term 'sexual generationing' was used in this chapter to describe the ways in which these girls were expected to develop sexually in an age-appropriate manner; to be heterofeminine young women but to delay their sexuality in favour of academic success.

It was not just the girls' teachers who policed them in terms of their sexual behaviour, for the girls themselves were quite active in this surveillance. Chapter One demonstrated how this 'policing of identity' took place within the girls' friendship groups. Like the girls in Kehily *et al's* (2003) diary group, these girls used their friendship chats as a way of maintaining group identities and policing boundaries of behaviour. The banister incident is also a powerful example of the ways in which the girls took up this gendered and sexualised policing for themselves. Although in this instance the girl was not physically present to reap the consequences of her behaviour (possibly remaining ignorant of the other girls' criticisms), there were many incidents that occurred during my research where girls did face harsh punishments for their supposedly transgressive behaviour. Chapter Seven, for example, cites an incident that occurred during the photography club to examine how a number of girls faced heavy (gendered and sexualised) criticism for failing to cover themselves up 'appropriately' in their photographs. What this incident also demonstrated, however, was just how fragile the limits of hyper-femininity were in this school context - the fine line that still exists for girls between being a hyper-feminine lady and a sexually capricious 'tart' (Lees 1999).

### **The importance of heterosexuality and the heterosexual imaginary**

The girls felt compelled not only to perform age-appropriate sexual identities, but also to perform heterosexual identities. This is perhaps not an entirely surprising finding, for many authors have commented on the dominance of heterosexual discourses (the heterosexual matrix) in educational settings (Epstein and Johnson 1999, Epstein *et al* 2003, Renold 2005, Youdell 2004, Rasmussen 2005). In addition, Thorne (1993:170) has argued that hyper-femininity is often negotiated through the heterosexual, for girls are frequently:

...pressured to make themselves 'attractive', to get a boyfriend; to define themselves and other girls in terms of the heterosexual market. Although boys enter into this market, it is less defining of their status and presumed futures, and given the structure of heterosexuality, it is they who tend to have the upper hand.

In this school it was certainly the case that many of the girls gained status from having and maintaining heterosexual romantic relationships. Despite the single-sex nature of the school and the relative absence of men in this setting, heterosexuality and boys played a large part in these girls' lives. Chapter six, for example, highlights the ways in which many girls felt that they did not want to be seen as 'too sporty' or 'too athletic' in case it made them unattractive to the opposite sex. Even though boys were not physically present on the hockey pitch or the lacrosse field, the girls pulled up their joggers and tied back their t-shirts to make themselves (hetero) 'sexy'. Chapter Seven also draws attention to the diversity of (often intensely pleasurable) bodily practices that many of the girls engaged in before attending discos or before heading into town on a shopping trip in order to make themselves noticeable to the opposite sex.

What is perhaps particularly interesting is the fact that a number of the girls in this school claimed that they did not know any boys. Although some of the girls claimed to have relationships with boys that they had met on holiday or on summer camps, many of the girls told me that they 'did not know any boys at all' and so could 'only imagine what they were really like'. As Chapter Seven suggested, the heterosexual really was imaginary in this school (Ingraham 1999). Not only because it was obscured from view (its dominance often went unnoticed in everyday school life) but also because it remained a kind of fantasy/imaginary ideal for these girls; a kind of 'boys in the head' fantasy/imaginary picture of what it would like to be with or go out with boys, rather than a relationship that existed in 'reality' (Holland *et al* 1998).

Despite the dominance of heterosexual norms in other school settings, the girls in this school believed that it was even more of an issue in their school due to its single-sex nature. Because only girls were present in the school, the girls told me that they felt even more pressured to present themselves as heterosexual so that they could not be (mis)recognised as lesbians. Hyper-hetero-femininity was intensified in this setting

due to the absence of men. This is perhaps a surprising finding since many authors have claimed that historically single-sex education has allowed girls more freedom in their romantic relationships with members of the same sex. Griffiths (1997), for example, mentions a number of instances where it was expected that girls in single-sex schools would have 'crushes' on girls older than themselves. Yet as Sedgwick (1990) suggests, it is often separatism and sameness (such as that found in single-sex education) that leads people to suspect 'homosexuality'.

Indeed, the girls in this school found that many more comments were made about their sexuality because of their separation from boys; they found that it was automatically assumed by their peers outside of the school that they were lesbians. Many of the girls also told me that they felt that their peers inside the school were suspicious of lesbianism too, both because of the single-sex nature of the school and because of the close and intimate form that some relationships would take. As Chapter Six, in particular, demonstrates, the girls felt that they had to go to great lengths to protect themselves from these claims and from this potentially injurious positioning. As Chapter Seven also demonstrates, even the tomboys were reluctant to reject heterosexual relationships altogether in case they were positioned as lesbians and because the emotional and social costs of rejecting heterosexuality altogether were extremely high (Renold 2006).

### **Class(y)ness and Respectability**

The 'lady' has always been a particularly upper-middle class identity, a concept that has come to stand for all things respectably feminine (see Poovey 1984). What this thesis has argued is that, for these girls, being a lady was not just about presenting oneself as hyper-feminine and heterosexual but also about presenting oneself as 'respectable' and upper-middle class(y) (enough). Indeed, despite Skeggs' (1997) claims that respectability (as a central mechanism through which class is marked out – a type of Englishness, individuality and morality) is predominantly a working-class concern, this thesis has demonstrated just how dominant a concern it was for these upper-middle class girls. The banister incident is just one example of the ways in which the girls in this school tried to mark out their own respectability against others in the school. Watching this event, the girls were able to mark themselves out as



ladylike and respectable by expressing their disgust at the younger girl's behaviour and by simultaneously positioning her as unrespectable and possibly even working-class. The girls did this explicitly by claiming that her behaviour was 'unladylike' but also more implicitly by expressing disgust over her failure to conceal her underwear and over her lack of bodily control (both being matters of overt sexuality, hygiene and morality, which, as Skeggs (2004) suggests, have commonly been regarded to be particularly working-class behaviours).

Chapter Seven also demonstrates the ways in which the girls in this school used others from outside of the school as a way of marking out their own respectability. It was particularly important for the girls in this school to distinguish themselves from (what they saw as) the working-class masses. They did this by constantly referring to others' less respectable behaviour – their overt 'tartiness' or extreme 'laddish' behaviour. Often, like the boys that these girls knew, these working-class figures were not 'real' people but exaggerated characters that existed in their imaginations; a type of 'class in the head'. For many of the girls it was these imaginary figures and stereotypes (especially personified in the Vicky Pollard character from the popular British comedy series 'Little Britain'<sup>1</sup>) that provided them with a constant and fearful reminder of what they should not allow themselves to become. Yet this was not only a fear that the girls mentioned in terms of their expected sexual behaviour (Vicky Pollard often being cited as a stereotype) for it was also a fear that many girls expressed over their academic achievement. As Chapter Seven suggests (alongside Walkerdine *et al* 2001 and Ball 2003), one of the reasons these girls kept on achieving so highly in school, despite the apparent pain and trauma it caused them, was their fear of falling off the edge - a fear of not being able to distinguish themselves from high-achieving others or of being unable to maintain their expected upper-middle class positions in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Little Britain is a popular British comic television series that makes a joke of several supposedly 'traditional' British characters. Vicky Pollard is the series characterisation of a 'chav' – a supposedly working-class and sexually promiscuous character.

### **Class Fractions and the 'messy' nature of the (upper) middle-class**

Despite the fact that many of the girls in my research came from upper-middle class backgrounds and felt that they had to present themselves as respectable ladies, their classed identities and experiences were by no means identical. As Butler and Robson (2001:71) suggest:

In analysing middle-class formation it is important to avoid simply reading different groups off from their 'objective' class/occupational positions. Processes of formation are, rather, better understood as emerging out of the dialectical interplay of varying forms of social and economic capital and habitus on the one hand, and the distinctive opportunities – across a range of fields – offered by metropolitan marketplaces on the other.

The concept of habitus has been important in my work to explore the ways in which the girls in my research differed in their experiences of social class despite their similar positioning(s). Bourdieu (1979) indicates that a person's habitus will form across different fields – as a person encounters different fields so they will develop different predispositions. Furthermore, Bourdieu remarks that the habitus is both an individual and a group phenomenon, thus explaining why groups of people who share similar positions in social space will have similar experiences of social life (owing to their group habitus) but also how they may differ due to the different trajectories that they take to reach those positions and owing to their individual habitus (Reay 2004).

For a number of the 'new' girls involved in my study, it was certainly the case that they experienced social class differently to the girls who had been in the school for some time. Despite their upper-middle class backgrounds many of these girls felt like 'fish out of water' in the elite and privileged context of the private school – many feeling that they did not properly belong in this environment due to the different 'training' and 'experiences' that they had received in the state sector (Connolly 2005, Reay 2001). As Chapter Five demonstrated, it was not always the case that all of the 'new' girls felt like this or that they passively accepted their positioning as 'lower middle-class' others, for many of the girls actively challenged the elite school culture through strategies of anti-pretension (Skeggs 2004). However, not all of the 'old' junior school girls felt like 'fish in water' in their schooling environment either. Elsie and Gayle were picked out as examples of two girls who felt particularly lacking in

cultural and economic capital compared to their classmates and who felt a distinct sense of shame owing to their privileged class positions. What all of these examples demonstrate, therefore, is not only the divided nature of the middle-classes but also the real differences that these class fractions can make to girl's experiences of education, and particularly to their experiences of schoolwork and academic success.

### **Resistance and agency**

Just as the girls' class identities could not be regarded to be fixed, static or stable, neither could their gender, generational or sexual identities. As Butler (1999) suggests, identity constitution needs to be understood as a fluid and multiple process. Moreover, identity constitution is a time of both subjection and mastery:

To claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked and resisted?

(Butler 1995:46)

Indeed it is important to recognise that moments like the banister incident are not just moments of pain and subjection but also moments where we can glimpse agency, pleasure and resistance. Despite the fact that this scene was eventually recouped and reworked by the girls in terms of the gendered, classed and sexualised norms of hyper-femininity and 'being a lady', the banister incident was still a micro-resistant practice, a moment where one pupil was able to do 'girl' differently. The moment was only a couple of minutes long, with only a few short actions and very few words. Yet it clearly demonstrated the micro-resistant practices that Foucault (1987) speaks of - it was no great rebellion but a local and momentary struggle against dominant norms.

This moment was also seemingly insignificant (certainly for me at the exact moment when it took place) and yet it had great significance for the girls involved in the scene. Raby (2006) helpfully suggests that resistant acts will not always be recognised by others as significant or successful events. Similarly, Butler (2004) suggests that resistant acts are always open to misfiring, backfiring or reworking but that this does

not necessarily take away from their significance for the subjects that are involved in them.

Of course, in the banister incident it remains unclear as to how significant this act was for the girl who slid down the banisters. During my research I never had time to ask the girl herself. Yet there were a number of 'micro-resistant' acts that occurred during my research that did appear to have great significance for the girls involved in them. Both Chapters Four and Five discuss episodes that occurred during the photography club. Chapter four discusses an occasion where some of the tomboys were determined to take a photograph that represented them as different from the girly girls in their class – a picture that portrayed them looking 'deadly serious' and all dressed in blue, whilst the girly girls frolicked 'immaturely' in the background, dressed head-to-toe in pink. For the girly girls involved in the picture it was not a significant event, in fact they saw it as a chance to celebrate and reinstate their own 'girlyness'. For the tomboys, however, this was a moment of great victory; a moment where they felt they had been able to rework these dominant norms so that it was they who were portrayed as 'normal' and 'powerful' and the girly girls who could be seen as 'alternative'.

Chapter Five discusses a picture that some of the girls from the rebel gang took to demonstrate their resistance to school. On the surface this photograph does not look particularly significant or revolutionary; a simple picture of one girl sprawled across the seat of a chair (in a superman [sic] pose) while her friends push her around. Yet for the girls involved in the picture there was more to the scene than first met the eye; this was a complex episode where, for just one moment, they felt that they had been able to turn the tables of power and to present themselves (the supposedly under-achievers) as different and powerful. Chapters Five and Six also note the ways in which a number of girls in my research used intentional strategies like humour to discursively manoeuvre themselves into more powerful positions. Humour was often used by the girls as a form of hyperbolic masquerade; as a way of 'performing powerfully in the space of shame' and of (paradoxically) being more of what rendered them other and marginal whilst simultaneously revaluing these otherwise devalued identities (Butler 1999, MacInnes and Couch 2004).

Not all of the moments of resistance that I have mentioned in my research necessarily happened with realised 'intent'. The animal play incident (mentioned in Chapter Seven) – where a number of girls performed a graphic scene of sexual intercourse in the middle of their English class – is a striking example of this seemingly unintentional resistance. The girls involved in the play had not expressed any desires to me before the event that signalled that they wanted to intentionally embarrass their teachers by bringing up this subject up in class. In fact, the girls often told me that 'sex' was not a subject that they wanted to talk about, especially in class with their teachers. What the incident demonstrates is the ways in which discourses that have previously been unspoken can enter into new situations; how non-ordinary meanings can enter into everyday action and disrupt historically sedimented discourses (Butler 2005, Youdell 2006). It is critical moments like these that have been important in my research, for as Butler (2004:216) contends, it is as important to identify how identities are performed as it is to identify how they are 'disputed and challenged'; to identify 'where coherence of categories are questioned and how gender turns out to be malleable and transformable'.

### **Alternative Femininities**

One of the ways in which the girls in this school felt able to 'do' their identities differently was as tomboys. In chapter four it was suggested that there was a large group of tomboys that existed in this class – approximately six girls who fully identified as 'proper tomboys'. These were girls who told me that they preferred fighting over gossiping, friendships with boys over romantic relationships and practical clothing over pink and fluffy attire. Chapter Five demonstrated the ways in which these girls felt that they differed in the classroom and in terms of academic achievement. It was suggested, in this chapter, that those girls who were identified as tomboys were also those who were most likely to be identified as naturally able and intelligent pupils. Their positioning in masculine discourses and subject positions appeared to enable them to achieve in more socially acceptable ways from the girly girls in their class.

Chapter Four demonstrated the ways in which the tomboys felt that their friendship group differed from those around them. Rather than identifying themselves as a group

of similar individuals (as many of the girly girls did) the tomboys saw themselves as a group made up of a variety of people, all of whom were tolerant to one another's differences. Similarly this chapter suggested that it was the tomboys who saw themselves as inhabiting 'authentic' and 'kind' identities as opposed to the 'fake', 'plastic' and 'mean girl' identities that they felt existed amongst the girly girls. Importantly, Chapter Seven also proposed that the tomboy identity was one of the only ways in which these girls felt that they could resist the dominant pressures of hyper-femininity and heterosexuality (Renold 2006). It was therefore a particularly important identity for them as one of the only ways to be different in a single-sex girls' school, a way of transgressing traditional gender norms and pushing the limits of normative femininity.

Yet as Chapter Six demonstrated, it was not just the tomboys who were found to be doing 'girl' differently, for a number of girls invested in acts of tomboyism (particularly through sporting events) in order to show their difference (Renold 2005b). Indeed, it could never be claimed that the girls took up their positions within hyper-feminine discourses passively, for none of them claimed to want to inhabit this category 'really' and fully and many of them could easily point to problems that this positioning held. However, it was also not simply the case that the tomboys could always be found to be actively challenging traditional feminine norms, for often alternative femininity meant just that: that the girls did not want to be masculine, rather they simply wanted to be 'different' girls. Holland (2004) concludes from her work with older women that they too felt that alternative femininity was a balancing act between being a lady and being differently feminine. It was an identity no less bound by cultural expectations of femininity; rather it was a position of ambivalence owing to femininity's status as a repudiated category. Holland suggests that in the case of her participants, alternative femininity often meant finding an alternative feminine appearance rather than an altogether alternative to femininity (the difference between identification and performance).

This also appeared to be the case for many of the girls in my study, for as chapter four argued ultimately the tomboys did not want to be seen as masculine. There was a real difference for these girls between 'being masculine' and 'acting like a boy' - they felt a strong need not to disrupt the coherence of sex/gender/desire (Butler's heterosexual

matrix). As Reay (1999) has argued from her own work with young tomboys, it is often the case that girls who identify as tomboys actually end up endorsing existing gender hierarchies rather than challenging them because through their actions they devalue femininity and confirm male superiority. Yet, as Reay (1999) also suggests, it is important to recognise the fact that although these girls are not actually pushing gendered boundaries they are actively working at the edges of these boundaries to create new possibilities and ways of being. In this school context being a tomboy was not necessarily a radical act of resistance (especially because it often did not involve much more than 'looking different'), yet it was a dominant way in which these girls felt that they could make a difference and 'stand out from the crowd' in school.

### **The pain and shame involved in growing up female**

As well as being a process of subjection and mastery, identity construction must also be recognised as a process involving pleasure and pain. Pain is perhaps a feeling that is rarely talked about with regard to middle-class girls. As Power *et al* (2001) and Walkerdine *et al* (2001) propose it is often felt that these are the girls who 'have it all' – they are doing well at school and are likely to succeed and so are not seen to be a problem. Yet 'growing-up female' was not an entirely easy experience for these girls. Despite the girls' claims that they were able to make themselves in the conditions of their own choosing (as DIY projects that they could work on to build towards a brilliant and successful future, Harris 2004) and despite the fact that they could be seen as 'cosmopolitans' and 'can do' girls with 'the world at their feet', there was no pain-free or straightforward pathway available to them to reach this success. Being an upper-middle class girl was no easy feat for these girls, nor was it an identity that they ever felt they could ever really achieve; instead it required constant hard work and attention.

Chapter Three, for example, suggested that these girls were under increasing pressure to make themselves in the conditions of individualisation. Abigail's experiences of academic achievement were highlighted in this chapter to explore how some girls experienced this pressure in terms of a connection/autonomy conflict (McLeod 2002). Abigail's example illustrated the intense pain some girls experienced through trying to successfully balance the competing conditions of sociality and individuality; by

trying to compete with their peers as successful pupils but also by trying to collaborate with them as respectable girls.

In terms of academic success, Chapter Five argued that there is a real need to look at the different discourses of success available to girls in school (the multiplicity of discourses which fuse together notions of effort, ability, attainment, discipline and conduct in complex ways) in order to determine the possible identities open to these girls as good/bad students and achievers (Youdell 2006). Despite their high attainments in tests, it was proposed in this chapter that many of the girls in this school still struggled to be recognised as successful students and ideal learners. The educational habitus was identified as a useful theoretical tool to explore just how painful these experiences could be for girls and the ways in which they may form barriers to these girls' academic success in the future. Success, in this chapter, was described as performative - as something that the girls felt they were under constant pressure to achieve and perform, something that was never ever fully achieved but had to constantly be worked at (Archer 2005). It was the pressure of having to constantly achieve these aims that many of the girls felt was so painful for them.

In Chapter Six it was suggested that the girls' experiences of physical education and bodily achievement could also be painful and shameful. Despite the mass of opportunities available to girls in this school to achieve in sport, it was suggested that success was only recognised in very narrow ways and often only as a result of girls embodying a particularly slender bodily shape. Chapter Seven further suggested that the girls' experiences of school substantially changed as they moved from the junior school to the senior school. Many of the girls felt that after this move they could no longer be children and enjoy the fun experiences of childhood; instead they felt they were being forced to grow up, be mature and become respectable hyper-feminine young women. This chapter also explored how many of the girls felt trapped at this age - caught in between both childhood and adulthood, as 'tweenagers' who were expected to behave like adults but who could not expect any of the rewards until much later on in life. As Walkerdine *et al* (2001) suggest it would appear that it is still not easy for girls to succeed at being feminine and being successful in school. In the words of one of my participants:



There is good and there is bad about being a girl at school...it is just that we are expected to hide the bad and only talk about the good. No one really realises just what it is like for us...but it can be really really bad .

(Eden – Year Seven Interviews, February 2005)

### **The pleasures of growing up female**

And yet these girls were extremely privileged – they had multiple opportunities open to them and they experienced a tremendous amount of pleasure alongside these pressures and pains. The banister incident provides a possible example of the pain that can result for girls when they transgress certain classed and gendered norms (in this instance the social isolation that could have occurred from the other girls (dis)identification with this act). Yet it is also a possible example of the intense pleasure that can result from these acts; the real freedom girls may experience from doing ‘girl’, ‘middle-class’ and ‘sexuality’ differently. Indeed, as Chapter Three suggests, many of the girls who were identified as ‘different’ often felt that they had chosen this position for themselves and would sometimes claim that it was an intensely pleasurable position to inhabit.

It is important to recognise that it was not only the girls who resisted these dominant (classed, gendered, aged and sexualised) norms that experienced pleasure and freedom during the processes of constituting their identities, for many of the girls who identified as ‘ladies’ and ‘girly girls’ also experienced pleasure by inhabiting these positions. As Butler (2004:2) suggests it is important to recognise the pleasure that is held in traditional feminine identities; to recognise the real desire that is linked to being recognised as a socially desirable and viable being. Indeed, Foucault’s concepts of power/knowledge and pleasure are useful tools for understanding how it is that discourses (and their resultant subject positions) can be both repressive and productive and painful and pleasurable. Rather than being concerned with a uni-dimensional model of power as repressive and painful, Foucault (1980:119) was concerned with its fluid and (sometimes) pleasurable nature. He suggested that:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure.

Foucault's own work on the nature of pleasure was not an exploration of the essential nature of pleasure; rather it was an examination of the ways in which the rules and conditions of experience enable individuals to experience pleasure 'properly'. Proper pleasure, in Foucault's (1985:43) terms, is achieved by subjects who use their knowledge of what they ought to do to guide their acts and moderate their behaviour in order to produce themselves as recognisable subjects.

It was certainly the case that a number of the girls in this school setting found that inhabiting the girly girl subject position was a powerful and pleasurable experience; it was extremely pleasurable for them to be recognised in these dominant ways. Despite being aware of the potential costs and pains involved in inhabiting this position many of the girls did try on a daily basis to moderate their behaviour and to actively perform this identity for themselves. Sarah's case study (presented in Chapter Seven) is a prominent example of this pleasure, as her photo caption stated:

All girls have to look their best if they want to impress. People such as tomboys never dress up as people like me. Pink skirts, high heels, lipstick, make-up. That is what I wear. Look your best girls! I look like a princess. I am a princess. Glamour, glory, that's my thing!

For Sarah there was real pleasure involved in the hard-work of producing glamour and in the traditional feminine beauty practices of dressing up and being made-over. This was also the case for a number of the other girls in my study, who spoke at great lengths about the 'joys' of getting themselves ready for the school disco (see Chapter Seven) and of presenting themselves as heterosexually attractive and desirable (both in terms of looks and smells!).

What is particularly interesting about these examples is the dominant role that the girls' bodies played in the constitution of their identities (the ways in which discourses were constitutive of certain subjectivities and how they were cited and inscribed through certain bodily practices), therefore demonstrating the role that both bodies and language play in identity formation (Butler 1997, Youdell 2006). This is also a salient point that is made throughout the entire thesis, though perhaps made most explicitly in Chapter Six where there is a particular emphasis on the role of the body in sport and dance.

What is also interesting about these examples, however, is the fact that at no point in their conversations did the girls seem unaware of the pain or contradictions that could also result from these beauty practices (i.e. the hard work involved in these practices, the fact that they would sometimes feel forced to present themselves in this way and the idea that they would not really benefit from these practices until much later on in life). Alongside the pleasures, the girls could easily speak of the pains involved in these practices. In a similar manner to the women participating in Black's (2004) study, it appeared that the girls held ambivalent feelings towards these beauty practices – they recognised their (sometimes) repressive force but did not reject them outright because they were simultaneously experienced as extremely pleasurable and physically sensuous. For the girls in this study, there were real pressures for them to present themselves as both bright and beautiful (Renold and Allan 2006), but there were also pleasures in achieving these aims and being recognised in these desirable ways, especially if these practices could be worked on within their friendship groups to promote social solidarity.

## **Discussion**

In both popular and academic thought it has commonly been argued that the single-sex selective school is the ideal social and educational environment for young girls. It is often suggested that such schools allow girls to be educated without the distraction of boys and with the help of positive female role models. Similarly, it has been suggested that the private and selective nature of these schools often attracts pupils (or in the first instance their parents) because of the use of traditional (classed) signifiers and because of their heavy emphasis on academic success (Jackson and Bissett 2005). In the school where my research was based, these were certainly some of the reasons that the girls' parents used to talk about why they had sent their children to this school. As one girl told me:

Ellissa: Well like I really did want to go to the same high school as my old friends... and everyone from my old class did go to the same school apart from me! My Dad said that he would let me choose but he also said that he wanted what is best for me and he thought that it would be best to come here cos there are more opportunities. My Dad like said just try it and see if you like it and do the test to see if you if you are good enough. So I gave that a go and in the end I did come here

because he really wanted me to come here and so did all my family cos it is a good school. I didn't want to leave my friends but then I did eventually choose to come here in the end.

In other interviews it seemed to be the case that the girls had drawn similar conclusions for themselves, as one girl suggested:

Maisy: Oh yeah I really did want to come to this school cos they give you so many opportunities for sports and stuff, especially cos we are girls and in my old school it was mainly only boys who could do that stuff! There are also more opportunities in music and stuff, like they let you play on instruments and things, like you have the swimming pool and things.

Although there really were multiple opportunities open to the girls in this school and there really was an attitude expressed by the staff that suggested that 'girls could do anything', the conclusion I am drawing from my research is not that that these girls could easily take up these 'successful' feminine identities for themselves just because of their attendance at this school. Rather I am concluding that it was a difficult balancing act, even for these girls in this privileged schooling environment. Because of the dual aims of the school (the emphasis on (classed) status/success and on equal/enhanced opportunities for girls) there was often a fine line that the school walked between reinforcing and challenging certain classed and gendered inequalities (Ball and Gewirtz 1997). As Watson (1997:382) expresses the point:

Girls' schools must walk a fine line since, while encouraging girls to succeed, they must also reinforce dominant discourses of femininity which may ultimately serve to reproduce the very gender inequalities they are perceived to be able to subvert.

The possibilities of achieving both academic and feminine success appeared to produce a number of contradictions that the girls had to negotiate on a daily basis. Success in academic work, for example, was expected and encouraged from these girls and yet simultaneously it was expected that the girls would act in a 'ladylike' manner, collaborating with their peers as 'ideal feminine pupils'. The school's anticipated aims for the girls' futures also seemed to follow these contradictory patterns, for the girls were actively encouraged to break certain gendered boundaries (to become entrepreneurs, business managers and world-class scientists); and yet, because of traditional classed (and academic) expectations, the girls told me that they

never felt able to access certain positions (as policewomen, army Majors and actresses).

What this thesis has tried to demonstrate is the multiple ways in which these girls negotiated their various identities. For as Butler (1993:116-17) suggests:

To prescribe an exclusive identification for a multiply constituted subject, as every subject is, is to enforce a reduction and a paralysis... And here it is not simply a matter of honouring the subject as a plurality or identifications, for these identifications are invariably imbricated in one another, the vehicle for one another.

In drawing this conclusion, the thesis has, I hope, demonstrated how, like many of their counterparts in co-educational, state run schools, these girls still struggled to balance these identities and to achieve success as feminine young women. It appeared to be the case that there were both 'old' and 'new' discourses circulating in this school context. As Gonick (2004:19) gleans from her own work with young girls, it appears that:

...the individualism that underlies the possibility of subjectivity in 'global times' offers girls new positions previously denied them, as well as constraints on what it is possible to become. Traditional femininity is being undone through its inclusion in discourses of individuality, rationality and adulthood, even as it is being rearticulated through an ever increasing array of contradictions, the juggling of which has always shaped experiences of femininity.

In today's 'global' society it appears that femininity is being reworked through discourses of neo-liberalism; seemingly offering an exciting new array of possibilities for girls who have the will and drive to continually reinvent themselves (Aapola *et al* 2005). Girls are increasingly becoming seen as powerful and agentic; as the metaphors for social change and mobility (Harris 2004, McRobbie 2004). These supposedly post-feminist ideas of 'having achieved it all' surround us in society - suggesting that feminism is outdated and that it can be 'done away with'.

In this school, there was certainly evidence of these new positions and possibilities, as girls were increasingly expected to make themselves as 'cosmopolitans' and 'glittering success stories'. Not only were the girls achieving in the present (both in terms of school grades and in terms of the 'mini businesses' that they were beginning

to build) but they also appeared to have great potential for the future (McRobbie 2004).

Yet the possibilities for the girls making themselves in these ways were also limited by enduring discourses of traditional upper-middle class femininity. The following field note further elucidates this point:

Walking down the corridors in school today I stop to look at the photographs lining the walls. On the whole these are pictures of previous students and staff. Although there is a range of images on display here I am struck momentarily by the ways in which they seem to be easily divided into categories of seemingly 'glamorous' or apparently 'butch' women. Thinking back to the photographs that the girls in my own research took I am further struck by the similar ways in which gender is portrayed in both of these sets of images – the ways in which the girls in my study also divided their own photographs into these categories of 'traditional' and 'alternative' femininity. Although I remind myself that there is much more going on in both of these sets of photographs and indeed the girls' own lives– (much more than gender identification alone, and more than a simple division between two different identities), I am haunted for the rest of the day by the apparent similarities and by the thought that these are historically enduring discourses that are sometimes overwritten and sometimes re-worked but still apparent in the girls' lives today. I am left gazing at these images with a sense of disappointment and with one question rattling round my head: despite recent changes (i.e. the real work that has occurred as a result of second-wave feminism and also the apparently changing conditions of late modern society), how much have these girls' lives really changed?

(Field note extract, September 2004)

When looked at in this way (rather than through the liberal feminist ideals which have led to 'narrow measures of performance by gender difference', Epstein and Ringrose 2006:3) the girls' lives do not appear to greatly differ from those of the women that had attended the same school before them. Certainly it seemed that these girls could achieve a great deal more than their 'ancestors' but still only within certain bounds and with the added pressure of trying to balance both 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities. Indeed, in this school 'girl power' often meant just that: that girls could be powerful but only when this enhanced and maintained normative femininity.

## **Final points and future research**

This thesis has begun to explore the identity processes at work for these 'successful' girls in a 'privileged' single-sex, private school. An ethnographic approach was adopted for the purposes of this study, with observation, photographs and interviews being used as methods to allow the girls to participate in the research and to explore their own subjectivities and discursive positionings. The girls in my study accomplished this with great competence and sophistication. It is important to note, however, that the school setting was not the only space in which these girls went about their identity work. As Fine and Weis (2001) suggest, there are many 'construction sites' (outside of education, and often going unmentioned in social research) that are important to young people in the construction of their identities.

Although this thesis has primarily focused on the schooling environment, it has tried to take space and place seriously - not just in the material sense (as something that can be touched or as a place where we can store our possessions, Bourdieu 1977) but also, as Foucault (1986:23) suggested, as a set of 'social relations'. The girls' photographs, for example, were used to begin to explore their use of space at home, in particular the importance of their bedrooms as one of the only 'private' spaces where they felt that they could express their identities. Similarly, through the girls' use of popular culture (mentioned throughout the thesis) it has been possible to explore the spaces that these forms provided for girls to discuss their own identities. Chapter Seven, for example, discussed the girls' use of magazines and novels that contained sexual content. Just as Kehily (2004) concluded from her work with young girls, it was also concluded in this chapter that these were useful resources for girls in learning about sexuality and as means of negotiating their own identities. In this sense, children's popular culture was taken seriously in my research, not unnecessarily or to make my work conform to ideals of 'decorative sociology' (Rojek 1999), but to illustrate that it is not as 'banal' and 'transparent' as it is often made out to be, and that it is an important space that many girls use in their identity work (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002).

Future work could, however, look at these different spaces in more detail: to understand the effect that these different contexts have on the construction of

identities. The home is a particularly important and pressing arena of concern for research with young upper-middle class girls, particularly as it is the space where these girls spend a major part of their time and because it is a space that goes relatively unnoticed in a great deal of social research. And so, this work represents only the beginning of this story of upper-middle class, feminine achievement - a thread that is beginning to unravel from a larger whole. As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, this research is not an end in itself, but a series of openings and possible starting points (Gonick 2003). The girls in my study certainly felt that this was the case, for as one girl told me:

It is like we have opened a huge can of worms and they just keep on coming out! We have begun to talk about these things but now it seems that we could carry on talking about them forever!



## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX ONE

### Timetable of Research

<b>Phase One</b>	2003/4	
	November	Letter written to senior school head seeking access to the school
	December	Contacted by the school and meeting arranged with the junior school head
	January	Meeting with the junior school head to discuss research design
	February	Meeting with class teacher to discuss research ideas
	March	Final discussions with the head teacher about the research
	April	Letters sent out to the children's parents
	May	Research begins - initial introductions to the children, photography club, interviews and observations begin
	June	Research continues – including a week away on a class residential
	July	Research in the junior school continues until the end of term. A meeting with the head of year seven is arranged to discuss the next phase of research
<b>Phase Two</b>		
	August	Meeting with the head of the senior school to discuss research so far and to talk about the next phase of research Time spent over the summer transcribing interviews and preparing for the next phase of research
	September	Introductory meeting with the senior school teachers to discuss my research. Research begins with in Year Seven – including interviews and observations
	October	Research continues in the senior school with the girls in Year Seven
	November	Research in year seven ends and time is spent out of school transcribing the interviews and preparing for the next phase of research
	December	Meeting with the Year Seven head to arrange the next phase of research

<b>Phase Three</b>	<b>2005</b>	
	<b>January</b>	<b>Meeting with the girls to discuss the possibilities of the next phase of research. Research begins.</b>
	<b>February</b>	<b>Research with the girls continues – including further follow up interviews and the lunchtime analysis club</b>
	<b>March</b>	<b>Research with the girls continues until the end of term and plans are made to finally leave the field</b>

## APPENDIX TWO

### **Participant details from group interviews, analysis groups and the photography club: (including: age, stated class identity and stated ethnic identity\*)**

#### **Phase one – Year Six interviews**

##### *Group one:*

Ebony: Age 11, Upper-middle class, White British.  
Helena: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Sarah: Age 10, Middle class, White British.  
Violet: Age 11, Upper middle-class, British – Mixed parentage.  
Jenny: Age 10, Middle-class, White British.

##### *Group two:*

Cathren: Age 10, Middle-class, White British.  
Eden: Age 10, Upper middle-class, White British.  
Isla: Age 11, Middle-class, British - Mixed parentage.  
Lucy: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Rachel: Age 10, Middle/working class, White British.

##### *Group three:*

Abigail: Age 10, Upper-middle class, White British.  
Kathryn: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Gene: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Maria: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Gayle: Age 10, Middle-class, White British.

##### *Group four:*

Ingrid: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Eva: Age 10, Middle-class, White British.  
Jasmine: Age 10, Middle-class, White British.  
Genella: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Elsie: Middle/working-class, White British.

##### *Group five:*

Amanda: Age 10, Upper-middle class, White British.  
Georgia: Age 10, Middle-class, White British.  
Poppy: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Ella: Age 10, Middle-class, White British.

#### **Phase one – Photography club members**

Abigail: Age 10, Upper-middle class, White British.  
Isla: Age 11, Middle-class, British - Mixed parentage.  
Jenny: Age 10, Middle-class, White British  
Violet: Age 11, Upper middle-class, British – Mixed parentage

Ingrid: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Eden: Age 10, Upper middle-class, White British.  
Gayle: Age 10, Middle-class, White British  
Poppy: Age 11, Middle-class, White British  
Sarah: Age 10, Middle class, White British

### **Phase two – Year Seven interviews**

#### *Group one:*

Elissa: Age 11, Middle/Working-class, British – mixed parentage.  
Millie: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.

#### *Group two:*

Odette: Age 12, Middle-class, White American.  
Amanda: Age 11, Upper-middle class, White British.  
Jenny: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Emilia: Age 11, Middle-class, White American.

#### *Group three:*

Karla: Age 12, Middle-class, British-Asian.  
Iyana: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.  
Isla: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.  
Lucy: Age 12, Middle-class, White British

#### *Group four:*

Gene: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.  
Libby: Age 12, Upper-Middle-class, White British.  
Violet: Age 12, Upper-middle class, British-mixed parentage

#### *Group five:*

Joanne: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Caroline: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.

#### *Group six:*

Susanna: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.  
Heidi: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.  
Sada: Age 11, Middle-class, British-Chinese  
Rai: Age 12, Middle-class, British-Chinese

#### *Group seven:*

Helena: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.  
Eden: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

#### *Group eight:*

Rachel: Age 11, Middle/working class, White British.  
Maisy: Age 12, Upper-middle class, White British.

### **Phase three – Year Seven follow-up interviews**

#### *Group one:*

Ingrid: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Clara: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Esther: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

#### *Group two:*

Helena: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Eden: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

#### *Group three:*

Gene: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Libby: Age 12, Upper-Middle-class, White British.

Violet: Age 12, Upper-middle class, British-mixed parentage

#### *Group four:*

Ella: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.

Abigail: Age 12, Upper-middle class, White British.

Kathryn: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

#### *Group five:*

Genella: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Elsie: Age 12, Middle/ working class, White British.

### **\*Phase three – Analysis groups**

#### *Group one:*

Ella: Age 11, Middle-class, White British.

Abigail: Age 12, Upper-middle class, White British.

Kathryn: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Gene: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

#### *Group two:*

Karla: Age 12, Middle-class, British-Asian.

Iyana: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Isla: Age 12, Middle-class, White British.

Lucy: Age 12, Middle-class, White British

\*These were the ‘identities’ that the girls claimed for themselves and talked to me about in group interviews.

## **APPENDIX THREE**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULES**

#### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE ONE – YEAR SIX GROUP INTERVIEWS**

**Introduction:** Re-introduce self and aims of research: to find out how you feel about school life, school work and being a girl.

- Any questions?
- Assure confidentiality
- Introduce tape recorder and experiment

#### **Opening questions/getting to know you:**

- Could you each tell me a bit about yourselves- name, age, what your parents do, siblings and the neighbourhood you live in.
- How do you feel you get on with your parents and siblings? Do you share any of the same interests?
- What do you like doing in your private time/ at home? What would you do on a typical weekend?
- Do you have any hobbies? What are they? Why do you like them?
- Do you watch television, films or videos? What programmes do you like and why?
- Do you like to read any magazines or comics? What articles do you like? Are they magazines that are typically for girls?
- What games do you like to play? Do you play with others or do you prefer to play on your own? Do you ever get together with your friends outside of school?
- Are you a member of any lunchtime clubs/activities? Which? Why?
- How would you describe yourself to someone else? What things are important to you? Why?
- How do you think other people view you? Why? How do you know?
- Is there anyone that you admire or would like to be? Who and why?

**Gender identities:**

- How would you describe what a girl is to me?
- What do you think are the important things to girls your age? Why?
- What kinds of things make you feel good? What is good about being a girl? Why?
- Are there different types of girls? What types? Is there any pressure to be a certain type of girl? Do any girls get picked on? What names do girls get called?
- Do you think that girls and boys are similar or different? Can girls and boys do the same sort of things? What? Why?
- Do you think it is easier to be a girl or a boy? Why?
- Are you happy being a girl? Have you ever wanted to be a boy/ When? Why?

**Gender Relations:**

- Who are your friends in school and out of school? What do you like to do together? What are you like? What do you talk about together? What do other people think about you as a group?
- How important are friends to you? Are they more important than school? Why/Why not?
- Do you have any friends that are older than you or that do not go to this school?
- Do you have any friends who are boys? What is that like?
- Is being friends with boys the same or different from being friends with girls? Do you do/ talk about different things?
- Does anyone in your class have a boyfriend? Do you? What does it mean to have a boyfriend? Is it important? Would you want a boyfriend?
- What is it like being in a single sex school? What would it be like if there were boys in your classes? How would it change? Would you like it? Would you ever like to go to a mixed sex school? Have you ever been to one?

**Conclusions:**

- How did you find the interview?
- What were the important things that we talked about? Why?



## **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE TWO – YEAR SEVEN GROUP INTERVIEWS**

**Introduction:** Reminder of the previous interview and summary of aims: to find out how you feel about school now and what you think will change over time as you move schools.

### **Current schooling:**

- How long have you been coming to this school? Which school did you attend before? Why did you choose to come to this school?
- Tell me how you feel about being at this school for so many years now? What was it like when you first came to this school?
- What has changed since you have been here? Do you think you have changed?
- How would you describe this school to me?
- What do you really like best about being at this school? Why? Would you change anything? What?
- What are your favourite lessons and why?
- Who have been your favourite teachers at this school, why?
- What do you think about the school buildings and classrooms? How do you use the space? Any favourite places? Do you have any personal space?
- Has your ethnicity or social class been an issue for you in this school? What social class/ ethnic group do you think you come from? How do you know? What about your friends? Does it make a difference?
- What have you been doing at school for the past year? Can you tell me of any sad or happy times you remember well?
- Are you happy in your class at school? Why/why not?
- If you were to look back in ten years from now what do you think you would remember most about being at this school? What has been most important to you?
- What do you think you would like to be remembered for at this school?

### **Future aspirations/career:**

- What do you see for yourself in the future? What do you hope for and what do you fear?

- Do you have any ideas about what you would like to do after school? What job you would like to do? Does your school prepare you for this goal?
- What do your parents want you to do?
- What do you think you will be doing when you are your parent's age? Will you be married/ single/ have children?

**Transition to senior school:**

- Do you know which secondary school you will be attending next year? Which? Have you been there on any induction days? Do you need to pass any exams first?
- Do you think about moving schools very often? How do you feel about it?
- Do you look forward to moving schools? What excites you? What worries you? How do you cope with this?
- What have you been told about your secondary schools? (by teachers, parents, friends, others).
- What do you think you will be doing in the next school year?
- Do you think you will change much when you move schools? How and why? Will you change as a girl?
- Do you think the move will affect your friendships? Do you have any friends/ contacts already in the school?
- How do you think it will affect your schoolwork/ achievements? How will the lessons change? What will the teachers be like?

**Conclusions:**

- How did you find the interview?
- Was it as you expected?
- What were the important things that we talked about? Why?

## **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE THREE – FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS**

**Introduction:** Reminder of the previous interview and summary of aims: to find out how you feel about school now and what you think will change over time as you move schools.

### **School life and experiences:**

- What is your favourite thing about school?
- How do you feel about your achievements at school? Anything you are particularly proud of? Anything you would change? How would you grade yourself?
- Is there anything about school or schoolwork that particularly bothers you? Why? Do you tell anyone? How do you cope?
- Is it important to do well at school and in your schoolwork? Why? Any pressures to do well? (parents, teachers, rewards, peers)
- How do you feel you have progressed in your schoolwork since being in this school/class?
- Are some people better at their schoolwork than others? Why? Who?
- What makes someone clever? (brains, hard work, parents) What does it mean to you when I say clever?
- Can you be clever and popular? Why and who? What is popular? Who is popular and why?
- What makes a good pupil? Why? How do you fit in with this idea? Is it easy to be a good pupil?
- Do you have to be a good pupil to get good marks? Why?
- How would you describe this school to me?
- What do you really like best about being at this school? Why? Would you change anything? What?
- What do you think about the school buildings and classrooms? How do you use the space? Any favourite places? Do you have any personal space?

### **Gender:**

- What things do you think are important to girls your age?
- What is good about being a girl?

- **Some people say that most girls are unhappy with the way that they look? What do you think? How do you feel about your own appearance? Why?**
- **Is there anything about your appearance that you would change?**
- **Are there pressures to dress or look a certain way?**
- **How do you feel about your school uniform?**
- **Who are your friends in school?**
- **How important are friends to you?**
- **Do you have any friends who are boys/ boyfriends?**
- **What is it like being in a single sex school?**
- **How would it change if you had boys in your class?**
- **Have you ever been to a mixed sex school? Was it different? How?**

## **APPENDIX FOUR**

### **Letters for consent**

#### *Letters for the parents:*

Dear Parent/Guardian

My name is Alexandra Allan and I am a PhD student working in the social sciences at Cardiff University. I am currently researching the issue of girls and achievement in schooling and Taylor's school has kindly agreed to participate in my study. I will be working specifically with the class your child is in and I am hoping to follow their progress into their year seven groups. I also intend to run a lunchtime photography club which I hope the girls will participate in. More information about my research is enclosed in the leaflet overleaf. If you have any other queries or concerns then please do not hesitate to contact me on (tel. no.) (Monday to Friday). Alternatively you can email me at (email add.). Thank you for your help in this matter.

Alexandra Allan

## **RESEARCH INTO GIRLS AND ACHIEVEMENT IN SCHOOL**

- **THE RESEARCH**

The research is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The researcher working on the project is Alexandra Allan, a PhD student from Cardiff University who is an experienced researcher and specializes in research with children in schools.

- **THE RESEARCH AIM**

The aim of the research is to explore how girls feel about school work and achievement. I am particularly interested in finding out how girls feel about school and school work during the transition to senior school. I am also interested in looking at their extra-curricular activities.

- **THE RESEARCH PLAN**

The research will be based in the year six class. I will be talking to some of the girls in small groups, in a relaxed and friendly manner, about school, school work and achievements. I will also talk to them more generally about being a girl, school life and their hobbies.

- **RESEARCH USES**

The research will be used to understand the ways in which girls feel about learning and succeeding at school. It will primarily be used as part of my larger PhD project concerning girls' achievements in the primary school.

- **INVOLVEMENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

Involvement in the project is completely voluntary so it will be understood if your daughter does not want to take part or if they change their mind at anytime. As a matter of policy no names of the children or the school will be used in reports arising from the research.

- **QUESTIONS:**

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Alexandra Allan on (tel. no.) who will be happy to phone you back. Or you can contact me by email at (email add.). You may also contact my university supervisor, on: (tel. no.).

*Photography club consent letter:*

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child has chosen to participate in a new lunchtime photography club. The club will be a fun and informative session to get the children to try and interrogate photographs and look at them analytically. It is based on the idea that photographs are 'often looked at but rarely looked into'.

Part of the project will involve the pupils looking at photographs to analyse the stories and meanings behind them. Another part of the project will involve the children creating their own photographic diaries to represent themselves and their identities.

These photographic diaries will belong to the children and they will be allowed to keep them once the project has finished. However, I would like to use the photographs as a basis of my own research project. It has been decided that none of the photographs will be reproduced for the moment and permission will be sought (from you and your child) if I decide to use any of them in the future. For the moment, the photographs will only be used as a basis for discussion to supplement my other research in the school.

The club is completely voluntary and students are free to withdraw from it at anytime. I would be grateful if you could fill in the permission slip below and return it to the school. This is to ensure that you understand the purposes of the club and that you are willing for your child to participate in the activities. If you have any further questions or concerns then do not hesitate to contact me on: (tel. no.) or email me at: (email add.).

Yours Sincerely,

Alexandra Allan

- I DO / DO NOT AGREE FOR MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS CLUB

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

- I UNDERSTAND THAT THE PHOTOGRAPHS THAT MY CHILD PRODUCES BELONG TO THEM AND PERMISSION WILL BE SOUGHT BEFORE THEY ARE REPRODUCED

SIGNED \_\_\_\_\_

*Final photography consent letter:*

Alexandra Allan  
PhD Student  
School of Social Sciences  
Cardiff University

Dear Mr and Mrs \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like to greatly thank you for participating in the junior school photography club. As you know, all of the photographs have now been developed and I hope you are pleased with the CD's you received from the workshop that took place with the professional photographer. Please let me know if you have any difficulty in printing these photographs or if you would like to receive any extra prints.

I am also writing to inform you that I have now almost finished my research in the school so I am at the stage of preparing the data for my PhD project. I would like to incorporate some of the photographs that you (or your daughter) have taken into this final PhD project. However, I will only have space for a maximum of twenty photographs.

This being the case I am writing to ask if you would indicate which photographs you would be happy for me to use in my final thesis. To this letter I have attached thumbnail copies of all of the photographs you (or your daughter) have taken over the course of the term. I would appreciate it greatly if you could look through these prints together and tick off the photographs that you would be happy for me to use in this way. I have also enclosed a stamped addressed envelope for you to send these sheets back to me when you have completed them.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this matter, I hope that it will not be too much trouble for you. I look forward to receiving your replies.

Yours Sincerely,

Alexandra Allan



*Letter for the head teacher:*

Dear [name],

**Re: Research into girl's learning and academic achievement.**

My name is Alexandra Allan and I am a postgraduate student from the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University. I am writing to ask if it would be possible for me to carry out some research into girl's perceptions and experiences of academic success in your school.

The research will form part of my PhD thesis and will try to understand the different ways children feel about learning and achieving in schools. Initially the fieldwork would involve spending two weeks observing and talking to a range of different classes in your school. I would like this to take place at a time that best suits you and your staff during the months of January and February. If the school is then happy I would like to return to the school at a later date to follow up my initial research and talk to some children in more depth.

I do appreciate the pressures you and your staff are under, however I would be very grateful if you would agree to participate in the research. Indeed any 'findings' from the study will be fed back to the school (both staff and children). As a matter of policy, no individuals or schools will be named in any reports arising from the research.

To take matters forward, I would like to ring you or your secretary next week, and, if you agree, arrange a mutually agreeable time to come and talk to you.

I hope to meet you in the near future.

Yours Sincerely,

Alexandra Allan.

# MY RESEARCH

## WHO AM I?

My name is Alexandra Allan I am a student from Cardiff University.

## WHAT AM I DOING?

I will be visiting your class for a week this term and also in the spring term. I am interested in talking to you about school-life, schoolwork and doing well at school. If you agree, I would like to talk to you in a small group with your friends. I will understand if you do not want to take part or if you change your mind at any time. I may also ask you to keep a diary of your thoughts about school but this is also completely voluntary.

## WHO WILL BE TOLD?

Bits of the interviews will only be shown to other researchers, but no-one will know what you tell me because your names will be changed. We even change the name of the school- so what you say is confidential.

## WHY AM I DOING THIS?

This research is a project I am working on for university. I want to find out how you feel about school and doing well at school. This will help other researchers know how girls feel about school.

## QUESTIONS

You can talk to me at anytime if you have any questions.

# TAKING PART IN THE PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

## I UNDERSTAND THAT:

1. I can withdraw from this club at any time if I change my mind.
2. The photographs I take are of my own choice.
3. I will take care to ask other people if it is okay to photograph them.
4. My photographs will be seen by Alex and used as part of a discussion.
5. The photographs I take belong to me and I will be asked before they are used by anyone else.

Signed .....

Signed .....

## APPENDIX FIVE

### WHAT IS PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB?

Eight of the girls in our class formed a group in the junior school called the photography club. The club was run by Alexandra Allan, a researcher from Cardiff University. In the club we were each given a photography pack which contained a disposable camera, a photo diary, a photo booklet and a photo notebook.

In the club we worked on a number of activities. One activity involved looking at a professional photographers work and choosing a photograph that we liked. We then wrote a story about what we thought was happening in the photograph. The aim of the club was to create a photographic diary that could show what was important to us. We each took a disposable camera home and took photographs of our friends and family and our different hobbies. Alex then got the photographs developed and we stuck them into our diary books. Underneath each photograph we wrote captions that explained why we had taken them.

At the end of the club we had a visit from a professional photographer. He came into school and we set up a photographic studio. We chose outfits to bring in for the workshop and we all chose our own poses for the photographs.

Eden and Sarah

### WEEK ONE - LOOKING AT PICTURES

**Overview:** The aim of this session was to sensitise the girls to the techniques of interrogating a photograph and to introduce them to the professional photography of Cindy Sherman.

- 1) Introduction:** To explain the activities of the session and as an opportunity for the girls to talk about any photographs they may have taken.
- 2) Kim's game:** A quick activity to test the girls' memories of the content of photographs.
- 3) Content and Context:** To introduce the girls to the idea that photographs contain content and context and that often they have a story behind them.
- 4) Introduction to Cindy Sherman:** A short talk about who Cindy Sherman is and what sort of photographs she takes and a chance to look through some of her photography.

**5) Looking for Stories:** An opportunity for the girls to look at the photos and work out what they thought the photos were about and if they could tell me a story about what was going on in the photograph.

**6) Conclusion:** To remind the girls that photos often hold meanings or stories and that they might want to think about the different meanings people could interpret from their own photographs.

## **WEEK TWO - LOOKING AT PEOPLE**

**Overview:** This session was aimed to help the girls become aware of stylistic choices in photographs and identity differences. This was done by looking at a number of photographs and following clues to work out meanings. The girls were also introduced to the work of professional photographer Sally Mann.

**1) Introduction:** A reminder of last week's activities and an introduction to this week's tasks - a chance for the girls to share any ideas that they may have had or to ask any questions.

**2) Baby photos:** An opportunity for the girls to look at each others baby photos and to try and work out which one belongs to which person.

**3) Matching photos:** The girls were shown photos of various people and their bedrooms, they were asked to match the photos together using visual clues from the photos.

**4) Introduction to Sally Mann:** A short talk about who Sally Mann is and the photographs she has taken.

**5) Photos of the girls:** The girls were asked to look through a number of Sally Mann's photos and work out the 'story' or meanings behind them. They were also specifically asked what her photographs show about being a 'girl'.

**6) Conclusion:** This was a quick reminder that photos contain meanings and that they can help us to work out who people are and what they are like. However, I suggested that sometimes clues in photos can be misleading and I showed the girls some examples from the book: Photos That Lie.

## **WEEK THREE - MAKING PICTURES**

**Overview:** The aim of this session was to get the girls to think about how they would make their own photographs and to think about how they would represent certain issues visually. The idea is that they would come to understand what is involved in constructing meanings through pictures.

**1) Introduction:** A reminder of the photographs that we looked at in the previous session.

**2) What is a 'girl'?:** The girls were asked to pretend that they were taking photographs like Sally Mann, to represent what it is like to be a 'girl'. They were restricted to taking just four photographs so that they had to define what was important to photograph.

**3) Group Work:** The girls were asked to split up into four groups and to brainstorm about all the different things that a girl may be. Once the girls had decided what they wanted to photograph they were then be given a camera to take the photographs.

**4) Conclusion:** The girls were told that they could expect their photographs to be developed by the next session.

## **WEEK FOUR – WHO AM I?**

**Overview:** The idea was to get the girls thinking about the photographs they would take with the professional photographer during the photo workshop day. It aimed to get the children to try out different ways of expressing their identities.

**1) Introduction:** The girls were given back the photographs to stick into their diaries. They were also asked if they would like to share any with the group and to talk about why they are important to them.

**2) Last week's photos:** The photographs taken in the previous week's session were given back and discussed in the group.

**3) Who am I? :** The girls were all given a large piece of paper to use to write down ideas about 'who they are'. Magazines were also supplied so that the girls could use pictures as well as words to express themselves - to create a collage.

**4) Group discussion:** An opportunity for the girls to share their ideas with each other and to discuss how they would represent their ideas visually.

**5) Polaroid camera:** The girls were given a Polaroid camera to try out some of their ideas in advance of the photo workshop. It allowed them to see the results of their work instantly.

**6) Conclusion:** I also reminded the girls of the photo workshop day and to bring any equipment/ props that they may wish to use.

## **WEEK FIVE – PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP DAY**

**Overview:** To conclude all of the activities that took place in the club, to get the girls to work alongside a professional photographer and to take photographs that they felt represented themselves as ‘girls’.

**1) Equipment:** The girls were introduced to the technical equipment and cameras and they participated in setting up the photographic studio.

**2) Initial images:** The girls took initial photographs as a way of getting used to posing for the photographs and to learn more about taking digital photographs.

**3) Video camera:** The girls were introduced to the camcorder and were asked to take it in turns to film the events of the day.

**4) Photographs:** The girls took it in turns to change (their clothing and props) in order to pose for photographs, whilst they were not posing the girls were either handling the camcorder or helping to take the pictures.

**5) Initial viewing and editing:** The photographs were downloaded so that the girls could view their photographs on a lap top, they were also shown how to edit/play with the photographs should they so wish.

**6) Final group picnic** – provided by members of the group.

## **WEEK SIX AND SEVEN – PHOTOGRAPHIC FEEDBACK SESSIONS**

**Overview:** The girls each bought their own photographic diaries to show me at times that suited them. They were asked to discuss the images that they took with me in a photographic feedback interview.

## **APPENDIX SIX**

### **THE ANALYSIS CLUB**

*Examples of handouts and activities:*

#### **What is analysis?**

Analysis generally means looking at something in detail - in this case it means looking at what you have said to me in interviews. Analysis means putting together all of the information you have given me to make a story or an account of your experiences. To do this researchers tend to read through what people have said time and time again to look for important points and different themes.

#### **Your job**

The reason we are having these workshops is so that you can help me analyse what you have told me in interviews. Because you know more about your lives than I do, I would like you to decide what I write about in my final project and what is important to you. I have collected together a number of extracts from your interviews for us to look through to find some themes for me to write about in my final project.

#### **Interview data**

Carefully read through the following extracts I have taken from your interviews. What themes or important ideas can we see in these extracts? What sort of things could I write about if I used these clips? You may want to take notes or circle things as you read through them.

\*\*\*\*\*

L: Because boys get to/

C: Boys get to fight more and stuff it is not fair.

L: Well boys get to do all the more active stuff and girls... it is not fair.

C: Boys do all the more fun stuff like you never get to see a girls' program like 007.

L: You never see anything for girls that is tomboy.

C: They are all like weeds and they are like oh please help me from this poisonous snake.

I: Then the boy flies in and saves them.

\*\*\*\*\*

L: Everyone is so like girls have to be girly and pink? I just think why do we have to fit into that and be like girls.

AA: So how are you different?

L: My favourite colour is black.



I: We are tomboys.

AA: What is a tomboy then?

I: It is a girl who sort of acts more like a boy.

\*\*\*\*\*

L: Yeah well they would all be like oh I fancy him and no I fancy him...  
YUCK!

I: Well like they were reading this book about boys and also when there was this man trying to teach year seven football she was like oh look at that man I fancy him

L: I mean it is so stupid!

C: Oh and some girls say like say you knock into a boy they are like oh you are touching a boy, you are touching a boy oh no!

L: It is so stupid

I: Yeah it is so pointless!

L: We are only ten and eleven

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Extra activities**

Think about all of the topics we have discussed in the group workshops (for example: tomboys, clothes or hobbies).

You may want to try and make a note of all these ideas. Now decide which you think is the most important to you and the one that you think I should definitely write about in my project.

Now try and write me half a page on this topic -

\* Tell me what you think about your chosen topic

\* Write about why you think it is an important topic

## References

- Aapola, S. (1997) 'Mature girls and adolescent boys? Deconstructing discourses of adolescence and gender', *Young* 5 (4) pp1-16.
- Aapola, S., Gonick, M. and Harris, A. (2005) *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Adkins, L. (2002) in T. May (ed) *Qualitative Research in Action*. London: Sage.
- Adkins, L. and Skeggs, B. (2004) *Feminism after Bourdieu*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Adonis, A. and Pollard, S. (1998) *A Class Act: The Myth of Britain's Classless Society*. London: Penguin Books.
- Alanen, L. (2001) 'Explorations of generational analysis', in B. Mayall, and L. Alanen (eds) *Conceptualising Child-Adult Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Alanen, L. and Mayall, B. (2004) *Conceptualising Child-Adult Relations*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Alanen, L. (2004) 'Explorations in generational analysis', in L. Alanen, B. Mayall (eds) *Conceptualising Child-Adult Relations*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Alderson, P. (1999) 'Research by Children', *International Journal of Social Research Methods*, 4 (2): 139-153.
- Alderson, P. (2000) 'School students views on school councils and daily life at school', *Children and Society*, 14 (2), pp121-34.
- Ali, S. (2002) 'Friendship and fandom: ethnicity, power and gendering readings of the popular'. *Discourse* 23 (2): 153-165.
- Allan, A. (2004) 'Using photographic diaries to research the gender and academic identities of young girls', in G. Walford, B. Jeffreys and G. Troman (eds) *Methodological Issues and Practices in Ethnography*. London: Elsevier.
- Allan, A. (2005) 'Analyse that! Engaging young girls in data analysis and interpretation', Paper presented at the *Oxford Education and Ethnography Conference*, 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> September, St Hilda's College Oxford.
- Allred, P and Gillies, V. (2002) 'Eliciting research accounts: reproducing modern subjects?', in M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop and T. Miller (eds) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. (2002) *Post-modernism and Social Research*. Buckingham: Open University.

Archer, L., Hutchings, M. & Leathwood, C. (2001) 'Engaging with commonality and difference: theoretical tensions in the analysis of working-class women's educational discourses', in *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11(1), pp 41-62.

Archer, L. (2002) 'Change, culture and tradition: British Muslim pupils talk about Muslim girls post-16 'choices' , *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 5(4), pp359-376.

Archer, L. (2005) 'The impossibility of girls' educational 'success': entanglements of gender, 'race', class and sexuality in the production and problematisation of educational femininities', Paper presented at the *ESRC Seminar series: 'Girls in Education 3-16*, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2005, Cardiff University.

Archer, L. & Francis, B. (2006) 'Challenging classes? Exploring the role of social class within the identities and achievement of British Chinese pupils', *Sociology* 40 (1), pp29-49.

Arksey, H. and Knight, P. (1999) *Interviews for Social Scientists*. London: Sage.

Armstrong, C.M. (1964) *Patterns of Achievement in Selected New York State Schools*. Albany: New York State Education Department.

Arnot, M., David, M. and Weiner, G. (1999) *Closing the Gender Gap*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Arthurs, J. and Grimshaw, J. (eds) (1998) *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*. London: Cassell.

Atkinson, E. (2002) 'The responsible anarchist: postmodernism and social change', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23 (1), pp 73-87.

Atkinson, P. (1992) *Understanding Ethnographic Texts*. London: Sage.

Ball, S. and Gewirtz, S. (1997) 'Girls in the education market: choice, competition and complexity', *Gender and Education* 9, pp207-222.

Ball, S. (2003) *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Ball, S. and Vincent, C. (2005) *Childcare, Choice and Class Practices*. London: Routledge.

Banks, M. (2001) *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.

Barbour, R.S. and Kitzinger, J. (1999) (eds) *Developing Focus Group Research*. London: Sage

Barker, J. and Weller, S. (2003) 'Never Work with Children?': The Geography of Methodological Issues in Research with Children, *Qualitative Research*, 3 (2): 207-227.

Bauman, Z. (1996) From pilgrim to tourist- or a short history of identity, in P. Du Gay and S.Hall (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.

Beck, U., Giddens, A. and Lash, S. (1994) *Reflexive modernisation: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the moral social order*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Beck, U. (2001) *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*. London: Vintage.

Beck, C. (2005) 'Show me science: photovoice and student concept of science', paper presented at the *American Educational Research Association*, April 2005, Montreal.

Becker, H.S. (1958) 'Problems of influence and proof in participant observation', *American Sociological Review*, 23 (6), pp652-660.

*Bend It Like Beckham* (motion picture) 2002, Fox Searchlight Pictures, directed by Gurinda Chuhar.

Benhabib, S. (1992) *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity.

Benjamin, S., Nind, M., Hall, K., Collins, J. and Sheehy, K. (2003) 'Moments of inclusion and exclusion: pupils negotiating classroom contexts', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24 (5), 547-58.

Benjamin, S. (2003) 'What counts as 'success': Hierarchical discourses in a girl's comprehensive school', *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education* 24 (1), pp105-118.

Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books.

Bernstein, B. (1975) *Class, Codes and Control*. Vol 3. London: Routledge.

Best, A. (2004) 'Girls, schooling and the discourse of self-change: negotiating meanings of the high school prom', in A. Harris (ed) *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*. London: Routledge.

Best, S. and Kellner, D. (1991) *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. London: Macmillan.

Bhuman, E. (1994) *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. London: Routledge.

Bjorkvist, K. (1994) 'Sex differences in verbal, physical and indirect aggression: a review of recent research', *Sex Roles*, 30, pp170-180.

Black, P. (2004) *The Beauty Industry: Gender, Culture, Pleasure*. London: Routledge.

Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M. and Robson, K. (2001) *Focus Groups in Social Research*. London: Sage.

- Bloustein, G. (2003) *Girl Making – A Cross Cultural Ethnography on the Processes of Growing up Female*. Oxford: Bergahn Books.
- Blumer, H. (1954) What is Wrong with Social Theory?, *American Sociological Review*, 19:3-10.
- Blyton, E. (1989) *Third Year at Malory Towers*. London: Armada.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu (1979) 'Symbolic power', *Critique of Anthropology* 4, pp77-85.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985) 'The social space and the genesis of groups', *Theory and Society* 14, pp723-744.
- Bourdieu, P. (1987) 'What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, pp1-17.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989) 'Social space and symbolic power', *Sociological Theory* 7, pp14-25.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000) *Pascalian Meditations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bordo, S. (1995) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. London: University of California Press.
- Boyd, D. (1973) *Elites and their Education*. Slough: NFER.
- Bramham, P. (2003) 'Boys, masculinities and PE', *Sport Education and Society*, 8 (1), pp57-71.
- British Educational Research Association Guidelines (2004)  
[www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICAL.PDF](http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/ETHICAL.PDF)  
 [WWW] accessed 12/06/05
- Britzman, D.P. (2000) 'Post structural Ethnography', in E. St Pierre and W.S Pillow (eds) *Working the Ruins – Feminist Post structural Theory and Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.

- Broadfoot, P.M. (1996) *Education, Assessment and Society: A Sociological Analysis*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Brook, B. (1999) *Feminist Perspectives on the Body*. Longman: London.
- Brown, J. and Armstrong, R. (1982) 'Structure of Pupils' Worried During Transition to Secondary School', in the *British Educational Research Journal*, 8, 123-31.
- Brown, L.M. (2003) *Girlfighting- Betrayal and Rejection Among Girls*. London: New York University Press.
- Brown, T., Waters, E., Edmunds, L.D., Kelly, S., Summerbell, C.D. and Campbell, K.J. (2006) *Reviews of Interventions for the Management of Childhood Obesity*. Available at: <http://www.aso.org.uk/portal.asp?eventid=459&targetcell=1,0&targetwidth=4&functionname=papers&paperid=543> [WWW] Accessed: 23/11/06.
- Brownmiller, S. (1984) *Femininity*. London: Paladin.
- Buckingham, D. (1996) *Moving Images: Understanding Children's Emotional Responses to Television*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Burgess, R.G. (1984) *In the Field – An Introduction to Field Research*. London; Unwintlyman.
- Butler, I. and Shaw, I. (1996) *A Case of Neglect? Children's Experiences and the Sociology of Childhood*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1992) 'Contingent foundations: feminism and the question of post-modernism', in J. Butler and J.W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorise the Political*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1995) 'Burning Acts-Injurious Speech', in A. Parker and E.K. Sedgwick (eds) *Performativity and Performance, Essays from the English Institute*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999) 'Performativity's social magic', in R. Schusterman (ed) *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Butler, J. (2004) *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge.

Butler, T. and Robson, G. (2001) 'Social capital, gentrification and neighbourhood change in London: a comparison of three South London neighbourhoods', *Urban Studies* 38 (12), pp2145-2162.

Butler, T. and Savage, M. (eds) (1995) *Social Change and the Middle Classes*. London: UCL Press.

Carlson, D. (1998) 'Who Am I? Gay Identity and a Democratic Politics of the Self', in W. Pinar (ed) *Queer Theory in Education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cealey Harrison, W. and Hood-Williams, J. (1998) 'More varieties than Heinz: social categories and sociality in Humphries, Hammersley and beyond', *Social Research Online* 3 (1) (<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/1/8.htm>).

Chaplin, E. (1994) *Sociology and Visual Representation*. London: Routledge.

Chappell, A. (1984) 'Family Fortunes: a Practical Photography Project', in McRobbie, A. and Nava, M. (eds) *Gender and Generation*. London: Macmillan.

Chernin, K. (1983) *Womansize: The Tyranny of Slenderness*. London: The Women's Press.

Christensen, P. (2004) 'Children's participation in ethnographic research: issues of power and representation', *Children and Society*, 18: 165-176.

Christensen, P. and Prout, A. (2002) 'Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children', *Childhood*, 9 (4): 477-497.

Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2001) *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*. The National Children's Bureau: London.

Clarke, G. and Humberstone, B. (eds) *Researching Women and Sport*. London: Macmillan.

Clarricoates, K. (1980) 'The importance of being Ernest... Emma... Tom... Jane: The perception and categorisation of gender conformity and gender deviation in primary schools', in Deem, R. (ed) *Schooling for Women's Work*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Clifford, J. (1983) 'On ethnographic authority', *Representations*, 1, pp118-146.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. (1986) (eds) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California.

Coats, M. (1994) *Women's Education*. Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Coffey, A. (1999) *The Ethnographic Self – Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity*. London: Sage.

Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data – Complementary Research Strategies*. London: Sage.

Coffey, A., Atkinson, P., Delamont, S., Lofland, L. and Lofland, J. (2001) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.

Cole, C. and Hribar, A. (1999) 'Celebrity feminism – Nike style, Postfordism, transcendence and consumer power', *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12 (4), pp347-69.

Cole, M., Hill, D. and Rikowski, G. (1997) 'Between postmodernism and nowhere: the predicament of the postmodernist', *British Journal of Education Studies* 45 (2), pp 187-200.

Connolly, P. (1998) *Racism, Gendered Identities and Young Children: Social Relations in a Multi-Ethnic, Inner-City Primary School*. London: Routledge.

Connolly, P. (2004) *Boys and Schooling in the Early Years*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Cotterell, J.L. (1979) 'Expectations and Realities: a Study of Transition from Primary to Secondary School', in the *Australian Journal of Education*, 23, 21-31.

Crick, N.R. and Grotpeter, J.K. (1996) 'Relational aggression, gender and social psychological adjustment', *Child Development*, 66, pp710-722.

Cullen, F. (2005) 'Hey let me see! Teenage photo stories, performing gendered 'communities of practice' and the construction of young women's identities'. Unpublished conference paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association conference*, September 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> 2005.

Cullen, F. (2006) 'Two's up and poncing fags.' Young women, smoking practices and gift exchange. Paper presented at the *ESRC Seminar series: 'Girls in Education 3-16*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2006, Lancaster University.

Darbyshire, P., Macdougall, C. and Schiller, W, (2005) 'Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: more insight or just more', *Qualitative Research* 5 (4), p417-436.

David, M. (1993) *Parents, Gender and Education Reform*. Cambridge; Polity Press.

Davies, B. (1982) *Life in the Classroom and the Playground: The Accounts of Primary School Children*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Davies, B. (1989) *Frogs, Snails and Feminist Tails: Pre-School Children and Gender*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Davies, B. and Harre, R. (1991) 'Positioning: the discursive production of selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20 (1), pp43-63.



- Davies, B. and Banks, C. (1991) 'The Gender Trap. A feminist poststructuralist analysis of primary school children's talk about gender', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 24 (1), pp1-25.
- Davies, B. (1991) 'The concept of agency: a feminist poststructuralist analysis'. *Social Analysis*, 30: 42-53.
- Davies, B. (1993) *Shards of Glass: Children Reading and Writing Beyond Gender Identities*. New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- Davies, B. (1997) 'The subject of poststructuralism – a reply to Alison Jones', *Gender and Education*, 9 (3), pp271-283.
- Davies, B., Dormer, S., Gannon, S., Laws, C., Rocco, S., Taguchi, H.L., and Mccann, H. (2001) 'Becoming schoolgirls: the ambivalent project of subjectification', *Gender and Education* 13 (2), pp167-182.
- Davies, B. (2006) 'Subjectification: the relevance of Butler's analysis for education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27 (4), pp425-438.
- Davies, J. (2004) Negotiating femininities online. *Gender and Education* 16 (1)
- Deegan, M.J. (2001) 'The Chicago School', in A. Coffey, P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, L. Lofland and J. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.
- Deem, R. (ed) *Schooling for Women's Work*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Delamont, S. (1989) *Knowledgeable Women: Structuralism and the Reproduction of Elites*. London: Routledge.
- Delamont, S. (1989) 'The Nun in the Toilet: Urban Legends and Educational Research', in *Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol 2, No.3:191-202.
- Delamont, S. (2002) *Fieldwork in Educational Settings – Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Delamont, S. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Fighting Familiarity – Essays on Education and Ethnography*. New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- de Lauretis, T. (1984) *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- de Lauretis, T. (1994) *The practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*. Bloomington: Indiana University press.
- Department for Education and Employment (1997) *Excellence in Schools*. London: HMSO.
- Department for Education and Skills (2003) *Excellence and Enjoyment: a Strategy for Primary Schools*. London: HMSO.

Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Pupils and Parents*. London: HMSO.

Derrida, J. (1973) *Speech and Phenomena*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Derrida, J. (1976) *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Driscoll, C. (2002) *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Du Gay, P. and Hall, S. (eds) (1996) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.

Durant, A. and Glion, A. (2004) *Always and Forever*. London: Harcourt.

Dyer, R. (1993) *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*. London: Routledge.

Eder, D. (1985) 'The cycle of popularity: interpersonal relations among female adolescents'. *Sociology of Education* 58:154-165.

Edge, S. and Baylis, G. (2004) 'Photographing children: the works of Tiernay Gearon and Sally Mann', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 5 (1), pp75-90.

Edwards, R. and Mauthner, M. (2002) 'Ethics and Feminist Research: Theory and Practice', in M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop and T. Miller (eds) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Emerson, R.M., Fretz, R.I., and Shaw, L.L. (2001) 'Participant Observation' in, A. Coffey, P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, L. Lofland and J. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.

Emmison, M. and Smith, P. (2000) *Researching the Visual*. London: Sage Publications.

Epstein, D. (1993) 'Essay review: practising heterosexuality', *Curriculum Studies*, 1 (2), pp275-86.

Epstein, D. and Johnson, R. (1997) *Schooling Sexualities*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Epstein, D., Hewitt, R., Leonard, D., Mauthner, M. and Watkins, C. (2003) 'Avoiding the issue: homophobia, school policies and identities in secondary schools', in C. Vincent (ed) *Social Justice, Education and Identity*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Epstein, D., O'Flynn, S. and Telford, D. (2003) *Silenced Sexualities in Schools and Universities*. London: Trentham Books.

Evans, J., Evans, R., Evans, C. and Evans, J.E. (2002) 'Fat free schooling: the discursive production of ill health', *International Studies in the Sociology of Education* 12 (2), pp191-212.

- Evans, J. and Penney, D. (2002) *Gender and Physical Education: Contemporary Issues and Future Directions*. Routledge: London.
- Evans, J., Rich, E. and Holroyd, E. (2004) 'Disordered eating and disordered schooling: what schools do to middle-class girls', in *The British Journal of the Sociology of Education* 25 (2), pp 123-142.
- Evans, J. Davies, J. and Wright, J. (eds) (2004) *Body Knowledge and Control: Studies in the Sociology of Education and Health*. London: Routledge.
- Evans, J., Rich, E., Davies, B. and Allwood, R. (2005) 'The embodiment of learning: what the sociology of education doesn't say about risk at school', *International Studies in the Sociology of Education* 15 (2) pp129-48.
- Fasoli, L. (2003) 'Reading Photographs of Young Children: looking at practices', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 4 (1): 32-47.
- Fielding, N. and Lee, R.M. (1991) *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Fine, M. (1988) 'Sexuality, schooling and adolescent females: the missing discourse of desire', *Harvard Educational Review*, 58 (1), pp29-53.
- Fine, M. and Weis, L. (2000) *Construction Sites: Excavating Race, Class and Gender Among Urban Youth*. New York: Teacher's College Press.
- Finger, J.A. and Silverman, M. (1966) 'Changes in academic Performance in the Junior High School', *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 45, 157-64.
- Flintoff, A. and Scraton, S. (2001) 'Stepping into active leisure? Young women's perceptions of active lifestyles and their experiences of school physical education', *Sport, Education and Society*, 6 (1), pp5-21.
- Fontana, A. (2003) 'Post modern trends in interviewing', in J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein (eds) *Post modern Interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Foster, V. (2001) 'Space invaders: desire and threat in the schooling of girls', *Discourse* 17 (1), pp43-63.
- Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Foucault, M. (1973) *The Birth of the Clinic*. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish*. Harmandsworth: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. London: Pantheon books.

- Foucault, M. (1981) *The History of Sexuality, Volume One. An Introduction*. Harmandsworth: Pelican.
- Foucault, M. (1985) *The History of Sexuality Vol Two: The Use of Pleasure*. Harmandsworth: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1986) 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics*, spring, pp22-27.
- Foucault, M. (1987) *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Vol 3*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1988) *The History of Sexuality, Volume Three. The Care of the Self*. Harmandsworth: Viking.
- Foucault, M. (1988) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. (1994) *Power – Essential Works of Foucault 1954–84, Vol 3*. London: Penguin Books.
- Francis, B. (1998) *Power Plays: Primary School Children's Constructions of Gender, Power and Adult Work*. London: Trentham.
- Francis, B. (1999) 'Modernist reductionism or post-structuralist relativism: can we move on? An evaluation of the arguments in relation to feminist educational research', *Gender and Education* 11 (4), pp381-393.
- Francis, B. (2000) *Boys, Girls and Achievement: Addressing the Classroom Issues*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Francis, B. (2001) 'Beyond postmodernism: feminist agency in educational research' in B. Francis & C. Skelton (eds) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary Perspectives in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Francis, B. and Skelton, C. (2001) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary Perspectives in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Francis, B. and Skelton, C. (2002) 'Clever Jack and conscientious Chloe; naturally able boys and hardworking girls in the classroom', Paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*, 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> September 2002, Exeter University.
- Fraser, N. (1997) 'Heterosexism, misrecognition and capitalism: a response to Judith Butler', *Social Text* 15 (3), pp279-289.
- Frost, L. (2001) *Young Women and the Body*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Furlong, A. and Cartmel, F. (1997) *Young People and Social Change: Individualisation and Risk in Late Modernity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Furlong, V. (1976) 'Interaction sets in the classroom', in M. Stubbs and S. Delamont (eds) *Exploration in Classroom Observation*. Chichester: John Wiley and sons.
- Fyfe, G. and Law, J. (1988) 'Introduction: on the Invisibility of the Visible', in *Picturing Power: Visual Depictions and Social Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Gamson, J. (2000) 'Sexualities, queer theory and qualitative research', in N. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research – Third Edition*. London: Sage.
- Garrett, R. (2004) 'Negotiating a physical identity: Girls, bodies and physical education', *Sport, Education and Society* 9 (2), pp223-237.
- George, R. (2004) 'Girls and their friendships', in M. Benn and C. Chitty (eds) *A Tribute to Caroline Benn, Education and Democracy*. London: Continuum Press.
- George, R. and Pratt, S. (2002) 'Transferring friendship – girls and boys friendships in the transition from primary to secondary school', *Children and Society* 19, pp16-26.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gillies, V. (2004) 'Raising the 'meritocracy': parenting and the individualisation of social class', *Sociology* 39 (5), pp835-853.
- Gilligan, C. (1983) *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Giulianotti, R. (2004) *Sport and Modern Social Theorists*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gleeson, K. and Frith, H. (2004) 'Pretty in Pink: Young Women Presenting Mature Sexual Identities', in A. Harris (ed) *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Gold, R.L. (1958) Roles in sociological field observation. *Social Forces*, 36, pp217-233.
- Gonick, M. (2003) *Between Femininities: Ambivalence, Identity and the Education of Girls*. New York: State University New York Press.
- Gonick, M. (2004) 'The mean girls crisis: problematizing representations of girl's friendships. *Feminism and Psychology* 14 (3): 395-400.
- Gonick, M. (2004) 'Old plots and new identities: ambivalent femininities in late modernity', *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education* 25 (2), pp189-209.
- Gonick, M. (2005) 'From nerd to popular – refiguring school identities and transformation stories', in *Seven Going on Seventeen: Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Gordon, T., Holland, J. and Lahelma, V. (2001) 'Ethnography in Education', in A. Coffey, P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, L. Lofland and J. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.
- Gordon, T., Holland, J., Lahelma, E. and Tolonen, T. (2005) 'Gazing with intent: ethnographic practice in classrooms', *Qualitative Research* 5 (1), p113-131.
- Green, J. and Hart, L. (1999) 'The impact of context on data', in R.S. Barbour and J. Kitzinger (eds) *Developing Focus Group Research*. London: Sage.
- Griffiths, V. (1997) *Adolescent Girls and Their Friends: A Feminist Ethnography*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Grimshaw, J. (1998) Working out with Merleau-Ponty, in J. Arthurs and J. Grimshaw (eds) *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*. London: Cassell.
- Gross, L., Katz, J.S. and Ruby, J. (1988) *Image Ethics in the Digital Age*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grover, S. (2004) 'Why Won't they Listen to us?': On Giving Voice to Children Participating in Research, *Childhood*, 11 (1): 81-93.
- Gubrium, J.F. and Holstein, J.A. (eds) (2003) *Post modern Interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Gvion, L. (2005) Dancing Bodies, Miserable Women and the Social Production of Anorexia Nervosa, Paper presented at the *Childhoods Conference*, Oslo, June 2005.
- Hall, M.A. (1996) *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice*. USA: Human Kinetics.
- Hall, G. Stanley. (1904) *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*. New York: Appleton.
- Hall, S. and du Gay, P. (1996) *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Hannerz, U. (1996) *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, J. (1994) *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sport*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, J. (2001) *Heroines of sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity*. Routledge: London.

- Hargreaves, J. (2004) 'Queering sport feminism: personal or political', in R. Giulianotti (ed) *Sport and Modern Social Theorists*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harker, R., Mahar, C. and Wilkes, C. (1990) *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu – The practice of Theory*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Harper, D. (2005) 'What's new visually?', in N. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research – Third Edition*. London: Sage.
- Harris, A. (2004a) *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Routledge.
- Harris, A. (ed) (2004b) *All About the Girl: Culture Power and Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Hart, R. (1997) *Children's Participation*. London: UNICEF.
- Haug, F. (1987) *Female Sexualisation: A Collective Work of Memory*. London: Verso.
- Hey, V. (1997) *The Company She Keeps*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hey, V. (2000) 'Troubling the autobiography of the question: rethinking rapport and the politics of social class in feminist participant observation', in G. Walford (ed) *Gender and Sexualities in Educational Ethnography*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Hey, V. (2002) 'Horizontal solidarities and molten capitalism: the subject, intersubjectivity, self and other in late modernity'. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 23 (2).
- Hey, V. (2006) 'Polymorphous sociality? Living between representations, desire and performativity in girls' social worlds', paper presented at *ESRC Seminar series: 'Girls in Education 3-16, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2005*, Lancaster University.
- Heywood, L. and Dworkin, S.L. (2003) *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hill, M. (1997) 'Research review: participatory research with children', *Child and Family Social Work*, 2, pp171-183.
- Holland, J. and Thomson, R. (2003) 'Hindsight, foresight and insight: the challenges of longitudinal qualitative research', *International Journal Social Research Methods* 6 (3), p233-244.
- Holland, J. and Thomson, R. (2005) 'Thanks for the memory: memory books as a methodological resource in biographical research', *Qualitative Research* 5 (2), p201-19.
- Holland, J., Ramazanoglu, C., Sharpe, S. and Thomson, R. (1998) *The Male in the Head: Young People Heterosexuality and Power*. London: The Tufnell Press.

- Holland, P. (1998) *Picturing Childhood: the Myth of the Child in the Popular Image*. London: Tauris.
- Holland, S. (2004) *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity*. Oxford: Berg.
- Holliday, R. (2000) 'We've been framed: visualising methodology', *The Sociological Review*, 48 (4), pp 503-521.
- Hollway, W. (1995) 'Feminist discourses and women's heterosexual desires', in S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (eds) *Feminism and Discourse*. London: Sage Publications.
- Home, J. (2006) *Sport in Consumer Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- hooks, B. (1981) *Aint I a woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- hooks, B. (1989) *Talking Back: Thinking Feminism, Thinking Black*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- hooks, B. (1991) *Yearning; race, gender and cultural politics*. London: turnaround books.
- hooks, B. (1994) *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press.
- Hunter, L. (2005) 'Bourdieu and the social space of the physical education class: reproduction of doxa through practice', *Sport, Education and Society* 9 (2), pp175-192.
- Ingraham, C. (1996) 'The heterosexual imaginary: feminist sociology and theories of gender', in R. Hennessy and C. Ingraham. (eds) *Materialist Feminism*. London: Routledge.
- Ingraham, C. (1999) *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, C. (2004) 'Wild girls?' An exploration of 'ladette' cultures in secondary schools', paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Conference*, 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> September 2004, Manchester University.
- Jackson, C. (2005) 'The bad girls don't really work hard and then they get really popular: an exploration of girls' attitudes and approaches to schoolwork', paper presented at *The British Educational Research Association Conference*, 14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> September 2005, University of Glamorgan.
- Jackson, C. and Bissett, M. (2005) 'Gender and school choice – factors influencing parents when choosing single-sex or co-educational schools for their children', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 35 (2), pp195-211.



Jackson, C. and Warin, J. (2000) 'The Importance of Gender as an Aspect of Identity at Key Transition Points in Compulsory Education' in *British Educational Research Journal*, 26, (3), pp 375-391.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1990) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Falmer Press.

James, A. (1993) *Childhood Identities – Self and Social Relationships in the Experience of the Child*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

James, A. (2001) 'Ethnography and Childhood', in A. Coffey, P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, L. Lofland and J. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.

James, A. and James, A. (2004) *Constructing Childhood*. London: Palgrave.

Jeffrey, B. and Troman, G. (2004) 'Time for ethnography', *British Educational Research Journal* 30 (4), p535-548.

Jenkins, R. (1992) *Pierre Bourdieu*. London: Routledge

Jiwani, J., Steenbergen, C., and Mitchell, C. (eds) *Girlhood: Redefining the Limits*. London: Black Rose Books.

Johnson, P and Lawler, S. (2004) 'Coming home to love and class', *Sociological research online* 10 (3). <<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/3/johnson.html>>.

Jones, A. (1997) 'Teaching feminist poststructuralist theory in education: student resistances', *Gender and Education* 9 (3), pp261-269.

Kay, J. and Laberge, S. (2002) 'The new corporate habitus in adventure racing', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37 (1), pp17-36.

Kehily, M.J., Mac an Ghail, M., Epstein, D. and Redman, P. (2002) 'Private girls and public worlds: producing femininities in the primary school'. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 23 (2).

Kehily, M.J. (2004) *Sexuality, Gender and Schooling: Shifting Agendas in Social Learning*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Kellett, M., Forrest, R., Dent, N. and Ward, S. (2004) 'Just Teach Us the Skills Please, We'll Do the Rest': Empowering 10 Year Olds as Active Researchers, *Children and Society*, 18: 329-343.

Kelly, D.M., Pomerantz, S. and Currie, D. (2005) 'Skater girlhood and emphasised femininity: 'you can't land an ollie properly in heels'. *Gender and Education* 17 (3):229-48.

- Kenway, J. (1997) 'Taking stock of gender reform policies for Australian schools: past, present, future', *British Educational Research Journal* 23 (3), pp329-344.
- Kitzinger, J. (1994) 'Focus groups: methods or madness?', in M. Boulton (ed) *Methodological Advances in Social Research in HIV and Aids*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Kramrae, C. and Triechler, P.A. (1985) *A Feminist Dictionary*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- La France, M.R. (1998) 'Colonizing the feminine: Nike's intersections of postfeminism and hyper-consumption', in G. Rail (ed) *Sport and Postmodern Times*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Lawler, S. (2005) 'Class, culture and identity', *Sociology* 39 (5), pp797-806.
- Lecompte, L.D., Milroy, W.D. and Priessle, J. (1996) (eds) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*. New York: Academic Press.
- Lee, N. (2001) *Childhood and Society – Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Lees, S. (1993) *Sugar and Spice: Sexuality and Adolescent Girls*. London: Penguin.
- Lesko, N. (1988) 'The curriculum of the body: lessons from a Catholic High School', in L.G. Roman, L.K. Christian and E. Ellsworth (eds) *Becoming Feminine the Politics of Popular Culture*. London: Falmer Press.
- Lesko, N. (2001) *Act Your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*. New York: Routledge.
- Lewins, A. and Silver, C. (2006) *Using Software for Qualitative Data Analysis: A Step-by-step Guide*. London: Sage.
- Lewis, A. (1992) 'Group child interviews as a research tool', *British Educational Research Journal* 18 (4).
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Denzin, N. (2005) *Handbook of Qualitative Research – Third Edition*. London: Sage.
- Lister, M. (1995) *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Lofland, L. and Lofland, J. (1995) *Analyzing Social Settings – A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. London: Wadsworth.
- Lucey, H. (2001) 'Social class, gender and schooling', in Francis, B. and Skelton, C. (eds) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary Perspectives in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Lucey, H. and Reay, D. (2000) 'Identities in transition: anxiety and excitement in the move to secondary school', *Oxford Review of Education* 26 (2), pp191-205.
- Lucey, H. and Reay, D. (2002) 'Carrying the beacon of excellence: social class differentiation and anxiety at a time of transition', *Journal of Educational Policy* 17, pp 321-336.
- Lucey, H., Melody, J. and Reay, D. (2003) 'Uneasy hybrids: psychosocial aspects of becoming educationally successful for working-class young women', *Gender and Education* 15 (3), pp285-299.
- Mac an Ghail, M. (1988) *Young, Gifted and Black*. Open University Press: Milton Keynes.
- Mac an Ghail, M. (1994) *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling*. Oxford: Open University Press.
- MacInnes, J. (1998) *The End of Masculinity*. Buckingham: Open University press.
- Macnaughton, G. (2000) *Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education*. London: Sage Publications.
- Macnaughton, G. (2004) *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies: Applying Poststructural Ideas*. London: Routledge.
- Mann, S. (1992) *Immediate Family*. USA: Aperture.
- Mason, J. (2002) 'Qualitative interviewing – asking, listening, interpreting', in T. May (ed) *Qualitative Research in Action*. London: Sage.
- Mason, J. (2006) 'Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way', *Qualitative Research* 6 (1), p9-25.
- Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J. and Miller, T. (eds) (2002) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Mauthner, N. and Doucet, A. (1998) Reflections on a Voice-centred Relational Method – Analysing Maternal and Domestic Voices, in J. Ribbens and R. Edwards (eds) *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*. London: Sage.
- May, T. (2002) *Qualitative Research in Action*. London: Sage.
- Mayall, B. (1994) *Children's Childhoods Observed and Experienced*. London: Falmer.
- Mayall, B. (2000) 'Conversations with children: working with generational issues', in P. Christensen and A. James (eds) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. London: Falmer Press.

McDonald, D., Rodger, S., Abbott, R., Ziviani, J. and Jones, J. (2005) 'I could do with a pair of wings': perspectives on physical activity, bodies and health from Australian children, in *Sport, Education and Society* 10 (2), pp195-209.

McInnes, D. and Couch, M. (2004) 'Quiet please! There is a lady on the stage: Boys, gender and sexual non-conformity and class', *Discourse*, 25 (4), pp 431-443.

McLeod, J. (2000) 'Why we interview now – reflexivity and perspective in a longitudinal study', *International Journal of Social Research Methods* 6 (3), p201-211.

McLeod, J. (2002) 'Working out intimacy: young people and friendship in an age of reflexivity'. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 23 (2):211-36.

McNay, L. (1992) *Foucault and Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McNay, L. (1994) *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Continuum.

McNay, L. (2004) 'Agency and experience: gender as a lived relation', in L. Adkins and B. Skeggs (eds) *Feminism after Bourdieu*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

McRobbie, A. (1991) *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

McRobbie, A. (2000) *Feminism and Youth Culture*. London: Macmillan.

McRobbie, A. (2002) 'Fashion culture: creative work, female individualisation', *Feminist Review*, 71, (1), pp 52-62.

McRobbie, A. (2004) 'Notes on postfeminism and popular culture: Bridget Jones and the new gender regime', in A. Harris (ed.) *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Meadmore, D. and Meadmore, P. (2004) 'The boundless of performativity in elite Australian schools', *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education* 25 (3), pp375-387.

*Mean Girls: The Movie* (motion picture) 2004, Paramount Pictures, screen play written by Tina Fey, produced by Mark Waters.

Measor, L. and Woods, P. (1984) *Changing Schools: Pupil Perspectives on Transfer to a Comprehensive*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Meyer, H. (2004) 'Novice and expert teachers' conceptions of learners prior knowledge', *Science Education*, 88, pp970-983.

Meyer, H. and Kroeger, S. (2005) 'Photovoice as an educational action research tool', Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, April 2005.

- Miles, S. (2000) *Youth Lifestyles in a Changing World*. Buckinghamshire: Open University Press.
- Mills, C. (2000) 'Efficacy and vulnerability: Judith Butler on reiteration and resistance', *Australian Feminist Studies* 15 (32), pp265-280.
- Miller and Bell (2002) 'Consenting to what? Issues of access, gate-keeping and informed consent', in M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop and T. Miller (eds) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Miller and Birch (2002) 'Encouraging participation: ethics and responsibilities', in M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop and T. Miller (eds) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Mitchell, C. and Reid-Walsh, J. (2002) *Researching Children's Popular Culture: The Cultural Spaces of Childhood*. London: Routledge.
- Mitchell, C. Moletsane, R., Stuart, J., Buthelezi, A. and de Lange, N. (2004) Taking Pictures/Taking Action! Visual Methodologies in Working with Young People, [www.ivmproject.ca/images/photo\\_voice/CHILDRENFIRSTARTICLE.pdf](http://www.ivmproject.ca/images/photo_voice/CHILDRENFIRSTARTICLE.pdf) [WWW] Accessed 12/06/05.
- Mitchell, C. and Reid-Walsh, J. (2004) 'Girl's websites: a virtual 'room of one's own''', in Harris, A. (ed) *All About the Girl*. Routledge: London.
- Mitchell, C. and Reid-Walsh, J. (2005) *Seven Going on Seventeen: Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Morgan, M., Gibbs, S., Maxwell, K. and Britten, N. (2002) 'Hearing children's voices: methodological issues in conducting focus groups with children aged 7-11 years old', *Qualitative Research* 2 (1), p5 -20.
- Morgan, D.L. (1998) *The Focus Group Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Morris-Roberts, K. (2002) *Individuality and (Dis)identification in young women's friendships at school*, PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.
- Morris-Roberts, K. (2004) 'Girl friendships, 'distinctive individuality' and socio-spatial practices of (dis)identification. *Children's Geographies*, Vol 2: 237-55.
- Muggleton, D (2002) *Inside Subculture: the Postmodern Meaning of Style*. Oxford: Berg.
- Munsch, R. and Marchenko, M. (1980) *The Paper Bag Princess*. Toronto: Annick Press Ltd.
- Murphy, E. and Dingwall, R. (2001) 'Ethics', in A. Coffey, P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, L. Lofland and J. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.

Myhill, D. and Jones, S. (2004) 'Seeing things differently: teacher's constructions of underachievement', *Gender and Education*, 16 (4), pp531-546.

Nash, R. (2002) 'The educated habitus, progress at school and real knowledge', *Interchange*, 33 (1), pp27-48.

Neale, B. and Flowerdew, J. (2003) 'Time, texture and childhood: the contours of longitudinal qualitative research', *International Journal of Social Research Methods* 6 (3), p189-199.

Nilan, P. (1991) 'Exclusion, inclusion and moral ordering in two girl's friendship groups'. *Gender and Education* 3 (1):163-182.

Nisbet, J.D. and Entwistle, N.J. (1969) *The Transition to Secondary Education*. London: University of London Press.

Novack, C.J. (1993) 'Ballet, gender and cultural power', in H. Thomas (ed) *Dance, Gender and Culture*. London: Macmillan.

Noyes, A. (2004) 'Video Diary: a Method for Exploring Learning Dispositions', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 34 (2): 193-209.

O'Brien, M. (2003) 'Girls and Transition to Second Level Schooling in Ireland; 'Moving On' and 'Moving Out', in *Gender and Education*, Vol 15, No.3: 249-267.

O'Kane, C. (2000) 'The development of participatory techniques: facilitating children's views about decisions which affect them', in P.Christensen and A.James (eds) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. London: Falmer Press.

O'Reilly, K. (2005) *Ethnographic Methods*. London: Routledge.

Paechter, C. (2001) 'Using Poststructuralist ideas in gender theory and research', in B. Francis and C.Skelton (eds) *Investigating Gender; Contemporary Perspectives in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Paechter, C. (2006) 'Masculine femininities/feminine masculinities: power, identities and gender', *Gender and Education* 18 (3), pp253-263.

Paechter, C. (2006b) 'Reconceptualising the gendered body: learning and constructing masculinities and femininities in school', *Gender and Education* 18 (2), pp121-35.

Parker, A. and Sedgwick, E.K. (1995) (eds) *Performativity and Performance, Essays from the English Institute*. London: Routledge.

Parsons, T. (1954) *Essays in Social Theory*. Glencoe: Free Press.

Petersen,R. and Simkus,A. (1993) *Making of Inequality*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

- Phoenix, A. (2001) 'Racialization and gendering in the (re)production of educational inequalities', in B. Francis and C. Skelton (eds) *Investigating Gender: Contemporary Perspectives in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Piaget, J. (1972) *Psychology and Epistemology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Pink, S. (2001) *Doing Visual Ethnography*. London; Sage Publications.
- Plummer, K. (2001) *Documents of Life Two: An Invitation to Critical Realism*. London: Sage.
- Pole, C., Mizen, P. and Bolton, A. (1999) Realising children's agency in research: partners and participants?, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2 (1):39-54.
- Pollard, A. (1984) Goodies, jokers and gangs, in M.Hammersley and P.Woods (eds) *Life in the School: the Sociology of Pupil Culture*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Pollard, A. (1985) *The Social World of the Primary School*. London: Cassell.
- Poovey, M. (1984) *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Power, S. and Whitty, G. (1998) 'Destined for success? Educational biographies of academically able pupils', *Research Papers in Education* 14 (3), pp321-339.
- Power, S., Edwards, T., Whitty, G. and Wigfall, V. (2003) *Education and the Middle Class*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Probyn, E. (1993) *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Prout, A. (ed) (2000) *The Body, Childhood and Society*. London: Macmillan.
- Prout, A. (2003) 'Participation, policy and the changing conditions of childhood', in A.Prout and C.Hallett (eds) *Hearing the Voices of Children: Social Policy for a New Century*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Prout, A. (2005) *The Future of Childhood*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Proweller, A. (1998) *Constructing Female Identities: Meaning Making in an Upper Middle Class Youth Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Pugsley, L., Coffey, A. and Delamont, S. (1996a) 'I don't eat peas anyway! Classroom stories and the social construction of childhood', in I. Butler and I. Shaw (eds) *A Case of Neglect? Children's Experiences and the Sociology of Childhood*. Aldershot: Avebury.

Pugsley, L., Coffey, A. and Delamont, S. (1996b) 'Daps, dykes and five mile hikes: physical education in pupils' folklore', in *Sport, Education and Society*, Vol 1, No.2:133-146.

Punch, S. (2002) 'Research with children: the same or different from research with adults?', *Childhood* 9 (3), pp321-341.

Qvortrup, J. (1994) 'Introduction', in J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta and H. Wintersberger (eds) *Childhood Matters: Social Theory, Practice and Politics*. Aldershot: Avebury.

Rabello de Castro, L. (2004) 'Otherness in me, otherness in others – children's and youth's constructions of self and others. *Childhood* 11 (4): 469-493.

Raby, R. (2006) 'Talking (behind) your back: young women and resistance', in J. Jiwani, C. Steenbergen and C. Mitchell (eds) *Girlhood: Redefining the Limits*. London: Black Rose Books.

Rail, G. (ed) (1998) *Sport and Postmodern Times*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Rasmussen, M.L., Rofes, E. and Talburt, S. (eds) (2004) *Youth and Sexualities: Pleasure, Subversion and Insubordination in and out of Schools*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rasmussen, M.L. (2006) *Becoming Subjects: Sexualities and Secondary Schooling*. London: Routledge.

Reay, D. (1995) 'They employ cleaners to do that: habitus in the primary classroom', *The British Journal of Sociology of Education* 16 (3), pp353-71.

Reay, D. (1998) 'Rethinking social class: Qualitative perspectives on gender and social class', *Sociology*, 32 (2), pp 259-275.

Reay, D. and Wiliam, D (1999) 'I'll be a nothing: Structure, agency and the construction of identity through assessment', *British Educational Research Journal* 25 (3), pp 343-354.

Reay, D. (2001) 'Spice girls', 'nice girls', 'girlies', and tomboys: gender discourses, girls' cultures and femininities in the primary classroom'. *Gender and Education* 13 (2): 153-66.

Reay, D. (2001) 'Finding or losing yourself?: working-class relationships to education', *Journal of Education Policy* 16 (4), pp 333-346.

Reay, D. (2004) 'Its all becoming a habitus: beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research', *The British journal of Sociology of Education* 25 (4), pp431-444.



- Reinharz, S. (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rennison, L. (2003) *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*. London: Piccadilly Press.
- Renold, E. (2001) 'Learning the 'hard' way: Boys, hegemonic masculinity and the negotiation of learner identities in the primary school', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 22 (3), pp39-385.
- Renold, E. (1999) '*Presumed Innocence*': *An Ethnographic Exploration into the Construction of Sexual and Gender Identities in the Primary School*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Cardiff: University of Wales.
- Renold, E. (2005) *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities: Exploring Children's Gender and Sexual Relations in the Primary School*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Renold, E. (2005b) 'Queering girly culture, negotiating heterogendered childhoods, tomboys, top girls and moshers' paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Conference*, September 2005, Glamorgan University.
- Renold, E. (2006) 'Girls, boys and Butler's heterosexual matrix', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27 (4), pp489-509.
- Renold, E. and Allan, A. (2006) 'Bright and Beautiful: high-achieving girls, ambivalent femininities, and the feminisation of success in the primary school', *Discourse* 27 (4), pp 457-473.
- Rich, A. (1983) 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence', *Signs* 5 (4), pp631-60.
- Rich, E. and Evans, J. (2005) 'Making sense of eating disorders in schools', *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education* 26 (2), pp247-62.
- Ringrose, J. (2006) 'A new universal mean girl? Examining the discursive construction and social regulation of a new feminine pathology', *Feminism and Psychology* 16, pp 405-424.
- Ringrose, J. (2006) 'Successful girls?: Complicating post-feminist, neo-liberal discourses of educational achievement and gender equality', *Gender and Education* (forthcoming).
- Rist, R.C. (1980) 'Blitzkreig ethnography: on the transformation of a method into movement', *Educational Researcher*, 9 (2), pp 8-10.
- Robinson, C. and Kellett, M. (2004) 'Power', in S. Fraser, V.Lewis, S.Ding, M.Kellett, and C.Robinson. *Doing Research With Children and Young People*. London: Sage Publications.

- Roman, L.G., Christian, L.K. and Ellsworth, E. (1989) *Becoming Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture*. London: Falmer Press.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ruddock, J. and Urquhart, I. (2003) 'Some neglected issues of transfer: identity, status and gender from the pupils' perspective', in C.Skelton and B.Francis (eds) *Boys and Girls in the Primary Classroom*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Russell, L. (2005) 'It's a question of trust: balancing the relationship between students and teachers in ethnographic field work', *Qualitative Research* 5 (2), p181-199.
- Saussure, F. (1974) *A Course in General Linguistics*. London: Fontana.
- Sawicki, J. (1991) *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body*. New York: Routledge.
- Scott, J. (1998) 'Deconstructing equality-versus-difference; or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism', *Feminist Studies* 14 (1), pp33-50.
- Scott, S. and Morgan, D. (eds) (1993) *Body Matters: Essays on the Sociology of the Body*. London: Falmer Press.
- Scraton, S. (1992) *Shaping Up to Womanhood: Gender and Girls Physical Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Scraton, S. and Flintoff, A. (2001) *Gender and Sport: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Sedgwick, E. (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Seidal, J. and Kelle, U. (1995) Different Functions of Coding in the Analysis of Textual Data, in U.Kelle (ed) *Computer-aided Qualitative Data Analysis: Theory, Methods and Practice*. London: Sage.
- Sherlock, J. (1993) 'Dance and the culture of the body', in S. Scott and D. Morgan (eds) *Body Matters: Essays on the Sociology of the Body*. London: Falmer Press.
- Sherman Heyl, B. (2001) 'Ethnographic Interviewing', in A. Coffey, P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, L. Lofland and J. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.
- Shilling, C. (1993) *The Body and Social Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Shilling, C. (2004) 'Educating bodies: schooling and the constitution of society', in Evans, J., Davies, B. and Wright, J. (eds) *Body Knowledge and Control: Studies in the Sociology of Physical Education and Health*. London: Routledge.
- Sikes, P. (2005) 'Storying schools: issues around attempts to create a sense of feel and place in narrative research writing', *Qualitative Research* 5 (1), p79-94.

- Silah, S. (2002) *Judith Butler*. London: Routledge.
- Silverman, D. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Simpson, B. (2000) 'Regulation and resistance: children's embodiment during the primary-secondary school transition', in A. Prout (ed) *The Body, Childhood and Society*. London: Macmillan.
- Sinclair, R. (2004) Participation in practice: Making it Meaningful, Effective and Sustainable, *Children and Society* (18): 106-118.
- Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage Publications.
- Skeggs, B. (2001) 'Feminist ethnography', in A. Coffey, P. Atkinson, S. Delamont, L. Lofland and J. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage: London.
- Skeggs, B. (2002) 'Techniques for telling the reflexive self', in T. May (ed) *Qualitative Research in Action*. London: Sage.
- Skeggs, B. (2004) *Class, Self, Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Skelton, C. (1997) 'Primary boys and hegemonic masculinities', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 18 (3), pp 349-370.
- Skelton, C. (2000) 'A passion for football: dominant masculinities and primary schooling', *Sport, Education and Society*, 5 (1), pp5-18.
- Skelton, C. and Francis, B. (eds) (2003) *Boys and Girls in the Primary Classroom*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Smart, B. (2000) *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, E. (2003) 'Understanding underachievement: an investigation into the differential attainment of secondary school pupils', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24 (5), 575-563.
- Sondheimer, J. and Bodington, P.R. (2002) (eds) *The Girls Public Day School Trust 1872-1972: A Centenary Review*. London: GDPST.
- Spelman, B.J. (1979) *Pupil Adaptations to Secondary School*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Council for Educational Research.
- Spence, J. (1979) *Putting Myself in the Picture: a Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography*. London: Camden.
- Spence, J. and Holland, P. (1991) *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*. London: Virago.

- Spindler, G. and Spindler, L. (1992) 'Cultural process and ethnography: an anthropological perspective', in M.D. Lecompte, W.L. Milroy and J. Priessle (eds) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*. New York: Academic Press.
- Stanley, L. and Temple, B. (1996) 'Doing the business: using qualitative software packages in the analysis of qualitative data sets', in R.G. Burgess (ed) *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*. Greenwich: JAI.
- Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1993) *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Stanworth, M. (1981) *Gender and Schooling: A Study of Sexual Divisions in the Classroom*. Pamphlet No.7, London: WRRRC.
- St Pierre, E. and Pillow, W.S. (2000) *Working the Ruins – Feminist Post structural Theory and Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.
- St Pierre, E. (2002) 'Poststructuralist feminism in education: an overview', *Qualitative Studies in Education* 13 (5), pp477-515.
- Streitmatter, J. (1999) *For Girls Only: Making a Case for Single-Sex Schooling*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Stronach, I. and Maclure, M. (1999) *Educational Research Undone*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Swain, J. (2004) 'The resources and strategies that 10-11-year-old boys use to construct masculinities in the school setting'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30, 1, pp. 167-185
- Thomas, H. (1993) *Dance, Gender and Culture*. London: Macmillan.
- Thomas, N. and O'Kane, C. (1998) 'The ethics of participatory research with children', *Children and Society*, 12: 336-348.
- Thomas-Slater, B. (1985) 'A brief history of participatory methodologies', in Slocum, R., Wichart, L., Rocheleau, D. and Thomas-Slater, B. (eds) *Power, Process and Participation – Tools for Change*. London: Intermediate Technologies Publication.
- Tomlinson, A. (2004) 'Pierre Bourdieu and the sociology of sport, habitus, capital and field', in R. Giulianotti (ed) *Sport and Modern Social Theorists*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Thomson, R., Holland, J. (2002) 'Imagined adulthood: resources, plans and contradictions', *Gender and Education* 14 (4), 337-350.
- Thomson R., Bell, R., Holland, J., Henderson, S., McGrellis, S. and Sharpe, S. (2002) 'Critical moments: Choice, chance and opportunity in young people's narratives of transition', in *Sociology*, Vol 36, No.2: 335-354.

Thomson, R., Holland, J., McGrellis, S., Henderson, S. and Sharpe, S. (2004) 'Inventing adulthood: a biographical approach to understanding youth citizenship', *Sociological Review*, 52 (2), pp219-239.

Thorne, B. (1993) *Gender Play: Boys and Girls in School*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Travers, M. (2001) *Qualitative Research Through Case Studies*. London: Sage.

Turner, B (1985) *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Turner, B.S. and Rojek, C. (1999) *Society and Culture*. London: Sage.

Tyler, S.A. (1996) 'Post-modern ethnography', in J.E. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (eds) *Writing Culture, The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California.

Tyler, M. and Russell, M. (2002) 'Thank heaven for little girls: 'Girl Heaven' and the commercial context of feminine childhood', *Sociology* 36 (3), pp619-637.

Underwood, M.K. (2004) 'Glances of contempt, eye rolls of disgust and turning away to exclude: non-verbal forms of social aggression among girls'. *Feminism and Psychology* 14 (3):371-75.

Vincent, C. (2001) 'Social class and parental agency', *Journal of Educational Policy*, 16 (4), pp 347-364.

Visweswaran, K. (1994) *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wacquant, L (1991) 'Making the middle class(es) in social theory and social structure', in S.G Macnall, R.F Levine and R. Fantasia (eds) *Bringing Class Back in Contemporary Historical Perspectives*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Walford, G. (1993) *Girl's Private Schooling: Past and Present*. London: Woburn Press.

Walkerdine, V. and Lucey, H. (1989) *Democracy in the Kitchen: Regulating Mothers and Socialising Daughters*. London: Virago.

Walkerdine, V. (1990) *Schoolgirl Fictions*. London: Verso.

Walkerdine, V. (1997) *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*. London: Macmillan.

Walkerdine, V. (1999) 'Violent girls and precocious girls: Regulating childhood at the end of the millennium', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1 (1), pp3-23.

- Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H. and Melody, J. (2001) *Growing Up Girl: Psychosocial Explorations of Gender and Class*. Buckingham: Palgrave.
- Wallace, C. and Kovatcheva, S. (1998) *Youth in Society: The Construction and Deconstruction of Youth in East and West Europe*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Wang, C. (1999) 'Photovoice: a participatory action research strategy applied to women's health', *Journal of Women's Health*, 8, pp185-192.
- Wang, C. and Burris, M.A. (1994) 'Empowerment through photo novella: portraits of participation', *Health Education Quarterly*, 21, pp171-186.
- Wang, C. and Burris, M.A. (1997) 'Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment', *Health Education and Behaviour*, 24, pp369-387.
- Watson, S. (1997) 'Single-sex education for girls: heterosexuality, gendered subjectivity and school choice', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18, pp371-383.
- Weedon, C. (1997) *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. London: Basil Blackwell.
- Weeks, J. (1986) *Sexuality*. London: Routledge.
- Weis, L. and Fine, M. (eds) (1997) *Off White: Readings on Race, Power and Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Weis, L. and Dimitriadis, G. (2001) 'Imagining possibilities with and for contemporary youth: (Re)writing and (re)visioning education today', *Qualitative Research*, 1 (2): 223-240.
- Weitzman, E.A. and Miles, M.B. (1995) *Computer Programs for Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Wheaton, B. and Tomlinson, A. (1998) 'The changing gender order in sport? The case of windsurfing cultures', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 22 (3), pp252-74.
- Whitfield, D. (2005) 'Learning from our students: photovoice and classroom action research', paper presented at the *American Educational Research Association*, April 2005, Montreal.
- Wilkes, C. (1990) 'Bourdieu's social class', in R. Harker, C. Mahar, and C. Wilkes (eds) *An Introduction to the Works of Pierre Bourdieu – The Practice of Theory*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Wilkinson, H. (1999) 'The Thatcher legacy: power feminism and the birth of girl power', in N. Walters (ed) *On the Move: Feminism for a New Generation*. London: Virago.

- Willett, R. (2005) 'Constructing the digital tween: market discourse and girl's interests', in C. Mitchell and J.Reid-Walsh (eds) *Seven Going on Seventeen: Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Williams, S.J., and Bendelow, G. (1998) *The Lived Body: Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues*. London: Routledge.
- Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Farnborough: Saxon House.
- Wilson, J. (2005) *Best Friends*. Yearling: London.
- Wilson, T.C. (2002) 'The paradox of sports and social class – the roles of cultural and economic capital', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 37 (1), pp5-16.
- Wimbledon: the movie* (motion picture) 2004, Universal Studios. Written by Adam Brooks and Jennifer Flackett, directed by Richard Loncraine.
- Wittig, M. (1992) *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Wolfinger, N.H. (2002) 'On writing field notes: collection strategies and background experiences', *Qualitative Research* 2 (1), p85-95.
- Wollcott, H.F. (1995) *The Art of Field Work*. Walnut Creek: Altamira.
- Woods, P. (1990) 'Having a laugh: an antidote to schooling', in M. Hammersley and P. Woods (eds) *The Process of Schooling: A Sociological Reader*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Woodward, K. (1987) *Identity and Difference – Culture, Media and Identities*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Wright, J. (1996) 'The construction of complementarity in physical education', *Gender and Education*, 8 (1), pp61-79.
- Wright, J. and Dewar, A. (1997) 'On pleasure and pain: women speak out about physical activity', in G. Clarke and B. Humberstone (eds) *Researching Women and Sport*. London: Macmillan.
- Wyn, J. and White, R. (1997) *Rethinking Youth*. London: Sage Publications.
- Youdell, D. (2003) 'Identity Traps or How Black Students Fail: The Interactions between Biographical, Sub-Cultural and Learner Identities', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24 (1), pp.3-20.
- Youdell, D. (2004) 'Wounds and reinscriptions: schools, sexualities and performative subjects', *Discourse*, 24(4), pp477-494.

Youdell, D. (2005) 'Sex-gender-sexuality: how sex, gender and sexuality constellations are constituted in secondary schools, *Gender and Education* 17 (3), p249-270.

Youdell, D. (2006) *Impossible Bodies, Impossible Selves: Exclusions and Student Subjectivities*. London: Springer.

Young, I. M. (1997) 'Unruly categories: a critique of Nancy Fraser's dual systems theory', *New Left Review* 222, pp147-160.

Young, I.M. (1980) *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Bodily Comportment Motility and Spatiality*. London: Springer.

Young, K. (1997) 'Women, sport and physicality', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 32 (3), pp297-306.

Young, L. and Barrett, H. (2000) 'Adapting visual methods: action research with Kampala street children', *Area*, 33 (2): 141-52.

Younger, M. and Warrington, M. (1999) 'The gender gap and classroom interactions: reality and rhetoric?', *British journal of Sociology of Education* 20 (3), pp 342-352.

Younger, M. and Warrington, M. (2000) 'Student attitudes, image and the gender gap', *British Educational Research Journal* 26 (3), pp 393-407.

Youngman, M.B. (ed) (1986) *Mid-Schooling Transfer: Problems and Proposals*. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.

